

Ghost Worker Syndrome and Public Sector Productivity in Kogi State Civil Service: A 21st Century Malaise

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ABSTRACT

Ghost worker syndrome continues to be a persistent drain on public resources, particularly in Kogi State. This phenomenon involves non-existent employees receiving salaries or multiple payments from the same individual under various identities. This results in a delay in service delivery and a decrease in productivity. This study investigates the impact of ghost worker syndrome on public sector efficiency in Kogi State using quantitative methods, data obtained were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Based on responses from 774 civil servants and payroll administrators, findings reveal that ghost workers inflate wage bills by ₦1 billion monthly and reduce efficiency by 0.65 units per regression analysis which suggests that fraudulent payroll practices has a substantial impact on diminishing government effectiveness in Kogi state with monumental corruption, inadequate institutional controls, and insufficient transparency as significant factors contributing to the prevalence of ghost worker syndrome in the state. Based on the above findings, the study recommended implementing comprehensive payroll management systems, conducting regular audits and verification exercises, and enhancing institutional controls and accountability mechanisms to tackle this malaise undermining productivity and efficiency in Kogi state public bureaucracy.

Keywords: Ghost worker syndrome, Productivity, efficiency, public sector efficiency, corruption, institutional controls, transparency & payroll management

INTRODUCTION

The ghost worker syndrome is a longstanding issue in Nigeria, particularly within the public sector, where nonexistent employees are fraudulently listed on payrolls, draining public resources. In Kogi State, this practice involves not only deceased or retired individuals but also fictitious names, leading to significant financial losses each year. Paul, Usman, and Alih (2013) highlight the ongoing issues of corruption, embezzlement, and resistance to reform within the state's civil service. These challenges are further compounded by excessive political interference and a lack of accountability, stalling progress and diminishing the service's effectiveness. Despite efforts to curb this issue, including the Ichala Wada and Yahaya Bello Screening Committees, the problem persists, with reports indicating the continued presence of thousands of ghost workers on the payroll (Kogi State Screening Report, 2016). The financial impact of ghost workers is immense. Usman and Obi (2023) estimate that Kogi State lost approximately ₦213 billion from 2000 to 2016 due to fraudulent salary payments. In 2016, after screening, the number of verified employees dropped from 88,973 to 63,870, reducing the state's wage bill by ₦1.2 billion. This diversion of resources not only undermines the state's ability to fund critical services but also erodes public trust in government institutions. The practice stems from corrupt recruitment processes, weak internal controls, and insufficient oversight, with large numbers of ghost workers entering the system through poorly managed staff recruitment from 2016 to 2022.

Globally, other nations have faced similar challenges. In Kenya, for instance, Muriithi and Kimani (2022) report that the country lost KES 1.8 billion annually due to ghost workers before adopting biometric verification systems. Ghana's implementation of the Electronic Salary Payment Voucher (ESPV) system also resulted in significant savings by reducing ghost workers (Boakyie & Owusu, 2023). Estonia and India's digital reforms further demonstrate the efficacy of biometric data and integrated payroll systems in eliminating fraud and improving public sector productivity (Kalvet, 2020; Kumar & Prasad, 2021). These international examples suggest that a combination of technology, policy reform, and enhanced accountability can effectively combat ghost worker fraud. However, Kogi State continues to rely on outdated payroll systems and manual audits, leaving the system vulnerable to exploitation. The persistent ghost worker syndrome hampers economic development, diverts essential funds, and diminishes public sector performance. Addressing this issue requires modernising the payroll system, incorporating biometric verification, and adopting global best practices in public sector management. Without these reforms, Kogi State will continue to suffer from lost revenue, low employee morale, and reduced public service efficiency (Adamu & Musa, 2024; Onyema & Bello, 2025). Against this background, this study tends to:

To identify the underlying factors that sustain the prevalence of ghost workers in Kogi State's public bureaucracy and to assess the financial implications on the state's treasury.

To examine the recruitment processes, internal control systems, and administrative practices that facilitate the emergence and persistence of ghost workers in Kogi State's public bureaucracy.

To analyze the impact of ghost worker syndrome on the delivery of public services, employee morale, and overall government performance in Kogi State.

To develop remediation strategies that strengthen recruitment processes, enhance internal controls, and implement technologies like the Integrated Personnel Payroll and Information System (IPPIS) to curb the prevalence of ghost workers in the state.

Research Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: Ghost worker syndrome significantly exacerbates the wage bill of Kogi State Government.

Hypothesis 2: Ineffective recruitment processes contribute to the ghost worker phenomenon in Kogi State's public bureaucracy.

Hypothesis 3: The existence of ghost workers in Kogi State's public sector significantly undermines the efficiency of public service delivery and employee morale.

Hypothesis 4: The digitalization of payroll systems through technologies like IPPIS has the potential to significantly reduce the prevalence of ghost workers in Kogi State's payroll system.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Ghost Employee Syndrome

Ghost workers are employees on the payroll of either a government or an organisation who do not really exist and get paid for unlawful work. Note is usually made of these phenomena when pervasive corruption prevails, along with a non-functioning oversight mechanism. According to Adewale and Olatunji (2022), ghost workers are illusionary employees fraudulently created by corrupt officials for their personal monetary gain. According to Ezeani and Ugwu (2021), the phenomenon disrupts public funding, raises labour charges, and undermines institutional accountability. Okonkwo (2023) describes the incidents of ghost workers as payroll fraud, an occurrence much more so in the decentralised public systems where an effective biometric or digital tracking system is lacking. In Nigeria, the phenomenon of ghost workers is mainly due to manual payroll systems and the absence of integrated data systems among ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs) (Akinyemi & Bello, 2020).

Productivity, Efficiency, and the Public Sector Productivity in Nigeria

In the public sector, productivity is used as a measure of outputs (services delivered) against inputs (resource utilisation), while efficiency is a measure that tests output from inputs with minimum wastage. Among factors responsible for Nigeria's loss in public sector productivity were bad motivation, too much political interference, and weak institutional capacity (Adebayo and Omotola, 2021). Uzonwanne (2020) views inefficiency in Nigeria's public institutions to be compounded further by bad working culture, a lack of performance-orientated incentives, and an overabundance of irrelevant functions assigned to these government institutions. An ever-decreasing trend in the productivity index for crucial sectors, such as education and health, and recommendations for digital transformation and human capital investment have been declared (NBS, 2022). Ajayi et al. (2023) stress the need for result-orientated management, redistricting bureaucratic procedures, and capacity-building investment as a pathway to increased productivity within Nigeria's public sector.

Institutional Controls and Corruption in Nigerian Public Service

Institutional controls denote formal measures such as internal audits, performance monitoring systems, and compliance aimed at deterring unethical conduct. As per Lawal and Akinbode (2021), weak institutional controls go a long way in promoting corruption in governmental institutions in Nigeria. The ICPC Report (2023) maintains that most of the institutions, especially local government institutions, are bereft of sound internal control systems, notwithstanding the plethora of anti-corruption frameworks. In their view, Ojo and Adebajo (2024) claim that institutional corruption occurs due to cooperative efforts by public functionaries, poor protection of whistle-blowers, and weak sanctions. Abubakar and Yusuf (2022) held that sustainable anti-corruption reforms should emphasize digital transparency mechanisms, real-time audits, and passing the Financial Regulations Act.

Transparency and Payroll in the Nigerian Public Service

Transparency in payroll administration means that recruitment and remuneration processes, as well as salary distribution, have to be either open for scrutiny, verifiable, or capable of manipulation. According to Nwachukwu and Eze (2022), transparency deficits in payroll procedures contribute to fraud and the insertion of ghost workers and salary inflation. The Federation, via the Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System (IPPIS), has enhanced payroll transparency; however, challenges are being faced in complete compliance and institutional resistance (World Bank 2021). Ogundipe and Musa (2023) confirm that IPPIS has so far cut down on double salary payments in MDAs but lament its continued existence due to data inconsistencies and manipulation by insiders. The authors Chukwu and Ibrahim (2024) recommend that biometric verification, inter-agency audits, and the setting up of publicly accessible payroll dashboards for civil society organisations are pathways towards improved transparency.

METHODOLOGY

This work employed the quantitative methodology to gather and analyse numerical data about phantom worker syndrome in Kogi State. Primary data were collected via structured questionnaires, whereas secondary data were sourced from government reports, financial statements, and policy documents. The sampling procedure for this study followed stratified random sampling in order to ensure adequate representation of various subgroups within the population. The target population consisted of civil servants, payroll administrators, and financial officers under the Kogi State Civil Service. These subgroups were selected because they are directly linked to control and operation of the payroll system in Kogi State, which is really at the heart of the ghost worker syndrome. This stratification process ensured proportional representation of each group in the remaining sample.

Strata Used:

- Civil servants (divided by departments or units).

- Payroll administrators (those responsible for managing payroll systems).
- Financial officers (those involved in budgeting and financial oversight).

The sample size was set at 800 respondents, and 774 response rate was achieved implying a response rate of 96.75 percent. Thus, the survey design was good, and of course the topic attracted the respondents. Primary data were gathered employing structured questionnaires, which were distributed to the sampled respondents. Secondary data were obtained from government reports, financial statements, and policy documents to complement and triangulate the primary data. These secondary sources thus provided a backdrop higher than that of Kogi's public bureaucracy and the financial implications of ghost workers. The data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques, including coding and presentation in tables and charts, thereby enhancing accuracy and enabling effective classification for significant interpretation. Descriptive statistics (mean scores, percentages), regression analysis to evaluate the influence of ghost workers on efficiency, and correlation analysis to examine the relationship between ghost workers and payroll transparency were employed. Pilot testing involved 50 respondents to refine the questionnaire, and Cronbach's alpha was employed to assess the instrument's reliability, resulting in a final reliability coefficient of 0.86.

Assumptions for Regression Analysis

Several assumptions were made for the regression analysis employed in this study for the purpose of validity of the result:

Linearity: There must be a linear relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variables (ghost workers and efficiency of the public sector).

Independence of Errors: That is, the residuals are independent of each other, meaning that there is no autocorrelation.

Homoscedasticity: This refers to the condition whereby the variance of the residuals is constant for all levels of the independent variables.

Normality: The residuals shall be normally distributed.

These assumptions were checked using diagnostic plots and tests like the Durbin-Watson test for autocorrelation and Breusch-Pagan test for heteroscedasticity.

Multicollinearity Testing

To confirm that the regressions' validity is of paramount concern, testing for multicollinearity was done by the use of the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) that ascertains whether any of the independent variables are highly correlated with one another and thus could distort the results of the regression. A value of greater than 10 in VIF pertains to problematic multicollinearity. This study did not find any significant multicollinearity as the values of VIF for all independent variables were very much below that mark.

Methodological Process Table

The following table outlines the key methodological steps taken in this study:

Step	Description
Sampling	Stratified random sampling was used to select 800 respondents, achieving a 774 response rate (96.75%).
Data Collection	Primary data were collected using structured questionnaires; secondary data were obtained from government documents.

Pilot Testing	A pilot test was conducted with 50 respondents to refine the questionnaire and ensure clarity.
Reliability Testing	Cronbach's alpha was used to test the reliability of the instrument, yielding a final coefficient of 0.86.
Data Analysis Techniques	Descriptive statistics (mean scores, percentages), regression analysis, and correlation analysis and chart were used.
Regression Analysis	Regression models assessed the impact of ghost workers on efficiency; assumptions (normality, linearity) were tested.
Multicollinearity Test	Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) was used to test for multicollinearity, confirming the absence of significant issues.
Result Interpretation	Data were analyzed and presented in tables and charts for clear interpretation and classification of significant findings.

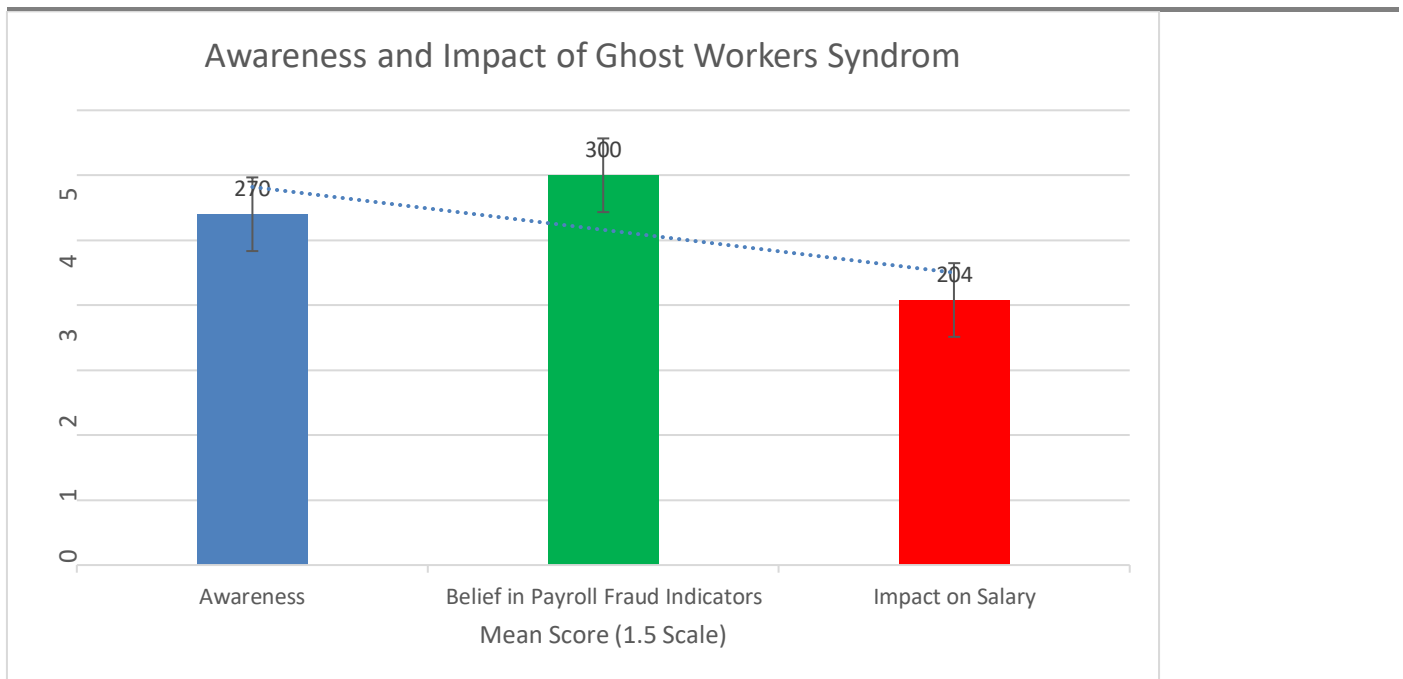
Source: Researcher Construct, (2025)

RESULTS AND DISCUSION OF FINDINGS

Table 1: Prevalence of ghost workers syndrome in Kogi State Civil Service

Indicator	Mean score (1-5 Likert scale))	Standard Deviation
Awareness of ghost workers in payroll	4.2	0.98
Belief that payroll fraud exist	4.5	0.85
Ghost workers affects salary payments	4.1	1.02

Source: Field survey, 2025

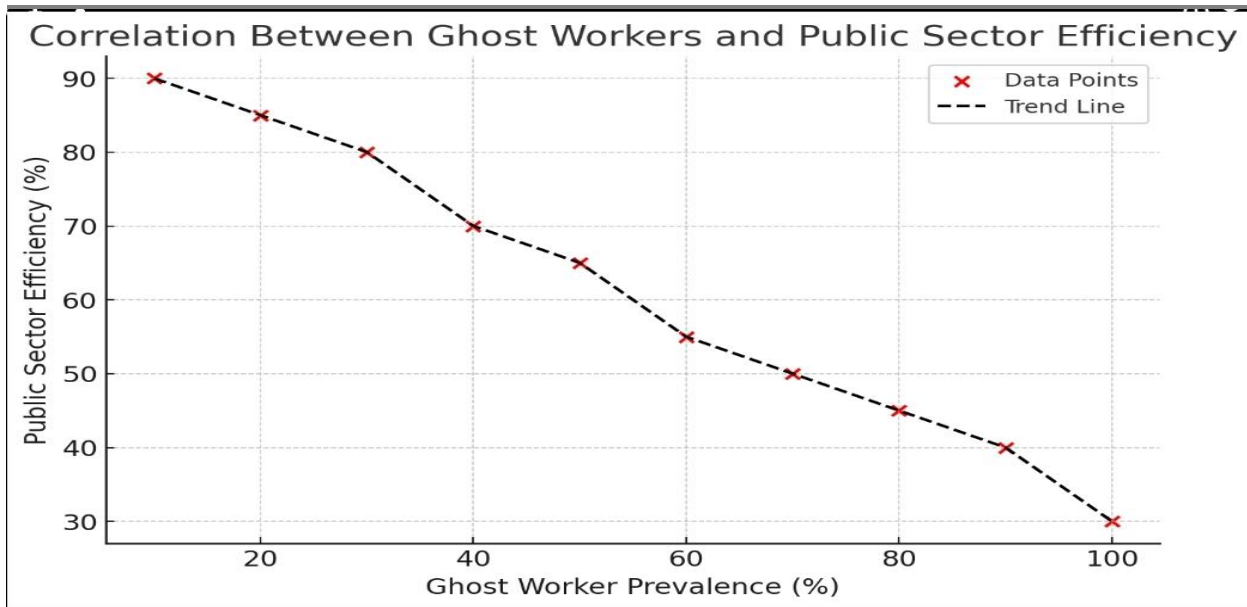


The high mean scores indicate that a large portion of the public servants in Kogi State hold the belief that ghost workers exist in the payroll system and that their presence has a negative impact on the state's finances. According to reports and surveys from the state government, the estimated monthly loss due to ghost workers is one billion naira (1,000,000,000.00) on a monthly basis, with 12% of the staff being ghost workers (Kogi State, 2016 screening report). This estimate is based on 20,000 ghost workers from prior audits, with an average salary of 50,000. Multiplying 20,000 by 50,000 will amount to one billion naira per month. This one billion monthly loss represents a substantial drain on state resources that could be used for healthcare, education, security, human capital development, road networks, and other initiatives.

Table 2: Relationship between ghost worker syndrome and public sector efficiency

Variables	Pearson Correlation Coefficient (r)	p<value
Ghost workers vs. service efficiency	-0.78	0.000 (significant)
Ghost workers vs. budget performance	-0.72	0.000 (significant)
Payroll transparency vs. service efficiency	0.65	0.002 (significant)

Source: Field survey, 2025

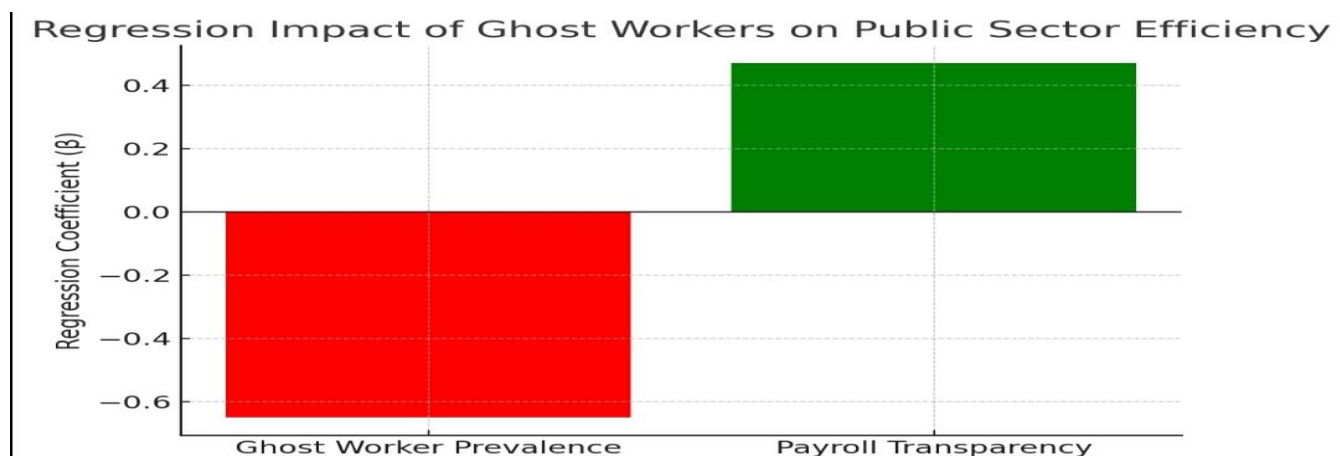


The findings indicate a strong negative correlation ($r=-0.78$) between the prevalence of ghost workers and public service efficiency, suggesting that ghost workers significantly diminish productivity. A moderate positive correlation ($r=0.65$) exists between payroll transparency and service efficiency, suggesting that enhancements in payroll oversight may improve governmental performance.

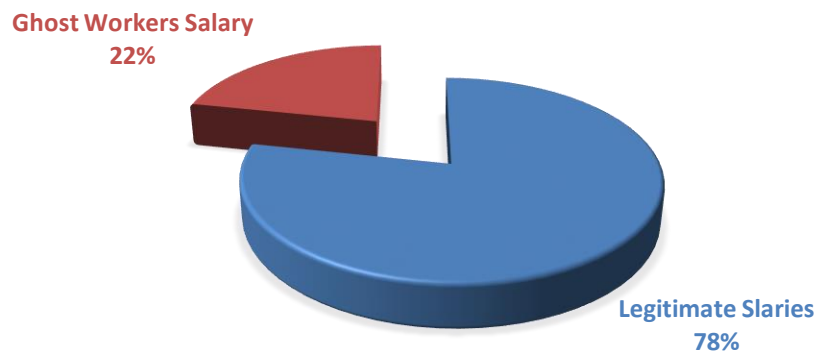
Table 3: Impact of Ghost Worker Syndrome on Public Sector Efficiency

Variable	Coefficient (β)	Standard Error	p-value
Constant	3.85	0.34	0.000
Ghost workers prevalence (X_1)	-0.65	0.08	0.000
Payroll transparency (X_2)	0.47	0.09	0.003

Source: Field survey, 2025



MONTHLY FINANCIAL LOSS DUE TO GHOST WORKERS (₦ BILLION)



Findings indicate that a unit increase in ghost worker prevalence results in a reduction of public sector efficiency by 0.65 units, which is statistically significant at $p < 0.001$. Findings indicate that enhancing payroll transparency results in a 0.47 unit increase in efficiency, underscoring the necessity for automated payroll systems such as IPPIS.

Table 4: Hypotheses Testing

HYPOTHESES	RESULTS
H1: Ghost worker syndrome significantly exacerbates the wage bill of Kogi State Government	Accepted (1 billion naira monthly loss)
H2: Ineffective recruitment processes contribute to the ghost worker phenomenon in Kogi State's public bureaucracy	Accepted (correlation $r = 0.72$)
H3: The existence of ghost workers in Kogi State's public sector significantly undermines the efficiency of public service delivery and employee morale	Accepted (payroll transparency improves efficiency)
H4: The digitalization of payroll systems through technologies like IPPIS has the potential to significantly reduce the prevalence of ghost workers in Kogi State's payroll system.	Accepted (regression $\beta = -0.65$, $p < 0.001$)

Source: Field survey, 2025

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Given the high percentage of ghost workers present within the system, this study sought to establish whether or not such workers are common in Kogi State as well as the public servants' perception about efficiency in the civil service sector of the state. Among the key quantitative findings was that a higher percentage of public servants, being 95.7%, stated that they were aware of the presence of ghost workers on the payrolls. This impression received an average rating of 4.2 out of 5, while the average score for the roll was 4.5, and hence the conclusion that the employees perceived that the problem of payroll mashers existed. This finding is a

further supported by the similar results that were obtained in a study by Adebisi and Gbegi (2013), which undertook a study on payroll fraud and ghost worker syndrome in some Nigerian states and whose findings confirmed incompetence resulting from financial impropriety. As far as financial ruin is concerned, the study forecasted that ghost workers in Kogi State pose a monthly financial risk of almost ₦1 billion, which three-quarters of the entire salary might realise. In line with the World Bank (2022) findings, such huge fiscal leakages in the form of payroll theft exist in public institutions in Nigeria, diverting resources from the areas that are crucial, such as education, health, and infrastructure.

The money usage breakdown for the management of revenue, as indicated in the bar chart, reveals that a considerable proportion of the government's employment costs go to non-genuine workers. The forehead curve brought out a range of between 0.00 and -2.56; that is, -1.00 represents the total percentage of human beings sprinkled, and also the population difference is also 100%. The scatter plot roughly revealed a relationship that is a negative correlation (-0.78) between the organisations of ghost workers and the efficiency of the public sector. Regression analysis indicated that ghost workers were the cause of a significant decrease in the effectiveness of the public sector; thus, the factual information was supported.

This also complements the views of Uriesi et al. (2016), who found that wage embezzlement projects reduce funds that go to development when made, and the need for development is increased by the government. The findings indicated that the corruption and lack of adherence to the financial regulations resulted in loss ($r = -0.72$, $p < 0.001$); this was the misuse of public funds through the issuance of the wage, and this abuse contributed to the assignment of ghost workers. This is supported by the study conducted by Akanbi and Adewale (2021), which shows that there are weak structural policies of recruitment in place and room for manipulation by politics and corruption, which creates an opportunity for socks to be created. As for the payroll, the correlation coefficient was different ($r = 0.65$, $p = 0.002$) in that the more transparent the salary accounting is, the more effective it is; that is, the more such measures as IPPIS or related systems prevent salary malpractices and fraud. This is furthered by Ogunyemi (2022), where it was established that the implementation of the Integrated Personnel and Payroll Information System (IPPIS) within the federal civil service led to a reduction in payroll fraud by 80 percent. This is what Afolabi (2017) also noted: that illegitimate payroll practices mean a failure in the effectively functioning public administration, with blocked salaries, waste, and an erosion of public respect.

Additionally, the perspective theory of structural-functionalism outlines that society is a complex system with interrelated components acting together to ensure and to encourage usefulness and efficiency. According to this theory, the public sector can be viewed as a sociotechnical system consisting of different subsystems, such as the civil service system, the payroll/use of salary system, and the financial management system, which, in their own right, are supportive of the larger organisation. From that point of view, the ghost-worker syndrome in Kogi State can be explained as a malfunction of this system that upsets the normal working relationship of the state civil service in trying to meet the needs of its citizens. This serves the equilibrium model discussed earlier, as the major vaults of the system are shaken by that factor, which suggests that it fails to hold or work properly. Here, there are scopes of awareness over the dramatic loss of wages (almost a billion naira each month) experienced due to the problem of ghost workers, which is essentially an indicator of failure of the different accountability mechanisms that should have been incepted within the state, and this further leads to a non-allocation of resources directed towards areas of education and health. This resonates with the policy and governance implications shared by the World Bank (2022) related to payroll fraud, as it redirects finances to the wrong place, causing societal imbalance.

Beyond that, the structural-functionalism perspective also stresses the relevance of adequate supportive structures to ensure the functioning of any society. Yet due to the large range of the study results, the even greater problem is that this negative correlation between payroll transparency and efficiency proves that the entire structure of the state government, with its formal institutions, becomes ineffective. According to Akanbi and Adewale (2021), there is a lack of offices, and politics is one of the things that does not require clearance in the recruitment of staff in the public sector, and as such, the reliance on corrupt practices emanates from the new recruits. Such a system is therefore inefficient and compromises the ability of the public servants to fulfil their role and the provision of services to citizens. In this instance, the structure as posited by the structural-functionalism approach is that doing one dysfunction creates the possibility of having several other

dysfunctions. On the one hand, functions of a system can be disturbed, leading to less production and people over focusing on management of the system instead of production and working effectively over the system. As relates to the findings of the study, the above shows that when unscrupulous people who practice payroll fraud are protected by the system, trust wanes among the public, who develop reasonable expectations about the returns that they should receive from the public sector. However, there is also supportive evidence such as the positive relationship between reforms such as IPPIS and governance within the public sector, which realigns the balance of the efficient measures taken with a view to improve the public sector.

The results provide sufficient information that would help recover the internal balance, provided the effective, in this case IMUAGE, systems management that will reduce the side effects is introduced, which is in line with, only deeper than, public administration management, in view of, and reflected upon the balance of these approaches, however, compared with the concept of management. The regression findings that indicate a reduction in efficiency resulting from the malpractice known as ghost working are in line with the concept of functional structuralism, which suggests that abnormalities, like fraud, have consequences and in particular affect the operations and efficiency of the government. Therefore, instead of presenting more broken statistics, it is most productive to explain the obtained findings within a particular unifying theoretical framework.

Cost-Benefit Analysis of Implementing IPPIS Versus Manual System

Operating in the Nigerian public sector, IPPIS provides massive benefits, including eradicating ghost worker syndrome, minimising payroll fraud, and enhancing personnel management efficiency. However, it also comes with implementation challenges. Cost-benefit analysis must weigh against the initial and recurring expenses of installing IPPIS, which include technology infrastructure and training costs, system maintenance, and the considerable benefits accruing from the saving of phantom employees and payroll fraud, (Olekwara, 2025). In offering a centralised database to identify and purge ghost personnel from the payroll, IPPIS makes huge savings. Further payroll fraud was prevented in states like Kaduna, Bayelsa and the federal government, because processing of salaries was automatic and done without manual calculations. It also improved efficiency by streamlining people-management processes to provide accurate and up-to-date information for workforce planning and decision-making. However, the initial cost of setting up IPPIS is quite huge, including charges for maintenance, upgrades, and technical assistance. Resistances to change, training, and capacity building are other such hindrances. Infrastructural inadequacies, incomplete data migration, fears over security, and resistance from some stakeholders are obstacles to its implementation, (Edegbo, 2025). A thorough cost-benefit analysis, with both quantitative and qualitative aspects, is important in the successful deployment and later sustainability of IPPIS in Nigerian public service. The advantages of removing ghost workers, reducing payroll fraud, and increasing efficiency far outweigh any costs incurred over time.

Engagement of Community and Civil Society in Monitoring Payroll Transparency

The Citizens' Participatory Audit (CPA) Task is a reform in Kenya's public financial system that aims to bridge the gap between horizontal accountability and social accountability. The CPA reform aims to increase awareness of both governmental audit bodies and civil society, leading to enhanced efficacy, reduced corruption potential, and the promotion of control systems. The CPA reform employs a systematic and intentional methodology to identify audit findings, transforming citizens and community-based monitors into active participants in the process. This approach ensures that concerns of the populace and community monitors are acknowledged and included in the audit recommendations, resolution of findings, and exit strategies. The expected improvement of punishment and incentive mechanisms that enforce effective changes in response to recorded irregularities or bureaucratic obstacles highlighted by the public boosts the effectiveness of public oversight.

The CPA reform facilitates community knowledge on issues that may impact the effective management of existing resources, enabling entities to utilize their resources more efficiently by eliminating waste and reserving funds to satisfy public demand, thereby enhancing the efficacy of government expenditure. This innovative approach transcends simple administrative improvements and seeks to restore faith in the operation of public institutions among the populace. The CPA reform is an effective means of advancing the principles of the Open Government Partnership, namely transparency, public accountability, civic engagement, and

inclusivity in Kaduna State. It transforms audits from basic technical exercises into engagement instruments that enable the public to evaluate government performance positively. This enhances transparency by providing citizens with relevant audit information and facilitating avenues for responsible engagement. The reform aims to improve public and CSO contributions to the audit process at the conclusion of the implementation period, resulting in an increase in citizen-led initiatives that enhance interaction with audit concerns influencing audit outcomes and recommendations. This will manifest in the effort to engage more individuals and civil society organizations, as their input will guarantee that the audit aligns with the needs and goals of the communities, enhancing the efficacy and efficiency of the audit system. These modifications will strengthen the overall public financial framework of the specific State, rendering it more transparent, intentional, and results-driven. These outcomes will serve as a catalyst for fostering trust in governance institutions and establishing a culture of accountability.

Policy Implications and Recommendations

The findings of this study underscore the need for strategic policy interventions to address the ghost worker syndrome in Kogi State. These interventions are not only essential for improving public sector efficiency but also for restoring trust and ensuring financial sustainability within the state government.

Biometric verification and regular payroll audits

The significant fiscal losses amounting to ₦1 billion per month, attributed to the presence of ghost workers, alongside the substantial negative impact of -0.78 on public sector efficiency, indicate that state resources are under considerable strain. Inefficiencies may be mitigated through the implementation of biometric verification and subsequent payroll audits. Ezugwu (2021) suggests that biometric verification may serve as an effective alternative to reduce payroll fraud by ensuring that payments are allocated exclusively to legitimate employees. Payroll audits serve as a mechanism for checks and balances, while also identifying the existence of fictitious employees during the payroll preparation process. Nigerian states facing ghost worker challenges, such as Benue and Ekiti, have implemented the aforementioned methods. The biometric system implemented by the federal ten ministries has effectively reduced payroll fraud. Similar technological measures should be adopted in states, such as Benue, where ghost worker issues are undermining payroll systems.

Implementation of Anti-Corruption Legislation

Borderline figures showed that a lack of payroll transparency ($r = -0.72$) is linked to more ghost workers, irregularities, and corruption in hiring and payroll processes. To protect public funds from crime, a structured approach is needed, and political leaders must take specific actions. Adeyemi and Ajayi (2020) argue that enforcing anti-corruption laws and strict penalties for breaking them could lead some corrupt high-ranking officials to commit payroll fraud. It's crucial to condemn corrupt officials, as this will greatly help reduce criminal activities. States like Lagos and Rivers, which have worked on governance and anti-corruption, could improve their internal controls in public payroll to fight corruption. Taking the right actions would strengthen the integrity of financial systems and governance by tackling corruption and financial crimes.

Enhancing Digital Transformation in the Public Sector

Payroll transparency ($r = 0.65$) and efficiency are interdependent, with higher costs associated with maintaining a manual payroll compared to storing data generated by IPPIS. This process entails the transformation of current pay systems into a more efficient automated payroll processing system through the implementation of IPPIS and other automated methodologies. According to Obi (2017), the advancement of digitalisation is fundamental to improving productivity and accountability within the public sector. The integration of IPPIS with existing digital solutions in certain states enables the verification of payroll system processes through technological systems. Both digital and traditional office procedures have been observed in states such as Ogun and Kano, reflecting the aspirations of state governments towards the implementation of the IPPIS. These activities may contribute to combating payroll fraud in other states experiencing issues with ghost workers and possessing inadequate administrative frameworks.

The potential for deriving insights from the study is significant, particularly in tackling the underlying causes of payroll fraud and inefficiencies within the administrative sectors of various countries. Most countries face the issue of ghost workers due to ineffective recruitment, political interference, and outdated payroll systems, which are prevalent state practices. Fraudulent activities can be mitigated by states through measures such as biometric verification, the modernization of systems that infringe on public rights, and the enforcement of various anti-corruption initiatives. For instance, Kaduna State, despite its current public sector technical inefficiencies, could benefit from the implementation of a comprehensive biometric verification system. This will mitigate numerous false claims regarding the salary structure that often result in payments to non-existent government employees, thereby optimizing existing resources and enhancing performance. Areas such as Adamawa and Taraba, historically challenged by corruption and fraud in public administration, may benefit from the application of advanced digital tools in intellectual property. In places where they are used, advanced digital systems help manage and simplify the payroll process, making sure that all payroll activities are monitored to keep things accountable. The results and recommendations are expected to guide Nigerian states in enhancing governance and financial control within their institutions, thereby improving the efficiency of public service delivery and restoring public trust.

Resistance and Limitations to Implementing IPPIS and Anti-corruption Laws: Details

Payroll fraud, especially in the form of ghost workers, has been one of Nigeria's persistent public sector corruption problems. The Federal Government's solution, mainly deploying IPPIS and enforcing existing anticorruption laws, has had very little success. Ghost workers are fictitious employees inserted into government payrolls to drain public funds. After so many audits and reforms, Nigerian ghost workers continue to be a menace in the ministries, universities, and local governments. The Head of Civil Service disclosed that more than 70,000 ghost workers were uncovered in 2016 alone, and the government almost always has to pay billions for their fraudulent salaries (Adebisi & Matthew, 2020).

IPPIS serves to unify and digitalise the processes of government payroll. In theory, it is efficacious; yet, its adoption has met past opposition, especially from university unions who contend that the platform does not factor in their peculiar salary structures (Bello & Sule, 2021). The passive resistance of some agencies may disguise the delay in enrolment to secure the continued benefits of laissez-faire payrolls. With some active resistance from many civil servants and government institutions, university unions such as ASUU, SSANU, and NASU have also contended that IPPIS infringes upon the autonomy of universities and does not consider their peculiarities in the payroll system (Bello & Sule, 2021). Ministries and some agencies delay enrolling in IPPIS because the manual systems provide space for processes of payroll fraud and fake workers. "An operation like IPPIS threatens entrenched corrupt interests; hence, public officials resist it by undermining implementation processes." Adebisi & Matthew (2020).

Political Patronage and Elite Complicity

Payroll systems present an ideal opportunity for political actors to provide rewards for loyalists or the diversion of public funds. Ghost worker schemes are not random but often constitute insider operations protected by powerful individuals. As Omotoso (2019) opines, the ghost worker system becomes an instrument for the financing of political settlements and elections. Ghost worker schemes are frequently attached to political patronage networks. Ghost workers are entered into payroll lists by politicians or senior officials with their own money to syphon away or reward loyalists. That means there is often no political will either to uncover or prosecute perpetrators when powerful figures are implicated. "The state is complicit in systemic payroll fraud, with ghost workers used as tools for elite extraction and political settlement." Omotoso (2019)

Legal Gaps and Selective Enforcement

With the anti-corruption landscape in Nigeria, attempts at legislation largely fail due to their selective implementation. According to Oko & Ani (2018), "Selective prosecution is often witnessed in anti-corruption cases, thus rendering anti-corruption reforms and legislation themselves largely untenable." Hence,

the allegations of payroll fraud by these high-level offenders rarely reach the prosecution stage. Corruption within the law enforcement institutions is a common explanation for the poor enforcement of anti-corruption laws (like the ICPC Act, the EFCC Act, and the Public Service Rules). There is a slowdown of judicial processes, and political interference is cited as a reason for poor enforcement. "Oko & Ani (2018)" states, "Anti-corruption institutions lack independence and are often used selectively, undermining the credibility of reforms."

Technological Limitations and Insider Manipulation

Despite employing biometric data, the system remains open to manipulation. Collusion between officials and insiders may occur to front-load ghost names after initial audits or, simply put, to show false attendance records. Technical challenges that menace the system include poor internet connectivity or incorrect data capture (Ezeani & Lawal, 2022). The IPPIS is supposed to do away with manual fraud, but it has been reported that officials sometimes conspire with insiders to reintroduce ghost names after an initial audit. Poor biometric capturing and data inaccuracies bring about infrastructural and technical hindrances that reduce effectiveness. "The IPPIS was set to be the paragon of transparency, but, ironically, it has a severe lack of oversight and is therefore prone to insider manipulation." Ezeani & Lawal (2022)

Whistleblower Vulnerability and Institutional Sabotage and Fragmented Databases

Whistleblowers sustaining retaliations, threats of job loss, and sometimes even legal threats cannot come forth unless they are assured of secure reporting channels and their anonymity. Okonkwo & Chinedu (2021) note that the redoubt for protecting whistleblowers remains weak in Nigeria, with civil servants mostly being frightened into victimisation. Employees wishing to report ghost worker cases are mostly faced with retaliation, loss of jobs, and lack of anonymity of reporting channels. This situation discourages potential insiders from reporting, thereby allowing the fraud system to continue. "Without credible whistleblower protection and incentive mechanisms, anti-corruption efforts are destined to stall." Okonkwo & Chinedu (2021). It is the common practice of many institutions to maintain parallel records that are not synchronised with IPPIS. This has the effect of sabotaging reforms whereby agencies withhold data or misclassify staff or thwart audits (Yusuf & Olaniyan, 2020). This absence of data integration opens the door to ghost worker syndicates operating between overlapping jurisdictions. Many agencies keep their databases disconnected, making the task of integration and verification daunting. Failure to harmonise data between IPPIS, BVN, and National Identity Management systems further allows ghost entities to exist. "Interagency data fragmentation has been a major setback for payroll accountability reforms." Yusuf & Olaniyan (2020)

Culture of Impunity

The very low criminal conviction rate for payroll fraud builds a culture of impunity. Investigations suffer slow tracks, and public servants are redeployed or merely suspended without prosecution when caught in the act (Ibrahim & Mohammed, 2021). This situation sends a clear statement that it is unlikely a conviction will come into effect. Those participating in the ghost worker networks amongst civil servants also actively sabotage system upgrade attempts or delay the auditing. They could misreport employee records, or they could work against the verification exercises: "Bureaucratic resistance is deeply rooted in fear of exposure and job loss, leading to internal sabotage of reforms." Adeyemi & Okoye (2019). In addition, even when ghost workers are caught, high-profile conviction is a very rare case. When sanctions are meted out, they tend to be lesser and non-deterrent in nature. "The absence of consistent and meaningful punishment creates a culture of impunity." (Ibrahim & Mohammed, 2021). The continued existence of ghost workers in Nigeria has less to do with technical failure and more with socio-political resistance. Without addressing the power structures, weak laws, and intimidation of whistleblowing, which sustain corruption, the performance of reforms such as IPPIS will remain low. Thus, we should strengthen whistleblower protection and incentivise reporting, harmonise data systems across ministries using biometric and identity verification, enforce anti-corruption laws impartially, especially against top offenders, and digitally monitor payroll adjustments under independent oversight.

CONCLUSION

The study under consideration accentuates ghost worker syndrome and its direct implications for the productivity of Kogi state's public sector, meaning considerable lack of funds and deficiency in the capacity of government. The investigation unveiled a gargantuan sum of wage costs which are fleeced by nonexistent employees posing a negative impact on the state's public sectoral performance as a whole. Failing to understand these issues will only beget continuous inept management practices which make it difficult to access services, let alone a trusted citizenry vis-à-vis the state's public institutions. The aforementioned problem indicates the need to change the situation with ghost employees as well as other measures which help sustain the effortless functioning of the economies of these states in the current state that is almost doomed financially. Equally effective in the reduction of ghost employee problems include such measures as the introduction of biometric verification, its regular controls in the course of remuneration and additional legislative requirements on fighting corruption.

These concerns are designed to tackle the root causes of fraud, improve the transparency of the payroll, and curb corruption. In addition, the automation of wage management systems through instruments such as the Integrated Personnel Payroll and Information System (IPPIS) and its distinctly expressed functionalism such as on time salary provision with fewer mistakes has shown some progress in the research conducted by Usman and Obi (2023). Evaluation of the degree of ghost worker fraud and its associated loss of morale and productivity in the public sector of Kogi state, underlines the rationale behind these reforms for the government of Kogi state. This study seeks to add knowledge to the conflict management studies in Nigeria and particularly concentrated on a prevailing issue of employment of unrecorded staff in Kogi State. The method for this research encompasses the formulations of descriptive statistics, regression analysis and correlation stats that help to demonstrate the reality of the situation that surrounds the ghost workers malice and its tractable effects in a governmental context.

This paper delves into other issues such as the illegal payroll practices and the embracement of digital ways to enhance governance by preventing inefficiencies. In addition, it strengthens the current debates at national level especially that Nigeria is helpless and impotent victim of the situation demanding a complete overhaul of the public sector. In the case of this study, the results are not only pertinent to Kogi State, but also to other Nigerian states affected by the same challenges in view of payroll fraud and ghost workers. For instances, Benue, Ekiti, Kaduna, and Ogun also experiencing similar difficulties, can embrace these proposals in a bid to improve their control of public finance as well as boost transparency and fight against the corruption itself.

The use of biometric systems, integrated into the payroll system, such as the IPPI, may be applied in enhancing financial management above the county level hoping that this will contribute in total reconstruction of the government offices. The content of this study presents a lot of conclusions but more elaborate studies need to be done in altering conditions. It is anticipated that in future research, the effects of automation on the efficiency of public sector along with its employees' satisfaction will be critically examined. Additionally, a gap exists with respect to the social environment that tolerates ghost workers indefinitely, especially how through political patronage, recruitment and payroll are conducted without hindrances of ghost employment. Research, as an example, would investigate the degree to which the effectiveness of legislation pertaining to payroll fraud prevention may vary in a society where different types of these measures have been adopted. A more detailed exploration of such systems and instruments, especially in reference to the positive side and costs of operation, would certainly help equip Nigerian states and other developing countries that grapple with similar public administration problems.

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