

A critical appraisal of recruitment and selection in the context public service reforms in Nigeria

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Abstract

The inability of the Nigerian Public Service to meet the expectations of its citizens both in terms of basic needs as well as institutional transformation has been a source of concern over the years. Good governance, effective and efficient public administration are practical requirements for development and economic growth. The absence of fundamentals of administrations all through Nigeria has over the years prompted civil unrest. The deterioration in the public sector was manifesting in several ways, accordingly reforms have been undertaken from the colonial days to present day with limited success due to the non-holistic (piece meal) and subjective approach to the reform. Most of the reforms have been based on wrong diagnosis treating the symptoms instead of the diseases.

This study undertakes a critical assessment of the concept and nature of recruitment and selection practice in the context of public service reforms in Nigeria. It highlights the neglect of this aspect of human resource management in this process of reforms. This research adopts qualitative method using Triangulation design by means of document analysis and interviews. Both primary and secondary data were the sources of data for analysis. Findings revealed that some of the causes of the limited success of the public service reforms can be traced to wrong foundation, non-institution of merit as a basis of recruitment and selection, etc. It concludes with recommendations aimed at calling attention to using recruitment and selection as a possible panacea to the continuing reform efforts.

1. Introduction

Organizations as organic beings need to evolve, survive and grow by drawing various nutrients (like men and materials) from its environment which it processes to sustain itself. These nutrients are various economic resources available in the environment and the economy which the classical economist has labelled as factors of production. Land, labour, capital and entrepreneurship are factors of production. Labour signifies the human assets which are also known as human resources applied to convert material or unrefined resources into consumer goods or services. Human capital includes all capable individuals able to work in a given society to provide several services to the society at large, organizations or the economy. These factors of production are not rigid resources because workforce can be assigned to diverse departments of the organization to produce consumer services or products. Human capital or manpower could be made to improve their performance through training or education, motivation or recruitment and selection to make-up for technical purposes or administrative responsibilities while working with other economic resources. In this current global village, the business environment or market place is characterized by competition irrespective of business or sector. To have a competitive edge; it is imperative that organizations really apply the employees as a competitive advantage. An organization might have all the most recent innovation and the best physical resources; however, in the event that it doesn't have the right individuals it will battle to accomplish the outcomes it requires. This is valid over the

entire spectrum of business in the public or private sector. A strategy (like good recruitment and selection practice) for enhancing workforce performance and organizational profitability to drive higher growth for the organization becomes an imperative. People make the difference, it is a truth, and it has been proven through many studies and research. Nations, organizations and institutions are given identical none human material resources like finance, raw materials, plants and equipment; technology and processes in a competitive environment it is found they come out with varying degrees of success. What accounts for this difference in success rate are the ability, capacity and innovativeness of the people in the entity to utilize (combine) these materials. Therefore, human capital is the backbone of any successful organization.

In response to this global scenario, most organizations embraced the notion of human capital as a good competitive advantage that will enhance higher performance. Human capital acquisition becomes a part of an overall corporate effort to achieve improved organizational performance. Hence, organizations and nations desirous of optimal performance need to put-in good human capital recruitment and selection practices that would bring in suitable employees improve performance and achieve desired outcomes. Although there is a broad assumption that quality human capital has positive effects on organization's and nations performance, this notion of performance enhancement due to good recruitment and selection practices seem to be lacking in Nigeria's public service and needs to be examined in the context of public service reforms.

2. Discussion:

Recruitment: Recruitment is the process of generating a pool of capable people to apply for employment in an organization (Bratton and Gold, 2007). This assertion is collaborated by Stonner and Freeman etal (2000), it is their view that the purpose of recruitment is to provide a group of candidates that is large enough to let the employer select the employees they need. While Costello (2006) sees recruitment as the set of actions and processes used to officially obtain an adequate number of competent people at the right place and time so that the people and the organization can select each other in their own best short and long term interest. But Hannagan (1995) opines that recruitment is the first process of filling vacancies. He further states that the process involves the ascertainment of the requirements for filling the vacancy (particularly in relation to job and person specifications); while bearing in mind the sources of suitable candidates, drafting job advertisements and deciding suitable media to carry them; assessing appropriate salary levels for employees; and arranging interviews and other aspects of selection. The following tools are essential aids in recruitment:

- Job analysis
- Job evaluation
- Job description
- Job specification

Selection:

Employee selection begins where recruiting stops. Recruitment attracts prospective candidates to show/indicate interest in working in the organization. This is done through applications, what follows is selection process.

Selection involves making decisions about people. Where there are several job applicants for a vacancy, the organization must decide who is most qualified. Selection is the process of identifying those individuals to be recruited, who is best suited to assist the organization in achieving organizational goals.

Stonner et al (2000) see the selection process as the mutual process whereby the organization decides whether or not to make a job offer and the candidate decides whether or not to accept it. In his opinion, Ejiofor (1989), says selection is the process of choosing from the pool of potential employees available those suitable for the job in terms of qualifications and organizational

requirements. Selection involves matching the requirements of a job with attributes of candidates. This is facilitated by drafting a person specification defining the background, education, training, personality and other characteristics of the ideal candidate. The person described may not exist, but the process of drafting a person qualification creates a standard against which candidates can be compared.

The purpose of the selection process is to choose individuals who are most likely to succeed on the job from those available using the requirements of the vacancy as shown in the job description and job specification. The success of this process depends on the effectiveness of the human resource planning and recruitment process. The ultimate objective is to match the requirements of the job and the qualifications of the individual.

According to Hannagan (1995) the selection process involves a number of steps although there is no standard procedure adopted by all organizations to select candidates, but below are some examples of popular methods:

- a) **Initial or preliminary interview** – It is usually quite short, most times done standing and at the front desk, the main objective is to screen off or eliminate the unqualified.
- b) **References** – The purpose is to obtain information on the past behaviour of the applicant.
- c) **Psychological Test**- This is a systematic procedure for comparing behaviour of two or more persons, this tests are superior to interviews since they are objective and impartial and free from biases. It is used to measure the abilities, aptitudes, interest, intelligence and personality of an individual in quantitative terms.
- d) **Interviewing** – This is the most popular method of selection, it is designed to predict future job performance on the basis of applicant's oral response questions and some behavioural attributes under pressure. It comes in several variants; guided or directed or patterned, unstructured interview, situational interview and behaviour description interview.

Public Service and Civil Service in Nigeria

Civil Service is a term used to cover government workers who are direct employees of the federal and state governments, these does not include the police, the armed forces personnel, the judicial personnel and the teachers. Its usage excludes also employees of statutory corporations and boards. According to Obikeze and Anthony (2004) the civil service comprises all servants of the state, other than those holding political appointments, who are employed in a civil capacity and whose remuneration is paid out of money voted by the legislature.

Adamolekum(1983) defines it as the totality of services that are organized under government authority. It can therefore be said that civil service is narrower in scope and excludes some government employees who are public servants. For further clarification, public service includes all jobs that relate to the government providing goods and services to the public. So a recreational pack worker is providing a public service as is the president of the country. Also the term "Civil Service" generally refers to a system where jobs and promotions are earned by merit. It is not Civil Service if jobs and promotions are given out based on patronage (on political connections to the important people).

Public Service Reforms in Nigeria:

The inability of the Nigerian Public Service to meet the expectations of its citizens both in terms of basic needs as well as institutional transformation has been a source of worry over the years. Good governance, effective and efficient public administration are practical requirements for development and economic growth. The absence of fundamentals of administrations all through Nigeria has over the years prompted civil unrest. The deterioration in the public sector was manifesting in several ways as captured by various writers, according to TunjiOlaopa (2010); Inefficiency in the conveyance of social administrations, lack of care to general welfare; detachment to the standards managing the behavior of public authorities; and rampant corruption.

Observing the deficiency in the public service delivery, the Federal Government of Nigeria at various times over the years undertook public service reforms which have had limited success. In spite of the enormous efforts, human and material resources spent over the years at public service reforms, little progress has been made as are expressed by several commentators and writers. TunjiOlaopa (2010) identified the cause of failures as absence of effectiveness, absence of accountability, ineffective management practices and debasement. Additionally, Michael A. Bentil (2004) made a more lengthy and comprehensive submission of variables as, absence of political will; inability to relate the reform measures to genuine needs; absence of required institutional support; failure to reasonably figure the expense of reform activities against the success to be attained; resistance from vested interests inside of the bureaucracy; absence of clarity in focus and content; blind duplicating of outside models; and in some cases poor thinking in timing. Further reasons adduced by Michael A. Bentil (2004) include that administrative reforms have not been integrated with socio-economic development process. There has also been a lack of comprehensiveness because studies that were undertaken were generally limited to only a sector or part of the public service system.

Reforms in the public sector aimed at enhancing service delivery have received extensive focus in the recent times. Changing demographics and public desires have changed the environment in which the public sector operates. Driven by these evolving expectations, the public sector was progressively required to reclassify its role, reinforce its human capacity and build coordinated service delivery models.

From the above listed problems bedeviling the public service in Nigeria, a careful study shows that most of the identified problems and solutions proffered are socio-cultural, political, economic and behavioral. Most of them are extraneous to human resource practice or at best circumstantial to human resource concern. The professional aspects of human resource management are either completely over looked or taken for granted or received a passing mention without any in-depth analysis or interrogation. This work seeks to interrogate some of the technical elements of recruitment and selection as a basis to anchor and drive the reforms. We posit that if the right process is used to bring in the right caliber of staff imbued with the belief in their qualification and ability as the basis of their employment they will owe their loyalty to the system rather than primordial, sectional, religious, ethnic and parochial sentiments.

3. Research Methodology: Document Analysis was combined with another qualitative research method as a means of triangulation “the combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon” (Denzin, 1970). The qualitative researcher is expected to draw upon multiple (at least two) sources of evidence; that is to seek a meeting point and collaboration through the use of different data sources and methods. By triangulating data, document analysis and interviews was used in an attempt to provide a confluence of evidence to dispel researchers’ bias and thus enhance the credibility of this work.

4. Data Presentation: As stated above in addition to the use of document analysis we have used interview as a means of triangulation to eliminate researcher bias. The data obtained from the interview was analyzed using percentiles to see if we could achieve congruence with the conclusions arrived at from the document analysis. Below we present the results.

Table 4.1 Employment by competitive examination

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	12	30.0	30.0	30.0
Valid No	28	70.0	70.0	100.0
Total	40	100.0	100.0	

From the table

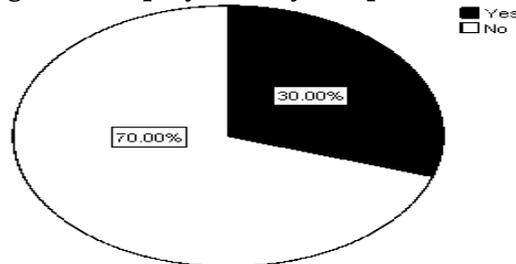
Yes 30%

No 70%

Interpretation:

30% of respondents said that competitive exams are used for employment into the public service in Nigeria while 70% said it is not used. This means that merit is not the basis for employment which supports our earlier conclusion.

Figure 1. Employment by competitive



examination

Table 4.2 Use of job description and job specification during recruitment and selection

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Yes	15	37.5	57.7	57.7
Valid No	11	27.5	42.3	100.0
Total	26	65.0	100.0	
Missing System	14	35.0		
Total	40	100.0		

From the table

Yes 57.7%

No 42.3

Interpretation:

57.7% of the interviewees said that job description and job specification are used in recruitment and selection while 42.3% answered in the negative. Ordinarily this result would mean that these tools are used in reality in the recruitment and selection process but a critical study of the advertisements used in the recruitment process (see appendix I) against international best practices shows a deficiency in the requisite information to be contained in a job description and job specification.

What the above means is that:

- a) Most of the respondents do not know what a good job description and job specification is.
- b) Most of the respondents are not professional human resource practitioners

Therefore, the reality in practice negates the answers.

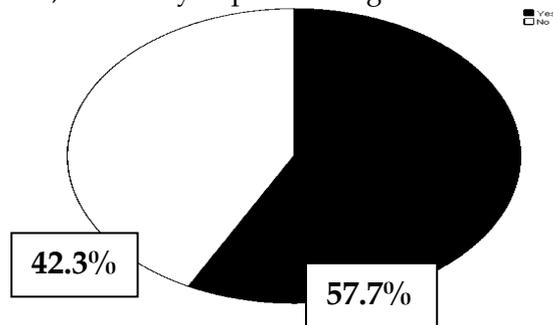


figure 2. Use of job description

Table 4.3 Incapacity in the public service

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	31	77.5	77.5	77.5
	No	9	22.5	22.5	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

From the table

Yes 77.5%

No 22.5%

Interpretation:

77.5% of those interviewed are of the opinion that the public service lacks the capacity to meet expectation and developmental needs of Nigeria due mainly to poor quality staff in the service while 22.5% hold the view that the service has the capacity.

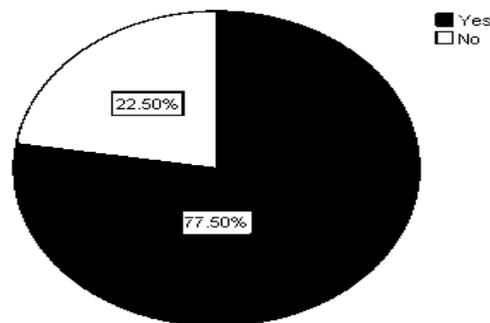


Figure 3. Incapacity in the public service

Table 4.4 Professionalism in public service

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	8	20.0	30.8	30.8
	No	18	45.0	69.2	100.0
	Total	26	65.0	100.0	
Missing	System	14	35.0		
Total		40	100.0		

From the table

Yes 30.8%

No 69.2%

Interpretation:

30.8% of the respondents are professional human resource management practitioners and or have a university degree in human resource management while 69.2 do not have a degree in human resource management neither are they a member of a professional body nor are they undergoing any professional training.

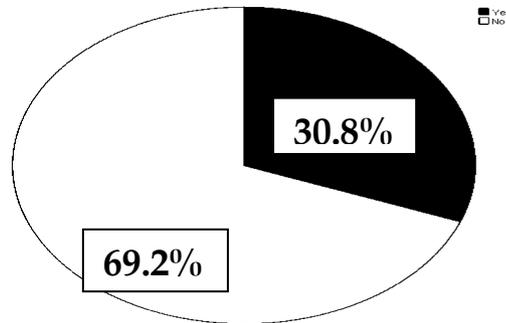


Figure 4. Professionalism of human resource managers

Table 4.5 Corruption in the public service

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Yes	27	67.5	67.5	67.5
Valid No	13	32.5	32.5	100.0
Total	40	100.0	100.0	

From the table

Yes 67.5%

No 32.5%

Interpretation:

67.5% of the respondents believe that there is corruption in the public service while 32.5% do not think so.

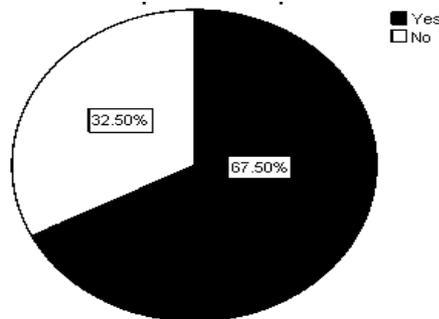


Figure 5. corruption in public service

5. Research findings

At the conclusion of this research, enumerated below is the presentation of our findings:

- **Wrong Foundation**

The foundation upon which the Nigerian public service and civil service are built on is faulty because it started as a part of the British colonial office, the early structure and objectives were narrow. It was set-up to aid the British facilitate their trade and commercial interest. Therefore, the caliber of staff needed was low skill artisans and clerical assistants. They had neither need for any elaborate structure nor need to put in place the basis for competitive and merit based system. As the agitation for more Nigerian involvement in governance was growing and the progress towards independence drew close the Nigerianization policy was introduced which demanded the employment of Nigerians at all cost with or without training.

Shortly before independence and immediately after independence, Nigerians insisted on taking over from the expatriates at the top managerial level even when there weren't enough trained and experienced people to man the positions. Also in the process of implementing this policy the issue of representativeness came up to muddle the situation thereby reducing further the quality and caliber of staff employed in the service.

None Institution of Merit

Civil service by concept and definition is a merit based system as people are to be hired on the basis of professional merit as proven by competitive examination, this is why the world adopted this system of public administration and the strict adherence to its principles has proven successful in many countries. But in the case of Nigeria as shown in our research findings merit has been subordinated to representativeness and the result of this the best hands are not employed into the service. There is no adherence to the Northcote-Trevelyan Report of 1854 of which the two key recommendations are, that recruitment should be on the basis of merit determined through competitive examination and promotion should be through achievement, rather than 'preferment, patronage or purchase'.

- **Constitutional Hindrance**

This is the most constraining factor to the institution of a merit based, open, transparent and competitive recruitment and selection practice in the public service in Nigeria. The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Government of Nigeria in Section 14 subsections 3 and 4 established the constitutional basis for the operation for the representativeness or federal character principle in Nigeria, by making this constitutional provision representativeness has been put above merit which no basis neither legal nor administrative base.

To add effect to the above stipulation the 1999 Constitution in Schedule 7 set-up an Executive body called the Federal Character Commission to enforce the constitutional provision of S.14 and sanction erring government organizations and officers.

- **Politicization of the Public Service**

This has been identified as another major factor aiding the debasement of the public service and it comes in various ways in the system. Before independence and immediately after independence was the Nigerianization agitation and policy then regionalism coupled with representativeness. The system was barstaded by the military by institution of the culture of impunity and arbitrariness in recruitment, promotion and discipline.

- **Lack of Capacity**

Many unqualified personnel joined the public service most of whom are not trainable therefore their deficiency could not be remedied. Politicization of placements, promotions, institution of the culture of impunity, arbitrariness, inadequate and sometimes complete absence of training or low quality training aggravated the loss capacity and consequently the under development of the country.

- **Absence of Good Recruitment and Selection Practice**

A critical analysis of the recruitment and selection practice in the public service in Nigeria shows that it does not conform to international best practice. Some of the critical elements of the process are not adhered to.

- **Corruption**

There is corruption in the system at various levels; it has been easily identified by most studies, commentators and writers as a key factor in the failure of the public service in Nigeria. In the course of this research we have come to the conclusion that it is a by-product of all the above stated findings. The enabling environment was created for it to feaster. It is both the direct and indirect consequence of the totality of these failings.

- **Non-Professionalization of the Human Resource Function:**

Our finding shows that this factor has not been given the preeminence it deserves because the human resource function is currently handled by generalist administrative officers in the department of administration or personnel of government agencies, ministries and departments.

6. Recommendations and Conclusion

The major focus of this research was to carry out a critical appraisal of recruitment and selection in the context of public service reforms in Nigeria. The study looked at the evolution of the public service and observed the political naivety of the Nationalists and Leaders who eagerly adopted the same colonial administrative structures and mindset where the objective of governance was narrow and mainly focused on maintaining law and order, and ensuring the exploitation of the agricultural products, mineral resources and other commercial interests for the benefit of their colonial metropolis. The failure of the Nigerian leaders to interrogate the colonial legacy affected the attempt to evolve a Nigerian bureaucracy.

The research portrays a public service that is dysfunctional with policy, process, capacity, resource and performance gaps. It shows a system that is polarized along ethnic lines, a structure that is eroded of professional self-confidence, esprit de corps and merit. A system that is not able to meet its basic obligation to the citizens, a system that has fallen into disrepute and decay. This research critically examined the various attempts by various administrations to arrest the decline in bureaucratic relevance through a series of administrative reforms in order to bridge the gap between the government and the governed. Unfortunately, in this process the critical element of the human resource management function has been overlooked. The research observed that scant attention has been paid to the human resource management function even when human resource capacity gap was the main issue.

This research was able to show that human capital is the most critical asset and any effort to rebuild, transform and make the Nigerian public service world-class has to find a way to harness this potent resource and the only viable and most effective way is through a merit based system of recruitment. The most efficient way is through a good recruitment and selection practice using the tools of job analysis, job description and job specification.

In conclusion, humans indeed make the difference and this is a proven fact by many researches and studies. That is, human capital is the backbone of any successful organization. Having noted the lacuna in the public service delivery in Nigeria and the several attempts by the Federal Government of various regimes at reforms which have had limited success. These study on the critical appraisal on recruitment and selection in the context of public service reforms in Nigeria highlights the fact that poor recruitment and selection processes and practices has a causal effect on the public service performance over these years. Professionalism in human resource management has been overlooked along many other factors and has left the Nigerian public service in the state of lack of efficiency, lack of accountability ineffective management practice and corruption.

The implementation of the below mentioned recommendations will eliminate politicization of the public service in Nigeria, build capacity, institute merit, lay the foundation for service delivery; national growth and development; and stem the tide of corruption.

Recommendations

- **Institution of Merit:** There is need to quickly put in place a merit based system of recruitment since it is based upon candidate's demonstration of suitability for public service which is objective and based on competitive exams which eliminates subjectivity. It will enable the government recruit competent people who have the requisite qualification and personality trait that is required to provide the services needed and bring about the development that will grow the country.

- **Constitutional Amendment:** To give effect to the above recommendation there is need to amend the 1999 Nigerian constitution especially Section 10 of the third schedule and Section 14 subsections 3 & 4 and any other relevant sections that are undermining the culture of merit.
- **Establishment of Equal Employment Opportunity Commission:** With the amendment of Section 14(3)(4) of the constitution, the Federal Character Commission should be scrapped or transformed to establish an Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.
- **Promote and Enforce the Features of Civil Service:** The features of the civil service are neutrality, impartiality, permanence and anonymity within these features are contained the ingredients needed to overcome the fears of discrimination and marginalization that are harbored by sections of the country which form the bases for the agitation and advancement of the federal character principle in Nigeria. If some of these features like neutrality and impartiality are given the force of law then merit and equal treatment for all in their service of the citizens or discharge of their duties will be guaranteed and the fear of discrimination will assuaged.
- **Develop and Institute a Good Recruitment and Selection Practice:** A good recruitment and selection practice in line with international best practice will eliminate employment of low caliber personnel and bring about recruitment of persons that are suited for the challenges confronting the country.
- **Institute Professionalism in the Human Resource Management Function:** In furtherance of recommendation five above, there is the need to ensure the strict professionalization of the human resource management function in the public service in Nigeria.

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