

# POLITICS OF RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION INTO THE NIGERIAN CIVIL SERVICE IN THE FOURTH REPUBLIC

Akinola, A.B. and Ganiyu, A.A.

Department of Public Administration, Polytechnic of Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria.

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All organizations irrespective of their sizes, products or services must recruit applicants to fill vacant positions. The effectiveness and efficiency of any establishment whether public or private sector largely depend on the caliber of the employees. Within the framework of bureaucratic theory, this paper examines the implication of politics or political interference and the challenges facing the Federal Civil Service Commission on the recruitment and selection of applicants into the federal civil service in Nigeria. This study uses content analysis to critically review the views of other scholars on the topical issue. It established that politics is a regular characteristic in the recruitment and selection exercise into the civil service system in Nigeria. The outcomes of the exercise have been identified as the bane of the service which include; corruption, low productivity, indiscipline, inefficiency etc. Based on these challenges, the study concludes that recruitment and selection exercise should be properly handled by the Federal Civil Service Commission in line with the ideal construct of bureaucracy according to Max Weber, the composition of the Civil Service Commission should include experts in human resource management. In addition, the autonomy of the Civil Service Commission should not only be in principle but also in practice. Hence, political interference, lobbying etc in the recruitment and selection of applicants into the federal civil service system should stop in order to encourage merit and discourage mediocrity.

**Keywords:** Politics, Recruitment, Selection, Civil Service, Republic.

## INTRODUCTION

The effective and efficient performance of any organization to a large extent depends on the caliber of its workforce. The availability of the pool of qualified and competent personnel does not just happen but through effective recruitment and selection exercise. Recruitment and selection are concerned with filling and keeping filled positions in the organization structure. Recruitment and selection constitute the process of soliciting, contacting and interpreting potential employees and then establishing whether it will be appropriate or suitable to appoint them. Whereas recruitment is defined as the set of activities used to obtain a sufficient number of the right people at the right time from the right places. Selection means the series of activities carried out to choose the most qualified applicants from the pool of prospective job candidates. The bottom line of any recruitment and selection exercise is to build and maintain a formidable workforce through which an organization can successfully satisfy its human resources plan as well as achieve its set objectives.

Scholars are in agreement that recruitment and selection of prospective job applicants starts with job analysis, which specifies in clear terms the human resources requirements (numbers, skills mix, levels, time frame) which is invariably a human resource planning activities. Information from this all important human resources planning activities leads to the next phase of the recruitment and selection exercise. In this phase, conscious effort is made to attract the potentially qualified candidates to apply for vacant positions in an organization (Biobele, 2007). This can be perfected through recruitment within the organization (internal) or outside the organization (external sources). To ensure that the best applicants are selected, the organization devises appropriate selection tools to aid in the sorting out of relative qualifications of the job applicants and appraises their potentials for being good performers in a particular job. According to Mullins (1996), the essence of the exercise is for the organization to appoint the best applicant with the right ability, temperament and willingness.

The civil service plays a vital role in formulation, implementation, evaluation and review of government policies and programmes. Whether the Chief Executive of a Government is an Emperor, King, President, Prime Minister, Duke, Governor or Mayor, that government cannot function without some form of civil service. A competent and motivated civil service is a prerequisite for maintenance of good governance, production and distribution of public goods and service, fiscal management and sustainability, and efficient and effective performance of government. It is incontestable fact that

the concern for effective and efficient resources management in the public sector is universal and historical. This is more emphatic particularly in a developing economy like Nigeria where there are acute scarcity of human and natural resources and the ever increasing demands for public expenditure.

In this context of public administration, the civil service is the administrative arm of government, an agent, an organ and machinery of government in the governance and developmental process of any country in the world. Hence, the effectiveness of a government is to a large extent determined by the efficiency and competence of its civil service. The Nigerian civil service is a product of colonialism, established as an instrument for expediently implementing the administrative structure and activities of the British Colonialist from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (Adamolekun, 1993).

The centrality of recruitment and selection exercise in the Nigerian civil service cannot be over emphasized. It lies at the heart of the problem of personnel administration (Basu, 1994). In public organization, the responsibility for recruitment and selection is a shared function between the personnel department and the line managers. Whereas the personnel department should be competent enough to play advisory role on the best techniques and practices in recruitment exercise as well as provide a professional support, the managers must be involved in terms of provision of job details and final decision as to who does or not work in their department. In the case of Nigerian civil service, the State and Federal Civil Service Commissions are constitutionally empowered to serve as employment agents for the service. Thus, the commission reserves the right to recruit and select prospective candidates using appropriate selecting tools such as interviews resumes, aptitude tests, reference checks, etc to appoint suitable candidates into job openings in the service. Nevertheless, the commission delegates' power to line ministries and extra-ministerial departments to recruit and select junior officers to posts graded Gh.01-06 (Al-Gazali, 2006).

It is instructive to note that the emphasis of the civil service is on uniformity, standardization and transparency in the recruitment and selection processes. In spite of the foregoing, it is no longer in dispute that the Nigerian civil service recruitment and selection exercise has been politicized with consequential and dysfunctional effects on the institutional and employee enhanced productivity, quality decisions, programme exercise and quality public service delivery (Ejumudo, 2011).

Politics of recruitment according to Osakwe (2007) is the recruitment and selection that are based on political patronage or determined by the political class. To Omeje and Ndukwe (2009), politicization of recruitment is the unconventional practice of employing political interest by those in the public offices to fill existing and non-existing vacancies in the public service and without following due process. This is therefore the process of recruitment and selection that is based on other mundane factors other than merit and competence criteria. Concerned members of the public have expressed utter displeasure on the development and have attributed it to factors such as inadequate and invalid standards for evaluating job candidates, sources of attracting potential applicants, transparency and independence of the recruiting authority. Others include environmental factors such as social, political, technological and economic demands (Biobele, 2007).

## CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL CLARIFICATION

**Recruitment:** the concept of recruitment has been variously defined by several scholars and organizational managers alike (Nickels et al, (2007) defined recruitment as "a set of activities used to obtain a sufficient number of the right people at the right time from the right places", and its purpose is to select and place those who best meet the needs of the work place, and to develop and maintain a qualified and adequate work force through which an organization can fulfill its human resource plan. Croft (1996:93) defines recruitment as "the analysis of a job and the features the organization will look for in a potential employee and attracting candidates to apply to the organization and the offering of various terms and conditions of employment to a chosen potential employed". This definition views recruitment is encompassing the process of attracting qualified prospective candidates to apply for jobs as well as choosing the best for appointment to the organization. Recruitment is conceived here to include selection. Fatiregun (1992) cited in Onah (2003) opines that recruitment is the process of assessing a job, announcing the vacancy, arousing and stimulating people to apply. According to Cole (2002), the principal purpose of recruitment is to attract sufficient and suitable potential employees for vacancies in the organization.

To Peretomode and Peretomode, (2001) recruitment is integral part of human recourses and involves the process of identifying and attracting or encouraging potential applicants with needed skills to fill vacant positions in an organization. Erasmus, Swanepoel, Schewk, Vander Westhelizen and Wessels (2005) conceive recruitment as "those activities in human resource management which are undertaken in order to attract sufficient job candidates who have the necessary potential, competencies and traits to fill job needs and to assist the civil service organization in achieving its objectives". Similarly, Cloete (In Motsoeneng, 2011) defines recruitment as about making sure that qualified people are available to meet the employment needs of government. Ineffective recruitment precludes any chance for effective candidate selection because when recruitment falls short of qualified applicants, selection must proceed with a pool of poorly qualified candidates. The task of recruitment is to generate a sufficient pool of applicants to ensure that there are people available with the necessary skills and requirements to fill positions as they arise.

From the foregoing, recruitment is a fundamental personnel function that involves analysis of job openings, discovery of pools of suitable prospective candidates, encouraging as well as attracting them to apply to the organization. It is the

process that provides an organization with as many qualified job applicants as possible from where the organization selects those that meet the job requirements of available positions. It is instructive to note that unless recruitment is soundly conceived, there can be little hope for securing and building a formidable first rate workforce.

However, we are going to expatiate on the two main sources of recruitment at this juncture.

- a. Internal source: This source allows an organization to fill vacant positions with people/staff that are already in the employ of the organization. The organization looks inward to scout for available employee with needed qualifications, skills and abilities to fill higher job openings. To Jones et al (2000), employees recruited internally are either seeking lateral moves (job changes that entail no major changes in responsibility or authority levels) like transfer or promotions. Among the benefits of internal source of recruitment is that it is less expensive, less time consuming, employees are already familiar with the system and the organization has information about their abilities, skills and actual behavior on the job. It serves as the source of boosting workers morale in effective and efficient performance (Biobebe, 2007).
- b. External source: This involves filling job vacancies in an organization with prospective candidates from outside the organization. In this source, the organization looks outside for potential applicants. In most cases, this mode of recruitment is always adopted to fill entry positions especially during expansion, and for positions whose specific requirements cannot be adequately satisfied by employees within the employ of the organization.

Dibie (2014); Erasmus, Swanepoel, Schenk, Vander Westhuizen and Wessels (2005) define “selection” as the process of trying to determine which individuals will best match particular jobs in the organizational context, taking into account individual differences, the requirements of the job and the organization’s internal and external environments. Selection is more or less concerned with making informed decision to choose outstanding candidates from the suitable pool of prospective candidates after they have been carefully examined using appropriate selecting tools. In line with the above, Ejumudo(2011), argued that while recruitment brings many people or persuades as many to apply for work in an organization, selection on the hand, rejects a good proportion of those who apply. He stressed that selection is a very important process that requires proper planning and objectivity. Bedeian (1999) maintained that where there are several job applicants for an existing position or job opening, managers or recruiting authority in both public and private sector organization must decide who is the most qualified. Such decision is made during selection exercise. It has been observed that decision to select the most qualified staff to fill important job openings is often times based on subjective views of the interviewer. To avoid such it has been recommended that there should be pre-interview based on logical, valid and reliable method.

**Selection:** Selection is seen as a two way process as you are selecting the prospective job applicants, the candidates are at the same time selecting you. From the above, we can safely define selection as a critical human resource activity that involves objective and systematic matching of prospective applicant skills and capabilities with the requirements of the job openings with a view to choosing the most suitable candidates for the jobs.

It should be stressed that any mistake or foul play at this stage leads to selection of mediocre into the organization whose pre-occupation will be mostly to collect monthly salaries, without any serious commitment to the goals and objectives of the organization.

“Selection” is basically a task of prediction. It presupposes a screening and sorting procedure in the course of which the candidates with the least potential are separated from those with the most potential. Selection is a complex procedure that comprises the following: collection of information, coding, interpretation, retrieval, integration of information and decision-making.

Essentially, selection is then the prediction of the future in terms of individual differences of individuals, the requirements of the job and the internal and external environment of the institution. Selection requires information about the job or work in question and about the knowledge, skills and abilities needed to do the job successfully. Selection decisions therefore require one to know how such knowledge, skills and abilities can be assessed, which makes the proper use of predictions in selection very important.

Obviously, this is not an easy task. In view of the complexity of the task, civil service employers need to take it seriously before hand to avoid possibly enormous and incalculable costs due to faculty employee selections. Therefore selection can be defined as a process undertaken to identify a match between an individual and the job.

For the purposes of this study, it is important to provide an example of a recruitment policy. The recruitment, selection and placement of personnel are done in terms of the legal framework applicable to the Nigerian civil service, namely: The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 as amended in 2011, The Public Service Rules Chapter 02 Section 2, Rule 01 (02201), (FRN., 2000 and 2000), Federal character Principle section 14 (3) of the constitution etc.

This study seeks to examine the politics of recruitment and selection process in the Nigerian civil service in the fourth republic. Based on this, the study is situated within the ambit of New Public Management theory. This is because new public management theory is the transition from process and procedure to an arrangement that is workable, practicable and result oriented. The theory places emphasis on good governance as a result of the recent globalization of the

economy, technological innovation and democratization (Shah, 2006). New public management theory is a relentless movement in the direction of greater transparency in resource allocation, decentralization of management authority and performance management through service quality (Pollit, 1996). New public management theory therefore captures the basis of institutional and organization restructuring as an attempt to raise its performance by improving the quality of service delivery. It is result focused rather than the process of result. The theory is concerned primarily with how to deliver public goods efficiently and equitably (Shah, 2006).

Jones and Thompson (1999) interpret new management into five categories, they are restructuring to focus on core competence, reengineering of work process, radical organization reinvention, realignment by introducing activity based costing and responsibility budgeting, rethinking by reconceptualising public sector bureaucracies or learning organizations. They focus on models of new public management and conceptualized four forms of model as follows: efficiency model, downsizing and decentralization model, management of change model and public service orientation to change model. These models are developed to engender effective service delivery. Also, Larbi (1995) observes that new public management theory centers on accountability, transparency, democratization and citizens participation. The new public management theory was an effort to improve government service delivery to the citizenry because of the expectations of the people. In many developing countries of Latin America, Asia and Africa, the new public management was a paradigm shift from autocracy to democracy in the down of political pluralism. New public management becomes an avenue through which democratic governance will transform into better governance that will lead to public policies that are technically efficient and effective and also responsive to the needs of large sections of the citizenry (Shah, 2006).

New public management has captured vividly the reason for the procedure without result of civil service operation in Nigeria during the fourth republic. The various civil service reforms based on recruitment and selection in Nigeria did not consider the option of new public management as alternative to excessiveness, therefore, policies were very good on paper and implementation and workability remain a tall dream. The recruitment and selection procedure in Nigerian civil service is still being explainable using the old bureaucracy that depends on degree of rigidity of rules, formal structuring and inefficiency, which inadvertently affect implementation of laws, policies and decisions at all levels of government during the fourth republic.

## **EVOLUTION OF CIVIL SERVICE SYSTEM IN NIGERIA**

The origin of civil service in Nigeria dates back to the pre-colonial era and its evolution as a field of practice is usually traced from the colonial period, which lasted from 1900 to 1960. Before the colonial civil service, the three Nigerian regions, Northern, Eastern and Western, had traditional mechanism for administering themselves under three dominant societies, Hausa in the north, Igbo in the east and Yoruba in the west (Nwosu, 1985). The Hausa traditional civil service system was centrally structured, and the Emir was the supreme head of the system with uncontrollable power. This exclusive right to bureaucratically control a specific jurisdiction helped emirates in formulating and administering laws, protecting citizens from external forces and collecting taxes from them to operate government (Ovaga, 2014).

Prior to the colonialism in Nigeria, Igbo traditional civil service system in the eastern region was participatory and segmented in nature. There was no central or consolidated political authority bestowed on chiefs or kings, as was done during colonial era and in contemporary times. But a number of villages formed political communities in which no single individual had supreme authority, as was the case in the Hausa traditional system. The Igbo administrative structure was community or group based, and a council of elders performed civil service duties. Each group usually included heads of families, titled men, warlords, heads of secret societies, and age grades to mention but a few. Generally civil service system in the traditional Igbo required the commitment of every member of the village bureaucratic community (Mutillullah, 2014).

The Yoruba system was not only divided into different political kingdoms, but its political sub-systems were classified as chiefdoms. During this period, there was no common traditional leadership in Yoruba kingdom. The administrative head of kingdom was referred to as the Oba and various and crucial decisions were made by the Oba and his council. Therefore, the civil service duties were performed by village chieftains under the Oba leadership. Nonetheless, Yoruba pre-colonial civil service system outsourced devolved the implementation of certain decisions of the council to the Ogboni society (Nwosu, 1985).

The contemporary civil service system in Nigeria originated from British colonial administration. According to Nigerian public administration scholars (Okoli 1980; Adamolekun, 1986; Adeosun, 2012), British Colonialist under the leadership of Lord Lugard administratively unified the then Northern and Southern protectorates including the Lagos colony in 1914 as a part of the colonial service. The Europeans vested themselves with all the executive, judicial, and legislative powers and later incorporated traditional rulers into the power structure through a system of indirect rule.

To solve the problems in the implementation of a centralized budgetary system, the three regional governance structures were created in 1946 along with a revenue commission. These regions, in turn, created their own civil services following the adoption of a federal system in 1954 and the creation of a public service commission at the centre. At independence in 1960, both the federal and regional services coalesced in advancing the establishment of a career civil service within their jurisdictions. (Anazodo, Okoye and Chukuwuemeka, 2012).

In October 1963, Nigeria adopted a new constitution and proclaimed itself as a federal republic. Moreover, it altered the British sphere of influence in the country, and in the same year created a fourth region, the Midwest. Although, the civil service that emerged after independence became more involved in formulating and executing public programmes and economic development politics, the unequal distribution of political power on the basis of ethnicity, and regional composition resulted in uneven socio-economic development. This is because both the elected and appointed government officials were more interested in bringing home the bacon to their respective regions. The politics of regional affiliation has deprived Nigeria of a national character and a sense of national interest as well as brought other issues such as zoning, federal character and quota system into the lexicon of Nigerian civil service (Mukoro, 2005).

The socio-economic problems of Nigeria in the 1960s may be seen as the consequences of weak federal and strong regional government (Adamolekun and Ayo, 1989); the regional civil services provided better opportunities for development than the national government. These issues had compelled every regime since post-independence to experiment with different types of civil service reforms or government organizational restricting measures. In its 2010 report, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa acknowledged that Nigerian civil service system has experienced three political influences, the colonial, military and civilian, each of these provided distinct legacies. For instance, political neutrality, anonymity and impartiality are attributes transmitted from colonial rule. Some of these transmitted attributes were not retained under the military governments. For example, there was a clear absence of the colonial legacy because higher civil servants, as confidential advisers to ministers dominated the public policy making process between 1967 and 1975, whereas the role of civil servants became irrelevant between 1975 and 1979 (Adamolekun, 1986; Adebayo, 1981; United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, 2010). Moreover, between 1979 and 1983, the national government experienced shifts from military to civilian rule and between 1984 and 1999, the Nigerian civil service system operated under military regimes that culminated in the series of civil service reforms which affected the structure and operation of civil system in Nigeria during the recent times. And since 1999 when the Fourth Republic commenced, various civilian administrations have been showing commitment to the reforms effectiveness and efficiency of the civil service at different levels of government in Nigeria.

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Generally in the Nigerian Federal Civil Service according to Igbokwe, Chinyeaka and Agbodike (2015), recruitment and selection assume these formats. The Department of Establishment under the office of the Secretary to the Government of the Federation sends out call circular to each of the ministry, parastatals and departments under the management of the federal government. This is subject to the fact that there must be existing vacancies and the need for filling such vacancies. There must also be adequate funds to pay those that may likely be recruited. Finally, there must be the authority to recruit. Once these conditions are met and by the provisions of the civil service (Reorganization) Decree, No. 43 section 9 (1) d of 1998, which states as follows: "Each ministry will undertake the appointment; discipline and promotion of its staff under general "and uniform guidelines to be provided by the Federal Civil Service Commission.

For each ministry or department to function in this capacity, it is expected to have its own personnel management Board to be supported by different committees. However, while the civil service commission appoints senior personnel on salary grade level 08-10 to reflect the federal character, the various ministries appoint junior officers on grade level 01-06 under the supervision of the Civil Service Commission Decree 43 (1988).

The Nigerian civil service places a lot of premium on the interview method for selection. Whatever the case, the principles of merit, that of quota system and federal character are always enforced to determine who to recruit and whom to select. This to a large extent and in the view of Nze (1988) downplays the inevitability of bureaucracies to efficiently and effectively deliver the good' as advocated for by Weber. Competence and job specialization cannot thrive where sentiments are brought to play. In any case, successful candidates are notified through letters of appointment duly signed by an officer designated to do so by the ministry concerned or by the civil service commission.

## **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

It is a well known fact that effective civil service is indispensable for overall socio-economic and political development of any nation. If the service lacks competent and qualified staff, it might dishonorably fall in its function to professionally advise and translate political decisions to concrete actions for the overall welfare of the masses. Recruitment and selection are therefore a critical aspect of personnel management in that they represent laid down policies and procedure through which competent and qualified prospective employees are attracted, selected and thereafter placed in various positions in the service. However, when recruitment and selection exercise do not adhere to the principles of systematic manpower planning, scientific principles, objectivity and merit, they end up producing unqualified and incompetent employees who can grind the service to a halt.

It was revealed in the study that despite the indispensability of credible and merit based recruitment and selection exercise in enthroning efficiency and high productivity in public service delivery, the civil service system in the Nigeria's fourth republic is highly politicized. In fact, there is high level of political manipulation and interference by the political

elites, top administrators and other stakeholders through the exploitation of such factors as ethnicity, nepotism, favouritism, institutional and top government connection in the selection and appointment of staff into the service with its attendant dysfunctional, inconsequential and negative implications for human resource competence, capability, quality decisions and service delivery.

However, the following recommendations are put forward to ensure recruitment and selection exercise insulated from political interferences:-

1. Recruitment and selection are core human resources management functions and should be competently handled by experts in the field of human resources management. Therefore, the civil service commission should be composed of professionals in human resources management. This will reposition the commission to effectively play its personnel functions.
2. Similarly, the appointment of chairman, commissioners and staff of the Federal and State Civil Service Commissions should not be based on political patronage. Rather, qualification, merit, experience and good track records should form part of the criteria for their selection and subsequent appointment.
3. In as much as we recognize the importance of ethnic balancing through the instrumentality of the principles of federal character, local government spread, etc we should not lose sight of merit, qualifications and experience in the selection and appointment of staff from the local government areas.
4. Recruitment and selection exercise in Nigeria should resultantly be performance, merit and action based with the potency of generating and sustaining the requisite skilled, knowledgeable and developed human resources that will be properly grounded in the acceptable civil service norms and standards.
5. There should be training and retraining for both the members of the Federal Civil Service Commission and the Line Managers on recruitment and selection policies and procedures. This is to imbue them with current skills in the exercise.
6. Efforts should be intensified to conduct intensive training and retraining programmes to cover all staff in the system especially the ineffective ones who might have been fraudulently employed into the service.
7. The autonomy of the Federal Civil Service Commission should not only exist in principle but in practice. The commission should be allowed free hand to carry out its constitutional assigned functions.

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