

Investigating the Effect of Training Reform on Employee Competencies in the Nigerian Public Sector

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ABSTRACT

Several reforms were carried out in Nigeria over the period 2004 and 2006. One such reform focused on the reorganization of the training structure of civil service. However, whether such reforms would impart the competency level of employees in the Nigerian public sector. This study examined government reform policy and how it affects the competencies of the employees. Primary data were collected for the study, using a structured questionnaire. The study employed a multi-stage sampling technique to select a total of 672 respondents. The data was analysed using correlation analysis, analysis of variance (ANOVA), and Chi-square statistics. The correlation results showed a positive, strong, and significant relationship between training and employees' skill acquisition ($\rho = 0.59$, $p < 0.05$). Similarly, the correlation between training and development of employees and knowledge acquisition was positive, strong, and significant ($\rho = 0.61$, $p < 0.05$). The result from ANOVA confirmed that training and development significantly enhance the skill ($F = 13.947$, $p < 0.05$) and knowledge ($F = 9.996$, $p < 0.05$) of Government employees. The results lead to the conclusion that civil service reform has the potential to improve the competency level of employees thereby improving the performance of civil service.

Keywords: reforms, training, public sector, employee competency, performance

INTRODUCTION

In the last few decades, one of the public sector strategies has been to drive public performance through several government-controlled reforms. Usually, reforms are driven toward improving efficiency public service provisions (Enders, Boer and Weyer, 2012). Globally, the need to improve the capability and performance of governance is also one of the cited reasons for the observed coordination and enforcement of rules at various units of government (Askim, Christensen, Fimreite and Laegreid, 2010). While various governmental agencies would prefer to dictate implementation of government activities and services, central government would always prefer to dictate both the policy and implementation agenda. Consequently, relevance and effectiveness of reforms set up by government to regulate redirect agencies have become subject of debate (Anas, 2018). Schofer (2013) considered policy reform to be a process that allows changes to be made to existence rules. Such reforms are usually brought about through processes including laws, regulations and institutions with a view to addressing social, economic or institutional problems.

In most developing countries, public sector is usually as subject of criticisms due to a number of factors. Ineffectiveness, lack of accountability, inefficiency, rigidity, corruption and poor performance are commonly cited as challenges of public sector driven economies (Siddiquee, 2006). Such criticisms have paved the way for administrative reforms and reorganizations seeking to address various administrative ailments and enhance the efficiency and performance of public bureaucracies. With changes in time and circumstances reform agenda has varied, but reforms have always been seen and applied as a means to bring

about desired changes in administration and improve its capacity as well as performance. While reforms are nothing new in public services, the period since the early 1980s has seen a major shift in public management reforms in both developed and developing countries. The recent reforms are unprecedented in terms of their scale and intensity and they have brought about far more profound changes than those experienced in the past. In many cases, such reforms have not only transformed the structure of public bureaucracy or the way it operates, they have also radically altered the nature of the government and its role in the society.

This study aims at assessing the impact of government training reforms on employee capacity and skills in Nigeria. The training reform is one of the main civil service reform carried out by former president Olusegun Obasanjo in the period between 2004 and 2006. As part of the implementation of the reforms, the administration also introduced the process of rationalization and downsizing of the staff in various ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs). The implementation of the reforms has both advantages and disadvantages. For example, many civil servants lost their placement in the federal service (Bureau for Public Service Reforms- BPSR, 2010). This is because the government believed that the success of the program depended on the overall implementation of the goals and the objectives of the program.

Efforts aimed at improving the administrative capability of the civil service is often described as reforms (Anas, 2018). The institution of reforms took a major dimension during former President Olusegun Obasanjo Regime in the period between 2003 and 2006. The reform, among others covers training and development of staff capacities in Nigeria. Every public official undergoes at least one performance improvement training program once in every three years. Frequently, overseas training is sponsored for top, senior and middle management level government officials to have an opportunity to learn from cross-country experiences, especially those officials whose training requirements cannot be offered effectively in the country. Funding for training is often secured from the budget of the government. There are various reasons why reforms are carried out in any administration. One of such reasons in the recent time is to reduce the cost of governance and as well improve the service delivery of the civil service. Every reform too comes with one form of impact or the other on the civil servants and the nation in general. Considering the series of reforms that had been carried out in the last ten years under the civilian administration, one of such impact that readily comes to mind is that of monetization of fringes benefits.

The study is arranged in sections. The following sections cover literature review, methodology, results and conclusions, respectively.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A number of studies considered reform and its implementation as a form of organizational change (Gallos, 2006; Kroll and Moynihan, 2015). Enders et al. (2012) argued that reform is a form of organizational regulation that usually aims to align a particular organization to the goals and objectives of government. But further analysis shows inconclusive link between regulatory actions of government and performance. These studies suggest application of theories of change a need for information which implies training from organizational development perspective. The classic model of Beckhard and Harris (1977) argued that in the process of change, people have to experience certain level of dissatisfaction with the status quo. Thereafter, they need to observe the desirability and practical applicability of an alternative, and have explicit doubts addressed. The model indicates a number of roles for training to be effective.

Training can help convey problems with the status quo and outline benefits of an alternative. Details on the content of a reform and competencies to overcome specific challenges can also illustrate the practicality of there form and overcome specific concerns about implementation (Kroll and Moynihan, 2015). Aguinis and Kraiger (2009) contended that reforms at governmental level could be more effective if training succeeds. This means that if reforms are designed to promote training, there is possibility of reverse advantage where

training can also help to implement various designs outlined by government reform. Askimet al. (2010) observed that administrative reform of public sector may be complex comprising of political control, organizational change and local autonomy. The implication of the reforms was found to be unclear suggesting that impact of reforms on development is mixed. Possible causes of uncertainty surrounding effects of reforms are highlighted by Pollit and Boukaert (2004). These include conflicting goals of reforms, timing and difficulty of measuring effect of a specific reform in the midst of other related reforms.

Training is perceived as a gift from the employers (Barrett and O'Connell, 2001). The effect of such gift according to Brum (2007) will make employees to exert more effort, become more productive, and have a greater sense of debt to the organization. According to Owoyemi et al. (2011), there is a positive statistical significant relationship between the different levels of training and employees' commitment to the organization. The research concludes that the more the training given to employees, the higher their level commitment to the organization. This result is consistent with other researches and findings on the relationship between training and employees' commitment to the organization. Training is also a process or procedure through which skills, talents, and knowledge of employees are enhanced (Industrial Training Fund, 2006). Oribabor (2000) submitted that training and development aim at developing competences (skills, knowledge and attitude) such as technical, conceptual and managerial for the furtherance of individual and organization growth. Isyaku (2000) also postulated that the process of training and development is a continuous one. Misko (2008) noted that where learning becomes integrated into workplace practices, organizations are more likely to be innovative, extend learning and reward employees. Tim et al. (2008) insist that human capital development represents the planned opportunity that is provided for training, education directed and planned experiences, and guided growth. Zigon (2002) saw training as the overall process whereby an individual's behavior is modified to conform to a pre-defined and specific pattern.

In most African countries such as Uganda, various studies commissioned by governments to determine the training needs, skills gap, leadership and management needs for top and senior managers show salient anomalies (Ministry of Public Service, 2006). These anomalies include lack of planning and professionalism; poor coordination; lack of career training milestones for every cadre; unclear responsibility centers for various training functions; trainings are largely supply instead of demand driven; discrimination in availing training opportunities to public officials; public officials undertaking training without prior authority/approval. Most governments support training and development of civil servants to address or improve institutional competency and individual career development needs. These are in line with equity and quality principles. Often the in-service training is emphasized. In-service training involves induction, performance improvement training courses professional development and pre-retirement training. Development and performance of employees fundamentally depends on many factors like performance appraisals, employee motivation, employee job satisfaction, compensation, training and development, job security, organizational structure and others. Employee performance is one of the policies to increase effectual job management amongst employees in organizations (Shadare et al, 2009). The study of Decramer et al. (2012) on the relationship between reform and employee performance indicates that except through coercive pressures, reforms are not necessarily significantly related to employee performance. While many countries have adopted reforms to ensure success, the primary aim of most reforms are to bring about accountability, effectiveness and efficiency of public sector employees.

METHODOLOGY

Primary data were collected for the study, using a structured questionnaire. The study covers government agencies under the Federal Ministry of Education in Nigeria. Using the existing population figure obtained in the year 2015, there are a total number of 1,883 staff in the Ministry. The number consists of clerical officers, typists, drivers, and the senior staff which includes the administrative officers, account officers, and

secretaries) and the management personnel. The study employed a multi-stage sampling technique to select a total of 672 respondents. The covers information on demographic characteristics, reforms, staff training and development programs about the competencies of employees. The competencies of employees are captured by their skills, knowledge and attitude. The structured items are made up of multiple-choice questions and rank-ordered statements patterned along the Likert scale method of five points (strongly agree=5, agree=4, undecided=3, not agree=2, strongly not agree=1). Analysis of data was carried out using descriptive statistics such as mean, frequency counts, and percentages. Also, correlation analysis, analysis of variance (ANOVA), and Chi-square were used.

RESULTS

1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The characteristics of respondents by staff categories are presented in this sub-section. Gender, age, and qualification are among the characteristics described. The results (Table 1) show that 56.7 percent of the respondents were males, while 43.3 percent were females. This reflects relative male dominance in Government agencies in Nigeria. Also, only 22.3 percent of the respondents were single while 77.2 percent were married. The marital status is an indication of several dependents an individual might cater for and a married individual is culturally considered to be more responsible. The result suggests that most of the civil service employees in the Ministry of Education have marital responsibilities to carry which could affect their level of motivation at work. The descriptive statistics of qualification of the study respondents show that 11.8% are Ordinary National Diploma (OND) and O/Level holders, 6.3% are National Certificate of Education (NCE) holders, while 22.8% hold Higher National Diploma (HND) certificates. The Bachelor's Degree holders among the employees are 55.1% and only 3.9% are Master's Degree and above graduates. These results reflect high level of education among the sample respondents. The years of working experience of the employees vary; 25.2% of the respondents have between 03-09 years of experience, 36.2% are in the range of 10 – 19 years, 25.2% have spent between 20 and 29 years as employees while 13.4% have 30 and above years of experience as employees in the civil service. This result of descriptive statistics shows the ability and capability of the respondents to provide relevant information on civil service reforms during the period under study and its effects on their level of motivation.

Table 1: Demographic distribution of respondents

Variables	Categories	Freq	Percentage (%)
Gender of Respondents	Male	324	56.7
	Female	248	43.3
Marital Status	Single	126	22.8
	Married	446	77.2
Educational Qualifications	O/L & OND	66	11.8
	NCE	36	6.3
	HND	130	22.8
	B. Degrees	315	55.1
	Masters	25	3.9
Years of Working Experience	03-09	144	25.2
	10-19	207	36.2
	20-29	144	25.2
	30-35	77	13.4

2. Staff Training and Development of Employees' Capacity

Employees' competencies are crucial to attaining the objectives of any organization, especially public service. To ascertain if sponsorship of staff for training and development programs (an important component of the reforms) enhances employees' competencies, spearman rank correlation and analysis of variance (ANOVA) were carried out. The correlation results showed a positive, strong and significant relationship between training and employees' skill acquisition ($\rho = 0.59, p < 0.05$). Similarly, the correlation between training and development of employees and knowledge acquisition was positive, strong and significant ($\rho = 0.61, p < 0.05$). Meanwhile, the result showed that attitude of employees has no significant correlation with training and development (Table 2). This indicates that to change individual's attitude requires different intervention like coaching and mentoring to impart staff behaviours.

Table 2: Training and development programs and employees' competencies

	1	2	3	4
1. Training	1			
2. Skills	0.59**	1		
3. Knowledge	0.61**	0.12	1	
4. Attitude	0.13	0.36**	-0.09	1

******, significant at 5%

The result from ANOVA to ascertain the mean difference between training and development and employees' competencies is presented in Table 3. The results confirmed that training and development significantly enhance the skill ($F = 13.947, p < 0.05$) and knowledge ($F = 9.996, p < 0.05$) of Government employees. The post hoc test of Tukey HSD also shows that the skills and knowledge of employees are adequately enhanced with training and development. While some employees will be thrilled by the idea of more funds, some may be highly elated by increasing exposure to self-development through sponsorship for training and development. These findings indicate that needs differ, and the importance attached to the needs of different people also differs. In the same vein, peoples' expectations and psychological drives differ one person to another. The Chi-Square result in Table 4 shows the crossbar of determinants of selection for training and staff performance. The analysis suggests an imbalance in the sponsorship of workers to professional training programmes by the reform.

Table 3: ANOVA of training and development programs and employees' competencies

Competencies	Mean rating	F	Sig.
Skill	4.06 ^a	13.947	0.000**
Knowledge	4.01 ^a	9.996	0.000**
Attitude	3.52 ^b	0.735	0.532

a, b variables with different letters are not the same.

******, significant at 5%

Table 4: Training and employee competence by staff categories

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Junior	12.563	9	.000

Senior	12.8049	.003
Management	26.2709	.000

CONCLUSIONS

Like many developing countries, Nigerian public sector has experienced a number of reforms to drive performance and efficiency. The most recent reforms were carried out between 2003 and 2006. Although civil servants are divided on the centrality of administrative reforms to staff motivation and productivity, they generally agree that reforms could increase commitment to work. This study investigated the effect of one of such reforms- training on employee competencies in Nigerian public sector. The findings lead to conclusion that sponsorship of employees for training and development enhances skills and knowledge but with little change in attitude. Hence, there is the need for coaching and mentoring for more commitment of the employees to their duties. The study further reveals that sponsorship of workers to staff training and development programs enhances their competencies in terms of skills and knowledge acquisition toward discharging of their duties. But it has not significantly achieved so in total attitudinal change to dedication, loyalty and prompt execution of goals. Behavioural change is more acquired through coaching and mentoring. This investigation re-iterates the need for training and development of employees in the civil service. Such training should be broad-based, sustainable but be more rigorous and impact able to ensure increasing competencies among public sector employees. Performance, skills, acknowledge, attitude and change in technologies should serve as major determinants for staff selection to attend training and development programs in Nigerian civil service. This will encourage hard work and eliminate redundancy.

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