

## **Understanding the Implications of Ethnic Diversity in the Nigerian Civil Service**

**Benjamin Erhirhie**

Department of Public Administration, Delta State University, Abraka

**Onofere PrinceWill Okereka (P.h.D)**

Department of public Administration, Faculty of Management Sciences, Delta State University  
P.M.B.I, Abraka, Nigeria

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**ABSTRACT:** *Ethnicity differentiated societies are often regarded as dysfunctional with poor violent civil conflict. This is because, Nigeria's multi ethnicity suggests a tendency to show favoritisms to individual because of ethnicity. This paper examines the implications of ethnic diversity in the Nigerian civil service to undermine the consideration of merit principles in the recruitment process. The paper relies on the Weberian bureaucratic model prescription to guide the Nigerian civil service commission out of the recruitment process bedeviled by the factors sentiments. Among other things, the paper recommends strict measure on the prevailing principles that promotes mediocrity as against old philosophy of excellence, competence and qualification that facilitate improved implementation of government policies and programmes in the Nigeria civil service commission.*

**KEYWORDS:** ethnic diversity, civil service, federal capital principle

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Societies characterized by distinct ethnicities are frequently viewed as problematic, exhibiting suboptimal economic outcomes and an increased likelihood of engaging in violent internal conflicts. The concept of nation building involves diminishing ethnic or local allegiances in favor of a stronger commitment to the nation. In many developing nations, this transformation has not yet occurred, as individuals often feel a stronger connection to their familial, ethnic, or religious groups rather than to the overarching nation. The influence of these sub-national identities is commonly perceived as a negative aspect. Societies marked by ethnic divisions are considered to be less prone to mistreating minority groups.

The primary accusation against ethnic differentiation is that it serves as a leading catalyst for violent civil conflicts. In the context of Nigeria, being a multi-ethnic nation provides an extensive pool of human resources that can be utilized to capitalize on opportunities and tackle challenges, as noted by Adegami and Uche (2015). Despite the advantage of diverse ethnic backgrounds, it has been observed that Nigeria's civil service demonstrates managerial bias, as highlighted by Rindap and Mari (2014). Nigeria is recognized as one of the world's top five most diverse countries, securing the 45th position among 47 globally diverse nations (George et al., 2017). Paradoxically, despite decades of committed efforts and legislation promoting equal opportunities, systematic discrimination persists in recruitment and selection processes for employment opportunities, as indicated by studies conducted by George et al. (2017) and Shen, Chander, D'netto, and Monga (2009).

According to researchers focused on Nigeria, ethnicity emerged as a crucial consideration for decision-making across various levels, as noted by Adegami and Uche (2015), Aker, Kleim, O'Connel, and Yang (2014), Nnahuihe, Aghemalo, and Okebugwu (2014), and Obo, Coker, and Omenka (2014). The overarching issue in Nigeria lies in the fact that ethnic diversity tends to influence managerial decisions, making them nuanced, subjective, and often inclined towards political or self-serving interests, as pointed out by Jacob (2014) and Rindap & Mari (2014). This inclination has the potential to introduce systematic discrimination into processes related to employment opportunities. A more specific problem is that the experiences of employees contribute to a perception of discrimination, ultimately leading to a decline in employee productivity (Stevensm, 2014). The resultant negative impact on employee productivity within the civil service poses significant threats to both Nigeria's economic development and its delicate unity, as emphasized by Rindap & Mari (2014).

The presence of ethnic diversity is a common occurrence in numerous countries (Rubinstein & Brenner, 2014). Nigeria, with an estimated population of 183 million individuals distributed across 36 states and 774 local government areas (National Population Commission, 2017), is characterized by a diverse makeup of 371 distinct ethnicities (Nigeria local, 2014; Online Nigeria, 2016). The country's multi-ethnic nature suggests a proclivity for showing favoritism to individuals based on their ethnicity, as highlighted by Adegami and Uche (2015) and Nnahuihe et al. (2014). Even in cases where such favoritism is not overt, it doesn't necessarily mean that decision-makers are devoid of some form of bias. Recent studies indicate that recruitment processes within the Nigerian Civil Service are significantly influenced by factors such as political considerations/godfatherism, nepotism, the quota system, ethnicity (Federal Character Principle), and government discretion, as identified by Inyang (2011), Gbervbie (2010), and Mcoliver (2005). Fajama et al. (2011) proposed that factors such as culture, language, religion, gender, and educational qualifications play a role in determining who is employed in the civil service. Despite endeavors to address these factors, the Nigerian Civil Service continues to be marked by inefficiency and ineffectiveness in providing essential social services, as noted by Nwamolue and

Iwuoha (2012) and Thomson (2005). This is primarily attributed to the negative implications of ethnic diversity within the Nigerian Civil Service. President Goodluck Jonathan has expressed that the developmental challenges facing Nigeria are closely linked to the ability of the country's public service to promptly and efficiently deliver the public goods necessary for accelerated development (Nigeria First, 2011).

The need to reassess the recruitment processes within government institutions in light of ethnic diversity and its implications in the Nigerian Civil Service is emphasized. Akinola (2013), as cited in Okereka (2020), affirmatively argues that the ethno-religious diversity among the various groups comprising modern-day Nigeria was not adequately considered by the British colonizers prior to the amalgamation or merging of the southern and northern protectorates into the entity now known as Nigeria. Akinola thus attributes the occasional political rivalry and disunity among the ethnic groups in the country to the unification of the protectorates of Nigeria.

The implementation of the federal character principle by the Federal Character Commission aims to rectify the negative consequences arising from opportunities and resources provided by the federal government to citizens. These provisions may seem impartial but can have a discriminatory impact on a protected group. Ekeh (1989) suggests that the federal character principle has become problematic instead of serving as a solution to the issues it was intended to address. Bodunrin (2003) adds that, when viewed from a merit perspective, the federal character principle is counterproductive. Consequently, it is crucial to emphasize that efficient manpower utilization is contingent upon a well-executed and credible recruitment process.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Societies characterized by ethnic differentiation are often perceived as dysfunctional, experiencing subpar economic performance and a heightened risk of violent civil conflict. Nigeria, ranking among the top five most diverse countries globally and 45th out of 47 countries sustaining diversity, faces this challenge (George et al., 2017). Despite several decades of committed efforts towards equal opportunities and legislation mandating equality, studies indicate that systematic discrimination in recruitment and selection processes for employment opportunities persists (George et al., 2017; Shen, Chanda, D. netto, Monga, 2009). The overarching issue in the Nigerian Civil Service lies in the fact that ethnic diversity tends to influence managerial decisions, making them nuanced, subjective, and often inclined towards political or self-serving interests, as highlighted by Jacob (2014) and Rindap & Mari (2014). This inclination has the potential to introduce systematic discrimination into the processes for employment opportunities. The particular issue lies in the fact that employee experiences contribute to a perception of discrimination, resulting in decreased employee productivity (Stevenson, 2014). This decline in employee productivity, attributed to perceived discrimination within the civil service, poses a significant threat to Nigeria's economic development and its delicate unity, as emphasized by Rindap & Mari (2014). Recent research suggests that the recruitment processes into the Nigerian

Civil Service are significantly influenced by various factors, including political considerations/godfatherism, nepotism, the quota system, ethnicity (Federal Character Principle), and government discretion, as identified by Inyang et al. (2011).

In a similar perspective, Fajama et al. (2011) proposed that factors such as culture, language, religion, gender, and educational qualifications play a role in determining who is employed in the civil service. Despite these considerations, the Nigerian Civil Service continues to be marked by inefficiency and ineffectiveness in delivering essential social services, as noted by Nwanolue and Jiwuoha (2012) and Thomson (2005). This inefficiency is attributed to the profound implications of ethnic diversity within the Nigerian Civil Service. Conversely, the federal character principle has transitioned into a problem rather than serving as a solution to the issues it was intended to address.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The primary aim of this study is to thoroughly analyze the consequences of ethnic diversity within the Nigerian Civil Service. The specific objectives of this study are based on the following considerations;

1. That an efficient and adequate implementation of the federal character principle would help to improve service delivery in the Nigerian Civil Service.
2. That the right applicability and strictly adherent to the civil service commission rules and regulations would help to address the negative employee productivity caused by the perception in the Civil Service.
3. Recommend a workable template that would help to address the implications of ethnic diversity in the Nigeria Civil Service.

### **Significance of the Study**

The importance of this study cannot be overstated. It aims to investigate the repercussions of ethnic diversity within the Nigerian Civil Service. This is prompted by the recognition that ethnic diversity is a prevalent phenomenon in most countries (Rubinstein & Brenner, 2014). The study underscores that Nigeria, with an estimated population of 183 million individuals spread across 36 states and 776 local government areas (National Population Commission, 2017), encompasses 371 distinct ethnicities (Nigeria Local, 2014; Online Nigeria, 2006). Furthermore, the examination reveals that Nigeria's multi-ethnic composition implies a proclivity for showing favoritism based on ethnicity (Adegbami & Uche, 2015; Nnahuihe et al., 2014). Even in cases where such expected favoritism is not overt, it does not negate the possibility that decision-makers may harbor some form of bias. Consequently, the implications of ethnic diversity on managerial decision-making processes within the Nigerian Civil Service are crucial in a country like Nigeria, amplifying the significance of this study.

### **Research Question**

Based on the above stated problems and objectives, the following research questions have been raised which this study provide relevant answers, namely:

1. Has ethnic diversity consideration in recruitment exercise any direct implications in the present state of inefficiency and ineffectiveness in the Nigeria Civil Service?
2. Can the Nigeria Civil Service Commission practice merit based principle in its recruitment process despite multiethnicity nature of Nigeria?
3. Is there a better way of implementing a credible recruitment policy that is free from these primordial factors of ethnicity, favoritism and nepotism?

### **Definition of Concept**

In this study, the clarification of key concepts has been presented to ensure a clear understanding of our procedures. This is crucial to prevent potential confusion and misunderstandings regarding the intended meaning of our terms by our readers, as emphasized by Okereka (2015:2). Therefore, the subsequent terms have been elucidated in the context of this study.

1. **Ethnic Diversity** – The cultural diversity exists within a singular entity, which could be a business, community, or even as expansive as a country or nation. It encompasses the inclusion of individuals from diverse cultural, ethnic, and identity backgrounds.
2. **Ethnicity** – A community is attributed to individuals or human groups who have a shared lineage based on physical or traditional resemblances (Baskerville, Wynn-Williams, Evans & Gillet, 2014). It serves as the cultural entity encompassing beliefs, nationality, language, or ancestry that imparts a unique sense of belongingness within a group to an individual.
3. **Diversity** – Various distinctive attributes of minorities within a group, comprising factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, health, and education (Chen & Hamilton, 2015).
4. **Federal Character Principle** – A constitutional provision in Nigeria aimed at ensuring proportional representation for all opportunities within the Nigerian federation. The intention is to mirror diversity and uphold equal opportunities for everyone (Cornlius & Greg, 2013).
5. **Public Service** – In Nigeria, agencies of government, civil service, legislature and judiciary (Omiseru & Okofu, 2014).

### **LITERATURE REVIEW/THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

An exploration of the impact of ethnic diversity in the Nigerian civil service is crucial, and it cannot be overstated without a comprehensive comprehension of the conceptual and historical factors embedded in the Civil Service. Despite these challenges, relevant literature is examined in this context.

### **Understanding the Place of Ethnic Diversity and its Implication in the Nigeria Civil Service**

Debrah, Alidu, and Owusu-Mensah (2016), along with Van der Meer and Tolsma (2014), have highlighted that ethnic diversity can have adverse effects on society, leading to conflicts that result in human, social, and economic losses. Ethnic diversity is a common occurrence in many countries, as pointed out by Rubinstein and Brenner (2014). Nigeria, with its vast population of approximately 183 million people, distributed across 36 states, 774 local government areas (National Population Commission, 2017), and comprising 371 distinct ethnicities (Nigeria Local, 2014; Online Nigeria, 2016), exemplifies this natural phenomenon. The multiethnic nature of Nigeria implies a potential inclination toward favoritism based on ethnicity (Adegbami & Uche, 2015). Even in cases where such favoritism may not be overt, it does not necessarily mean that decision-makers are free from some form of bias.

Rindap and Mari (2014) emphasized that ethnicity exerts a significant influence on virtually every aspect of Nigerian society. Ogunrotifa (2012) theorized that in Nigeria, ethnicity gives rise to narrow and individualistic interests that take precedence over national concerns, resulting in violent protests. Ethnic diversity encompasses various factors such as religion, gender, age, ethnicity, race, class, disability, and others (Daya, 2014; Lee & Sharp, 2017). The primary challenge faced by many entities in the Nigerian Civil Service is determining the most effective way to leverage the advantages of diversity, such as fostering innovation and creativity, while minimizing the potential for discriminatory practices to achieve organizational objectives (Daya, 2014; Kamwendo & Seretse, 2015). Stevenson (2014) argued that poorly managed diversity could have detrimental effects on employee commitment and productivity.

Put differently, diversity encompasses the varied human differences arising from natural, situational, demographic, and environmental factors, both visible and invisible (Daya, 2014; Lee & Sharp, 2017). Nittle (2016) proposed that ethnicity might be viewed as a subset of race. Parboteeah et al. (2014) theorized that ethnic diversity has both advantages and drawbacks in the context of decision-making and society.

### **Diversity and Perceived Discrimination**

Diversity encompasses the range of human differences arising from natural, situational, demographic, and environmental factors, both apparent and hidden (Daya, 2014; Lee & Sharp, 2017). Discrimination refers to prejudiced actions, attitudes, or treatment directed at an individual or group based on pre-existing biases (Mishra & Mishra, 2015). Harnois (2014) pointed out that discriminatory practices can take the form of one-dimensional, oppositional, or international actions targeting individuals or groups based on a single criterion or a combination of factors. Chamberlain (2016) highlighted that biases are mental barriers and beliefs that hinder objectivity, while overt biases are thoughts and interpretations that can mislead an individual, particularly when they stubbornly adhere to a position regardless of the facts. Ethnicity/race, religion, gender,



age, health, sexual orientation, and marital status represent extensive categories of diversity and can serve as underlying factors for discriminatory behaviors (Elias & Paradies, 2016; Hedija, 2016; Souza & Cribari-Neto, 2015).

Ethnic diversity refers to the cultural variety present within a given entity, which can range from a small business or community to a large country or nation. This diversity stems from two key components. A person's ethnicity comprises cultural elements such as beliefs, nationality, language, or ancestry that contribute to a distinct sense of belonging within a group. Diversity, on the other hand, involves recognizing individuals from diverse backgrounds, encompassing factors like race, ethnicity, and gender. Individuals are categorized based on cultural, tribal, linguistic, or other distinguishing characteristics (Parboteeah, Seriki & Hoegal, 2014). Among various factors, ethnicity stands out as a significant influence contributing to the diminishing independence of recruiting bodies. It is undeniable that every leader is shaped by a specific ethnic group. However, it has been convincingly demonstrated that substantial development can only be achieved through the cultivation of a shared civil identity, which often conflicts with ethnic differentiation. From 1999 to 2023, findings from our targeted group discussions indicate that lists of applicants based on ethnicity are assembled by elected representatives from different constituencies and forwarded to the commission for job placements. Commissioners, ministry directors, advisers, special advisers, as well as local government chairpersons affiliated with the ruling party and board executives, also submit candidate lists to the commission for employment (Okereka, 2015). Notably, some of the individuals included in these lists lack the necessary qualifications but are still hired into the system.

Ethnic differentiation is seen as having adverse effects on economic management. Easterly and Levine (1997) reported that ethnic diversity is linked to a reduced rate of economic growth, particularly in the context of the challenges faced by the Nigerian Civil Service. Diverse societies are believed to struggle more in reaching cooperative solutions, leading to a greater likelihood of resource wastage in distributional conflicts. The economic consequences of this perceived dysfunctional politics are deemed significant, with Easterly and Levine attributing Africa's current poverty, in large part, to its unusually high ethnic diversity. In developed societies, vital statistics serve as a tool for continually updating census figures. These vital registration data enable effective and comprehensive national development planning. Despite Nigeria conducting several census exercises since gaining independence, the figures, while accepted for planning purposes, have remained contentious. Nigeria has been unable to establish a reliable vital civic registration system. It's worth noting that the history of census-taking in Nigeria has consistently been marked by controversy, with each successive attempt often sparking sensitive reactions related to cultural, religious, and ethnic reasons (Okereka, 2015).

### **The Federal Character Principle**

The diverse nation of Nigeria compelled the government to establish the Federal Character Principle, tasked with developing a fair formula for distributing various levels of positions within the Nigerian Civil Service. This principle guides recruitment into federal, state, and local government civil services. However, a significant drawback of this approach is that it prioritizes quotas over merit. Gladden (1998:12) warns that the principle, if not confined to a minimum acceptable standard, could lead to disappointment and jeopardize the country's image. A key argument supporting the precedence of the principle over merit in the Nigerian Civil Service is that political leaders from disadvantaged areas, primarily the Northern regions in the case of the Federal Civil Service, as suggested by Olowu (1997:32), often leverage ethnic and religious sentiments. This allows them to use their positions to safeguard their regions through the application of the Federal Character Principle. Additionally, the Northern region faces educational challenges, and despite this educational lag, individuals from the North hold significant positions in the federal civil service due to the persistence of the federal character principle. If not rigorously controlled, this could perpetuate mediocrity, laziness, and inefficiency in the Nigerian civil service.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Awamber and Ijeoma (1998:18) emphasize the importance of incorporating theoretical frameworks into research, whether it pertains to social, political, or developmental phenomena. The use of theoretical frameworks is essential because they act as a framework to filter and organize the study variables, facilitating meaningful comparisons. In line with this, the study has chosen to employ Marx Weber's bureaucratic theory, also known as the Weberian ideal bureaucratic model, to elucidate the consequences of ethnic diversity within the Nigerian Civil Service.

### **Applicability of the Marx Weber Ideal Bureaucratic Theory to Nigeria Civil Service**

According to Thompson (1983:28), the Weberian ideal bureaucratic theory is built upon the concept of legal rational authority and has become a prevailing practice in modern society's institutions. This authority structure is termed "legal" because it operates through a system of rules and procedures. To adhere to all the prescribed features of bureaucracy, as outlined by Weber, staff members must be chosen based on merit and adhere to regulatory frameworks. The critical assumptions of Weber's ideal bureaucratic theory are deeply ingrained in its characteristics of labor specialization, a well-defined hierarchical structure, clear responsibilities and authority, a system of rules and procedures, and the impersonality of reactions. Recruiting based on merit rather than patronage is believed to foster competence, efficiency, and overall development. In this study, we strongly argue that employees hired on merit are more likely to specialize, maintain impersonal interactions, maintain accurate official records, and meet expectations, as opposed to those hired through patronage.



Over the years, the Nigerian Civil Service has faced criticism for implementing its recruitment policy through patronage. Factors such as ethnic diversity, the federal capital principle, religion, party loyalty, and others have been identified as influencers on the Civil Service Commission and other recruiting bodies. Recognizing that the efficiency and effectiveness of any organization are shaped by its workforce, it is noteworthy that, despite criticisms, the Weberian ideal bureaucratic theory's universal applicability is increasingly acknowledged, especially by developing nations. While acknowledging Mouzelis's caution (1968:28) about the careful application of Weber's ideal bureaucratic theory, its fundamental features are widely accepted as essential for establishing order, efficiency, and development in modern and emerging societies. This study aims to attribute the sustained criticism of the civil service's poor performance to its inconsistent application of the characteristics of Marx Weber's ideal type bureaucratic theory. Specifically, it asserts that the Nigerian Civil Service can only meet expectations when the Civil Service Commission recruits personnel based on merit and actively embraces Weberian recommendations related to civil service practices. Adhering strictly to bureaucratic theory recommendations is seen as a potential solution to addressing the challenges posed by ethnic diversity in the Nigerian Civil Service.

### **Empirical Review**

This study aims to compare itself with other related studies, highlighting both their commonalities and differences. The implication of ethnic diversity in the Nigerian Civil Service is a subject of debate, particularly given Nigeria's multi-ethnic and heterogeneous composition, featuring 371 ethnicities (Nigeria Local, 2014; Online Nigeria, 2016). This diversity significantly influences the operations of the civil service commission in Nigeria. The country's heterogeneous nature compelled the government to adopt the federal character principle, seeking an equitable formula for distributing various positions in the public service at the federal and state levels (Elaigqwu, 2006). However, this principle tends to prioritize ethnicity over merit. As noted by Yaro (2014), sentiments and factors like ethnicity, nepotism, and favoritism often receive more consideration than merit in employment decisions. This underscores the substantial role that ethnic diversity and its implications play in the Nigerian Civil Service, presenting a significant challenge that demands careful attention.

### **METHODOLOGY**

This research is qualitative in nature, relying on data sourced from secondary outlets such as journals and online literature. The focus of the study is Nigeria, a nation comprising thirty-six states and seven hundred and seventy-four local governments. Nigeria is characterized by its multiethnic and multicultural makeup, encompassing various ethnic groups, with the major ones being the Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba, while other languages and ethnicities are considered minority groups. The study is particularly concerned with the implications of ethnic diversity in the country, which has given rise to various agitations. The research involves a review and description of existing literature on ethnic diversity in the Nigerian Civil Service by other scholars. Themes

addressed in the study encompass the implications of ethnic diversity, ethnicity, and the federal character principle.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

Conclusions drawn from the diverse literature examined reveal that ethnic diversity, among other factors, has significant adverse consequences within the Nigeria civil service. It stands out as a major factor influencing the decreasing independence of recruitment bodies. It is undeniable that leaders often emerge from specific ethnic groups, establishing a direct connection between ethnic diversity and the current state of inefficiency and ineffectiveness in the Nigeria civil service.

It was also uncovered that, in order for an organization to preserve meritocracy, institutions such as the Nigeria Civil Service must adhere to all the specified features of bureaucracy outlined by Weber. This entails selecting staff based on merit and providing regular training and retraining to ensure optimal performance. Therefore, it can be asserted that the Nigeria Civil Service can maintain a merit-based recruitment process if the Weberian theory is fully implemented. The study also highlighted the significance of staff recruitment based on merit, emphasizing the importance of recommendations in the recruitment and selection process. Consequently, we contend that strict adherence to the recommendations of the Weberian ideal bureaucratic theory in the implementation of recruitment policies will contribute to addressing issues of laziness, incompetence, and diminishing efficiency in the Nigeria civil service.

## **CONCLUSION**

The unique characteristics of Nigeria reveal that the responsibilities of modern democratic governance extend beyond the conventional role of maintaining stability, peace, and order. Ensuring the formulation of policies that provide improved goods and services for the social, political, and economic well-being of the general public is crucial. However, this objective has been hindered by shortcomings in the recruitment process. It is imperative to emphasize that the civil service commission should establish standardized methods to recruit the most qualified individuals into the civil service, regardless of environmental factors such as ethnicity, nepotism, federal character, favoritism, corruption, and others. By selecting qualified personnel, the civil service can enhance the development and execution of government programs and policies. This, in turn, will contribute to promoting public satisfaction, as well as mobilizing and fostering widespread support for effective governance.

Despite the challenges posed by Nigeria's multi-ethnic composition, the Weberian ideal bureaucratic theory, rooted in the concept of legal rational authority, remains the most effective theory for standard measurement in institutional capacity building and progress. Emphasizing its principles, including the requisite competence and qualifications for standardizing the recruitment process, is crucial. There is a need to steadfastly deemphasize prevailing principles that give undue

importance to environmental factors, shifting the focus back to the longstanding values of excellence and qualification. Addressing the shortcomings associated with the recruitment process in Nigeria is contingent upon embracing merit-based principles and executing the process through an independent and impartial body. This approach is essential for fostering fairness and efficacy in the recruitment exercise.

### **Recommendation**

In light of the findings and conclusions, the paper proposes the following strategies to enhance the Nigeria Civil Service Commission and ensure merit-based recruitment, considering the implications of ethnic diversity identified in the study.

- i. The appropriate authorities, in collaboration with the federal, state, and local governments, should enact legislation to mandate that recruitment into the Nigeria civil service is conducted by experienced and impartial personnel.
- ii. The recruitment officer should be a qualified professional and allowed to complete the entire process by adhering strictly to the principles of systematic planning, scientific execution, objectivity, and merit, even when there is a requirement to address demands for gender or ethnic balancing.
- iii. Consequently, the recruitment process for the Nigeria civil service should be oriented towards performance, merit, and action, with the capability to produce and maintain the necessary skilled, knowledgeable, and developed human resources. These individuals should be aligned with the recognized values, norms, culture, and standards of public service performance.
- iv. The recruitment process should be conducted based on the recommendations of recognized job experts. This approach will facilitate the hiring of essential staff and prevent an excess of personnel in the system.
- v. The civil service commission should collaborate with other ministries to redesign and implement strategies that align with position classification.

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