
A Sociological Analysis of Public Service Management Practices and Problems in Niger State

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Abstract: *The Study examines the practices and problems of Public Service Management in Niger State. The researcher empirically investigates the sharp practices and problems of public service management in Niger State. And specifically, to investigate the extent to which civil servants in the state adhere to public services rules, curb the problems of corruption and mismanagement and identify areas of their weakness and challenges. Survey method was adopted for the study. 396 responses from the sampled respondents were analyzed through the use of descriptive statistics. Some of the findings are; fair adherence to promotions, poor training of the staff, few cases of missing files. It also found few challenges which include corruption and mismanagement, low salary structure for the state's civil servants and concluded that there was poor practices in public service management in Niger State. The study therefore recommended the institutionalization of processes and procedures for training as well as better salary structures for public servants in Niger State.*

Keywords: *Corruption, Government, Management, Public Service, and Service delivery.*

1. Introduction

The Nigerian Public Service can be traced to the era of colonialism which was established as an instrument of British colonialists from the late 19th century, Iyang (2008). According to Tokunboh (1990), the system of state enterprises begun in 1898 when the British Colonial administration undertook the railway transport project in the capital city of Nigeria, Lagos, to the hinterland. This was followed by coal mining, electricity, and marine ports, primarily as administrative organ for facilitating trade and commercial activities of the colonial government. As at independence in 1960, Nigeria had only a centralized system of government and three regional governments namely: Northern, Eastern, and Western regions in the context of Federal System of Government with specific functional allocation by the constitution Okojie, (2009). But in an attempt by government to bring governance closer to the people, the fourth region known as the Mid Western region was created in 1963. More so, in May 1967, the government broke the four regions into twelve states' federal structure and in 1996, the number of states increased to 36 states and 774 local governments to enhance the unity of Nigeria's diverse ethnic groups Okojie, (2009).

The traditional role of public service all over the world is anchored on the provision of basic socio-economic services that are accessible for all citizens with emphasis on decentralization, devolution and modernization of service delivery (USAID, 2009; Mwita, 2009; & Kakabadse, 2001). Thus, public service according to ADB (2010: 3) is expected to make ensuring content and process decisions aimed at collective national progress and development (stabilizing functions, provision of a regulatory framework: law and order, provision of preconditions for the operations of the private sector and the market, and promotion of equity among players). Public service therefore refers to all organizations that exist as part of government machinery for implementing policy decisions and delivery of service that are of value to the citizens (Ayeni, 2008). Hence, the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, chapter four part I (D) and part II (C), regards public service as a mandatory institution of the state for national prosperity towards progress and development (Ayeni, 2008).

With heterogeneous social environment in Nigeria, the wider society looks up to the public service not only to implement developmental goals and administer government policies on a day-to-day basis, but also to play significant roles in formulating development strategies, policies and programmes in such a way that will stimulate accelerated social and economic changes. Such desired changes include reduction in unemployment, increased social products and a more equitable redistribution of income (Lawal & Abe,

2011). Hence, these societal desires have made management in the public service imperative in the current millennium resulting from market dynamics, emergence of the global economy, advances in technology, and the need to provide more social services with fewer resources. With the advent of modern state, the public service becomes the steward of public resources and guardian of a special trust of the citizens and therefore its management became imperative. As a result, ethics and principles were devised to guide the operations of public service workers (civil servants) and in order to uphold public confidence, the ethics and principles emphasized on professionalism in the discharge of designated duties.

The public service has initiated several moves since independence in 1960 to make its management responsive to the aspirations of the people (Ayeni, 2008). As a result, Morgan Commission was constituted in 1963 in which salaries/wages of junior staff of public and private sectors were reviewed and led to the introduction of minimum wage for the first time on geographical basis in Nigeria. In order to consolidate on the recommendations of the Morgan Commission, Elwood Grading Team was set up in 1966 to examine the anomalies in the grading of posts to proposed uniform salaries for officers performing identical duties. In 1971, Adebo Salaries/Wages Commission was set up which proposed the establishment of a Public Service Review Commission which would examine the role of Public Service Commission; Structure of the Civil Service; Conditions of Service; and Training arrangements; among others Ayeni, (2008).

Also in an attempt to improve on quality service delivery in Niger State, the Government introduced the Youth Employment Programme (YEP). Under the scheme unemployed Graduates were screened and shortlisted for three-month training and at the end of the training programme they were absorbed into the State Public Service. This has contributed to reducing unemployment, promotion of merit and transparency in recruitment into Niger State Public Service (NCSC, 2012). These initiatives were expected to re-engineer and streamline public service (the government machinery) so that a significant increase in the quality, quantity and cost effectiveness of the public service can be achieved with a system-wide goal for improvement in public service operations.

However, this study is an attempt which seeks to improve on the management of public service with a view to make it more effective and efficient, as it will bring to light some of the flaws in the public service management and its practices in Niger State. The study will add to the relevant literature used by policy makers in decision-making (policy formulation and strategies) which will help deliver the public services in line with the overall national developmental goals of ensuring an effective and efficient public service system that will ensure the well-being of the citizens through the provision of basic needs of life (Okojie, 2009).

1.1 Objective of the study

The main objective of study was to analyze the practices and problems of Public Service Management in Niger State from a sociological perspective. The specific objectives are:

1. To ascertain the regularity of staff promotion exercise
2. To assess whether the practices of file administration and management is up-to-date and adequate to cater for the record-keeping needs of the state public service.
3. To identify how poor training and development affect the productivity of employees in Niger State public service.

2. Review of Literature and theoretical framework

2.1 Review of Literature

Public Service Management (PSM) focuses on modalities through which governments can meet the expectations of ordinary citizens, business sector, and civil society in delivering higher standards of services and putting integrity in public civil service and government agencies/parastatals (Hambleton, 2004, Howard, 2001). The call for New Public Service Management (NPSM) thus emanates from inability of governments to deliver expected services resulting in the deepening of poverty, degrading infrastructural facilities, and escalation of social vices in the midst of increasing public expenditure (Satish, 2004).

Mathew (2003) in his work titled “The Global Influence of New Public management: a case studies from Africa” using systematic review approach, evaluated New Public Service Management in terms of privatization, decentralization, and civil service reforms with emphasis on Ghana, Nigeria, and Uganda. The study found out that state-owned enterprises (SOEs) in these countries operate with huge deficits (amount greater than expenditure on health and education combined). The step taken to correct this scenario was the introduction of privatization which was marred with three basic problems: corruption and lack of transparency; lack of functioning markets; and inefficiency in regulation of new economic paradigm. With regards to decentralization, granting some level of autonomy to agencies/parastatals and tiers of governments was seen as a way of enhancing leadership and improved service delivery which were also engulfed with the problems of lack of political will and elites' interest superseding social interest. In terms of civil service reform (CSR), the main goal was to address the problems of overstaffing, deterioration of real salaries, lack of morale, inadequate training, and lack of capacity building in order to create a small civil service with better paid, more efficient and effective working force. However, the efforts in CSR focused mainly on retrenchment. The work concluded that little successes were achieved in privatization, decentralization, and civil service reform in the case countries and recommended therefore that issues of capacity building be paramount to the successful implementation of new public service management policy in most of the developing countries.

Roberto (2011) in his study on the “Victim or Victimizer: Firm Responses to Government Corruption”, where he used systematic review to find the relationship between government corruption and firm performance; found both corrosive and heterogeneous impacts of government corruption on (individual) firm performances which resulted from firm's activities in response to dealing with government corruption. The study thus recommended integrative model of firm strategy on corruption. The model explains various options open to a firm based on its organizational structure, political resources, industry regulation, and surrounding institutions.

However, Gideon (1998) in a paper titled “Welfare Fraud and Welfare Stigma”, using a mean – tested welfare modeling on public assistance programme argued that welfare fraud and welfare stigma are two phenomena of opposite nature. Focusing on public exposure stigma generated through excessive reporting or work requirements in welfare programmes it was found that under fairly reasonable conditions stigma constitutes stronger deterrent to participation than the expected punishment on dishonest claiming. This result, which is in line with sociologists' contention that the threat of informal sanctions has much greater effect on behaviour than the threat of legal sanctions, suggests that the truly needy could be more effectively assisted if less effort were directed towards the enforcement of reporting and work requirements, and more resources shifted to enforcing eligibility conditions and combating dishonest claims. The study also identified such requirements as a means by public officers to engage in criminal acts through collaborating with dishonest claims. It is recommended that work requirements should be set low enough to raise the effective benefit above the minimum wage in order to combat dishonest claims and collaboration.

Laurence (1999) observed in his work: Public Management in North America with reference to Canada, Mexico, and the United States, using historical methodology; distinct public service administrative systems, in the North American countries with identical drive, performance, accountability, and privatization/decentralization, found that countries with different electoral, structural, and socio-economic policies are unlikely to be engaging in a convergent dialogue concerning public service management. It concluded that whatever the drive or administrative system, public service management strive towards similar design and management of social insurance, anti – poverty programmes, and environmental protection policies (*that well planned public service management can have about 70% impact on these variables*); intergovernmental relations and devolution of responsibility to sub – national governments; best management practices and the leadership of public agencies; public sector innovation and quality improvement; the public use of private markets for service delivery; and the role of the non-profit sector as both complement to and substitute for the public sector. In making recommendations, the paper focused on the abilities of countries to effect reform and re – allocations of political influence and thus calls for sustained effort at improving public service management and delivery in the wake of growing complexity of the administration of public service. Hence, this growing complexity has

stimulated considerable development of public management theory, methods of inquiry, and practice and more curiosity about these developments in the community.

Hambleton (2004) in his paper “Beyond New Public Management: City Leadership, Democratic Renewal, and the Politics of Place”, (US) drew on the experiences of some Local Government Areas (LGA) in Europe, Australia and North America with focus on the strengths and weaknesses of the 'New Public Management: NPM'. The paper observed that in spite of the contribution of new public management to improved service delivery in some areas; it is plagued by certain limitations: inability to use key driver of improvement (the energy and enthusiasm of citizens and communities) and provision/utilization of political movements and community action. In essence, the paper identified major challenges to improving service delivery as the roles of politicians, officials and citizens and their triangular relationships; public innovation ethos/ public service ethos; and revitalization of local political process to highly disadvantaged groups. It is concluded from this paper that unless managerial and political aspect of a place is harmonized, the rationale of public service management will be far from being realized.

Bassey and Benjamin (2009), in a paper Nigerian Public Sector: A Case for Performance Management through systematic review found that ineffective and inefficient management (corruption, mismanagement, and fraudulent practices) are the bane of poor public sector performance in Nigeria. They concluded that the only way to enable the public sector to achieve its set goals is adoption and implementation of performance management system. Odd – Helge (2003) in his paper titled “fighting fiscal corruption: lessons from the Tanzanian Revenue Authority” observed that several African countries have undertaken comprehensive reforms of their public service administration (tax administration) in order to increase revenue and curb corruption. Two strategies were identified: high demand for corrupt services promoted fraudulent practices even with relatively high wages and good working conditions; and corruption network: link between government officer and external actors hinders hiring and firing procedures. The paper found that the corruption network is the main hindering factor for fighting corruptions in Africa. It recommended that firing procedure should be designed such that an officer fired from public sector should be blacklisted even in the private sector employment process.

Mohammed (2011) in his paper titled “Economic Effect of Corruption in Nigeria” through the use of corruption perception index (CPI) suggested high corruption magnitude ranging from 0.69 to 2.7. The paper concluded that establishment of various anti-corruption agencies such as EFCC, ICPC, and due process have little or no impact on reducing corruption in Nigeria. It is recommended that leadership by example, zero corruption tolerance, credible institutional/legal framework, and effective measures to curtail supply of and demand for corruption should be the agenda of political leadership and management strategies in Nigeria.

On the other hand, Obayelu (2007) in his paper titled “Effects of Corruption and Economic Reforms on Economic Growth and Development: Lessons from Nigeria”, using historical review approach (drawing data from news, stories, reports of tribunals and commissions of enquiry, interviews of Nigerians with relevant information, anecdotes, and personal knowledge of Nigeria) observed significant impact of anti-corruption agencies in reducing corruption in Nigeria. The paper found a negative correlation between levels of corruption and economic growth thereby hindering achievement on growth and development trajectory. Corruption is also found to cause multiple problems: reduction in economic efficiency, creates negative national image, devalues the quality of human life, robs the economy (schools, agricultural sectors, hospital, and welfare services) of funds, discourages foreign investments, exacerbates inequality, desecrates the rule of law, undermines legitimacy/stability of democratic regimes, slows down administrative processes, etc. The paper recommended that Nigeria must reverse the prevailing socio-cultural ethics through intensive education and creation of more jobs with less stringent conditions.

Yahaya (2006) in his paper titled “Strategies of Enhancing Ethics and Accountability in the Nigerian Public Service as Viewed by Accountants” using student test methodology posits that public service is a catalyst for national development in Nigeria through provision of essential services, regulation of private business undertakings, and enhancement of conducive even play environment for all players. Descriptive

survey method was used to collect information from 150 Chartered Accountants and 100 non – Chartered Accountants on strategies of enhancing effective fight against corruption/fraudulent practices through ethics and accountability in the Nigerian public service. Analyzed by test statistics, it found public enlightenment, reduction in bureaucratic network, and adoption of modern techniques of record keeping and data storage as the effective ways of building ethics and accountability model. The study concluded that ineffective legal punishment is responsible for high corruption and fraudulent practices and recommended therefore that corrupt and unethical practices should be severely dealt with.

There is no doubt that the Nigerian public service has provided significant benefits to Nigerians as well as the nation itself since its inception in the areas of resources distribution and information technology (Lawal and Abe, 2011). However, Lawal and Abe (2011) failed to take account of the disagreement between the federal and the state government over revenue sharing allocation formula which in some cases resulted to delay in allocation to the various tiers of government from the excess crude oil funds. Also, Agagu (2008) in his work did not agree with Lawal and Abe instead asserts that the public service which was seen as the custodian of rules and regulation of the government and the engine of development has lost its prestige and confidence due to inadequate and low quality service delivery to the people. Obasanjo (2003) has also once observed that “Nigeria has long been feeling shortchanged by the quality of public service” as the public officers have too long been showcased for combined evils of inefficiency and corruption; a great impediment for effective implementation of public service rules.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

Marxist/Economic Theory

This theory arose to correct the failure of most theories to relate the reality of crime to its overall social structure by employing pluralistic conflict model to analyze the different groups and classes with unequal access to the means of production and political power. Using the dialectical materialism as a springboard, economic infrastructure becomes the basis for the understanding of the other superstructure. The Marxist perspective is concerned with the process of lawmaking, lawbreaking and enforcement and the contradictions that arise between the “form” and “reality”. In addition, this perspective does not see crime as a willful violation of the common good, but the struggle of the isolated individual against the prevailing socio-economic condition. That is to say that, Marxist views crime as a “forced response” to the inequality, socio-economic disorder and system generated by the excesses of the elite in the society. No wonder Richard Quinney (1970) cited in Steven Jones (2001) argued that whatever the physical reality of crime maybe it is the social reality that matter; the process by which a collective meaning of crime comes to be established and maintained.

Similarly, Willem Bonger provides the first deeper insights to crime in relation to economic conditions in his book entitled “*criminality and Economic Conditions*” (1916). He is of the view that capitalism breeds and encourages egoism and greed rather than altruism. The advantages of the rich, the struggle of the middle class to make a living and the working class in particular has no reason to have altruistic feelings towards those in power (Stephen, 2001). Crime is more prevalent among the lower classes because they have little, if any security in their employment. Moreover, society which encouraged the poor to compete against each other for material gains criminalizes their greed yet does nothing about the greed of the rich (Stephen 2001). The poor are dehumanized, exploited by capitalism, a situation that cause status frustration and forced responses in form of crime and revolution.

Although Bonger (1916) cited in Stephen (2001) agrees that there are inborn differences between individuals which make some more liable to commit crimes than others, and he still maintained that capitalism is the major driving force behind criminality. For us to understand the crime situation in public service management in Niger State we have to rely on applying the dialectical principle of Marxism. In this regard we need to understand the socio-economic factors that create the criminogenic circumstance for corruption and mismanagement in public service in Niger State and aslo pay attention to the way and manner the social order is organized; the structural opportunities and crimino-genic risk factors created by that order in the form of greed, primitive accumulation and lack of accountability and transparency, Abdullahi (2006).

3. Methodology

The study adopted descriptive survey research design. Primary and secondary data were utilized for the study. The secondary data used was strictly obtained from the Office of the Head of Service of the state and the economic and planning units.

3.1 Population of the Study

Public service, as an institution, is present in each state and LGA of the federation, Based on the research objectives, Niger state public service is the target of the study and as such, all state civil servants form the population of the study. However, given that Niger state has 25 LGAs and each has state and LGA public service sector, the study focused on the state public service sector and emphasis is given to the state secretariat, Minna in the state headquarters. The total population of Niger state public service as estimated in 2014 is 37,000 workers managed by 480 personnel at managerial cadre (Niger State Government Budget, 2014). Both secondary and primary data was used in the study; the secondary involves some reviewed papers while, the primary data was utilized to get the opinions from the Civil Servants which provide their experiences on the operations of the duties assigned to them in their respective office. The respondents were randomly selected

3.2 Sample size and Sample Techniques

Given that Niger state public service workers spread across the 25 Local Government Areas (LGA) and the state capital and that emphasis is placed on the centre (state capital), Yamane, (1967) formula was used to determine the sample size for the study where;

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

4. Results and Discussions

Table 3.1 is the analysis of the administered questionnaires and response rate. From the table, 396 questionnaires were distributed to the sampled respondents from the State Secretariat, Minna. Also, from the table, 374 questionnaires representing 94.44% response rate were returned and used for the analysis while 22 (5.6%) of the questionnaires were either not returned or returned but invalid for the analysis and this response rate enabled the continuity of the survey (AAPOR, 1997 and 2000; de Leeuw and de Heer, 2002; Huffington, 1998; and Johnson and Owens, 2003). A purposive sampling technique was adopted for the study. Some ministries were selected for the study as follows; Ministry of Education, 170 respondents, Office of the Head of Service, 106 respondents and Ministry for Local Government and Chieftaincy affairs 120 respondents.

Table 3.1: Analysis of the Administered Questionnaires and Response Rate

Category of Respondents	No. Questionnaires Administered	Percent (%)	No. of Questionnaires Returned	Percent (%)	Response Rate (%)
Ministry of Education	170	42.93%	164	43.85%	41.41%
Head of Service	106	26.77%	102	27.27%	25.76%
Ministry for Local Government	120	30.30%	108	28.88%	27.27%
Total	396	100	374	100	94.44

Source: Estimated from the Distributed Questionnaire for Field Survey, 2014.

Table 4.1: Analysis of Responses using Simple Percentages

Income (Naira)	Responses	Percentage (%)
N10,000 – N29, 999	106	28.3
N30, 000 – N49, 999	143	38.2
N50, 000 – N69, 999	62	17
N70, 000 – N89, 999	35	9.4
N90, 000 and above	28	7.5
Total	374	100.0
Engagements in other activities	Responses	Percentage (%)
Patty trade	155	41.4
Vocational work	52	14
Contractor	0	0
None	167	44.6
Total	374	100.0
Staff Training	Responses	Percentage (%)
Zero times	254	67.9
1 – 2 times	60	16.04
3 – 4 times	25	6.6
5 – 6 times	25	6.6
7 – 8 times	5	1.33
9 – 10 times	5	1.33
Total	374	100.0
Staff promotion	Responses	Percentage (%)
Regular promotion	267	71.3
Irregular promotion	19	5.1
Not due	88	23.5
Total	374	100.0
Missing file	Responses	Percentage (%)
Yes	36	9.6
No	338	90.4
Total	374	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2014

4.2 Major Findings

From the analysis, the result shows that Niger State public service management practices is faced by so many problems ranging from poor salary structure, inadequate training and development and inadequate funding of ministries and parastatals which hinders the attainment of organizational goals. The income level of public servant is also found to be very relevant in this study, as the study found that fair wage and salary can reduce corrupt practices bedeviling public service in Niger State. The result also shows that majority of the respondents in Niger State Public Service practice extended family system which makes them to engage in other businesses to augmenting their monthly income so as to take care of their family members. The high percentage of employees engaging in other business other than public service has contributed towards the low level of productivity and inefficient service delivery in the public service in Niger State. The result also indicated that Niger State public service has a good tradition of up-to-date record keeping through effective file administration process, while in the area of staff promotion a significant number of personnel expressed satisfaction with the regularity of their promotion exercise, even though 3.9% of the employees have complained of irregular promotion.

Given the 21st century drive for excellence where every organization train their staff for greater efficiency and productivity more than half of the sampled respondents in Niger State public service have not been trained, which indicate poor practice in terms of training profile given its low adherence to staff professionalism and efficiency. In identifying cases of missing files, the result shows that 9.6% of the respondents indicate that they have experienced a case of file disappearing in the office which is against the ethics of public service rule in Niger State. On the challenges faced by the Niger State public service, majority of the respondents said that, there were serious challenges. However in identifying those challenges 95.3% of the respondents identified inadequate fund to run the office and lack of staff training

as one of the major challenges. This result shows that those challenges had affected productivity, efficiency and quality service delivery in Niger State Public Service Management. This study was able to highlight the challenges facing Public Service Management in Niger State from the responses of the respondents which give more reliable information about Public Service Management.

5. Summary, Conclusion & Recommendations

5.1 Summary of Findings

Based on the results from analysis of the generated, the study came up with the following summary of findings:

1. Staff promotion has been impressive as more have received promotion and timely too.
2. There exist fair practices in the management of public service in Niger state through record keeping system given that only very few have experienced cases of missing files.
3. Poor training of public servants in Niger State has resulted in weak practices of public service management in the state as staff professionalism is not being promoted which is however the brain –box in the 21st century drive for excellence.
4. Generally, Niger State public servants were on low salary therefore, virtually all the workers irrespective of grade level engaged in extra activities to augment their incomes, thus, making them less dedicated.

5.2 Conclusion

We can conclusively say that public service management practices in Niger State Niger State is characterized by so many challenges ranging from poor salary structure to inadequate training and development and inadequate funding of ministries and parastatals which affect productivity and hinders the attainment of organizational goals. The major limitation of this study is that the study cannot be generalized as it focuses only on Niger State. Other limiting factors in the course of data collection, is the difficulty encountered in obtaining some vital documents from the public service of the state even with the passage of information bill by the National Assembly, poor record keeping in ministries and parastatals also, marred the availability of important information and as such, estimations were used in certain points.

5.3 Recommendations

In line with the conclusions reached, the following recommendations had become imperative for the improvement of public service management in Niger State:

1. For transparency, accountability and equity to prevail, the current employment procedure should be institutionalized into the State laws so that equal opportunities could be given to every group.
2. Job placement should be based on qualification/expertise in order to tackle the problems of in-service training and also, there should be effective timetable for training where necessary.
3. The Niger State government should establish the necessary infrastructure for the installation of electronic software for data management and effective documentation.
4. There should be provision of adequate fund for day-to-day running of public service activities
5. Public service managers should adhere strictly to public service rules which will pave way for reward and punishment and subsequently effectiveness and efficiency in the system.

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