

Patronage Versus Merit: A Systemic Review of Recruitment Dynamics in the Nigerian Public Service

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Abstract

A contest for superiority between patronage and merit has ensued in the recruitment process of the Nigerian public service in recent time. This battle for supremacy arises from the fact that political connectedness, ethnic fantasy, religious identity, party affiliation and other primordial considerations have become the criteria for accessing employment into the Nigerian public service. The objective of this paper is to examine the interplay, conflict and superiority challenge between patronage and merit in employment into the public sector. Data for the study was gotten from secondary sources and the framework of analysis adopted was the capture theory. The findings of the paper revealed that the capture instincts of the political elites whereby governance position is seen as an extension of their private estate and the intense pressure on them to reward supporters, associates and party loyalists gave credence to the practice of patronage in recruitment. The study concluded that the culture of emphasizing patronage and quota at the detriment of merit has caused primordial considerations to outshine merit in the recruitment matrix of the public service, with the implication that effective, qualitative, efficient service delivery and productivity has become a mirage in the Nigerian public service. From the foregoing, the paper recommended that meritocracy should be fostered in the process of recruitment into the public service and that the practice of substituting recruitment with replacement should be stopped by legislation by the national and state assemblies.

Keywords: Recruitment, Public Service, Merit, Patronage, Politics.

Introduction

Every organization requires certain resources to actualize its objectives. These include money, materials, machines and man. Of all these resources man is the most essential resource available to an organization. Man has the ability to direct, manipulate, transform and utilize the other resources for effective and efficient functionality of the organization and the realization of its aspirations and goals. Ebegbuna (1992) posits that manpower is mostly assumed to be the most important resource of any organizational setup against the background that through it, other resources are adequately harnessed to satisfy organizational needs. The appropriate use of manpower in an organization undoubtedly has a direct and significant bearing on the productivity of the organization. Hence, the process through which this important organizational resource is brought into organization must be such that allow for the best among the many to be selected and recruited on the basis of merit and not on primordial consideration like political patronage.

Public service depends largely on the optimal performance of human resources to realize the goals of effectiveness, efficiency and sensitivity in service delivery and infrastructural development of government. To achieve these lofty objectives, capable employees with requisite skills and

technical competence are required, because it is through these capable employees that the developmental objectives of the nation cum state can be achieved. In consonance with this position Osakwe (2007) posits that it is important to have a good organizational structure, but it is more important to fill the job with the right staff. To him, the recruitment pattern of any organization can determine the success or failure of that organization. The availability of the pool of qualified and competent personnel do not just happen; but through effective and efficient recruitment exercise

The emphasis of the Nigerian civil service since independence has been on uniformity, standardization and transparency in the recruitment and selection processes. In spite of the foregoing, available evidence suggests that recruitment into the Nigerian public service has been on patronage, with consequential and dysfunctional effects on the institution, employee productivity, and quality public service delivery (Ejumudo, 2011). The patronage system in the Nigerian public service is made manifest in recruitment, staffing, development and promotion of individuals on the basis of favouritism, political party affiliation, ethnic and religious consideration and interest group affinity.

Politicization of employment according to Osakwe (2007) is employment that is based on political patronage or determined by the political class. To Omeje and Ndukwe (2009), politicization of employment 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 without following due process

Considering the huge input consisting of human and material resources deployed to the public service and the rather poor services received by tax payers and the public in general, there is need to question the personnel and the processes through which they were recruited into these organizations. Hence, the crux of this paper is to examine the superiority, interplay and conflict between patronage and merit in recruitment into the public service of Nigeria.

The Problem

The substance of the problem is all about the “new normal” in the recruitment dynamics of the Nigerian public service. This new normal is superiority of political consideration (patronage) over merit in the recruitment process into the Nigerian public service. Political patronage which is identified as political expediency instead of merit has now become the criterion for recruitment, appointment and promotion in the Nigerian public service. In recent times, the recruitment process into the Nigerian public service is such that supplant merit and due process in favour of political consideration, mediocrity, nepotism and predendalism.

Ideally, bureaucracy as modeled by Marx Weber was supposed to be politically neutral and autonomous, in effect, insulated from the vagaries and impact of politics. Specifically, Weber argues that recruitment into the bureaucracy should be based strictly on merit and that recruitment should not be influenced by any other factor. Unfortunately, in Nigeria many factors other than merit and technical competence play decisive role in the employment process into the country's public service. Prominent among these anti-merit considerations in the recruitment process is the cancerous issue of political patronage, a situation in which the available job slots in the public service are distributed to the top ranking politicians, highly placed public administrators and renowned ethnic and religious leaders, so they can be filled by the loyalists of these high profiled citizens of the country.

The problematic requires greater scrutiny because it has led to inefficiency and ineffectiveness in the Nigerian public service, especially because due process is hardly ever followed in the recruitment process. Under this arrangement, most of the people with the needed work experience, skill-set and educational qualification to deliver essential services to the people of the

country expediently, are rarely given the opportunity to contribute to the development of the service and the country at large. The implication of this is that in the nearest future, acquisition of knowledge and requisite qualification may be inconsequential for employment and appointment provided one is connected to the politician. The reasons for this sharp practice in the public service and Nigeria in general can be adduced to the fact that political leaders in Nigeria see governance positions as the extension of their personal estate, a situation which put them under intense pressure to reward their supporters and political loyalists, hence, every opportunity for employment is seen by them as an avenue to payback those who stood by and supported them during elections, even if it means degrading merit for mediocrity (Okafor, 2005). The consequence of this practice is that it slows down the capacity of the public service as the driver of the nation's development.

Conceptual Explication

Public Service

The concept of public service in this paper is interchangeably used with public sector, public bureaucracy and public sector organizations. Therefore, public service refers to all organizations that exist as part of government machinery for implementing policy decisions and delivering services that are of value to citizens (Onah, 2010). It is a mandatory institution of the state under the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, as outlined in chapter VI of the constitution under the title: The Executive, Part 1 (D) and Part 11 (C) which provide for a public service at the federal and state levels of government. The public service in Nigeria comprises the following: the civil service, consisting of line ministries and extra-ministerial agencies and the public bureaucracy, or enlarged public service made up of the following: services of the state and national assemblies, the judiciary, the armed forces, the police and other security agencies, paramilitary services (immigration, customs, prisons etc.) and parastatals and agencies including social services, commercially-oriented agencies, regulatory agencies, educational institutions, research institutes etc.

Ugbor (2011) postulates that the public service is a part of the state that deals with the production, delivery and allocation of services by and for the government or its citizens, whether national, regional or local. Ozor (1995) sees public service as those organizations that are controlled by the state and organize its work on behalf of and at the authority of the state, in accordance with the interest of the economy. He further explains that the public sector is any organizational setup, institution or enterprise which is operated under the support of the state, either as a commercial concern or as an instrument of social welfare and services. They are generally corporate bodies responsible to the state.

The Nigerian public service in its early origin was on the one hand, an obedient instrument of the governing authorities, and on the other hand, an impartial interpreter and implementer of the policies and programmes of government. Gradually, the public service earned public confidence and was largely perceived as the protector of the public interest (Onah, 2010). However, in the late 1980s, the public service showed signs of progressive decay arising from a combination of human resource management defects that began to creep into the system, namely (a) over-centralization, incessant conflict between cadres (b) little emphasis on results and concrete performance and (c) inappropriate staff recruitment practices (prominence of patronage over merit). In the process, its capacity to adequately respond to new development challenges which require alternative innovative strategies of managing the public service and redefining the role of the state in a development paradigm became weakened (Onah, 2010, Ugbor, 2011).

Recruitment

The term recruitment is pregnant of meanings. There are different variants of the concept as there are authors in the field of personnel management. For Waldo (1967), recruitment is the process through which suitable candidates are induced to compete for appointments. Croft (1996) posits that recruitment is 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 for employment by a chosen potential employee. Some scholars look at recruitment from the respective steps taken by recruitment authorities to attract applicants. On the basis of the above, White (1955) hypothesizes that recruitment means specific steps taken to attract suitable candidates to apply for examination. It simply means specific process for declaring the right people for particular jobs, and it may take the form of advertising for large group of employees. Employment process is seen as tripartite functions of recruitment, selection and placement (White, 1955, Otu, 2013).

Recruitment as a concept can be either negative or positive. Where recruitment does not eliminate the factors of political influence or favouritism, even where it may be organized in such a way that it keeps the rascals out, it is termed as a negative concept of recruitment. At the initial stage, the recruitment processes were guided by the prescriptions of the spoils system, even by the provision of the civil service commission. Such method (the spoils system) of recruitment, it was assumed, aimed at providing equality of opportunities for all to compete in an open market public service, provided they possessed the very basic qualification, without strict recourse to the evaluation of their competence through extant test mechanisms. This recruitment method did not strive to provide a competent body of public servants. They were more emphatic and “open” than on “competition”. This negative approach resulted in the recruitment of mediocres. The result of this approach was that, the rascals have been kept out perhaps, but so have many men of vision and ability (Bhagwan and Bhushan, 2007). With the passage of time, the spoils system disappeared and emphasis in recruitment shifted towards securing the best and the most competent persons for public services.

Thus the concept of positive recruitment emerged, which therefore means that the personnel agency will recruit the best, the most talented and competent personnel. Consequently, in positive recruitment, new techniques have to be employed to attract the most qualified personnel. In other words, recruitment programmes have to be so devised that only qualified applicants get a chance to compete (Bhagwan and Bhushan, 2007). In Nigeria the reverse is rather the case; the merit system is substituted by the spoil system and this practice has given political patronage superiority over merit. The resultant effect has been the ineffectiveness of the public service to live up to the responsibility of ensuring the rapid economic development of the country.

Patronage/Patronage System

It is instructive to note that most writings on political patronage focus on Africa and other third world countries. This is partly attributed to the fact that these third world countries have not been able to ensure role differentiation in their administrative systems, as a result, selectivism, poly-functionalism and favouritism is conspicuous in these societies. In the words of Mamogale (2013) political patronage is associated with names like political appointment, system or cadre deployment in the Nigerian context. He concludes that political patronage is an immoral and a democratic pathology.

According to Webster New College Dictionary (1995), patronage is the power of appointing people to governmental or political positions and the positions so distributed. Generally, the word patronage has a negative connotation that this straight forward definition fails to convey. In the view of Rasak (2017), patronage implies the transgression of real or perceived boundaries of legitimate political influence, the violation of principles of merit and competition in civil service

recruitment and promotion. The implication of this practice is that within a foreseeable future, the civil service is occupied with docile personnel whose faith are determined by politicians, right from the point of entry through the career ladder. It is therefore difficult for these caliber of civil servants to protect the profession against the overriding influence of the political leaders. Thus, their docility results in inefficiency and ineffectiveness (Adebimpe, 2017).

Consequently, Political patronage is the dispensation of favour or reward such as public office, jobs, contracts subsidies or other valued benefits by a patron (who controls their dispensation) to a client (Sundell, 2012). The patron is usually an elected official or is otherwise empowered to make such grant (Rasak, 2017). In return the client supplies the patron with some valued service, such as voting for the patron's party or providing money or labour for campaigns. This patron does not generally grant favour to all potential clients but picks and chooses among them (Bassey, 2008). The patron/client relationships that popularized the term in Nigerian politics have cultural roots among many Nigerians. It is not a totally new experience in the sociology of the Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo and Efik for people to have one or any other type of political benefactor/patron or 'godfather' (Isaac, 2005).

Salawu (2015) posits that the assessment of the risk level of patronage, nepotism (and other socio-cultural factors) should determine the best way to recruit. If there is a high risk of patronage and nepotism, then more meritocracy is needed in the recruitment process than the use of discretion. Nigeria being a heterogeneous nation with issues of ethnicity, religion and political patronage bothering its affairs, would suffer most likely if the principle of meritocracy is sacrificed on the altar of use of discretion (Adebimpe, 2017). In order to achieve the greatest good for a large number of people in Nigeria, merit must be given prominence over patronage for tenured jobs and the principle of merit in appointment/recruitment as advocated by the bureaucratic model must be recognized as power for good.

Framework of Analysis

It is the thoughtfulness of the discourse that the most appropriate prism through which the phenomenon could be understood and analyzed is the application of the elite theory. It appears that it is the capture instinct of the ruling elite that has resulted in the relegation of merit and the prominence of patronage in the recruitment process of the Nigerian public service. This theory explains the use of privileged positions by the privileged few to pillage the resources (vacancies in public service) meant for the masses. The proponents of this theory, Vilfredo Pareto (1935) Gaetano Mosca (1939) and Robert Michels (1962) maintain that the beneficiaries of the pillaged resources are particular vested interests that have concentrated financial stake in the outcomes of political decisions. The elites are gate-keepers who determine the development initiative to be followed and employ benefactor's privileges. They are in a position to bestow privilege and concession as they deem fit. These privileges include employment into choice public institutions in the Nigerian public sector. The theory also explicates a phenomenon where resources meant for the benefit of the masses are usurped by a few powerful, usually politically and economically advantaged groups, at the expense of the less economically and politically influential groups. This explain a situation where vacancies meant for the best brains in the public service are captured by political heavy weight and given to their loyalists and supporters without due consideration to merit. Elite capture is seen as a mechanism for entrenching corruption, inefficiency and ineffectiveness in the Nigerian public service.

Elite theorists (Vilfredo Pareto 1935, Gaetano Mosca 1939 and Robert Michels 1962) are also of the opinion that Elites are rent-seekers who use their redistributive powers to enrich themselves and certain powerful groups. Today, many of the elite have acquired wealth through connections to the state or via participation in the state itself through politics, the public service or military. They are the ones who win most government contracts, they dispense employment to people they

like, they are able to obtain loans from state-owned financial institutions, are able to apply successfully for government allocations of public land, and are able to lobby most effectively for government tax concessions; changes in investment regulations and the like.

The Nigerian situation is worsened by the capture-seeking behaviour of the elites who manage the affairs of the state. They often transfer public wealth, opportunities, privileges and positions in the public service to party loyalists, supporters, social cronies, religious associates, ethnic allies and family bloodline (Uneke, 2010). As a result, government institutions are defectively structured such that they cannot respond effectively and efficiently to the development demands of the masses. The enormous power and privileges of the political office conferred on the elite can be harmful in dispensing political patronage and capturing the common wealth of the nation.

Analysis of Patronage and Merit System in the Nigerian Public Sector

Recruitment and selection are two extremes of the same process. Thus, the quality of the selected applicants in a recruitment process cannot be better than the quality of the group of candidates who are presented for the selection process. The rationale and significance of recruitment are as follows: Recruitment into the public service makes it possible for ministries, departments and agencies to -

- (a) Determine its present and future staff needs in conjunction with human resource planning and work/job analysis;
- (b) Increase the pool of job applicants at minimum cost;
- (c) Increase the success rate of the selection process by reducing the number of obviously under-qualified or over qualified job applicants;
- (d) Reduce the probability that new hires will leave the organization after only a short period of time;
- (e) Meet its responsibility for equal opportunity programmes and other social obligations regarding the composition of the work force; and
- (f) Evaluate the effectiveness of various techniques and services for sourcing job applicants.

The recruitment process in the public service involve all those activities prescribed and designed by the civil service commission to secure a supply of possible candidates for employment in the service. These activities usually culminate in the selection and placement of applicants adjudged to be the most suitable for the available jobs. Prior to the 1988 civil service reforms, recruitment into the service was vested in the various civil service commissions. In practice however, authority for recruitment, appointment, promotion and discipline of staff on salary grade level 01 to 06 was delegated by the civil service commission to ministries and extra-ministerial offices which performed such functions through their Departmental Advisory Committees (DACs) as they were commonly known (Otu, 2013). The civil service commissions reserved to themselves the power to recruit civil servants into posts on salary grade level 07 and above.

Conversely, with the introduction of forms in the service in 1988, the power to recruit and make appointments into posts of salary grade level 01 to 06 and grade level 12 and above was passed to the Personnel Management Boards (PMB), Senior Staff Committees (SSC) and Junior Staff Committees (JSC) of ministries and extra- ministerial departments. These agencies were however required, in performing this function, to adhere to the approved schemes of service and civil service rules and to comply with regulations and guidelines that may be issue by the relevant civil service commission from time to time. The civil service rule for employment is that vacancies must exist in the service and such vacancies advertised and people that apply for the vacancies must be interviewed and the best selected among them to fill the vacant positions, with consideration given to geographical spread (Onah, 2010, Otu, 2013).

Regrettably, this rule of recruitment into the service has been jettisoned for the current practice of replacement, where vacancies in the service are not being declared to the public for competition but are filled by allies, supporters and close associates of political bigwigs, by means of political patronage. Patronage leads to politicization rather than professionalization of state institutions. Politicization of state institutions eventually culminates into poor institutional capacity and lack of accountability on public good provisions. This is the case in Nigeria.

The elements of political patronage in the Nigerian public service take the form of clientelism, favouritism, nepotism and the practice of replacement. The first three dimensions are interrelated. Clientelism includes various forms of favouritism of which nepotism is a particular type. These concepts are herein explained:

Clientelism: Clientelism represents a situation in which a person (an elected official or an employed public servant) uses his or her public power to obtain a favour for a member of his or her family, for his or her ethnic or religious group, political party, friends or other interests to which he/she has adherence (Otu, 2013). Clientelism is the rather common proclivity to favour one's kinship members (family, clan and tribe, ethnic, religious or regional group). In most non-democratic systems, the president has for instance the constitutional right to appoint all high ranking positions. This easily adds up to several hundred positions within the ministries, the military and security apparatus, in parastatals and public companies and agencies, in the diplomatic corps and in the ruling party. This legal or customary right, of course extends the possibilities for (and intensifies) all kinds of favouritism. Clientelism often manifests as an element of political patronage in the public service recruitment because most times, those in positions of authority capture employment in the service to their family members, without due consideration to merit and other rules governing the service.

Favouritism: Favouritism or cronyism is a mechanism of power abuse implying “privatization” of and a biased distribution of state resources. Favouritism is to grant offices or benefits to friends and relatives, regardless of merit. Favouritism is simply the normal human proclivity to favour friends, family and anybody close and trusted. In the political sphere, favouritism is the penchant of state officials and politicians, who have access to state resources and the power to decide upon the distribution of these, to give preferential treatment to certain people when distributing resources. The purpose is to sustain and prolong one's power, position and wealth.

Favouritism is not only a legal and procedural problem, but also a problem of flawed qualifications, lacking skills and inefficiency. Furthermore, where public a position is strongly correlated to possibilities of corrupt and extractive practices, favouritism can secure substantial prerogatives and profits for certain families, clans and social sub-groups. This is the case in the public service where the favourites of political office holders are employed in key ministries, departments and agencies of government without recourse to merit and due process. A case in point is the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) with forty top management positions and the distribution of these positions as shown below:

Table 1: Regional Distribution of Top Management Positions in NNPC

| S/N | Region | Number | Percentage |
|-----|--------------|-----------|------------|
| 1 | North | 28 | 70 |
| 2 | South | 12 | 30 |
| | Total | 40 | 100 |

Source: Abba, A. (2020).

Out of the forty top management positions in the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), twenty-eight key positions, representing 70% are occupied by the north while 12 positions are occupied by the south. The implication of this lopsidedness in the control of managerial positions in this organization is that, the section of the country who dominates the hierarchy of this bureaucracy would readily dispense favour to their ethnic brethren, religious affiliates, social cronies and political associates in terms of replacement/ recruitment into vacant positions in the public sector, on the basis of patronage.

To give credence to the views expressed above, the 2020 employment (replacement exercise) of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation is presented in the table below:

Table 2: Regional Distribution of Recent Employees in NNPC

| S/N | Region | Numbers | Percentage |
|-----|--------------|-------------|------------|
| 1 | North | 714 | 68 |
| 2 | South | 336 | 32 |
| | Total | 1050 | 100 |

Source: International Centre for Investigative Reporting (2020)

In February, the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation announced the employment of one thousand and fifty fresh graduates (1050). Though processes leading to this employment was not a public knowledge, the result showed that 714 representing sixty-eight percent (68%) of those employed were from the north and 336 employees, representing thirty-two percent (32%) were from the south. This reinforces our position that when a section of a county dominates the hierarchy of any bureaucracy in the Nigerian state, they would readily dispense favour to their ethnic brethren, religious affiliates, social cronies and political associates.

The prevalence of elements of ethno-regional inclination in the distribution of employment in NNPC can be attributed to the dominance of one section of the country in top managerial position of the organization. This explains why the north is the majority in the total staff composition of the corporation. This culture of favouritism is a booster to patronage in the Nigerian public sector.

Nepotism: Nepotism is a special form of favouring family members and relatives (wife, brothers and sisters, children, nephews, cousins, in-laws etc.). It is a special form of favouritism, in which an office holder (ruler) with the right to make appointments, prefers to nominate to prominent positions, his proper kinsfolk/family. Many public office holders, elites, ethnic and religious leaders and political heavy weights in the country have tried to secure their (precarious) power

positions by nominating family members to key political, economic and military/security positions in the state apparatus, where “successful” deeply nepotistic systems are getting closer to a “mafia” because of shared family “values” and loyalties (Otu, 2013, Adebimpe, 2017).

Nepotism can cause conflict of loyalties within organizations. These trend in the recruitment process of public servants in the Nigerian state is often expressed in the form of patronage, where the patrons being in elitist positions in all sphere of the nation's structures seek to reward family members, friends, associate and cronies first before any other person or any other criteria such as merit is considered in the offering of employment and positions in the country.

Replacement as a Booster of Patronage in Public Service Recruitment: Replacement has become a substitute for recruitment in most Nigerian public service organizations. Replacement is a practice whereby available vacancies in government ministries, departments and agencies are not advertised for competitive application, selection, interview and employment. Rather, such openings are being filled by sons, daughters, wives, party supporters, social cronies, ethnic and religious affiliates of the political and elitist class. This practice gives credence to the scourge of political patronage in employment. Often times, the people brought in as replacement for those who have either died or retire from the service lack the requisite qualifications and experience needed for the job. Hence, merit and due process of recruitment is habitually relegated or neglected in this process.

This practice of replacement is the reason we hardly hear of vacancies in top government ministries, departments and agencies like the Federal Inland Revenue Service (FIRS), the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), Department of Petroleum Resources (DPR), Local Content Board (LCB) Federal Ministry of Finance and Nigerian Minting Agency etc. The metaphorical questions this paper asked are: is it that people do not die or retire from these ministries, departments and agencies? Does it mean that this ministries, departments and agencies are the exclusive reserve/right of the elites and political bigwigs in Nigeria? Given that these ministries, departments and agencies of government do not make public their vacancies, how do they seek and recruit their staff? Why can't recruitment in these ministries, departments and agencies of government follow the normal process? These inquests give support to the fact that patronage has taken a superior posture over merit in the recruitment process into the Nigerian public sector.

Political Patronage and Inefficiency in the Nigerian Public Service

The objective of every organization is to achieve efficiency and productivity. Igbokwe, Chinyere and Agbodike (2015) define productivity as a measure of how well resources are brought together in an organization and utilized, to accomplish a set of results. To be efficient is to reach the highest level of performance with the least expenditures or resources.

The non-meritocratic factors in the recruitment process of the country's public service have endangered socio-economic development of the country. In the views of Okereka (2015), the recruitment and selection system in the Nigerian public service is bedeviled by factors that are hindering and stilling the climate of meritocracy that is critical to actualizing the potency of the public service; in engineering administrative efficiency, organizational effectiveness and socio-economic development. The associated consequence of this unpleasant practice against the merit philosophy is the up-holding of mediocrity as standard of performance (Obisi, 2018). The public service therefore is occupied with docile personnel whose faith is determined by politicians, right from the point of entry through the career ladder. It is therefore difficult for these caliber of public servants to protect the profession against the overriding influence of political leaders. Thus, their tameness results in inefficiency and ineffectiveness (Adebimpe and Omolayo, 2017).

In consonance with above, Achebe (1988) posits that the denial of merit in the recruitment process of the nation's public service in preference for patronage, is a form of social injustice which can hurt not only the individuals directly concerned but ultimately the entire society. He concludes that the greatest sufferer is the nation herself which has to contain the legitimate grievance of a wronged citizen; accommodate the impotence of a favoured citizen and more importantly and of a great scope, endure a general decline of moral and subversion of efficiency caused by erratic system of performance and reward. In his observation, Agboola (2016) believes that the public service which was once vibrant, productive and incorruptible has become a haven of corruption, inefficiency and stupor due the relegation of merit as a virtue of the service.

Furthermore, Adebayo (1992) avers that one of the blights of the Nigerian public service is the recruitment of mediocre or totally unsuitable candidates in preference to candidates of high merit. He further asserts that when mediocre or totally unsuitable candidates are appointed to senior positions in the public service, the process of inefficiency has started to germinate. This is why, according to him, it is rightfully important that the process of recruitment or appointment should be an instrument for the promotion of efficiency in the public service, for it is upon this that the effectiveness of any government depends. Efficiency also serves as a measure of its ability to respond in political terms its policy decisions, which is assumed to be in the interest of general public. In Nigeria, political consideration has taken the centre stage in nearly all phases of national life including recruitment into the public service. This has bred inefficiency, ineffectiveness and sluggishness in the discharge of the functions of the service.

Conclusion and Policy Prescriptions

Human resources are the most vital resource in every organization; therefore, the processes through which these valuable assets are brought into the public service must be such that confidence and faith is built and merit safeguarded. This implies that the system of appointment of an employee must be determined exclusively by his inherent merit, which include his educational and technical qualifications, personal capacities, experience and physical fitness.

The contentious and multifarious nature of the recruitment process in Nigeria which emphasizes political patronage and quota at the detriment of merit must be abhorred, because this politically responsive doctrine has extensive negative impacts on the public service of the nation. Recruitment into the public service should strike a balance between merit and quota and political considerations should be purged in its entirety to guarantee effectiveness and efficiency in the service.

It is the contention of this paper that patronage has overshadowed merit in the recruitment matrix of the Nigerian public service, thus, Nigeria is still in the spoils system era where corruption, ineffectiveness, incompetence, inefficiency and recruitment based on social affiliation, religious identity, ethnic fantasy and political connectedness are prevalent. The implication of this is that qualitative, effective service delivery and productivity is a mirage in the public service.

Consequent upon the above, the paper suggests the following policy prescriptions:

- (a) Though we share the view that an arrangement be made in which important positions in the public service are filled through the selection of candidates from all states of the federation to promote participation of all sections of the country in policy formulation and implementation, we content that it will not be in the best interest of the nation if this principle plays down on efficiency and merit. Thus, we should not lose sight of merit, qualification and experience in the recruitment, selection and appointment of staff into the public service.

(b) To foster meritocracy in the recruitment process of the Nigerian public service, impartiality in all its ramifications must be abhorred and competition, openness and integrity entrenched, that is, ensuring that job vacancies are openly advertised and the advertisement framed to adequately reflect the requirements of the job, to maximize the potential field of candidates and candidates must be selected according to these criteria.

© The practice of substituting recruitment with replacement in some public organization in Nigeria like, NNPC, CBN, DPR, FIRS etc. should be discontinued. There should be legislation to compel all ministries, departments and agencies of government to publicly advertise all vacancies in their ministries and due process followed in the selection and recruitment of staff. This would nip in the bud, the practice of making certain ministries, department and agencies of government the exclusive reserves of the elite and their cronies.

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