

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE RECRUITMENT POLICY OF THE NIGERIAN CIVIL SERVICE

USMAN MADUGU

**Department of Public Administration,
Faculty of Management Sciences,
University of Abuja.
Email: usman_madugu@yahoo.com
Phone No.: 08065757771**

&

OKAFOR IKECHUKWU JOSEPH

**Department of Public Administration,
Faculty of Management Sciences,
University of Abuja.
Email: josviyk@yahoo.com
Phone No.: 08036785625**

ABSTRACT

The Civil Service is considered as the “engine of growth and development” in modern society because of its critical role in policy making and implementation. For this reason, it is crucial that qualified and competent talents are recruited to man the service. This study is a critical analysis of the recruitment policy of the Nigerian civil service. To achieve this, the paper made use of secondary sources of information and system theory as its theoretical underpinning. The study established among others that emphasis on connections and informal contacts, and inadequate utilisation of some significant sources of recruitment, constitute the major challenges facing the recruitment of personnel in the civil service. These challenges have created difficulties for the federal civil service to appoint the right persons for the right jobs based on the principles of merit and equal opportunities for all citizens. It is therefore recommended that the prevailing practice based on all kinds of subjective feelings and informal contacts in the recruitment exercise should be discouraged, while emphasising a meritocratic approach.

Key words: Recruitment, Policy, Recruitment Policy, Civil Service.

Introduction

Every eligible citizen has the right to be gainfully employed in Nigeria. As in most other developing countries, the public sector consisting of the civil service, public corporations and other services at both national and local levels employ most of the working class (Waterman, 1976). However, it is worthy to note that not all those who desire a particular job or position get it. The challenge of personnel officers is not only the recruitment of people to fill identified vacancies in an establishment but also to ensure that appropriate and relevant skills are obtained. That is why the management and recruitment of personnel into the government is through selection of qualified and competent personnel.

Recruitment is the key to a strong civil service and it is the cornerstone of the whole public personnel structure. A faulty recruitment policy inflicts permanent weakness upon the administration; therefore, the need for a sound and scientific recruitment policy is clearly justified. A recruitment policy in the field of public administration must be in accordance with country’s constitutional requirements and political outlook.

Towards this obligation, the Federal Civil Service Commission has fashioned out specific means of personnel recruitment to secure a supply of required candidates for employment in the service. It is against this backdrop that this study carries out a critical examination of the recruitment policy of the Nigerian civil service.

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of this study is to critically examine the recruitment policy of the Nigerian civil service. The specific objectives include;

1. to identify the major elements of the recruitment policy of the Nigerian civil service;
2. to examine the challenges and prospects of the recruitment policy of the Nigerian civil service; and
3. to advance recommendations that will help to reposition and make more effective the recruitment policy of the Nigerian civil service.

Research Methodology

The study relied on secondary data, which were obtained from textbooks, journals and other publications.

Conceptual Clarifications

Three broad concepts are significant to this study, namely; recruitment, policy and civil service.

Recruitment

Recruitment in the technical phraseology of administration means the process of tapping the most suitable and competent hands for a particular job. In the words of White (1955) the process of recruitment illustrates admirably the tug and pull of the opposing forces – equalitarianism and humanitarianism on the one hand, against the claims of special competence on the other. Thus, recruitment means attracting the proper and suitable type of personnel for a particular job. Omale (2006), talks about recruitment fairly differently from how practitioners of personnel management talk. He said, in defining recruitment that;

In its conceptual and restricted sense, however, recruitment is that process which starts from getting an applicant interested enough in a job and in a particular organisation to write an application, and the process stops when his application has been received in the organisation (Omale, 2006: 36).

Omale (2006) continued the definition of recruitment by adding that “recruitment is the salesmanship which organisations do of themselves and the various jobs they have for filling”. This definition of recruitment is similar to that of Cole (2002), who said that, “the principal purpose of recruitment activities is to attract sufficient and suitable potential employees to apply for vacancies in the organisation”. He, thereafter, distinguished this process from the very next step to recruitment i.e. selection, by saying “the principal purpose of selection activities, by comparison, is to identify the most suitable applicants and persuade them to accept a position in the organisation”. Hank (as cited in Oransaya, 1981) explains that the purpose of recruitment function is “to seek out, evaluate, obtain commitment from, place and orientate new employees to fill positions required for the successful conduct of the work”.

These definitions show that recruitment is not only concerned with merely engaging the required numbers of people but also concerned with measuring their quality. Such activity should not aim at satisfying only the present needs of the organisation, but also influencing the shape of the organisation’s future. This is because employees that are well chosen and well placed not only contribute to the smooth running of the organisation but also offer important potentials for future placement and expansion. On the other hand, inefficient recruitment has been known to lead to a high rate of frustration, absenteeism, and turnover which have far reaching negative consequences for the organisation and the individual (Oransaya, 1981). Thus, many organisations rightly feel that management has a direct obligation to carefully select and correctly place each employee in an organisation.

Policy

Policies are general statements that guide decision making; they define the boundaries within which decisions are made (Wahab, 2009). A policy means deliberate plan to guide a decision in order to achieve outcome. Public policy is a course of action or inaction taken by the government. In a democratic political system, public policy is generally embodied in the constitution, legislative acts and executive orders.

Recruitment Policy

In the words of Cole (2002), “a recruitment policy represents the organisation’s code of conduct in this area of activity”. He outlined the following activities as a typical policy statement for recruitment; the organisation will:

- (1) Advertise all vacancies.

- (2) Reply to every job applicant with the minimum of delay.
- (3) Aim to inform potential recruits in good faith about the basic details and job conditions of every job advertised.
- (4) Aim to process all applications with efficiency and courtesy.
- (5) Seek candidates on the basis of their qualification for the vacancy concerned.
- (6) Aim to ensure that every person invited for interview will be given a fair and thorough hearing.

The organisation will not:

- (1) Discriminate unfairly against potential applicants on grounds of sex, race, religion or physical disability.
- (2) Discriminate unfairly against applicants with a criminal record.
- (3) Knowingly make false or exaggerated claims in its recruitment literature or job advertisements (Cole, 2002: 173).

Civil Service

The word civil commonly means belonging to the general public and not to the army. Literally, therefore, civil service connotes public or government service. It is a body of officials employed to serve the public in a civil capacity (Olagboye, 2005). According to Abdulsalam (1988), “civil service is the administrative structure employed in the fulfilment of government policies and development programmes. The civil service is thus an ancient institution which no government in the world has been able to dispense with. All over the world, the civil service is a permanent body of officials employed to implement the plans and decisions of government. Adebayo (1981), states that the civil service is the “entire service of government which is divided into departments and in which civil servants work”. On the other hand, the Nigerian Civil Service Handbook (2008) sees the civil service as a “body or organ which enjoys continuity of existence and whose members, unlike elected political office holders are not limited to a short term of office at the end of which they may not be returned to office”.

The civil service or the bureaucracy as it is commonly referred to has progressed beyond a mere “set of arrangements, procedures, and people for implementing and administering public policy”. According to Denovan, et al (1986), the civil service now also plays a significant role in “initiating new programmes and policies and has thus become an important policy maker, as well as a policy implementer. The civil service in Nigeria does not only assist in formulating public policies, it also very often originates policies. This important role of the civil service underscores the need to recruit the best talents for the service in order to make it a relevant, dynamic and powerful force of change.

Theoretical Framework

There is a myriad of theories employed in elucidating the art of policy making and implementation. Some of these management theories are elite theory of Dye, T.R. & Zeigler, L.H. (1990), Pareto, V. (19); group theory of Latham, E. (1965); rational-choice of Down, A. (1957); institutional theory of Powell and DiMaggio (1991); system theory of Easton, D. (1966) etc. But the choice of framework of analysis within which this study operates is “system theory”.

A system according to Rapoport (as cited in Ishiyama and Breuning (2010), is a set of interrelated entities connected by behaviour and history. Specifically, he stated that a system must satisfy the following criteria:

1. One can specify a set of identifiable elements.
2. Among at least some of the elements, one can specify identifiable relations.
3. Certain relations imply others.
4. A certain complex of relations at a given time implies a certain complex (or one of several possible complex) at a later time.

To Easton (1966), a system was not viewed from general perspective but from political perspective. Easton (1966) maintained that a system is any set of variables regardless of the degree of interrelationship among them. By this definition, Easton suggested that a political system is distinct from other systems because it concerned itself with the interaction through which values are authoritatively allocated for a society.

Relating the aforementioned to the study; a system composed of interrelated and interdependent parts arranged in a manner that produces a unified whole, is critical in understanding all parts of the recruitment policy process. Viewing the Nigerian civil service as a complex open system, which interact

with its environment provides such a critical view of the recruitment policy. Systems theory is based on the idea that everything is part of a larger, interdependent arrangement. It centred on clarifying the whole, its parts and the relations between them (Bertalanffy, 1962).

Recruitment policy makers acknowledge that effective recruitment policy requires the co-operation of the entire civil service vis-à-vis the society at large. Recruitment policy does not operate in isolation but as a part of an open system. Effective recruitment policy is dependent on incorporation of various factors, that is, it is hinged on the relationship between the needs of the service of the federation and the multi-dimensional groups in the society vis-à-vis their expertise.

A synergy is an important concept for recruitment policy in the Nigerian civil service in that it emphasises the need for citizens, as well as Ministries and Departments to work together in a co-operative fashion. Recruitment policy is not just a single act but of many different parts that, when effective, enhances service delivery as well as ushers in good governance.

In a nutshell, system approach is therefore, useful for viewing the relationship between interdependent parts in terms of how these relationships affect the performance of the overall system. System theory provides policy makers in this regard, with a critical perspective to view and understand how to make recruitment policy to respond to the needs of the citizens as well as that of the civil service of the federation.

Recruitment in the Nigeria Civil Service

Recruitment in the Nigerian Federal Civil Service is determined by three major factors (Babaru, 2003). The first is the availability of vacancies declared by the ministries and extra-ministerial departments and forwarded to the Federal Civil Service Commission through the Office of the Head of Civil Service of the Federation. Awareness for such vacancies are publicised through advertisement and notices. The second factor is the qualifications of the potential applicants. The specific qualifications and skills required for various categories are presented in the schemes of service (Olagboye, 2005). The third factor is the principle of federal character. That is quota allocated in the recruitment exercise to states to ensure that the Federal Civil Service reflects federal character. The federal character principle is a constitutional matter and an important policy that determines appointments into the Federal Civil Service. This issue is expressed in section 14(3) of the 1999 constitution as:

The composition of the government of the federation or any of its agencies and the conduct of its affairs shall be carried out in such a manner as to reflect the federal character of Nigeria and the need to promote national unity, and also to command national loyalty, thereby ensuring that there shall be no predominance of persons from few states or from few ethnic or other sectional groups in the government or in any of its agencies.

The basic idea of the principle is to have an even representation of all states, ethnic and other sectional groups in the federal service. This policy, however has been accused of undermining merit in the recruitment process in the Nigerian Civil Service. The policy, according to Olowu et al (1987) has a lot of political support, especially from those in the disadvantaged areas – mainly the northern states of Nigeria.

Challenges and Prospects of the Recruitment Policy in the Nigerian Civil Service

Challenges

The efficacy of an organisation be it private or public grossly depends on the quality of the workforce; and the quality of the workforce is a function of the recruitment policies or principles. The recruitment of personnel for the civil service is one of the crucial tasks of modern government and lies in the heart of the problem of personnel administration (Basu, as cited in Briggs, 2007).

Over the years, there have been rules and procedures in form of policies guiding the way and manner of attracting and subsequently engaging a number of persons in the government Ministries and Departments (civil service). These policies have failed to yield the desired outcome because of some challenges militating against its proper implementation. Therefore, this section of the article is dedicated to dwell on the challenges of recruitment policies in the Nigerian Civil Service. According to Briggs (2007), there are six (6) challenges of recruitment in the civil service of the federation; viz:

1. Lack of independence of the Federal Civil Service Commission (FCSC).
2. Delegation of recruitment functions.
3. Federal character principle.
4. Long military era.

5. Increasing pressures from applicants.
6. Sources of recruitment.

In addition to the above challenges, the following also constitute some of the challenges of recruitment policies in the Nigeria civil service.

7. Commercialisation of appointments.
8. Infusion of sentiments.

Lack of independence of the Federal Civil Service Commission: Section 158(1) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria provides for the independence of the commission in the exercise of its constitutional powers and functions from direction or control of any other authority or person along with some other federal executive bodies. But in practice, it is observed that members of the commission are being influenced and pressured by the executive arm and other arms of government, pressures from friends, family members and others who are regarded to be powerful in the country. These pressures and influences from the interested parties affect the independence of the commission; dissuade suitable candidates from competing for appointments into the civil service. The pressures and influences also affect the principles of merit and equal opportunities. In a nutshell, lack of independence of the commission hampers proper implementation of recruitment policies in the Nigerian civil service.

Delegation of recruitment functions and activities by the Federal Civil Service Commission to ministries and extra-ministerial department: Section 170 of the 1999 constitution empowers the commission to delegate any of its powers and functions as it deems fit because of the crucial role of the commission; the commission is expected to play the role of a regulatory authority for the federal civil service. Owing to the above, the commission delegates to ministries and extra-ministerial departments the activities and functions to recruit the lower category of civil servants (i.e. grade level 01-06). Here, the delegation is imperative because it eliminates delays and engenders quick decision but it constitutes a problem or a challenge to recruitment policies because in Nigeria, such an act lacks proper control which in turn gives room to heads of ministries and ministerial departments to employ or rather recruit without adherence to recruitment policies and procedures.

Federal character principle: Originally, the principle is meant to strike a balance in terms of representation in the civil service of the federation to ensure due representation of all states. But the major problem associated with the principle as observed in a research survey by Briggs (2007) is that the principle sacrifices merit in favour of quota system. The undue use of quota system goes antithesis to the recruitment policies in the Nigerian civil service, which breeds mediocres at the expense of meritocrats. This implies ineffectiveness and inefficiency in service delivery.

Long era of military rule: Here, considering long term of military regimes and their unsound reforms in the country since independence; it is evident that the military ruled the country for about 28 years and during these times, they initiated different reforms that led to the conscious and deliberate politicisation of the Nigerian civil service which made the system decline in efficiency, effectiveness and productivity (Babaru, as cited in Briggs, 2007). The military reforms affected the recruitment policies of the Nigerian civil service because it led to loss of the attributes of political neutrality, anonymity and impartiality in the recruitment process (Briggs, 2007).

It has been observed that pressures from potential applicants have also contributed substantially to the reasons why the federal civil service commission is not independent. These applicants desperately search for influential contacts to secure jobs for them in the service. When this happens, the commission and other recruiting authorities are under pressure to recruit even when human resource needs do not exist making the system have excess and unproductive staff (Briggs, 2007). This culminates in inefficiency and ineffectiveness in the service delivery.

Source of recruitment: Briggs (2007) revealed through a research survey that connections and informal contacts dominated the sources. These sources are not valid and reliable methods. This is so because the sources of connections and informal contacts do not possess the characteristics of objectivity, standardisation, uniformity, and transparency. It was observed that civil servants who were recruited through informal sources consistently depend on such contacts for transfers, advancements and promotions. They also perpetuate unethical practices in the service without being reprimanded as a result of their level of connection, making the service of the federation to lack discipline.

Commercialisation of Appointments: This is to say that, corruption has eaten deeply into the fabric of this nation to the extent that jobs of late, are meant for those who have the economic power to pay at the expense of those who have the expertise. This has hampered recruitment policies to a large extent making the entire system sick or rather on the brink of collapsing.

Finally, sentiments of tribalism, nepotism, religion, sectionalism/regionalism, clanism, etc. have to a large extent hindered the recruitment policies in the Nigerian civil service.

Prospects

An effective recruitment policy is critical in bringing about a robust civil service capable of promoting sustainable and equitable economic growth. Such process if adequately managed would breed an administrative bureaucracy which occupies an essential position in the political system of the nation. In spite of the aforementioned pathologies in the recruitment policies, there still holds some hopes, expectations and likelihood that the recruitment policies in Nigeria civil service could reposition the nation's civil service system for better given the recent reforms introduced into the system. One of the novel ideas of the reforms is to view and treat the service of the federation in the same perspective as private ones. This leads to the introduction of the concept of New Public Management (NPM) in the running of the government ministries and departments.

Hood (as cited in Anazodo et al, 2012) opined that the major doctrines are: (a) direct public sector cost must be cut; (b) private sector style management practices must be applied to increase flexibility in decision making; (c) competition in the public sector must be increased to help lower costs and better standards; (d) the public sector must be decentralised to make units more manageable and productive; (e) results should be stressed rather than procedure; (f) explicit standards and performance measurement must be established because accountability requires clearly stated aims and efficiency requires attention to goals; (g) managers must be given powers for professional management, because accountability requires clear assignment of responsibility not diffusion of power.

Therefore, NPM reform initiative is capable of arresting the recruitment challenges in the Nigerian Civil Service – first, NPM underscores efficiency through cost minimization as outlined above as one of its doctrines, that is to say that, in the Nigerian Civil Service the work force should be kept to need (i.e. only required persons with requisite skills should be engaged in the service of the federation). By so doing, pressures and influences from government arms and other parties alike will be inhibited. Second, NPM stresses better standards and result orientation – this doctrine is capable of addressing the following challenges: commercialization of appointments, loose application of federal character principle, delegation of recruitment functions, infusion of sentiments and the impact of long era of military rule.

Jann (as cited in Anazodo, 2012) said, the New Public Management inspired measures which include reduction and refocusing of public sector functions through staff reductions and changes in budgetary allocations, restructuring of public organisations through re-organisation of ministries, decentralisation, delinking or hiring-off of central government functions to local governments or other bodies or private sector, etc.

The adoption of the reform initiatives such as rightsizing, downsizing, and other related concepts would go a long way in overcoming the challenges of recruitment policies in the Nigerian civil service, in that; the reform initiatives attempt to overhaul the entire civil service system which begins with recruitment down to separation of personnel from the service of the federation. In a nutshell, making government apparatus smarter through reform initiatives holds a lot of hopes for the recruitment policies in the Nigerian civil service.

Conclusion

Given the preceding discussions, it is concluded from the findings that Nigerian civil service is faced with recruitment challenges that have hampered its services. The study examined the challenges confronting the effectiveness of the recruitment policy of the Nigerian civil service which include: connections and informal contacts, inadequate utilisation of some significant sources, lack of independence of Federal Civil Service Commission (FCSC), delegation of recruitment functions, federal character principle, long military era, increasing pressures from applicants, commercialisation of appointments (recruitment) and infusion of sentiments, etc. These challenges have created difficulties for the Federal Civil Service Commission (FCSC) to appoint the right persons for the right jobs based on the principles of merit and equal opportunities for all citizens. Therefore, the system is perceived to be made up of mediocres at the expense of meritocrats, culminating to low employee productivity in the service of the federation.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made.

It is recommended that the prevailing practice based on all kinds of subjective and informal contacts in the recruitment exercise should be discouraged; that is, reliable, valid and objective selection

instruments (advertisement, aptitude test, interview, verification of qualifications etc.) should be devised and adequately utilised. Therefore, it is recommended that sources from notices and advertisements on various media, such as radio, television, newspapers, internet, etc., educational institutions and professional bodies should be sufficiently utilised.

The autonomy of Federal Civil Service Commission should be unchanging (rigid) to guarantee the non-interference of the presidency and the likes in the recruitment exercise. To make recruitment exercise citizen-oriented, the federal government is recommended to enlarge the size as well as increase the strength of the commission; that is zonal offices should be established in addition to state offices which will make for more commissioners. Therefore, this will make the commission to be more responsive, which obviate the need to delegate or rather eliminate/reduce the extent of delegation and easily monitor the application of the principle of federal character objectively. The principle of federal character should only be applied to recruitment at the lowest grade levels (01 – 06) while recruitment at other categories should be squarely on merit system.

The federal government should promulgate employment laws that will safeguard job security in the private organisations so as to reduce the pressure for employment in the Federal Civil Service. Government should also put in place stiffer punitive measures for those commercialising government appointments so as to instil sanity and fairness in the system.

In summary, priority should be accorded to the need to re-examine the reliability and validity of employee-selection instruments in the Nigerian civil service in order to get rid of sentiments. Therefore, objectivity should be the rule of the game if productivity and effective service delivery is sought for, to reposition the service of the federation.

References

- Abdulsalam, I. and Longe, J. B. (1988) *Public Administration in an Ailing Economy*. Zaria: Northern Nigeria Publishing Company Ltd.
- Adebayo, A. (1981) *Principles and Practices of Public Administration in Nigeria*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited.
- Anazodo, R. O. et al (2012) "Civil Service Reforms in Nigeria: The Journey So Far in the Service Delivery". *American Journal of Social and Management Sciences*. Retrieved from <http://www.scihub.org/AJSMS>.
- Babaru, A. S. M. (2003) Programme on "Leading Public Service Innovation". Paper Presented at the Commonwealth, New Zealand Agency for International Development (NEAID), February 24th – 6th March.
- Beralanffy, L. V. (1962) *General System Theory: Critical Review*.
- Briggs, B. R. (2007) "Problems of Recruitment in Civil Service: Case of the Nigerian Civil Service". *African Journal of Business Management* Vol. 1(6). Available online <http://www.academicjournal.org/ajbm>.
- Cole, G. A. (2002) *Personnel and Human Resource Management*. London: International Padstow Cornwall.
- Denovan et al (1986) *People, Power and Politics*. New York: Random House.
- Easton, D. (1966) *A Systems Analysis of Political Life*. New York: Wiley.
- Ishiyama, J. T. and Breuning, M. (2010) *Systems Theory and Structural Functionalism*. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Olagboye, A. A. (2005) *Inside the Nigerian Civil Service*. Ibadan: Daily Graphics Nigeria Ltd.
- Olowu, D. et al (1997) "The Role of the Civil Service in Enhancing Development and Democracy: An Evaluation of the Nigerian Experience". A Paper Presented at Civil Service Systems in Comparative Perspective, School of Public and Environmental Affairs, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, April 5th – 8th.
- Omale, I. (2006) *Principles and Practice of Personnel Management: From Recruitment to Retirement*. Makurdi: Aboki Press.
- Oransaya, A. O. (1981) "A Critical assessment of the uses and limits of test in employee selection". PERMAN 1981, January-March 9 -15.
- The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.
- The 2008 Public Service Rules of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

- Wahab, A. (2009) “Civil Service Recruitment Policy in Bangladesh: A Critical Analysis”. Paper Presented at NAPSIPAG International Conference 2009 at Executive Development Centre, Utara, Malaysia.
- Waterman, P. (1976) Conservation Amongst Nigerian Workers: Economy and Society. London: Rex Collings.
- White, L. D. (1955) Introduction to the Study of Public Administration. New York: MacMillan Company.