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ADMINISTRATIVE RESPONSIBILITY AND THE IMO STATE CIVIL SERVICE

Ugbaja, Charles Ikechukwu[1] Edmund Amaechi Egboh[2]
[1&2]*Department of Political Science, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State.*
E-mails: charlesugbaja332@gmail.com[1]; eddyegboh@yahoo.com[2]

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Abstract
The Imo State Service has existed since the creation of the state in 1976, yet it does not enjoy a favourable image in the estimation of the people of the state due to the poor attitude to work exhibited by many civil servants. This work, therefore, focused on determining the level of Administrative Responsibility exhibited by civil servants in the Imo State Civil Service in the period 2011-2023. The Public Choice Theory was the framework of analysis for the study. The questionnaire and interviews were the major sources of data collection, while data generated were analyzed by descriptive statistics. The findings revealed that the level of Administrative Responsibility in the Imo State Civil Service within the period of the study was low. To stem this trend, the researcher recommended that the Imo State Civil Service should strictly uphold the statutory measures for the enforcement of rules and regulations in the service. It should also adopt appropriate measures to provide satisfactory service to the public.

Key Words: *Administrative Responsibility, Public Service Rules, Civil Service, Service Delivery, Due Process.*

Introduction
Dick-Sagoe (2020) stated that some of the problems that confront the Public Service (of which the Civil Service is a part) are political, educational, linguistic, socio-economic and above all, administrative, which is our concern in this paper. In Nigeria, for instance, the Civil Service does not enjoy a favourable image. In addition, most civil servants are motivated by personal gain, rather than the good of the society in the performance of their duties. This unwillingness of civil servants to adhere to the tenets of administrative responsibility has adverse consequences on their obligations to provide satisfactory service delivery, which is detrimental to the attainment of societal goals and the implementation of government policy. The failure of civil servants to act responsibly is manifested in the loss of man hours due to lateness at work, malingering, and sometimes, outright absence from work. This leads to more serious consequences like short-falls in revenue generation, corruption, inefficiency and denial of rights and privileges to members of the public and to fellow civil servants.

Agbodike et al (2015) state that Olusegun Obasanjo the elected President of Nigeria (1999-2007) said that Nigerians have for too long been feeling shortchanged by the quality of public service delivery in which the decisions of the public servants are influenced by selfish considerations. He also highlighted other negative aspects of the public service such as inefficiency, corruption and ineffective implementation of

government policies. Unfortunately, the situation in Imo State is not better than the picture painted by the former president. The perception of the Imo State Civil Service by the people of the state is that of an indolent, corrupt organization whose staff fritter away government revenue for personal gain and who do not add much value to the commonwealth of the state. This perception is heightened by the poor attitude to work displayed by many civil servants in the state. However, the provisions of statutory documents like the Imo State Public Service Rules (PSR) and the Financial Instructions (FI) clearly outline the rules and regulations that make for the adherence of the staff to the principles of Administrative Responsibility. Most of the time, the provisions of these documents are flagrantly flouted which causes members of the public and some civil servants to suffer one form of deprivation or the other due to acts of impropriety by civil servants. In this regard, it must be noted that the arbitrary use of official authority in the service is caused by the lack of the qualities of responsibility, responsiveness, initiative, empathy and other indices or proper work ethics by schedule officers.

The Public Service Rules of the Imo State Civil Service (2001) provides that the authority to exercise disciplinary control over civil servants and to dismiss them from service is vested in the Civil Service Commission. The PSR defines discipline in terms of the following categories of wrongdoing:

i. General Inefficiency, which it defines as a series of omissions or incompetence which shows that an officer incapable of efficiently discharging the duties of his office.
ii. Misconduct, which it defines as a specific act of wrong-doing or improper conduct which can be investigated or proved.
iii. Serious misconduct, defined as a specific act of serious wrong-doing which can be investigated and proved.

The PSR, while highlighting standard practices, also upholds the principles of administrative responsibility. This is what is termed due process, accountability and transparency in common parlance. Therefore, this work was intended to assess the level of administrative responsibility in the Imo State Civil Service within the period of the study.

Research Question

What was the state of Administrative Responsibility in the Imo State Civil Service within the period 2011-2023?

Literature Review

The Civil Service

Babalola (2022) states that the Civil Service refers to the career personnel of the different arms of government like the presidency, the ministries, the extra-ministerial departments, the National Assembly, the judiciary and others. He states that the Civil Service is the operational arm of the government which is charged with the analysis, implementation and administration of public policy. Agbodike et al (2005) posit that at independence in 1960, the British bequeathed Nigeria with a civil service that was efficient and effective. This tradition of excellence, they say, was maintained until the advent of the military brought the civil service into political roles – the era of the super

permanent secretaries when civil servants abandoned their professional roles. This led the public to view it as corrupt, unaccountable and self-serving. They also stated that the Civil Service is operated on the lines of Weber's ideal type bureaucracy which implies that the operation of impersonal rules suggest that ethical codes guide the conduct of officials in the discharge of their duties. Consequently, they assert that public servants should be accountable to one another and to the public for their actions and decisions. Ogunna (1999) states that the civil service is the life wire of the state machinery and an essential factor for national development. He defines the civil service as a large scale organization of tenured, salaried officials recruited in a civil capacity by the Civil Service Commission to exercise the executive authority of government and whose activities are guided by rules and regulations as they operate in systematically inter-related patterns to achieve the complex objectives of government.

The Imo State Public Service Rules

The Imo State Public Service Rules (2001) consists of twenty three chapters, each dealing with a specific aspect of the rules and regulations governing the official conduct of civil servants in the state. The documents contain the rules and regulations that govern the relationship between the civil service and government. It also states the conditions of service of civil servants and the procedures for undertaking different aspects of the personnel management function in the civil service. Its main objective is to enforce compliance of civil servants with the principles of transparency, accountability, equity, justice, fairness, due process and the rule of law which are also indices of the concept of Administrative Responsibility which is of major concern to us in this study.

The Concept of Administrative Responsibility

Nigro and Nigro (1980) provide us with one of the most comprehensive discussions on the concept of Administrative Responsibility. Their basic premise was that public officials must act responsibly. It was difficult for them to define the concept because criticisms of public officials are made in sweeping terms without any specific indication of the wrongs that may have been committed by the officials. They identified what they refer to as "areas of possible abuse" which indicate administrative irresponsibility, as it were. These are:

a. Dishonesty
b. Unethical behaviour
c. Overriding the law
d. Unfair treatment of employees
e. Violation of procedural Due Process
f. Failure to respect Legislative Intent
g. Gross Inefficiency
h. Failure to show initiative.

Jos (1990) categorises administrative responsibility into twelve indices as is mostly used in the literature of public administration. These are: Responsiveness, Flexibility, Consistency, Stability, Leadership, Probity, Candor, Competence, Efficacy, Prudence, Due Process and Accountability. Akume (2014), states that the public service is organized to provide services to the people. It is responsible for the development of the

state through effective implementation of policy for the good of the people. However, he avers that Nigerians often associate public institutions with inefficiency and aimless, time consuming formalities (Koven, 2016).

The Enforcement of Responsibility in the Civil Service

The Civil Service Commission

Ogunna (1999) states that the Civil Service Commissions which operate at the state level were created by Section 197 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended). The constitutional status granted to the commission was to enable them operate impartially. Part II of the Third Schedule of the same constitution provides for membership of the commission – a Chairman and not less than two and not more than four persons adjudged to be persons of unquestionable integrity and sound political judgment. The functions of the commission include the following:-

i. Appointments into the service
ii. Promotions and advancements
iii. Deployments of officers to Ministries, Agencies and Departments (MDAs)
iv. Discipline of all staff of the service
v. Retirement of staff

Ogunna (1999) also stated that the commission in its actual operations, delegated some of its functions to Personnel Management Boards (PMBs) domiciled in the different Ministries and extra-ministerial departments in the service. However, it must be noted that the Civil Service Commission is the major enforcer of administrative responsibility in the Civil Service.

Theoretical Framework

The Public Choice Theory was adopted as framework of analysis for the work. The founding father of the theory is James M. Buchann. The main thesis of the theory was articulated in the book "The Calculus of Content: Logical Foundations of Constitutional Democracy" which Buchanan co-authored with Gordon Tullock, published in1862. The theory applies economic principles like the "rational actor" model of economic theory to politics. The main thrust of the theory is their public officials are usually disposed to maximize personal gain rather than to promote public interest or social benefit.A broader categorization of the basic components of the theory are the three elements of Buchanan's methodology of Public Choice as identified by Udehn (2002). These are

i. Self-interest motivation or behavioural symmetry, which is the psychological theory that all human behavior is motivated by self-interest. It holds that people's actions, even at work are based on the expectation of personal gain.
ii. Politics as Exchange, or politics without romance (Buchanan's definition of Public Choice), which incorporates elements of rational choice theory and individual utility maximization. Accordingly, the ultimate exchange process is not based on some romantic notion of public service, but on personal interest. In effect, it dispels the wishful presumption that politicians are motivated by a desire to promote the common good.

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iii. Methodological Individualism can be viewed as the inclination to study the balance between self-centred interests and the importance given to the interests or values of other people as well as institutional commitments.

It is important to note that in Imo State, many people view the Civil Service in a bad light and consider its activities as characterized by red tape, indolence and corruption. Unfortunately, some staff of the Civil Service exhibit some of the tendencies mentioned above and this portrays the service negatively. This situation is seen in many ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs) of the Imo State Civil Service where the interests of top officials like Commissioners, Permanent Secretaries, Directors, etc, take priority over the payment of emoluments, allowances and entitlements of staff (Jibir & Aluthge, 2019).

There is no doubt that the Public Choice Theory has made a significant impact in the study of Political Science, indeed many scholars consider it as one of the most important developments in the social sciences in the last few decades. It has proved useful as an analytical tool for many scholars to evaluate political choices and decision making globally. However, in spite of all these, some scholars have criticized its utility as a tool of analysis in Political Science. In this regard, Udehn (2002) stated that there are definite limits that Public Choice Theory cannot overcome as an economic approach to the study of politics; indeed, there are certain phenomena it is not well equipped to deal with, and some phenomena it cannot handle at all. His argument against the theory is that political man acts with regards to both group interests and public interest in ways that deny purely selfish motives. He is opposed to the orthodox Public Choice paradigm which equates self-interest with selfishness. Furthermore, he argued that the use of economic policy to predict the outcome of elections does not prove that politicians are selfish, it only proves that they are human. Udehn concludes that power and authority are integral to politics, yet they are beyond the realms of economics: authority involves adherence to rules and regulations and, therefore, is not subject to rational choice analysis.

Methodology

The objective of the study was to determine the level of Administrative Responsibility prevailing in the Imo State Civil Service within the period of the study. The descriptive survey design was adopted by the researcher for the study. The geographical area of the study was Imo State of Nigeria, but the actual research was conducted in ten randomly selected ministries in the Civil Service. Imo State is located in the South East geo-political zone of Nigeria, with a projected population of about 4 million people based on a twenty five year projection of the 1991 census figure of 2,485,599 persons. It has an area of 5,289.49 square kilometers (Ifeanyichukwu, 2017).

The sampling technique for the study was based on the Taro Yamane (1967) formula for determining sample sizes. This was done at 95% confidence level. The simple random and stratified sampling methods were adopted for the research and 37 questionnaires were administered to senior civil servants in each of the selected ministries. The population for the study was the total number of civil servants in the Imo State Civil Service as shown below:

Total number of civil servants - 4212

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(Source: Nominal Roll of Imo State Civil Service, 2023.)

In order to determine the sample size, the researcher adopted the Taro Yamane (1967) sampling technique as shown below:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

(95% confidence level and p = 0.5 levels of maximum variability are assumed).
Where n = sample size, N is the population size and e is the level of precision (allowable error) which is 5% or 0.005.
Therefore,
N = 4212
$e^2 = (0.05)^2$
1 = constant

$$n = \frac{4212}{1+4212\ (0.05)^2}$$

$$= \frac{4212}{1+4212\ (0.025)}$$

$$= \frac{4212}{11.53}$$

= 365.308
approximately = 365.

Therefore, the sample size was 365 senior staff of the Imo State Civil Service.

The questionnaire was the major instrument of data collection for the study. The question items in the questionnaire were based on the five (5) point Likert Scale. Interviews were also conducted with five directors in the sampled ministries and with two staff of the Public Complaints Commission, Owerri. Data generated from the respondents were analyzed by descriptive statistics for proper understanding.

Research Findings

Three question items were posed to the respondents to choose one option which enabled the researcher to determine the level of Administrative Responsibility in the Imo State Civil Service, as follows:

Table 1: "Rules and regulations influenced the enforcement of accountability in the Imo State Civil Service within the period 2011-2023"

Responses	Frequency	Percentage %
Strongly Agree	20	6
Agree	87	25
Undecided	66	19
Disagree	136	40
Strongly Disagree	36	10

Source: Field Survey 2024

From table 1, we observe that 20 persons, (6%) strongly agreed with the assertion, while 87 persons (25%) agreed. 66 persons (19%) were undecided. 136 persons (40%) disagreed, while 36 persons (10%) strongly disagreed with the assertion. In effect, 50% of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the assertion, while 31% agreed or strongly agreed. Therefore, we deduce that rules and regulations did not greatly influence the enforcement of accountability in Imo State Civil Service for the period 2011-2023.

Table 2: "Defined procedures (Due Process) existed for enforcing accountability in the Imo State Civil Service within the period of the study"

Responses	Frequency	Percentage %
Strongly Agree	16	5
Agree	88	25
Undecided	48	14
Disagree	154	45
Strongly Disagree	39	11

Source: Field Study 2024

From table 2, we observe that 16 persons (5%) strongly agree with the assertion, while 88 persons (25%) agreed. 48 persons were undecided. 154 persons (45%) disagreed, while 39 persons (11%) strongly disagreed. From the figures, we observe that 56% of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the assertion while 30% agreed or strongly agreed. Therefore, we can infer that the level of Due Process which existed in the service for the period was not adequate to enforce accountability in the service.

Table 3: "Performance evaluation was the basis for promotion and advancement in the service the period of the study"

Responses	Frequency	Percentage %
Strongly Agree	17	5
Agree	68	20
Undecided	66	19
Disagree	152	44
Strongly Disagree	42	12

Source: Field Survey 2024

From table 3, we observe that 17 persons (5%) strongly agreed, while 68 persons (20%) agreed. 66 persons (19%) were undecided. 152 persons (44%) disagreed, while 42 persons (12%) strongly disagreed with the assertion. The figures show that 56% of the respondents disagree or strongly disagree with the assertion, while 25% agree or strongly agree. Therefore, we can deduce that performance evaluation was not the sole basis for promotion and advancement in the service within the study period.

Discussion of the Findings

The result of this study showed that the level of Administrative Responsibility in the Imo State Civil Service was low within the period of the study. This implies that administrative processes and procedures did not largely follow due process and promotions and advancements were not always based on merit and excellent performance. This situation does not lead to high morale amongst the workers, nor does

it conduce to efficient service delivery. These findings are in tandem with the view of such scholars as Ogunna (1999), Olaopa (2008), Agbodike et al (2015), Babalola (2022) and Koven (2016) on the Civil Service in Nigeria.

Conclusion

We can conclude from the study that the level of Administrative Responsibility in the Imo State Civil Service within the period of the study was low. This implies that the level of observance of the tenets of Administrative Prosperity in the service was not significant enough to improve the quality of service delivery in the Imo State Civil Service within the period of the study.

Recommendations

a. Concerted efforts should be made by the leadership of the Imo State Civil Service to strictly uphold the statutory measures for adequate enforcement of rules and regulations to ensure that the tenets of Administrative Responsibility are adhered to.
b. The leadership of the Imo State Civil Service should adopt appropriate measures to provide "timely, fair, honest, effective and transparent service" (Olaopa, 2008) to the public and to civil servants. This will greatly reduce the level of complaints and grievances within the service and the general public. It will also reduce the high incidence of petition writing, formal complaints and litigation against the government by members of the public and aggrieved civil servants.
c. The management of the Imo State Civil Service should periodically organize training programmes such as seminars, workshops, etc, to build the capacity of civil servants in modern work ethics. Such programmes should also embody lectures that will improve the understanding of the Imo State Public Service Rules and other related documents by civil servants.

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