

Staff Recruitment and Selection Process in the Nigerian Public Service: What is to be done?

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Abstract

The recruitment and selection of staff in any organization be it public or private sector is of paramount importance to the organization. This is so because it is the staff that turns the vision and mission of the organization into reality. Thus, the objectives of any organization can only be realized through the effective co-ordination of the human resource (staff) of the organization. This paper attempts an examination of the process of staff recruitment and selection in the public service of Nigeria.

Five relevant research questions were raised and addressed. Descriptive statistics was used to analyse the data collected from respondents to the questionnaire designed for this purpose. The results obtained showed that merit is often jettisoned on the altar of ethnicity and religion in recruitment into the public service in Nigeria. Since the public service is directly controlled and regulated by the government, the Nigerian Federal Character Principle was largely complied with. The study also reveals that though there are stipulated periods for recruitment and selection into the public service, these are often sidelined. This paper concludes by recommending that for government to operate the most efficient administrative service that would be beneficial to all, her recruitment and selection policies into the Nigerian public services should be unfettered. It should be able to absorb the most qualified, technically sound, disciplined and committed human resource that would in turn help government achieve the objectives of governance.

Keywords: Staff, recruitment, selection, process, nigerian, public service.

1. Introduction

While it is true that machines have been developed to do the work human beings used to do, it is also true that the machines cannot operate themselves. They have to be operated by human beings in order to achieve desired results. Thus, every organization (public or private) depends on the effective use of its available resources in order to achieve its objectives. These resources (human and material) should be in the right quantity, quality and time, if they are to be effectively utilized. However, one of the resources of the organization which

is considered as the most vital, most valuable, most complicated and the least predictable is the human resource. This is because it is the human resource that processes the other resources of the organization so that the goals and objectives of the organization are achieved.

All over the world, the services provided by governments are done through public servants. Public servants are those that work in the public service of any country or state. In Nigeria, public servants are made up mainly of senior and junior staff, as well as executive, technical and administrative cadres who are largely distinguished based on their educational qualifications, training, skills, ranks and the duties they discharge (Yaro, 2014). The term Public Service covers agencies of government (federal or state) civil service, the legislature and judiciary as well as their agencies and parastatals. It encompasses the civil service in the strict sense of the ministries and departments of central or state government and the field administration. It also includes local governments, the military, the police and other security or paramilitary agencies. The Public Service is a dynamic structure of government which operates based on rules that are reviewed every five years in Nigeria so as to keep in tune with changing times to serve the current needs of society and to provide for the future requirements of the people (Yaro, 2014).

The indigenization of the public service that accompanied independence in the 1960s, which was coated with the perpetuated problems of sectionalism, nepotism, tribalism and religion, could be traced from the rationalization and popular purges which gave birth to competitions among ethnic groups in the country who want to favour their ethnic cleavages. Ever since then, these issues became and remain critical and never left the Nigerian Public Service.

This research effort is, therefore, an attempt at focusing on the process of staff recruitment and selection into the public service in Nigeria. This paper will also attempt to proffer some suggestions to improve the process.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

This paper seeks to examine the process of staff recruitment and selection into the Nigerian Public Service. It also seeks to find out the roles of ethnicity, religion, etc., in recruitment and selection into the Public Service. This becomes necessary in the light of recent attempt by the Nigerian Immigration Service (N.I.S) to select new employees, which left gory tales in the minds of many families in Nigeria. It would be recalled that on the 15th of March 2014, N.I.S attempted selecting some new recruits but due to some logistic reasons, some candidates who went for the selection interview lost their lives. This paper is also an attempt to establish whether or not the Federal Character Principle is being adhered to. It also aims at finding out whether equity and fairness are the benchmark of recruitment and selection into the Public Service in Nigeria. Effort would also be geared towards proffering solutions to observed shortcomings.

1.2 Study Questions

This study intends to create awareness of workplace equality and diversity policies where they are not practiced. In view of this, the following study questions were raised to be addressed by this paper:

- (i) How frequent are recruitment exercises conducted in the Public Service in Nigeria?
- (ii) Is merit system adopted in the recruitment and selection into the Public Service in Nigeria?
- (iii) Do ethnicity and religion play any role in the recruitment and selection into the Public Service in Nigeria?
- (iv) Are the recruitment and selection practices into the Public Service guided by the Federal Character Principle?
- (v) Is training, professionalism, etc., used as guiding principles in recruitment and selection into the Public Service in Nigeria?

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Concept of Recruitment

Butler, et al (1991) defines recruitment as “encompassing the array of organizational practices and decisions used to affect the number or types of individuals who are willing to apply for, or to accept, employment in a given vacancy”. Thus defined, recruitment combines with selection and placement procedures to bring people into positions, specified by some type of job analysis, that were previously unfilled. If, through recruitment, a large number of candidates can be identified for a particular position, selection procedures may be used to determine which are most likely to pass the test provided by future performance evaluations; it is thus possible to skin the cream off the top of the applicant pool. But if recruiting yields only just enough people to fill vacancies, there will be a long way from the cream level. Successful recruiting thus is the *sin qua non* for successful selection and staffing. Without it, organizations will not have the human resources to implement their strategies effectively (Miner, et al, 1995).

Griffin, (1997) defines recruitment to mean, “securing the right people for particular jobs, and it may take the form of advertising for large groups of employees or tracking out a lightly skilled individual for specific work”. This means that not any person with paper qualification is eligible for recruitment. A choice has to be made on who is the right candidate for a particular post. This is very important due to the fact that it is through this process that the government or organization can achieve its sets of goals and objectives.

According to Monday and Noe (2005) “recruitment is a process of attracting individuals on a timely basis, in sufficient numbers and with appropriate qualifications, developing their interest in an organization and encouraging them to apply for jobs within it”. This shows clearly that recruitment exercises are not conducted all year round but at a designated time when the need arises. The need arises as a result of vacant positions created by those who left the service as a result of their retirement, withdrawal from the service or other reasons. During this process, efforts are made to inform the applicants fully about the selection criteria of the required competencies that will lead to effective performance, as well as career opportunities the organization can provide the employee. Clear knowledge of the job helps the potential employees to put in their best when employed because it is only when you know what you are going to do that you can understand not only how to do it but how to do it best (Yaro, 2014).

Recruitment and selection of staff is often conducted in a series of stages known as the resourcing cycle. The resourcing cycle begins with the identification of a vacancy and ends when the successful candidate performs the job to an acceptable standard.

2.1.1 Stage One: Pre-Recruitment

The actual and hidden costs of recruitment and selection are important. The total outlay in recruiting one employee can involve expenditure of the order of six to forty percent of the annual basic salary. Costs of advertising, agency/search/selection consultancy fees, royalties, fee for occupational testing, etc., all soon mount up, without taking into account administrative costs and the recruiter's own time. If no engagement is made these costs can escalate dramatically, for there are unquantifiable but significant costs involved in repeating the recruitment exercise. It is important therefore to establish an effective recruitment system, if only because such significant sums of money can be put at risk (Humphrey, 2010).

The process should provide statistical information for human resource planning, job information, and administrative support to deal with responses from candidates (Humphrey, 2010).

2.1.2 Stage Two: Recruitment

2.1.2.1 *Prequisitions*

According to Humphrey (2010), information on a formal staff requisition document should include the following:

1. Name and location of originating department
2. Job title
3. Main job function
4. Salary or grade
5. Benefits (allowances)
6. Reason for requisition
 - Replacement
 - New appointment
 - Additional appointment
7. Required by : (date)
8. Signature..... (Head of Department).

2.1.2.2 *Job information*

The Department of Employment's Glossary of Management Terms defines "Job Description" as a broad statement of the purpose, scope, duties and responsibilities of a particular job, whereas a "job specification" is a detailed statement of the physical and mental activities in a job.

2.1.3 Job Description

A job description identifies the authority of the job, its location in the organization and the activities and major responsibilities that must be done to perform the job. It is a written statement of what a job holder does, how it is done and why it is done. It should accurately portray job content, environment and conditions of employment. Job description serves as

the basis for performance rating and promotion. It makes the duties, tasks and responsibilities clear to the job holder. It is used in determining employees' remuneration and, consequently, his/her status in the organization. It is very useful in designing training programmes and it is used in contract negotiation with labour unions. There are two basic approaches to job description: open approach and classified approach. Job description is not an end in itself and the compilation is not a once-and-for-all exercise, especially as changes in technology, raw materials, company objectives, products and labour market will dedicate new jobs.

2.1.4 Job Specification

According to Ejumudo (2012) a person's specification, also known as job specification, defines the education, training, qualification and competences required for the job. Candidate profile as it is sometimes called, is to make explicit the attributes that are required in candidates for the job in question. Thus, the personnel specification becomes a summary of the most important knowledge, skills and personal characteristics required by the successful candidates in order to be able to carry out the job at an acceptable standard of performance. Naturally, the nature of the job will be performed in a type and level of knowledge and skills required, but the job will be performed in a particular social context, and so it is important to have the manager's view as to the sort of personal qualities that would permit the newcomer to fit into the team (Ejumudo, 2012).

As Fraser (2008) explicitly stated, each human being is unique and can only be understood as a complete entity. Ill-conceived attempts to force him into classifications usually lead to essential elements being either concealed or missed out entirely. But when trying to select from among a group of candidates, we want to be able to compare one with another.

2.1.5 Methods and Sources of Recruitment

Generally, there are two main sources of recruitment. The first is recruitment from outside the organization while the second is from within the organization itself. This second method is mainly through departmental promotion which is one in which appointment to the higher posts in the service is made only from within the service itself. This may be done through restricted competitive examinations.

2.2 Stage Three: Selection

Selection is the process of choosing from the pool of applicants those to be hired by the organization based on the specified organizational requirements. This stage in the recruitment cycle is very important as it is through this that employers make decisions on who is the most appropriate candidate to be employed of all the job applicants that possess the relevant qualifications, experience and aptitude. It is at this stage that the recruiters are very careful not to select candidates that would not fit into the workforce properly.

2.2.1 Planning and Setting Up the Interview

For any applicant to be hired or offered employment in any organization, the applicant must attend an interview (which is the selection process). According to Humphrey (2010), for a situation to be described as an interview it must meet the following criteria:

- a. It is a part of the communication process.
- b. It is a vehicle for the transmission of information from one person to another.

- c. It focuses upon specific subject-matter that is relevant to its situation, occasion and purpose.
- d. It requires the participation of at least two people who interact freely with each other.
- e. It is initiated to achieve one or several objectives.
- f. It takes place in a particular physical or social setting.
- g. It occurs as part of a procedural sequence of events.

2.2.2 The Interview Setting

In any interview, privacy is an important requirement. This is to avoid third parties having knowledge of the conversation between the candidate and the interviewer during interviews. Although the interview has a social element, it is also a business meeting. If an office is used for the interview it might be necessary to consider tidiness, positions of desks and chairs, as well as barring the telephone and turning off the personal computer. Privacy includes avoidance of interruptions and visual distractions (Humphrey, 2010).

In the course of the interview, every effort must be made to establish rapport with the candidate. If this element is missing, chances are that the objectives will not be achieved, unless a deliberate stress situation has been created for a purpose. It is also necessary that the necessary courtesies are extended to candidates during any waiting period. This is because feelings of being isolated or ignored can easily be aroused by lack of attention and it takes much time and effort to overcome these effects (Humphrey, 2010).

2.2.3 Conducting the Interview

After defining the context of the interview, the interviewer has to decide on the style of interview to adopt. The style can be directed, non-directed or probing.

2.2.3.1 *Directed interviews*

In this style of interview, direct questions requiring definite answers are used. This style is especially appropriate for school leavers, for applicants with complicated job histories and when there is a suggestion that “facts” are in dispute.

2.2.3.2 *Non-Directed interviews*

Open questions that allow the candidate to choose an answer should always be relied on. It is the best way of searching or developing a candidate’s views on any subject. Prompting is a useful technique. Another technique is for the interviewer to keep silent, thus building pressure on the interviewee, who usually cannot resist the need to fill the vacuum by continuing to talk, trying to establish his/her point (Humphrey 2010).

2.2.3.3 *Probing interviews*

In this kind of interview, the interviewer attempts to cover and recover the same ground by a series of questions. The interviewer may need to check on claimed experience, perceived inconsistencies in the job history or even on attitudes displayed which may not seem to be in character.

2.2.4.3 *Assessment*

Immediately after the interview, an initial assessment of each candidate should be made. This practice, always valuable, is especially important when there is a long delay between interviews and the final decision. A simple form based on Fraser’s five-point plan can be used, and this should be attached to the interview notes. The scale assigned to each of the

factors is rather broad, but simple methods such as this provide a useful framework which allows the interviewer to summarize his or her thoughts and make an initial judgement (Humphrey, 2010).

Name:	Age:	Job:
Impact and appearance		Very good/good/acceptable/ poor
Training and qualifications		Very good/good/acceptable/ poor
Other abilities		Very good/good/acceptable/ poor
Motivation		Very good/good/acceptable/ poor
Adjustment		Very good/good/acceptable/ poor
Experience		Very good/good/acceptable/ poor
Assessment (all factors)		Very suitable/suitable/reserve/unsuitable

Initial Assessment and Interview Summary adapted from Peter Humphrey. The Gower Hand Book of Management 4th Edition, 2010, pg. 1022.

2.3. Stage Four: Post-Recruitment

According to Humphrey (2010), with the offer and acceptance of employment, recruitment and selection of staff ends. Despite this, there are important post-recruitment activities which need to be mentioned here.

2.3.1. Introducing the New Employee to the Organization

Any new employee (staff) will need a period of familiarization before he can perform his job properly. As a result, an established induction programme for new recruits (employees) is necessary and useful, especially when this includes a formal introductory course through which new employees learn about the policies, practices and nature of the organization. The main objective of induction is to integrate the new employee (staff) as soon as possible into the organization.

2.3.2. Follow – Up

It is important that contact is maintained with new recruits until it becomes apparent that they have settled down and have become fully integrated into the team. Following up the progress of the new employee (staff) is particularly important where the appointment is subject to a probationary period of employment as is always the case in the Nigerian Public Service where appointments are subject to a probationary period of between twelve (12) and twenty four (24) calendar months.

Humphrey (2010), believes that the employee must be kept informed of the progress which he or she is seen to be making. This may not be on a formal basis. The result of an informal chat can be a mending of ways or a spur to even better performance.

2.4. Kind of Appointment in the Nigerian Public Service

According to chapter 2, section 1 of the Federal Republic of Nigeria Public Service Rules, (2008), “appointments to public offices in the Federal Civil Service are made on the authority of the Federal Civil Service Commission. These appointments are made either:

- (a) by a letter written under the direction of the Federal Civil Service Commission;
- or

- (b) by formal agreement between the officer and the Federal Government or its appointed agents. Subject to Rule 020205, 020206 and 020207 - Permanent Secretaries/Heads of Extra-Ministerial Offices are authorized to appoint eligible candidates to posts in respect of which the powers of appointment have been delegated to them.

2.4.1. Types of Appointment

According to Yaro (2014), direct appointment to the Public Service may be made in any of the following categories;

- (a) As trainee or pupil;
- (b) On probation in a pensionable post;
- (c) On non-pensionable contract to a non-pensionable post or against a pensionable post; and
- (d) On temporary basis.

2.2.4 Eligibility for Appointment

Yaro (2014), states that prospective employees of the Public Service are expected to satisfy the following conditions;

- (i) Be over sixteen (16) years of age;
- (ii) Possess such minimum qualification as are specified from time to time;
- (iii) Be certified by a government medical officer as sound in health and medically fit for the government service; and
- (iv) Possess a testimonial of good conduct from his last employer or if not previously employed, from the last school or college he/she attended.

However, every applicant for employment by government must state:

- (i) Whether he/she has been previously convicted of criminal offence;
- (ii) All employment he/she has engaged in and if he/she has left employment, why he/she did so; or if he/she is still in any employment, whether he/she is under any obligation to remain in it; and
- (iii) Whether he/she is free from pecuniary embarrassment.

It is worthy of note that every state of the Federal Republic of Nigeria has its own Civil Service Commission which performs similar functions with the Federal Public Service Commission. Similarly, all the Local Governments in Nigeria also have their Local Government Service Commission which perform functions similar to that of both the Federal Public Service Commission and State Public Service Commission.

3. METHODOLOGY, DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

3.1. Methodology

In this paper, the mixed methodology approach was adopted by drawing data from both primary and secondary sources. The population included any government (federal and state) ministries and their extra-ministerial offices operating in Lagos State. A sample of 120 staff were randomly selected. Out of these, 70 were from Federal Ministries and Extra-ministerial offices based in Lagos while the remaining 50 were from Lagos State Ministries and Extra-Ministerial offices also in Lagos. Primary data was collected through questionnaire designed for the purpose and administered to respondents in both the Federal

and State Public Services earlier stated. The secondary data was collected through a review of existing employment legislations, previous researches and other existing literature.

3.2. Data Presentation and Analysis

Relevant questions dealing with the research questions were asked in the questionnaire for this paper. The questionnaires were distributed to respondents of the Federal and State Ministries and Extra-Ministerial Departments located in Lagos State. The questionnaires were meticulously filled and returned. The result of data collated therefrom are presented as follows

Study question 1: How frequent are recruitment exercises conducted in the Public Service in Nigeria?

Table 1

Responses	No. of respondents	Percentage (%)
Annually	11	9.2%
Biannually	8	6.6%
As the need arises	101	84.2%
Total	120	100%

Study question 2: Is merit system adopted in the recruitment and selection into the Public Service in Nigeria?

Table 2

Responses	No. of respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes	46	38.3%
No	42	35.0%
Not sure	32	26.7%
Total	120	100%

Study question 3: Do ethnicity and religion play any role in the recruitment and selection into the Public Services in Nigeria?

Table 3

Responses	No. of respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes	51	42.5%
No	40	33.3%
Not sure	29	24.2%
Total	120	100%

Study question 4: Are the recruitment and selection practices into the Public Services guided by the Federal Character Principle?

Table 4

Responses	No. of respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes	49	40.8%
No	36	30.0%
Not sure	35	29.2%
Total	120	100%

Study question 5: Is training, professionalism, etc., used as guiding principles in recruitment and selection into the Public Services in Nigeria?

Table 5

Responses	No. of respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes	41	34.2%
No	50	41.6%
Not sure	29	24.2%
Total	120	100%

3.3. Findings and Discussions

From the analysis of data presented above, it is quite clear that recruitment and selection exercises in the Public Service are not conducted annually or biannually but when the need arises. The need may arise when people go on retirement, quit the service as a result of gaining better employment elsewhere or due to disciplinary measures. Again, the need may also arise due to some highly placed persons mounting pressure. Due to some political, ethnic or religious consideration. In such cases, vacancies may be created.

Again, Table 2 shows that 38.3% of respondents agree that merit system is adopted in recruitment and selection into the public service of Nigeria. Thirty five per cent claim that some other considerations are used in recruitment and selection exercises while 27.6% claim they do not know the criteria used. As many as 42.5% of the respondents agree that ethnicity and religion play active role in recruitment and selection exercises in the public services while 33.3% disagree with this view. The remaining 24.2% do not know the criteria used in recruitment and selection exercises into the Public Service.

Table 4 shows that 40.8% of respondents are of the view that recruitment and selection into the Public Service of Nigeria are guided by the Federal Character Principle while 30% are of the opinion that the Federal Character Principle is not applied in recruitment and selection. The remaining 29.2% are not used while the balance are not sure whether or not the principle is applied in employment purposes. Also, 34.2% agree that training and professionalism are guiding principles in employment purposes in the Public Service while 41.6% are of the opinion that training and professionalism are not used as guides when recruitment exercises are being embarked upon in the Public Service. This tallies with the result obtained in Table 3.

This means that ethnic, religious or political considerations are used rather than training and professionalism.

4. Conclusion

On the whole, it is safe to conclude that staff recruitment and selection in the Public Service in Nigeria are complementary and critical indispensable institutional activities that add significant value to Nigeria's civil service. This is due to the fact that they jointly provide the basis or bottom line for the efficacious role of the civil service in supporting the policy formulation process and translating policies into action. After all, the onerous task of the civil service is to operate the administrative machinery in accordance with the policy established by the political executive, and the work of government cannot be done without it. This explains why staff recruitment and selection systems and practices must be allowed to take its full course or follow its entire cycle by adhering to the principles of systematic planning, clinical execution, objectivity and merit, even where there is need to satisfy such demands for ethnic balancing or Federal Character Principle. In the Public Service of Nigeria, staff recruitment and selection system and practice is beset with extra-institutional/organizational factors that alter the demands for meritocracy and constitute a threat to the efficacy of the Public Service as an instrument and machinery of development in Nigeria. Indeed, the high level of political interference and manipulation by the political class, top administrative echelon and others, through the exploitation of such factors as ethnicity, nepotism, favoritism, institutional and state politics, top governmental connection and outright corruption, in determining who gets engaged in the service is not only anachronistic, but it is equally dysfunctional with consequential effects and negative implications for human resource competence, capability, quality decisions and service delivery.

The effect of the manipulation of the staff recruitment and selection process in Nigeria's Public Service is a failed and incapacitated civil service that is unable or constrained from providing the desired and inevitable nexus between policy formulation and execution through a committed team of competent, capable, quality and service-minded workforce.

Though the staff recruitment and selection system in the Public Service of Nigeria is characterized by a number of irregularities, which are mostly sentimental, it is believed that a lot can be achieved if the recruiters maintain the status quo by making sure that merit is considered as number one priority followed by impartiality, fairness and equality. After all, the Fulton Committee ignored the attempt devised by the Nigerian State to justify the need to incorporate such tendencies as quota system, Federal Character, religion, etc, which in the final analysis are used negatively to favour sectionalism.

4.1 Recommendations for Improvement

The following recommendations are put forward for consideration. It is hoped that if these recommendations are implemented, the Nigerian Public Service would come alive and become the envy of other nations.

- (a) The Nigerian Public Service Commission should try as much as possible to ensure that no unlawful discrimination occurs in the recruitment and selection process on the

grounds of sex, ethnic origin and religion. Thus, recruitment and selection into the Public Service should be based on merit.

- (b) Staff recruitment and selection in the Public Service, should not be based on the skills of the applicants alone. Positive attitude should also be considered as well. The right attitude not only benefits the employee but also maintains workplace morale and improves overall performance that benefits both the employee as well as the organization as a whole.
- (c) Political office holders and other top government functionaries should minimize or stop constant interference in the issue of recruitment and selection of staff in the public service. This would help to avoid the very sad experience of the Nigerian Immigration Service (N.I.S) selection process scheduled for early this year.
- (d) Public Service employers should be cautious in choosing recruitment and selection methods as well as assessing the predictive value of the methods in order to maintain credibility among applicants. The parameters considered before employment should be sound, not biased and up to date.
- (e) Finally, recruiters in the Nigerian Public Service need to keep abreast of changes in the labour market to ensure that their recruitment efforts are not wasted or directed at too small a pool of labour. This means that government must know its exact workforce and also know when there is need to add to the existing workforce.

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