



DIGITALIZATION OF THE RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION OF ACADEMIC STAFF OF COLLEGES OF EDUCATION IN NIGERIA



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Abstract

Digitalization has significantly transformed various sectors worldwide, and the educational sector in Nigeria is no exception. This study explored the impact of digitalization on the recruitment and selection processes for academic staff in Nigerian Colleges of Education. Historically, these processes were manual and paper-based, involving face-to-face interactions and physical advertisements. However, with the advent of digital technologies, such as online job portals, electronic applications, and advanced data analytics, there has been a notable shift towards digitalization. This transition promises increased efficiency, broader reach, and improved accuracy in candidate assessment. The study adopted a qualitative approach, utilizing secondary data sources, including academic journals, government documents, and relevant publications. Theoretical insights from the Diffusion of Innovations theory were used to understand the stages of digital adoption and its challenges. Key findings showed that while digitalization offers numerous benefits, such as streamlined application processing and enhanced candidate screening through AI. The included limited technological infrastructure, disparities in digital access, data privacy concerns, and the need for digital literacy among staff and candidates. To enhance digital recruitment, Colleges of Education should expand job postings to digital platforms, adopt application management systems, integrate automated screening tools, and invest in virtual interview infrastructure. Additionally, electronic onboarding systems can streamline hiring and improve new staff integration. This paper suggests that Colleges of Education should expand their recruitment and selection, strategies to include digital platform such as job boards, social media and professional methods.

Keywords: Digitalization, Recruitment, Selection, Colleges of Education

Introduction

Digitalization has revolutionized various sectors across the globe, significantly impacting how organizations operate and deliver services. The educational sector, particularly in Nigeria, has not been left behind in this digital wave. The recruitment and selection of academic staff in Colleges of Education in Nigeria is one such area that has experienced notable transformation due to digitalization (Emmanuel, 2024). Recruitment and selection are critical functions within educational institutions, as they directly influence the quality of education delivered. According to Onah and Anikwe (2016), the ability to attract, identify, and retain competent academic staff is essential for maintaining high educational standards and fostering a productive learning environment. Traditionally, these processes in Nigerian Colleges of Education were predominantly manual, involving considerable paperwork, face-to-face interviews, and physical advertisements. However, the advent of digital technologies has introduced new methods and tools, significantly altering these conventional practices. Digitalization in recruitment and selection involves a range of activities, from online job postings and electronic applications to the use of advanced data analytics and artificial intelligence (AI) in candidate screening and assessment (Odili, Daudu, Adefemi, Ekemezie & Usiagu, 2024). These technologies offer several advantages, including broader reach, efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and improved accuracy in identifying suitable candidates. They also present challenges such as the need for technological infrastructure, digital literacy, and concerns regarding data privacy and security.

Recruitment and selection processes in Nigerian Colleges of Education can be traced back to the colonial era when formal education systems were first introduced. During this period, the recruitment of academic staff was primarily influenced by the British educational model, with a strong emphasis on qualifications and experience. Selection processes were largely manual, involving rigorous scrutiny of academic credentials and personal interviews conducted by colonial administrators and educationists (Odor, Martins-Emesom, & Bakwuye, 2019). In the post-independence era, the Nigerian educational system underwent significant expansion, leading to the establishment of numerous Colleges of Education across the country (Imam, 2012). The recruitment and selection of academic staff during this period were characterized by increased autonomy, with individual institutions developing their own procedures and criteria. Despite this decentralization, the processes remained predominantly manual, relying heavily on physical advertisements, written applications, and face-to-face interactions. The late 20th century and early 21st century marked the beginning of a gradual shift towards digitalization in various sectors, including education. The introduction of computers and the internet provided new opportunities for streamlining administrative functions, including recruitment and selection (DigitalDefynd, 2024; Yamin, 2019). However, Nwokike, Abasili and Ezeneme (2023) state that the adoption of digital tools in Nigerian Colleges of Education was initially slow, hindered by factors such as limited technological infrastructure, inadequate funding, and resistance to change among staff.

The turn of the 21st century brought about a more concerted effort towards digital transformation in Nigeria's educational sector. Government initiatives and policies aimed at promoting ICT integration in education played a crucial role in this shift. For instance, the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) was established in 2001 to drive ICT development and implementation across various sectors (Irele, 2021). Additionally, the National Policy on Information and Communication Technology in Education, launched in 2010, provided a framework for incorporating digital tools into teaching, learning, and administrative processes (Federal Ministry of Education, 2019). These initiatives created a conducive environment for the digitalization of recruitment and selection processes in Nigerian Colleges of Education. Online job portals and electronic application systems began to emerge, offering more efficient and accessible platforms for both institutions and prospective candidates. The use of email and other electronic communication methods also became commonplace, replacing traditional mail and face-to-face interactions in many instances. In recent years, the adoption of more advanced digital technologies has further transformed recruitment and selection practices in Nigerian Colleges of Education. The use of AI and machine learning algorithms for candidate screening and assessment has become increasingly popular, enabling institutions to process large volumes of applications quickly and accurately (Okatta, Ajayi & Olawale, 2024). Video interviews and virtual assessment centers have also gained traction, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, which necessitated a shift towards remote and online interactions.

Despite these advancements, the digitalization of recruitment and selection processes in Nigerian Colleges of Education is not without challenges. One of the primary issues is the digital divide, with disparities in access to technology and internet connectivity across different regions of the country (Okoye & Umeifekwem, 2023). This divide can limit the reach of digital recruitment efforts and exclude potential candidates from remote or underserved areas. Additionally, concerns about data privacy and security have emerged as critical considerations, particularly with the increasing reliance on digital platforms for handling sensitive information (Olaoye & Adedokun, 2023). Moreover, the success of digitalization efforts depends on the digital literacy of both staff and candidates. Ensuring that academic staff possess the necessary skills to navigate and utilize digital tools effectively is essential for maximizing the benefits of these technologies. Training and capacity-building initiatives are therefore crucial components of the digital transformation journey in Nigerian Colleges of Education. This study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of these dynamics, offering insights and recommendations for enhancing the recruitment and selection of academic staff in Nigerian Colleges of Education in the digital age.

Concept Clarifications

Digitalization

Digitalization has profoundly transformed the global landscape across myriad aspects of life in recent decades. Industries have undergone seismic shifts, adopting advanced technologies to streamline processes, enhance productivity, and create new market opportunities. Communication has been revolutionized, enabling instantaneous global connectivity and fostering unprecedented levels of collaboration and knowledge sharing. Governments and organizations alike have embraced digital tools to improve service delivery, governance, and decision-making processes. Education and healthcare have also seen significant advancements through digital platforms, expanding access to learning resources and medical expertise. Social interactions and cultural exchanges have transcended geographical boundaries, fostering a more interconnected and inclusive global community. As digitalization continues to evolve, its impact on economies, societies, and individual lives grows ever more profound, promising further innovations and challenges as we navigate an increasingly digital future. Parviainen, Tihinen, Kääriäinen and Teppola (2017) state that digitalization has been recognized as a transformative force reshaping both society and business in the foreseeable and distant future. Its impact is projected to be profound, often likened by various scholars to the magnitude of the industrial revolution. This comparison underscores the far-reaching implications of digital technologies across sectors, from manufacturing and finance to healthcare and education, fundamentally altering how organizations operate and interact with stakeholders in a globally connected environment.

Digitalization refers to the interaction between digital technologies and both the social and institutional processes, converting traditional methods and systems into digital formats. This transformation integrates digital tools and platforms into existing social structures and institutional frameworks, aiming to enhance efficiency, accessibility, and connectivity (Calderon-Monge & Ribeiro-Soriano, 2023). It involves leveraging technologies such as artificial intelligence, cloud computing, and data analytics to streamline operations, improve decision-making, and facilitate seamless interaction between individuals, organizations, and governmental bodies in the digital ecosystem. Wirtz, Weyerer, and Heckerroth (2022) emphasized that digitalization is significantly impacting organizations, triggering disruptive changes within firms and their immediate business environment. This phenomenon is accelerating the obsolescence of current business models, compelling companies to swiftly adapt or face the risk of becoming irrelevant in rapidly evolving markets. The integration of digital technologies is reshaping operational strategies, customer interactions, and market dynamics, challenging traditional paradigms and demanding innovative approaches to sustain competitive advantage in the digital era.

Digitalization signifies the comprehensive integration of digital technologies into various aspects of daily life, spanning processes, organizational structures, businesses, and broader societal realms. It involves the widespread adoption and application of digital tools and platforms aimed at enhancing efficiency, connectivity, and accessibility across sectors. This transformation encompasses several key elements: the digitization of information and processes, automation of tasks through artificial intelligence and robotics, and the leveraging of data-driven insights to foster innovation, streamline decision-making, and optimize overall operations. In practical terms, digitalization empowers organizations to digitize their workflows and operations, enabling seamless communication, collaboration, and resource management. Businesses increasingly utilize cloud computing, Internet of Things (IoT) devices, and advanced analytics to drive productivity gains and operational efficiencies. Similarly, governments leverage digital technologies to enhance public service delivery, improve governance frameworks, and engage citizens more effectively (Baykal, 2020). At a societal level, digitalization facilitates greater connectivity and access to information, transforming how individuals interact, learn, and participate in economic and social activities. It underpins the emergence of digital economies and ecosystems, where online platforms and digital marketplaces enable new business models and consumer behaviours. Moreover, digitalization plays a pivotal role in addressing global challenges such as sustainability, healthcare access, and inclusive economic growth by enabling innovative solutions and scalable interventions (Mihu, Pitic & Bayraktar, 2023).

Recruitment and Selection

Recruitment is defined as the process of generating a pool of qualified candidates for a particular job. This process involves various activities aimed at attracting potential candidates who possess the necessary skills, qualifications, and experience for the job (Adjei-Bamfo, Yeboah-Assiamah & Bawole, 2018). The recruitment process can include job postings, advertising, networking, and other strategies to reach a wide audience of potential applicants. On the other hand, selection is described as the process of making a 'hire' or 'no hire' decision with respect to each applicant for a job. Selection involves a series of steps to evaluate and choose the best candidate from the pool of applicants generated during the recruitment phase. This process typically includes reviewing resumes, conducting interviews, administering tests, and assessing candidates' qualifications against the job requirements (Oyadiran, Ishaq & Agunbiade, 2023). Job analysis helps in creating a detailed job description and specification, which serve as the criteria for evaluating candidates during the selection process.

Recruitment and selection processes as critical components of human resource management (Ahmad, 2020). The primary objective of recruitment is multifaceted: it involves seeking out or exploring potential candidates, evaluating their qualifications and suitability, inducing their interest, and ultimately obtaining their commitment to fill positions necessary for the successful operation of the organization. Selection goes beyond merely choosing the best candidate from a pool of applicants. It is a complex process that involves picking individuals who possess the relevant qualifications to fulfill specific job roles within the organization (Imam, 2012). The selection process aims to achieve a harmonious balance between what the applicant can do and desires to do and what the organization needs. This ensures that the chosen candidates are not only capable but also motivated and aligned with the organization's goals, leading to a more effective and cohesive workforce.

Colleges of Education

Colleges of education (COEs) are crucial teacher education institutions responsible for preparing educators for Nigerian schools. These institutions occupy a significant position as the third tier in Nigeria's tertiary educational framework (Ezugoh, Adesina, & Yakubu, 2020). They play a pivotal role in shaping the academic and professional development of future teachers, equipping them with the necessary knowledge, skills, and pedagogical techniques essential for effective teaching and learning in the country's educational system. College of education" refers to a tertiary institution or teacher training college primarily dedicated to teaching or conducting research tailored to the requirements of early childhood, primary, secondary, or higher education and training sectors (Law Insider (2024).

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative approach, primarily utilizing secondary data sources. These sources included academic journals, online government documents, gazettes, and other relevant publications. The focus was on examining the effect of digitalization on the recruitment and selection processes for academic staff in Colleges of Education in Nigeria. By analyzing these various secondary sources, the study aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of how digital tools and platforms are transforming traditional recruitment and selection methods, identifying both the benefits and challenges associated with these changes.

Theoretical Framework

The Diffusion of Innovations Theory (DOI) was adopted for this work, developed by Everett Rogers in 1962, explains how, why, and at what rate new ideas and technology spread through cultures. The theory posited that innovation diffusion is a process that occurs over time through a series of stages: knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation, and confirmation. This framework is highly relevant in understanding the effect of digitalization on the recruitment and selection of academic staff in Nigerian Colleges of Education. In the context of Nigerian Colleges of Education, the knowledge stage involves awareness of digital recruitment and selection tools. Institutions must disseminate

information about the benefits and functionalities of digital systems. This can be achieved through workshops, seminars, and training sessions aimed at familiarizing faculty and administrative staff with digital tools and platforms.

Once knowledge is acquired, the next stage is persuasion, where stakeholders form an attitude towards the innovation. In Nigerian Colleges of Education, it is crucial to address concerns and demonstrate the advantages of digitalization, such as increased efficiency, transparency, and the ability to reach a wider pool of candidates. Success stories from other institutions and pilot projects can be effective in persuading stakeholders. The decision stage involves the commitment to adopt or reject the innovation. For Colleges of Education, this may involve administrative decisions to allocate resources towards digital infrastructure, selecting suitable digital platforms, and incorporating digital processes into existing recruitment policies. The decision to adopt digital recruitment systems must be supported by a clear implementation strategy. The implementation stage is where the actual integration of digital tools into the recruitment process takes place. Nigerian Colleges of Education need to invest in the necessary technological infrastructure, provide training for staff, and ensure that the digital tools are user-friendly and accessible. This may involve setting up online application systems, digital interview platforms, and databases for candidate information. In the final stage, confirmation, the institution evaluates the outcomes of the digital recruitment process and seeks reinforcement for the decision. Continuous monitoring and feedback mechanisms are essential to ensure that the digital systems are functioning as intended and to make any necessary adjustments. Success in this stage can lead to the institutionalization of digital recruitment practices and pave the way for further innovations.

The Diffusion of Innovations Theory can be applied to digitalize recruitment and selection in Nigerian Colleges of Education through integrated strategies. Awareness and training programs are essential. Regular training sessions can enhance digital literacy among administrative and academic staff, ensuring proficiency with digital tools. Awareness campaigns can highlight the benefits of digital recruitment, addressing initial resistance. Implementing pilot projects in a few departments can demonstrate the benefits and effectiveness of digital processes. Feedback from these pilots can refine the tools before a full-scale rollout. Resource allocation is crucial. Colleges must allocate budgets to procure necessary hardware and software, invest in reliable internet connectivity, and ensure robust cybersecurity to protect sensitive data. Developing and updating recruitment policies to incorporate digital procedures is vital. These policies should be transparent and provide clear guidelines. Regular monitoring and evaluation ensure effectiveness, with metrics established to evaluate success and updates based on feedback. Engaging stakeholders, including faculty, administrative staff, and prospective candidates, is key. Addressing concerns, providing support, and involving them in the transition fosters acceptance and smoother implementation.

Challenges of Digitalization on the Recruitment and Selection of Academic Staff in Nigeria Colleges of Education

Among Nigerian Colleges of Education, the advent of digitalization has promised transformative possibilities for the recruitment and selection of academic staff. However, this transition is not without its challenges. This research examines the numerous barriers hindering the full adoption of digital practices in this context.

Limited Reach and Visibility: Many colleges of education in Nigeria still rely on traditional methods for advertising job openings, such as physical postings and word-of-mouth, rather than leveraging digital platforms. This limited reach can restrict the pool of potential candidates to those within immediate geographic proximity or those who are already connected with the institution (Baykal, 2020). The lack of digital advertising reduces the diversity and inclusivity of the applicant pool. Institutions may miss out on highly qualified candidates who are beyond their immediate area but are interested in the roles. This constraint hinders the ability of colleges to attract top talent and fosters a narrow perspective in institutional culture.



Inefficiencies in Application Processing: With a reliance on paper-based application systems, there are inherent inefficiencies in the processing and management of applications. Manual handling of applications increases the risk of errors and delays (Ahmed, Omotunde, Atoloye & Olayemi, 2021). The slow and cumbersome nature of processing applications can lead to extended recruitment cycles, affecting the institution's ability to fill vacancies promptly. This inefficiency also places additional administrative burdens on HR staff, potentially leading to burnout and decreased job satisfaction among employees.

Challenges with Automated Screening Tools: Many colleges do not use automated screening tools to filter and manage applications. This absence of digital tools results in reliance on manual review processes, which can be time-consuming and prone to human error (Albassam, 2023; Odili, Daudu, Adefemi, Ekemezie, & Usiagu, 2024). The lack of automated screening tools can perpetuate biases and inconsistencies in the selection process, leading to less objective and fair evaluations of candidates. Institutions might inadvertently overlook qualified candidates due to the limitations of manual sorting and filtering.

Virtual Interview Challenges: While the adoption of virtual interviews has increased, not all colleges are equipped with the necessary infrastructure or digital literacy to conduct effective virtual interviews. Technical issues, such as poor internet connectivity and inadequate software, can disrupt the interview process (Miller, Thakkar, & Das, 2024; Yunusa, Sanusi, Dada, Oyelere, Agbo, Obaido, & Aruleba, 2021). Technical disruptions during virtual interviews can hinder communication, resulting in a less effective assessment of candidates' skills and suitability. The lack of face-to-face interaction may also make it difficult to evaluate candidates' interpersonal skills and cultural fit, which are critical aspects of the recruitment process.

Inadequate Electronic Onboarding Systems: The onboarding process in many institutions still relies on traditional methods, such as in-person orientations and printed handbooks, rather than utilizing digital onboarding systems (Jeske & Olson, 2021). The absence of electronic onboarding tools can lead to inconsistent onboarding experiences for new hires, potentially causing confusion and delays in their integration into the institution. Inefficient onboarding can affect new employees' early engagement and productivity, impacting their overall experience and retention.

Conclusion

Digitalization has brought transformative changes to the recruitment and selection processes in Nigerian Colleges of Education. The shift from traditional, manual methods to digital platforms has introduced significant improvements in efficiency, reach, and accuracy. Online job postings, electronic applications, and advanced data analytics have streamlined the recruitment process, enabling institutions to attract and evaluate a diverse pool of candidates more effectively. The benefits of digitalization are evident in the broader reach of job advertisements, reduced administrative burdens, and the ability to process applications more quickly. The use of AI and machine learning tools has enhanced candidate screening and assessment, leading to more precise matches between candidates' skills and job requirements. Additionally, digital tools have the potential to overcome geographical and logistical barriers that previously limited recruitment efforts. However, this digital transformation is not without its challenges. The digital divide in Nigeria, characterized by uneven access to technology and internet connectivity, can hinder the effectiveness of digital recruitment efforts, particularly in remote or underserved areas. Concerns about data privacy and security are also significant, necessitating robust measures to protect sensitive information. Furthermore, the success of digital recruitment relies heavily on the digital literacy of both staff and candidates, making training and capacity-building essential. To fully realize the benefits of digitalization, Nigerian Colleges of Education must invest in technological infrastructure, address digital divide issues, and ensure data security. Providing comprehensive training for staff and candidates will also be crucial in maximizing the effectiveness of digital recruitment tools.

By overcoming these challenges and embracing digital innovation, institutions can enhance their recruitment processes, ultimately contributing to improved educational outcomes and the overall quality of education in Nigeria.

Suggestions

In order to successfully navigate the challenges posed by digitalization in the recruitment and selection of academic staff within Nigerian colleges of education, it is imperative to adopt a strategic approach focused on fostering digital literacy, improving infrastructure, and ensuring robust data security measures. The following recommendations are tailored to address these critical areas and promote effective integration of digital technologies:

1. Colleges of education should expand their recruitment strategies to include digital platforms such as job boards, social media, and professional networks. Leveraging these platforms can significantly enhance the visibility of job openings and attract a broader and more diverse pool of candidates beyond immediate geographic areas. This approach not only improves the chances of finding highly qualified candidates but also fosters a more inclusive institutional culture by tapping into a wider range of applicants.
2. They should invest in digital application management systems. These systems can streamline application processing, reduce the risk of errors, and accelerate recruitment cycles. Automation in application handling not only minimizes administrative burdens but also enhances the overall efficiency of the recruitment process, ultimately improving the institution's ability to fill vacancies promptly.
3. To overcome the limitations of manual review processes, colleges should incorporate automated screening tools. These tools can assist in filtering and managing applications more objectively and efficiently. By reducing human error and bias, automated screening can ensure fairer evaluations of candidates and help institutions identify the most suitable individuals for the roles.
4. To improve the effectiveness of virtual interviews, colleges should invest in robust digital infrastructure and provide training to staff on virtual interview best practices. Ensuring reliable internet connectivity and using up-to-date software can minimize technical disruptions and facilitate smoother communication during interviews.
5. They should transition to electronic onboarding systems. These systems can provide a consistent and streamlined onboarding process, including digital orientation modules and online handbooks. Effective electronic onboarding can help new employees integrate more quickly and smoothly into the institution, improving their early engagement and productivity.

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