

Limited Career Prospects and Non-Merit-Based Employment Practices: Implications for Employee Motivation and Career Development

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Abstract: The lack of career prospects and non-merit-based employment practices significantly affect employee motivation, performance, and professional development in both public and private sectors. This study examines how nepotism and corruption influence recruitment, promotion, and the overall functioning of public institutions in Kosovo. Drawing on existing literature and empirical evidence, the research identifies mechanisms that create barriers to career advancement and reduce organizational efficiency. Findings indicate that nepotistic and corrupt practices favor individuals with personal connections over those with professional skills and merit, demotivating qualified employees and weakening institutional credibility. These phenomena also diminish citizens' trust in public institutions and hinder economic development. The study proposes practical recommendations to enhance human resource management, promote transparency in hiring and promotion processes, and establish meritocratic administrative systems. By linking employment practices, career prospects, nepotism, and corruption, the study provides an integrated framework to understand their combined effects on professional and institutional outcomes. The insights generated are intended for policymakers, public administration leaders, human resource scholars, and stakeholders committed to improving governance, fostering meritocracy, and strengthening institutional trust.

Keywords: Employment practices, career prospects, human resource, management.

1. INTRODUCTION

This study seeks to contribute to the existing literature by combining theoretical insights with empirical evidence to analyze the mechanisms that hinder professional advancement and undermine merit-based human resource management. By examining employees' perceptions and institutional practices, the study provides practical recommendations for policymakers and organizational leaders aiming to enhance transparency, motivation, and institutional credibility. The lack of career prospects and non-merit-based employment practices are profound concerns that affect employee motivation and career development in both the public and private sectors. These practices are often linked to phenomena such as nepotism and corruption, which favor individuals with personal connections over professional skills and merits, thereby creating barriers to professional advancement and institutional development. As highlighted by Luthans (2015), organizational justice and merit-based systems are essential for fostering employee motivation and commitment. This study examines the factors that hinder professional advancement and the quality of human resource management, identifying mechanisms that create obstacles to both individual and institutional development.

Nepotism and corruption significantly contribute to non-meritocratic employment practices, favoring individuals with personal connections rather than professional competencies and merits (Sadozai et al., 2012; Lewis, 2006). Such condi-

tions hinder the career advancement of qualified employees, weaken public institutions, and reduce citizens' trust in administration (OECD, 2021).

In line with this, Dessler (2019) and Bertelli & Lynn (2006) argue that the absence of meritocratic systems undermines organizational performance and decision-making processes, generating uncertainty and demotivation among employees. Kwon & Kim (2020) emphasize that fair human resource policies enhance psychological engagement and significantly improve workplace motivation.

Through a combined theoretical and empirical approach, this study proposes measures to improve human resource management and increase transparency in recruitment and promotion processes, aiming to establish a meritocratic administration and strengthen institutional credibility (Merton, 1940; OECD, 2021).

The term "nepotism" derives from the Latin *nepōs* (grandson or nephew), passing first into Italian (*nepotismo*) and later into French (*népotisme*). Historically, it was associated with medieval and Renaissance practices in which Popes and high-ranking clergy appointed relatives to important positions (Jones, 2011). In modern times, nepotism refers to the favoritism of relatives or close friends in hiring and promotion, regardless of their skills or merits (Dictionary, 2013).

According to Kregar (1997), corruption — of which nepotism is a form — is a pathological phenomenon in which political elites place personal interests above public interest. Rose-Ackerman (1999) and Klitgaard (2006) highlight that

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corruption and nepotism undermine the credibility of public institutions, slow economic development, and compromise the rule of law.

In many transitional or developing countries, these phenomena have systemic proportions due to institutional weakness, lack of control mechanisms, and high levels of politicization in public administration (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2015). Mauro (1995) emphasizes their negative impact on foreign investments and economic growth, while Dahlström, Lapuente, and Teorell (2012) demonstrate that politicization of human resources reduces governance efficiency and the quality of public services.

Beyond economic and institutional consequences, nepotism and corruption have profound social and moral implications. They erode citizens' trust in institutions, increase inequality, and create perceptions of unfairness in society (Bowman, 2008). Favoring relatives often demotivates more qualified individuals, obstructs merit-based career development, and fosters a clientelist culture, where personal success depends more on family or political connections than on professional competence (Gjinovci, 2017).

Research on these phenomena is crucial for improving public administration and economic development, providing the foundation for preventive and reform-oriented policies aimed at creating meritocratic institutions and reducing clientelist practices.

Although extensive research has addressed corruption and nepotism from legal and economic perspectives, fewer studies have systematically explored their impact on employee motivation, career development, and human resource management quality. In particular, there is limited empirical evidence on how non-meritocratic practices shape employees' perceptions of fairness and influence their professional behavior within organizations.

1.1. Study Purpose

The primary purpose of this study is to analyze:

- The impact of non merit based employment practices on professional advancement, employee motivation, and institutional efficiency.
- The role of nepotism and corruption in shaping recruitment and promotion decisions in public sector.
- Processes through which these practices create barriers to career development and reduce organizational reputation.

The study aims to identify factors that hinder professional development and create a lack of career prospects for employees, offering recommendations to improve human resource management and strengthen meritocratic administration. The research findings will serve as a valuable resource for scholars seeking to examine the factors that drive nepotism and corruption.

1.2. Study Objectives

The specific objectives of the study include:

- To analyze the non-meritocratic employment practices, nepotism, and corruption influence recruitment and promotion.
- To examine the consequences of these practices on employee motivation and effectiveness in the public sector.
- To evaluate their impact on citizens' trust in institutions and the quality of public services.
- To develop recommendations for policymakers and managers to reduce the negative effects of nepotism and corruption in public administration.

1.3. Research Questions

To achieve the objectives outlined above, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- How do non-meritocratic employment practices and nepotism influence decisions regarding promotion and professional advancement?
- What are the consequences of these practices on employee motivation and performance in public administration?
- How do these phenomena affect citizens' trust in institutions and the country's economic development?

1.4. Study Hypotheses

Based on existing literature and prior research, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Non-meritocratic practices and nepotism negatively affect the quality of employment and promotion decisions.

H2: Corruption and nepotism reduce employee motivation and performance in public administration.

H3: The presence of these phenomena decreases citizens' trust in institutions and hinders economic development.

1.5. Intended Audience

This study is intended for a wide range of stakeholders, including:

- Researchers and scholars in human resource management and public administration.
- Policymakers and regulators aiming to implement merit-based practices.
- Leaders and managers of public institutions seeking to enhance organizational performance.
- Students of public administration and HR studies.

By addressing this audience, the study provides insights that can guide policy reforms, improve governance practices, and strengthen the trust and credibility of institutions.

1.6. Unique Contribution of the Study

This study offers an integrated approach linking employment practices, the lack of career prospects, nepotism,

and corruption, highlighting their combined effects on professional development and the performance of public institutions. The Kosovo-focused analysis provides new evidence to inform policy-making and preventive measures, which can also be valuable for similar regional contexts.

1.7. Study Limitations

The study primarily focuses on the public sector in Kosovo, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to the private sector or other countries. Based mainly on available theoretical and empirical analyses, direct data from interviews or large-scale surveys may be lacking. Findings may vary depending on future institutional changes or reforms in public administration. For future research, collecting direct insights through large scale surveys or interviews with employees in both public and private sectors would be valuable. Comparative studies in other Balkan or transitional countries could also shed light on how widely these findings apply and deepen our understanding of the impact of non merit based employment practices.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Managers must continue to pay close attention to organizational and human resources. Line organizational leaders increasingly recognize the need to focus specifically on human resource issues, emphasizing the identification of talent within the organization (Christensen, 2006). The lack of career prospects and non-merit-based employment practices directly influence employee motivation and career development in both the public and private sectors. As highlighted by Luthans (2015) and Armstrong (2020), organizational justice, effective management, and merit-based systems are essential for fostering employee motivation and commitment. This study examines the factors that hinder professional advancement and the quality of human resource management, identifying mechanisms that create barriers to individual and institutional development.

Nepotism and corruption significantly contribute to non-meritocratic employment practices, favoring individuals with personal connections over professional skills and merit (Sadozai et al., 2012; Lewis, 2006). Literature shows that the lack of career prospects and non-merit-based employment practices negatively affect employee motivation and career development (Gjinovci, 2017; Smith & Johnson, 2023). Recruitment processes often fail to meet professional and legal standards, creating barriers to professional advancement and institutional development. These issues are closely linked to nepotism and corruption, which prioritize personal connections over competencies and merit (Dahlström, Lapuente & Teorell, 2012; Mungiu-Pippidi, 2015). As a result, many qualified professionals choose to emigrate or leave public institutions that do not operate on meritocratic principles (Gjinovci, 2018).

Nepotism refers to favoring relatives or close friends in hiring and promotion, regardless of their skills or merits (Dictionary, 2013; Jones, 2011). Studies indicate that nepotism in Kosovo is widespread across political, administrative, and economic sectors, from senior leadership to municipal administration (Gjinovci & Gjinovci, 2017; Gjinovci, 2021). The politicization of public administration leads to

politically appointed boards, unqualified staff, and a lack of professional neutrality (Gjinovci et al., 2018). This phenomenon reduces institutional efficiency, obstructs professional capacity development, and demotivates qualified employees (Smith & Johnson, 2023; Bowman, 2008).

Corruption and clientelism are closely related to non-meritocratic practices, increasing business costs, deterring investment, and harming the economic climate (Kayabaşı, 2005; Gjinovci, 2014; Strasbourg Convention, 1999). According to Klitgaard (2006), corruption arises from excessive discretion of power, lack of competition, and weak accountability, facilitating favoritism towards relatives and political allies. Mauro (1995) highlights the macroeconomic consequences, including low efficiency, obstacles to investment, and market inequality.

The combination of nepotism and corruption has wide-ranging effects on administration and the economy:

- It reduces employee motivation and performance;
- It diminishes citizens' trust in institutions;
- It hinders economic development and increases social uncertainty (Gjinovci, 2015; Gjinovci, 2018).

Research shows that human resource management, through ethical training, clear recruitment and evaluation policies, and fostering a transparent culture, can mitigate the negative impacts of these phenomena (Patel & Kumar, 2025; Fanesha Fazriyani & Wawan Prahyawan, 2025; Almeida & Ferreira, 2025). This literature review links non-meritocratic practices, lack of career prospects, nepotism, and corruption to the study's aims and research questions:

- Their impact on recruitment and promotion decisions (H1);
- Their effects on employee motivation and performance (H2);
- Their influence on citizens' trust and economic development (H3).

The literature demonstrates that these issues are not merely moral concerns but directly affect human resource management, the quality of public services, and the creation of meritocratic administration, closely connecting the study to its unique contribution and objectives.

3. RESEARCH FINDINGS

Based on the analysis of literature and empirical data collected from the public sector in Kosovo, it is evident that non-merit-based employment practices, nepotism, and corruption have a significant impact on employees' professional development and institutional effectiveness.

3.1. Demographic Information

The analysis of demographic data shows that the majority of participants are male (75%), while females represent 25% of the total sample. Regarding educational level, 25% of respondents have completed secondary education, whereas 75% hold a university degree (Bachelor's or Master's).

This demographic structure indicates that participants represent a relatively well-educated group, enabling a more

Figura 1: Përfaqësimi gjinor i pjesëmarrësve

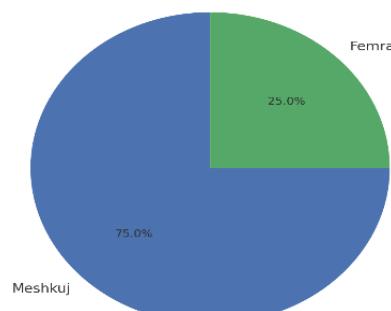
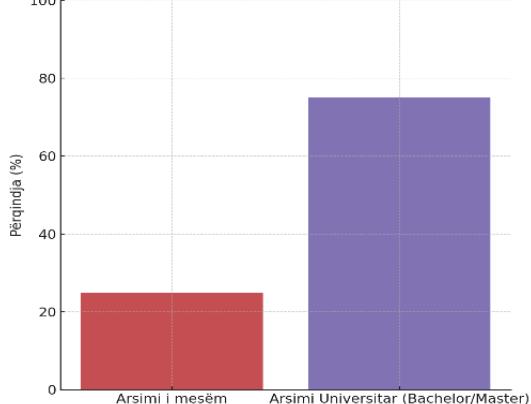


Figura 2: Niveli arsimor i pjesëmarrësve



informed and critical assessment of employment practices, the impact of nepotism, and career development in Kosovo. Moreover, it suggests that perceptions of meritocracy and institutional trust are grounded in a solid understanding of the labor market context.

3.2. Employees' Perceptions of Promotions, Nepotism, and Lack of Merit

This section of the study examines respondents' perceptions regarding promotions, the practice of nepotism, and the impact of non-merit-based decisions on professional motivation and engagement. The analysis reveals a significant lack of trust in meritocratic systems, alongside a high perception of nepotistic practices within both public and private institutions.

3.2.1. Promotions and Meritocracy

According to the data, only 25% of respondents believe that promotions rarely occur based on merit, while 75% consider that promotions are occasionally merit-based. These results indicate that the professional advancement system is not perceived as fully meritocratic, reflecting limited confidence in the transparency of promotion procedures.

3.2.2. Nepotism and Favoritism

Regarding nepotistic practices, 25% of respondents view them as very widespread, while 75% consider them widespread. This suggests a critical perception among the majority of employees, identifying nepotism as a significant barrier to professional and institutional development.

3.2.3. Impact on Employee Motivation

For 75% of participants, nepotism and the lack of merit have a strongly negative effect on motivation, while 25% consider the impact negative but less severe. This clearly shows that the absence of fairness and transparency in promotion processes reduces both engagement and performance.

3.2.4. Organizational Commitment and Staff Turnover

Experiences with non-meritocratic practices are seen as a major factor influencing the decision to leave the organiza-

tion for 75% of respondents, while 25% are uncertain. This indicates that the lack of meritocracy increases demotivation and the risk of staff turnover, harming organizational stability and performance.

Table 1. Employees' Perceptions of Promotions, Nepotism, and Lack of Merit.

Question	Response Percentages	Interpretation / Conclusion
How often are promotions in your organization based on merit?	25% – rarely; 75% – occasionally	The promotion system is perceived as not fully meritocratic; confidence in the transparency of advancement is limited.
How widespread do you think nepotism is in public sector workplaces?	25% – very widespread; 75% – widespread	Nepotism is perceived as a serious barrier to equitable professional and institutional development.
How does nepotism and the lack of merit affect your motivation?	75% – very negative; 25% – negative, but not very	The absence of fairness and merit has direct effects on employee engagement and performance.
Would experiencing non-merit-based practices influence your decision to stay or leave?	75% – would significantly influence; 25% – uncertain	Lack of meritocracy increases demotivation and staff turnover, negatively impacting organizational stability.

Source: Author (2025).

3.2.5. Comparative Analysis with the Literature

Existing studies indicate that employment and promotion decisions are often not based on merit or professional skills but rather on family ties, friendships, or political affiliations (Gjinovci, A., 2017; Gjinovci D., & Gjinovci, A., 2018). This model favors close associates, reducing opportunities for qualified employees and fostering a clientelist culture.

Consequently:

- Many qualified individuals are unable to advance professionally;

Table 2. Employees' Perceptions of Trust in Public Institutions.

Question	Key Results	Interpretation / Conclusion
How much trust do you have in public institutions in Kosovo?	25% – Little trust; 75% – Neutral	Trust in public institutions remains fragile; most respondents have not formed a strong positive or negative opinion about institutional effectiveness.
How do you think corruption affects economic development and professional opportunities in the country?	25% – Highly negative impact; 75% – Negative impact	There is a consensus that corruption is a serious barrier to economic development and the creation of a fair, merit-based labor market.
How reliable do you consider the rewards for your efforts and education in the workplace?	25% – Not at all reliable; 75% – Somewhat reliable	There is a marked lack of confidence in evaluation and professional reward mechanisms, reflecting the perception that current systems are not fully based on merit and performance.

Source: Author (2025)

- Leadership boards and key positions are often politically appointed, diminishing neutrality and professionalism within the administration (Smith & Johnson, 2023).

3.3. Analysis of Public Trust, the Impact of Corruption, and Perceptions of Fairness in Professional Rewards

This section examines respondents' perceptions regarding the level of trust in public institutions, the impact of corruption on economic development and professional opportunities, and perceptions of fairness in rewarding individual effort and education. The collected responses indicate a significant lack of trust and a low perception of meritocracy within public institutions and workplaces.

3.3.1. Trust in Public Institutions

Results show that 25% of respondents have little trust in public institutions, while 75% maintain a neutral stance. This suggests that overall trust in institutions remains fragile, as most participants have not formed a strong belief regarding institutional effectiveness and transparency.

3.3.2. Impact of Corruption

According to the data, 25% of respondents believe that corruption has a highly negative impact on economic development and professional opportunities, while 75% consider the impact negative but not extreme. This consensus highlights that corruption represents a serious barrier to economic development and to the creation of a fair and merit-based labor market.

3.3.3. Fairness in Professional Rewards

For 25% of respondents, their efforts and education are not rewarded fairly, while 75% perceive professional rewards as somewhat unreliable. This reflects a substantial lack of confidence in evaluation and reward mechanisms, confirming the perception that current promotion and reward systems are not fully based on merit and performance.

Table 2 presents employees' perceptions regarding trust in public institutions, the impact of corruption on economic development and professional opportunities, as well as fairness in rewarding individual effort and education. The results

indicate that trust in public institutions remains fragile, as most respondents have not formed a strong belief about institutional effectiveness. Furthermore, there is a clear consensus that corruption hinders economic development and the creation of a fair labor market, while perceptions of fairness in rewards reveal a lack of confidence in current professional evaluation systems. These findings are significant as they illustrate the connection between institutional trust, corruption, and perceptions of meritocracy in the workplace, highlighting the impact of non-merit-based practices on employee motivation and performance.

3.4. Analysis of the Impact of Unemployment, Economic Insecurity, and Lack of Meritocracy on Migration Decisions

This section examines respondents' perceptions regarding the influence of unemployment, economic insecurity, and the lack of meritocracy on migration decisions, as well as on perceptions of professional prospects in Kosovo.

3.4.1. Impact of Unemployment and Lack of Stable Employment Opportunities

Results show that 75% of respondents consider the impact of unemployment and the lack of stable employment opportunities as very high on migration decisions, while 25% consider it moderate. This highlights that the absence of labor market stability and the lack of suitable job opportunities are key factors driving individuals toward migration.

3.4.2. Role of Economic and Social Security

For 75% of participants, economic and social security has a very high influence on the decision to stay or leave Kosovo, while 25% rate it as high. These findings indicate that socio-economic insecurity is one of the main drivers of the desire to migrate, emphasizing the need for a more stable and reliable environment for citizens.

3.4.3. Impact of Past Governance and Lack of Meritocracy

Twenty-five percent of respondents perceive the impact of past governance and the lack of meritocracy as highly negative, while 75% consider it negative. This suggests that

Table 3. Perceptions of Unemployment, Economic Security, and Migration.

Question	(%)	Summary of Findings
How much does unemployment and lack of stable employment opportunities influence your decision to migrate?	Very high – 75%; Moderate – 25%	Unemployment and lack of labor market stability are the most significant factors driving individuals toward migration.
How much does economic and social security influence your decision to stay or leave Kosovo?	Very high – 75%; High – 25%	Economic and social insecurity is perceived as a primary reason affecting the desire to migrate, reflecting the need for socio-economic stability.
How do past governance and the lack of meritocracy influence your perception of professional prospects in Kosovo?	Very negative – 25%; Negative – 75%	The lack of meritocracy and the influence of past governance have weakened trust in professional development opportunities within the country.
How much does low trust in public institutions and perceptions of corruption affect your decision to migrate?	High – 75%; Moderate – 25%	Low institutional trust and perceptions of corruption are among the strongest factors influencing migration decisions.

Source: Author (2025).

the absence of fairness and transparency in both public and private sectors has reduced citizens' trust in professional development opportunities within the country.

3.4.4. Impact of Trust in Public Institutions and Perceptions of Corruption

According to the data, 75% of respondents rate the impact of low trust in public institutions and perceptions of corruption as high on migration decisions, while 25% consider it moderate. This indicates that dissatisfaction with the institutional system and lack of transparency in governance are significant factors shaping decisions to leave the country.

The phenomena of nepotism and corruption have a clear demotivating effect on employees:

- They reduce engagement and job satisfaction;
- They increase staff turnover, especially in institutions where non-merit-based practices are widespread;
- They hinder the development of professional capacities and innovation within organizations (Chen & Wu, 2024; Almeida & Ferreira, 2025).

Favoritism toward close associates and political clientelism negatively affect public perceptions of fairness and institutional transparency:

- They decrease citizens' trust in public institutions;
- They increase inequality and the perception of injustice;
- They hinder economic development due to higher costs, uncertainty for foreign investors, and low administrative efficiency (Gjinovci, 2015; Mauro, 1995).

3.5. Respondents' Perceptions on Migration Factors and Paths to Improve Meritocracy and Institutional Trust

Key Factors Influencing the Decision to Migrate from Kosovo

The results show that 55% of respondents consider the lack of real career development prospects as the main reason

for considering migration. Regardless of education level, professional experience, or personal commitment, competition in the labor market is often perceived as unfair and non-meritocratic.

On the other hand, 45% of respondents emphasize the importance of implementing meritocratic principles and supporting professional staff to build a more sustainable future for younger generations. They argue that knowledge, skills, and professionalism should be the primary criteria for advancement and creating a fair and competitive work environment.

Suggestions for Improving Career Prospects and Enhancing Trust in Public Institutions According to the data, 60% of respondents believe that raising awareness and education about the values of meritocracy and civic responsibility should begin at early educational levels. They suggest improving democratic culture through education on the importance of voting, representation, and transparency in public institutions. Furthermore, they highlight the need to adapt employment regulations to the social and economic realities of the country, avoiding obstacles arising from the application of formal European models in a local context still influenced by past systems.

Meanwhile, 40% of respondents stress the necessity of reforming the judicial system and strengthening institutional accountability mechanisms, including stricter sanctions against public officials who support or participate in nepotistic practices. They argue that these measures are essential to increase citizens' trust in public institutions and to create a fairer and more transparent system for all.

The findings of this study on "Employment Practices, Nepotism, and Career Prospects in Kosovo" indicate that the lack of meritocracy, the influence of corruption and nepotism, as well as low trust in institutions, represent major barriers to professional development, institutional stability, and young people's motivation to build careers locally. Field data revealed that:

- 75% of respondents have neutral or low trust in public institutions;

Table 4. Summary of Responses to Open-Ended Questions.

Question	Main Responses (%)	Summary of Findings
What are the main factors influencing your decision to migrate from Kosovo?	Lack of professional prospects – 55% Implementation of meritocracy and support for professional staff – 45%	Lack of career development and perception of unfair competition are the main drivers of migration. Emphasizes the need for a meritocratic system that values knowledge and ability.
What are your suggestions for improving career prospects and increasing trust in public institutions?	Education on meritocracy and civic responsibility – 60% Judicial reform and strengthening accountability mechanisms – 40%	Respondents call for social awareness of meritocratic values and legal reforms to ensure fairness and institutional transparency.

Source: Author (2025).

Table 5. Linking Findings to Research Hypotheses.

Hypothesis	Research Question	Key Findings
H1 – Non-meritocratic practices negatively affect employment and promotion decisions.	How do non-meritocratic practices and nepotism influence promotion and career advancement decisions?	75% of respondents indicate that promotions rarely depend on merit. Nepotism is perceived as widespread in public institutions.
H2 – Nepotistic practices and politicization demotivate employees and reduce institutional performance.	What are the consequences of these practices on employee motivation and performance?	75% report a very negative impact on motivation; 25% report a moderate impact. This indicates a decline in professional commitment.
H3 – Corruption and lack of meritocracy reduce trust in institutions and influence migration.	How does the perception of corruption and lack of fairness affect migration decisions and institutional trust?	75% highlight that low trust and corruption strongly influence migration decisions.

Source: Author (2025).

- 100% agree that corruption and nepotism negatively affect economic development and professional opportunities;
- 75% identify the lack of stable employment and economic insecurity as major migration factors;
- 75% perceive low trust in merit-based professional reward systems.

These findings demonstrate the existence of a meritocracy crisis, directly affecting employee motivation, staff turnover, and the inclination to migrate, in line with international observations on the impact of nepotism and corruption in public systems (Mauro, 1995; Smith & Johnson, 2023; Chen & Wu, 2024; Lee et al., 2025).

Analyses indicate that effective human resource management can help mitigate the negative effects of nepotism and corruption through:

- Clear recruitment and promotion policies;
- Ethical training and the development of a transparent organizational culture;
- Objective monitoring and performance evaluation (Patel & Kumar, 2025; Fanesha Fazriyani & WawanPrahyawan, 2025).

The table presents the connection between the research hypotheses (H1–H3), research questions, and the findings derived from the study. Each hypothesis represents a specific aspect of the impact of non-meritocratic practices, nepotism, and corruption on public administration and economic development:

- **H1** relates to the effect on employment and promotion decisions, showing that favoritism toward individuals with family or political connections hinders the advancement of qualified employees and reduces institutional efficiency.
- **H2** concerns the impact on employee motivation and performance, demonstrating that politicization and favoritism demotivate qualified staff and obstruct the development of professional capacities.
- **H3** addresses the effect on citizen trust and economic development, where the combination of corruption and nepotism lowers institutional trust, increases social and political uncertainty, and impedes economic growth.

This table structure helps visualize how the hypotheses are directly linked to empirical findings and research questions, providing a clear and organized overview of the study's results.

4.1. Conclusions and Recommendations

The research findings indicate that the dominance of non-meritocratic practices in hiring and professional advancement has fostered an organizational culture where ability, education, and dedication are often overlooked in favor of political or familial connections.

The study highlights that nepotism and corruption act as major barriers to the development of human capital, negatively affecting productivity and institutional efficiency. A lack of trust in public institutions and the perception of lim-

Table 6. Hypotheses, Research Questions, and Findings.

Hypothesis (H)	Research Question	Research Findings
H1 – Non-meritocratic practices and nepotism negatively affect employment and promotion decisions.	How do non-meritocratic employment practices and nepotism influence promotion and career advancement decisions?	Non-meritocratic practices and nepotism favor individuals with family or political connections over skills and merit, hindering qualified employees' advancement and reducing institutional efficiency (Gjinovci, 2017; Smith & Johnson, 2023).
H2 – Corruption and nepotism reduce employee motivation and performance in public administration.	What are the consequences of these practices on employee motivation and performance in public administration?	Favoritism and politicization demotivate qualified staff, increase employee turnover, and hinder the development of professional capacities, reducing administrative effectiveness (Chen & Wu, 2024; Lee et al., 2025).
H3 – These phenomena decrease citizen trust in institutions and hinder economic development.	How do these phenomena affect citizens' trust in institutions and the country's economic development?	The combination of corruption and nepotism lowers trust in institutions, increases social and political uncertainty, and hinders the country's economic development (Gjinovci, 2015; Mauro, 1995).

Source: Author (2025).

ited transparency have significantly reduced citizens' sense of belonging and confidence in fair recognition of professional contributions.

Unemployment and economic insecurity are dominant factors driving young people to consider migration, creating a persistent risk of human capital loss (Lee et al., 2025).

A culture of unaccountability and the absence of effective institutional control mechanisms have hindered the practical implementation of meritocracy and reforms in public administration. The study confirms that non-meritocratic practices, nepotism, and corruption remain key obstacles to professional and institutional development in Kosovo.

Only through the implementation of genuine meritocracy, strengthened justice, and the promotion of a culture of public integrity can the following be achieved:

- Increased professional motivation,
- Reduced migration tendencies,
- Sustainable socio-economic development of the country.

4.2. Scientific Recommendations

Based on empirical results and existing literature, the following strategic measures are recommended:

Implementation of true meritocratic principles

- Develop transparent systems for recruitment and promotion based on competence and performance.
- Apply independent professional evaluations and publish competition results to prevent political and nepotistic influence.

Strengthening justice and accountability systems

- Implement structural reforms in the judiciary and administration to sanction abuses of official positions.
- Establish internal and external audit mechanisms to monitor hiring and promotion practices.

Active involvement of civil society and media

- Encourage investigative media and NGOs to oversee the work of public institutions.

- Promote transparency and public reporting of cases of nepotism and corruption.

Development of professional and ethical capacities

- Mandatory ethics training for human resource managers and public administrators.
- Foster an organizational culture that values professionalism and integrity (Patel & Kumar, 2025; Fanesha&Prahyawan, 2025).

Improvement of working conditions and reduction of migration

- Develop policies for stable employment and support of young professionals.
- Provide economic incentives to retain qualified personnel in the country through increased economic security and social stability.

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All authors listed have made a substantial, direct and intellectual contribution to the work, and approved it for publication.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

We declare that there is no conflict of interest in this research.

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