Sapientia Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Development Studies (SGOJAHDS), Vol.5 No.3 September, 2022; p.g. 27 – 40; ISSN: 2695-2319 (Print); ISSN: 2695-2327 (Online)

SURMOUNTING THE CHALLENGES OF THE APPLICATION OF MERIT SYSTEM IN HUMAN RESOURCES PROCUREMENT IN THE NIGERIAN PUBLIC SERVICE

ADESOYE ISIAKA MUSTAPHA (PhD)
Department of Public Administration
University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria
isiakamustapha1961@gmail.com
+2348033552838

EMMANUEL IFECHUKWUDE OKONMAH (PhD)
Department of Public Administration
University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria
emmanuel.okonmah@uniben.edu;
+2348066647630

&
FRED OSAHON OKUNMAHIE (MSc)
Department of Public Administration
University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria
fred.okunmahie@gmail.com
+2347035800851

Abstract

This paper examined merit system principles and the challenges associated with its application in human resource procurement in the Nigerian public service. It viewed merit system as a system in which a position is occupied or promotion is earned on the basis of competence rather than other criteria such as political "connection", favoritism, nepotism, bribery and corruption among others. It reviewed existing literatures on merit system and the paper through the use of secondary data adopted equity theory to analyze the importance of merit system in human resource recruitment. The study identifies federal character principle, job racketeering, client-patron relationship, ethnicity, among others, as some of the hindrances to the entrenchment of merit system in human resource procurement. It recommended the implementation of federal character principle in consistence with merit system as well as the creation of merit compliance department, criminalization of non-merit based employment among others in human resource procurement and administration in the Nigeria public service.

Keywords: **Merit System, Human Resource, Procurement, Public Service, Equity.**

Introduction

Procurement of human resources is one of the fundamental responsibilities of human resource and personnel department in any organization be it public or private concern. Human resources in recent times are seen as the most important asset of any organization and the most complicated and the least predictable. It is this resource that processes other resources in order that the result of these processes would constitute the goals of the organization

(Mustapha and Adetunji, 2018; Mukoro, 2015). The availability of a competent and effective labour force does not just happen by chance but through an articulated job analysis and recruitment because the success or failure of any organization is largely determined by the quality of its human resource (Okon, 2005).

Public procurement of human resources, other goods and services is a crucial pillar of strategic governance and social service delivery for government because of the sheer volume of spending it represents, and well governed public procurement can and must play major roles in fostering public sector efficiency, fair play, justice, equity and establishing citizen's trust (Mustapha and Adetunji, 2018). Well-designed public procurement systems also contribute to achieving pressing policy goal, such as innovation, job creation and the development of small and medium enterprise (OECD, 2016). Human resource procurement component of public administration activities have a significant impact on the daily lives of citizens determine the way political and economic decisions made by governments are implemented and how budgets are allocated and spent for the good of the greatest numbers of the citizens (Ugiagbe, 2019). For these reasons, merit should be applied in its entirety in the recruitment and selection of these public officials.

Furthermore, the act of human resource procurement in the Nigerian public service ought to be guided by the application of merit system as it is obtainable in developed countries of the world, so that the right man for the right job and round peg in a round hole can be entrenched (Oluya, Olu-Braimoh and Okege, 1998). Sadly, the application of merit system in human resource recruitment and selection has been sacrificed at the altar of mediocrity, ethnicity and political patronage among others (Mustapha and Osaghae, 2018). The above has created consequential and dysfunctional effects on the institutional and employee enhanced productivity, quality decisions programmes and quality public service delivery (Ejumudo, 2011).

A merit based human resource procurement process is usually initiated by a unit or departmental head who decides through a written request to the personnel or human resource management Department that he needs to add to his staff or replace one who is retiring or quitting his job for other reasons. He states the position, job description and job specifications where the personnel or human resource management Department is convinced on the need to fill a job vacancy (Okon, 2005).

However, the first step in merit based human resource procurement process is job advertisement which should describe the job and the relevant qualification required which will enable applications to be received from the potential recruits. This step is immediately followed by applicant selection test with the aim of employing the most competent and qualified persons from the pool of applicants most suitable for the job (Okon, 2005; Mustapha and Adetunji, 2018). Consequently, procurement of human resource into the Nigerian public service seldom follow the above mentioned process as it is characterized by flagrant disregard to the application of merit system, a situation that perfect ways for incompetent and unqualified applicants of those in corridors of powers to be employed into the Nigerian public service.

To this end this paper tends to examine the challenges of the application of merit system in human resources procurement in the Nigerian public service and how it can be surmounted.

Statement of the problem

Procurement of human resource into the Nigerian public service without due consideration to merit system resulted in the employment of incompetent and unqualified persons into Public service. This cankerworm further induces official corruption, job racketeering to the highest bidder, promotion of mediocrity at the expense of meritocracy, inefficiency, ethnic suspicions among others (Suberu, 2004 cited in Mafos, 2015). The non- application of merit in recruitment in Nigerian public service negates the tenet of Max Weber bureaucracy which emphasizes that employment of persons into public service should be based on the application of merit so that the principle of the right man for the right job can be achieved. The effect of procuring human resource without regard to merit principles manifest in the underdevelopment and weakening of Nigeria public service institution owing to lack of competent and qualified public servants to implement and drive public policies to achieve good governance in Nigeria (Mustapha and Osaghae, 2018).

With the above enumerated problem this paper tends to answer the following questions: What is merit system in human resource procurement in the Nigerian public service? What are the challenges of the application of merit system in human resource procurement in the Nigerian public service?

Research Objectives

1. to evaluate application of merit system in human resources procurement in the Nigerian
   public service.
2. to determine the challenges of the application of merit system in human resources procurement in the Nigerian public service.
3. to make appropriate recommendations to policy makers on how to surmount the challenges of the application of merit system in human resource procurement in the Nigerian public service.

Conceptual Clarifications

Merit

Merit system is a system in which a position is occupied or promotion is earned on the basis of competence rather than other criteria such as political affiliation or length of service. In other words the merit system is the process of promoting or hiring government or private employees based on their ability to perform a job, rather than other considerations. It is the opposite of spoil system or patronage system. Furthermore, merit system is a system by which appointments and promotion in the public and civil service are based on competence rather than political connection, nepotism, favoritism, bribery among others.

Human Resource Procurement

Human Resource refers to the segment or department of an organization or establishment either public or private that has the mandate of managing and administering employee and labour related activities. These activities cut across recruiting and hiring new employees, orientation and compensation, training and organization development and culture,

organizational behavior, discipline and motivation of workers, just to mention a few (Heatfield,2019).

Additionally, Megginson (1977), considers human resource from the national point of view as knowledge, skills, creative abilities, talents and attitude obtained in the population; whereas from the view point of individual enterprise they represent the total of the inherent abilities acquired, knowledge and skills as exemplified in the talents and aptitude of its employers.

Literature Review

Everest-Phillips (2015) posited that merit principle can promote social mobility and can benefit individuals and society at large. He made a particular reference to the case of Singapore that turned meritocracy into a development factor. It found that development is closely linked with building a public service meritocracy state and fostering public administration through motivation, promotion, and the rule of law, integration, and non-tolerance of corruption. The author explains the benefits that arise from meritocracy and the impacts to humans and society. However, the author is commended for identifying meritocracy as an important catalyst in building strong public service institution.

Moreover, Tong, Jeffrey, and Walter (1999) emphasized an important element in reforming by applying a merit system in human resource management. This includes evaluating performance by rewarding employees and imposing sanctions on non-performing employees. Open and fair competitions in the selection and promotion process to assure the quality of government employees. The authors recognize merit system as an important tool in promoting employee and selecting government employee.

Furthermore, Ko and Walter (2013), states that Human Resource Management in practice based on merit system has a significant contribution to organizational commitment, organizational behavior, and encourage the performance of the organization. The work of Ko and Walter shows that application of merit system is a vital ingredient in the management of human resource in any organization.

Cho, et al. (2013), X-rayed the concept of Weber bureaucracy where the application of the merit system in the selection process is done to encourage professionalism in the bureaucracy, high-performance, and comply with applicable regulations in comparison with the trend of political connections. The authors aligned themselves with the work of weber that merit system promote professionalism and ensure "square peg for square hole" possible.

Origin of Merit System

Prior to the emergence of the merit system in the United States of America, the spoil system was used as the basis of procurement of human resource into the public service from 1825-1883 and was generally associated with President Andrew Jackson, though he was not the inventor of the spoil system but he heightened and advertised it by openly providing jobs for his supporters following the 1823 election. The spoil system is based on the recruitment principle whereby the political party that emerged victorious in an election sacked all its political opponents from the public or civil service and replaced them with its own supporters at the expense of those who are qualified and competent for the job which resulted in the lack of continuity, inefficiency and mediocrity.

In consonance to the above, public opinion became conscious and dissatisfied with this practice when President James A Garfied was killed by a disappointed job seeker in 1881. Two years later the US congress passed the Pendleton Act in 1883 marking the beginning of the merit system in the United States public Service. The Act abrogated the spoil system which prescribed that employee can only be employed into public service only after passing competitive job examination. The merit system later spreads to all parts of the globe (Edigin, 1994).

Theoretical Framework

This paper relies on equity theory as proposed by Stacy Adams (1963) which emphasizes the principle of fairness, justice and equity in human resource procurement (Sapru, 2013). According to the principles of Equity Theory, the best recruitment and selection criterion in the organization is that which portrays the firm as Equal Opportunity Employer (McEvoy, 1984; Deshpande & Golhar, 1994; Atkinson & Storey, 1994).

Basically, equity theory assumes that an individual is concerned with his achievement (rewards and recognition) as well as with achievement of others; employee expect a fair and equitable return for their contribution to their jobs; employees determine what return (equitable) they should receive after comparing what their relational workers have received; employees who perceived themselves as being in an equitable scenario will attempt to reduce inequity either by distorting inputs and/or outputs or by quieting the organization. A systematic recruitment process that embraces equity principle according to Gamage (2014) involves identifying vacancies, job analysis, job description, person specification and advertising as against informal process for recruiting and selecting employees. A systematic selection process involves the gathering of information about qualified applicants, evaluating the qualification of each applicant and making decisions about employment (Gamage, 2014).

The implication of equity theory to this study is to crystalize the ideal process in human resource procurement and to objectify the consequences of deviation from the ideal. More so, it enables public service recruiter to use the success of an individual (applicants) as a yardstick in offering a job as against favoritism, nepotism, political consideration among others, a concept referred to as "fairness model". It also helps applicants, recruiters and general public determine what equitable human resource procurement exercise should be after thorough evaluation of how recruiters implemented the general employment conditions whether or not it is based on political consideration, favoritism, nepotism, bribery and corruption that violate merit a, concept referred to as "social comparison". The perception of inequity in human resource procurement by an applicant and the society at large is a sign of organizational injustice. Subsequently, the theory has wide reaching implications for employee morale, efficiency, productivity, and turnover in the Nigerian public service.

Methodology

The paper relied on secondary sources of data collection which include books, journals, newspapers, and internet publications among others. Desk analysis of the data collected was done and on the basis of that, conclusions were drawn and recommendations made.

Merit System and its Application

The "merit system" is a method of personnel management designed to promote the efficiency and economy of the service and the good of the public by providing for the selection and retention of employees and other related matters based upon merit and fitness. The merit system operates under the following merit principles: it hires and promotes employees on the basis of ability, with open competition in initial appointment; it retains employees on the basis of performance. This includes correcting inadequate performance, and separating those whose inadequate performance cannot be corrected; it encourages training of employees for high quality performance; it removes appointments to positions from the political arena or personal favoritism; it insures that employees doing like work are classified the same and receive like pay; it provides for fair and impartial rules and consistency in the administration of the rules; it assures fair treatment of applicants and employees in all aspects of personnel administration without regard to political affiliation, sex, religion, disability, or marital status or any other basis prohibited by law, and with proper regard for their privacy and constitutional rights as citizens (Del Norte,1966).

The public service system is predicated on the merit principle, and a long standing definition of merit system is a personal system in which comparative merit or achievement governs each individual's selection and progress (Henry, 2012). Merit can also be viewed as a process of determining which job seeker has the skills, abilities and knowledge deemed to be most suitable for the job. In a merit based system, applicants effectively compete for a job. The written application, the selection interview and any testing of applicants is all part of the competition process.

Additionally, selection process of human resource procurement could be based on closed merit or open merit. When procurement of human resource is on closed merit, it means a vacant position will be advertised only within the organization. As such, only applicants from within the organization will be able to compete for the vacant position and will subsequently be filled with due consideration of merit. Closed merit has a number of advantages which include; assurance of better motivation of employee because it is recognition of their capabilities and offers opportunities for advancement in the organizational hierarchy; it assurance of better and proper utilization of employees because it presents the use of abilities in another job. In other words, it is a call to higher service; it is more reliable because the employee is already better known than external candidate and employee procured through closed merit is more likely to stay with the organization than fresh employee recruited through open merit system and human resource procurement process made through closed merit system is quicker and cheaper than the one made through open merit system (Okon, 2005).

On the other hand, procurement of human resource can also be on open merit which means the vacant position is advertised widely by whatever means deemed to be suitable to attract a pool of applicants from outside the organization. Generally, in an open merit based human resource procurement process, vacant positions are advertised in the jobs section of a newspaper. If jobs are awarded to individuals on the basis of friendship or relationship with flagrant disregard to merit, then the procurement process is not merit based.

Similarly, if a position is awarded on seniority or plan proximity of an individual i.e. working in the same office as the person who previously held the position, then the procurement process is also not merit based. Procurement of human resource on merit has more advantages than disadvantages, but if there is a disadvantage, it is the cost and time involved in going through the process properly. On the other hand, the main advantage is that it avails public service the opportunity to obtain a more skilled, competent and qualified person for the vacant position, and this has tremendous benefits to the entire organization as it makes the "right man for the right job" and "round peg in a round hole possible". In the Nigerian public service merit is often jettisoned on the altar of ethnicity and religion leading to the procurement of human resources that are unqualified, incompetent or not best suited for a particular position and this has negatively affected the efficiency and effectiveness of public sector mandate (Mustapha, Edegware and Onya, 2018).

An Evaluation of the Application of Merit System

Merit system reinforces the notion of equality and competence as it rejects patronage, nepotism, corruption, and incompetence for entering into the public service. It is a system that values the principle of competition, open selection, careful evaluation of qualities and having a set of qualification standards and established recruitment process rather than an arbitrary appointment of individual to public service (Dahlstrom, Lapuente and Teorell, 2012).

Today, Nigerian public service recruitment is marred with obstacles to merit system application which include Federal character principle; favoritism; partisanship; corruption; nepotism and other primordial considerations among others (Osawe, 2015). Though, public service recruiters will sometime openly advertise for job vacancies, conduct job entrance examination, screen curriculum vitae among others but the actual selection of candidates is not always transparent. More often, those candidates that are eventually selected for the job seldom fulfill the merit rules and the criteria for the final selection are not made public. Thus in a pure merit system, all appointments from top to bottom are openly advertised, followed by a competition based on merit rules that are publicly understood and can be challenged if a breach is suspected (McCount, 2007). In Nigerian public service recruitment, the reverse is the case as majority of public service job vacancies are not advertised. More so, unsuccessful applicants are not given the privilege to challenge the outcome of a recruitment process when they perceive breach, a practice that negates what merit system represents.

Challenges against the Application of Merit System

One of the odds against the application of merit system in procuring human resource in the Nigerian public service is the statutory application of federal character principle in the employment of people. Presently, the Federal Character Principle is recognized by the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The principle is enshrined in section 14 and sub section 3 and 4 of the same constitution. According to Section 14(3):

> "The composition of the Government of the federation or any of its agencies and the conduct of its affairs shall be carried out in such a manner as to reflect the federal character of Nigeria and the need to promote national unity and also to command national loyalty, thereby ensuring that there shall be no predominance of persons from a few states, ethnic or other sectional groups in that government or any of its agencies"

Section 14 (4) says:

> "The composition of the government of a state, a local government council, or any of the agencies of such Government or council, and the conduct of their affairs of the Government or Council or such agencies shall be carried out in such manner as to recognize the diversity of the people within the area of authority and the need to promote a sense of belonging and loyalty among all the people of the federation" (FGN,1999).

Federal Character Principle which is implemented by the Federal Character Commission is a recruitment policy that regulates the recruitment of people into federal, state and local government public or civil service for the purpose of ensuring that there is no predominance of persons from few states, ethnic or other sectional groups in government MDA's (Mafos, 2015).As laudable as this may look, the application of the Federal character undermines equity, fairness and excellence in the public service recruitment. It means that the best can be left out of the service and the worst picked (Osawe, 2015). Further to that, Federal character can be appreciated when aptitude test and other criteria of selection are conducted for people to be recruited from states to throw up the best material from each of the states. However, the non-application of federal character principle in this regard has continued to weaken the Nigerian public service, making the processes of service delivery towards national development more challenging than it could otherwise have been. One of the manifestations of the implementation of the federal character is poor employee procurement practice which often resulted in the employment of incompetent, less qualified hands in the Nigerian public service (Osawe, 2015).

To align with the above, Daniel and Jide (2013) posited that the introduction of the federal character principle and its subsequent implementation have failed to bring into the Nigerian public service competent and motivated workforce that could support administrative effectiveness for enhanced performance in the implementation of government policies for sustainable development.

Another major challenge hindering the application of merit in human resource procurement is the oversupply of human resources owing to the general unemployment in the society which gives rise to a situation whereby several applicants chase few jobs. More so, unsolicited application in many organizations is another hiccup bedeviling the application of merit system in human resource procurement. This is as a result of acute lack of jobs due to rise in the population of graduates in the country without corresponding job increase owing to low absorptive capacity of the economy, huge infrastructural gap occasioned by low level of private sector investment (Ajayi and Adeniji, 2009). At times, jobs which require School Certificate holders are scampered for by graduates in possession of higher qualifications like NCE, HND, B.Sc., M.Sc. amidst others. This makes it a herculean task for merit to be applied in line with the advertised job description and specification to select qualified and competent persons (Ezenagu, 2018).

Furthermore, the application of merit in human resource procurement starts with who is available for hire. Many public service recruiters cite "abundant of qualified applicants" as against few available job vacancies as their primary obstacle in hiring employee on the basis

of merit (Henry, 2012). A vivid example is the Nigeria Immigration recruitment tragedy which occurred on Saturday March 15, 2014, when 6.5 million job seekers in the 36 states of Nigeria and Federal Capital Territory (FCT) stormed various recruitment centers in the country to participate in recruitment test for about 4000 vacant positions in the Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS). Resulting from the stampede, no fewer than 16 applicants including a pregnant woman were confirmed dead and several others were seriously injured. All applicants were made to pay N1000 each, after satisfying the initial application criteria, as an application fees through an e-payment platform which amounted to a whopping sum of N6.5billion naira (www. wikipedia.com).

Although (NIS) exhibited fairness and openness as demanded by equity theory in the failed recruitment exercise, it would have been practically difficult for merit to be entrenched in the selection and recruitment process due to the millions of qualified applicants that applied as against the 4000 vacant positions. With the problem of abundant of qualified applicants, corrupt public officials see it as an avenue to demand bribe from desperate job seekers in return for employment. As such, the application of merit is sacrificed at the altar of bribery and corruption.

Further to that, faulty teaching and learning curriculum of tertiary institutions that are not practically and vocationally oriented makes millions of graduates to be trained as job seekers instead of job creators (Okoroma, 2006). As a result, millions of graduates who are supposed to be self-reliant and create jobs for others after graduation flock the streets scampering for the few available white collar jobs in the public service. For this obvious reason, recruiters are faced with the problem of applying merit in the selection and recruitment of millions of applicants to fill limited job vacancies.

Additionally, utilization of informal sources of human resource procurement such as in-house staff, family and friends' referrals, internet based hiring, self -initiated walk-in by the job seekers among others also hinder the application of merit system in public service recruitment. Though, the use of informal source of human resource procurement is positively linked with more advantageous results such as high organizational assurance, recruitments are more reliable and cost effective, save time from the hassle of recruiting from outside the organization and help in reducing executive turnover and boost the morale and loyalty among the existing employees (Sameen, 2016; Mustapha, Edegware and Onya, 2018). Despite these enormous advantage of informal source of recruitment, such still contravene the application of merit and equity theory of fairness and equal opportunity for job seekers because it is against the standard HR practice and principle, It provides opportunity for limited applicants, the vacant position is not known to the public and it will obviously reduce the number of applicants that could bring innovative ideas to the organization from outside. Each department within the organization also competes for the best candidates which will sometime leads to conflict between departments. It can also act against the organizations integrity. Large firm cannot rely on informal source of human resource procurement (Sameen, 2016).

Employment racket is another visible challenge to the entrenchment of merit system in the public service of the federation. Employment racket is a situation whereby job seekers offer money in exchange for job which is devoid of the application of merit system leading to the

procurement of unqualified and incompetent persons in many cases. The resultant effect of this is weak and under-performing public institutions because applicants are not subjected to competitive test aimed at getting the best applicants for the job as extolled by equity principle of fairness, justice and equality. The Honourable Minister of Information and Culture Lai Muhammed opined on employment racketeering:

> the first scandal I met in one of the parastatals when I assumed office was the illegal employment of 400 people by a very senior officer up to grade level 17in which the culprit collected the sum of N400,000 each from the applicants amounting to N160 million from desperate job seekers. They did not stop there. They invited these people to go and be captured in the (IPPIS) and they even took camera to hotel to get them captured. At the end of the day, the bubble burst. One of the victims told these officials 'you cannot take my money and still disengage me. I have a valid letter'. That was how we got to know that there was a dedicated account these people paid into. Of course, we dismissed these officials and we even handed them over to the police (*The Nation Newspaper,* January 24, 2016).

In a similar vein, Senator Danjuma La'ah, the Chairman Committee on Federal Character Commission and Inter-Governmental Affairs expressed sadness over job racketeering at the Federal Character Commission who said:

> I got reports from different people on the sales of jobs going on at the Federal Character Commission (FCC), and someone has forwarded to me a text message which is in my phone that he purchased Nigeria Ports Authority job from the Federal Character Commission at N3million (*Vanguard Newspaper*, February, 24, 2020).

It is important to note that the agency of government charged with the responsibility of ensuring equitable distribution of appointment is indulged in employment racket, a development which contravenes the application of merit principles in human resource procurement.

The pattern of patron-client exchange system between political elites of various shades and job seekers also hampers the application of merit. This is manifested in a way that the job seekers express political support through voting and sometimes functioning as party militia and private guards during and after election in return for employment in public service. Political elites, according to Ayoade (2010), sometimes appear more powerful than the state. Political elite through the control of state power and information in Nigeria has proven to be viable source of employment. These political class often request for employment slots from Chief Executive Officers of MDAs as a condition to approve any request brought before them and when such is eventually approved they distribute it among their "loyal" followers.

This pattern of patron-client exchange between political elites and job seekers violate the basic tenet of equity theory which emphasizes fair and open recruitment, competitive job examination for job seekers that is free of political influence or other non-merit factors to enable the most competent and qualified persons to be engaged. Again, competition for job in the public service has therefore been reduced to political competition at the expense of merit. A vivid example is the recent case where Senate President Ahmad Lawan (Yobe North) was

reported to have been given 26 job slots by the Federal Internal Revenue Service (FIRS) which the Senator in turn shared among members of a political movement in his constituency called Unity for Collective Progress. These job slots were later distributed among the Local Government Areas that made up his constituency as follows: Nguru, 5; Karasuwa, 3; Machina,4; Bade,7; Jasafaru, 4; Jakusko,3. The group confirmed that beneficiaries have received employment letters and will commence work in earnest (*Daily Trust*, October 17, 2019).

In the same vein, 100 job slots for federal agencies were allotted to 10 principal officers of the Senate, a development which created squabbles among the senators (*Daily Trust*, October 17, 2019). The above are few cases among many where employment into public service has been politicized with flagrant disregard to merit and principle of fairness.

Further to that, ethnicity, tribalism, nepotism, favoritism, corruption, religious and other primordial considerations are factors inhibiting the application of merit in procurement of human resource in public service (Osawe, 2015). Merit system in human resource procurement is supposed to be objectively practiced and be the guiding principle in appointments and promotion in the service but the reverse is the case in the Nigerian public service. Appointments, promotion and other privileges are guaranteed for applicants if they have the same ethnic background with the man at the helm of affairs, while it is denied if the contrary is the case(Osawe, 2015).

Consequently, recruitment into the public service is also marked with favoritism. Public service recruiters extend recruitment favor to applicants of same ethnic bloc, friends, relations and those generally known, while other applicants with contrary ethnic background or who are not friends or relations to the "men at the top" are out-rightly denied appointment unless they can bribe their way into the service. Favoritism violates the principle of equity and fairness extolled by equity theory in public service recruitment (Ayo, 1998, and Ajayi 2001). All these have negatively affected the performance of the public service. In many cases recruits employed on the platform of these primordial factors are mediocre who are incompetent and ineffective in the performance of their job.

Conclusion

This paper has espoused merit system and evaluated how it is implemented in human resource procurement in the Nigerian public service as well as the challenges faced by the application of merit system in human resource procurement. The paper found that merit is, to a large extent, not followed in the recruitment of public service workers, a development that is largely responsible for underperforming public service institutions. The paper recognizes merit system as one that offers a fair system which results in better outcomes for both the individual and society assemble talented and hard -working people from all walks of life with a means of advancement and the opportunity to contribute to the wellbeing of the larger society.

However, the application of merit in human resource procurement is bedeviled with the statutory application of federal character principle as a recruitment policy, client-patron mode of employment, job racketeering among others. All the above have constituted impediments to the ability of the Nigerian public service institutions to deliver on their mandates.

In addition, making a meritocracy of the public service helps to bring in high quality staff, confers prestige on public and civil service position and can do a great deal to motivate good performance (World Bank, 1997).

Recommendations

From the discussions above, this paper recommended the following to surmount the challenges to the application of merit system in human resources procurement in the Nigeria public service.

1. That the Federal Character Principle should be implemented to be consistent with merit principle in all government recruitments. To achieve that, there should be competition through aptitude test and other selection criteria among the people to be recruited from states to throw up the best materials from each of the states, and the creation of Merit Compliance Department in the Federal Character Commission to supervise and monitor this process.
2 Public service recruiters should build a procurement system that enables the best man and the most suitable to go into the job that needs them. With this, public service will be armed with competent and intelligent personnel that will effectively and efficiently implement the reforms of government at all levels.
3. Government should criminalize and decisively deal with any Chief Executive Officers of its MDAs found in the allotment of employment slots to political elites as a patronage forthwith and also dismiss any of its public servants found in the act of employment racketeering.
4. Institutions of learning should redraft their teaching curriculum to be more vocational and practical oriented, so that graduates can be job creators and not job seekers in order to reduce the desperation of job seekers for public service employment.
5. Government should urgently invest massively in critical public infrastructure of the economy to encourage private sector investment. With this, more jobs will be created and the absorptive capacity of the private sectors will be improved.
6. Public service job vacancies should be advertised openly to the general public subject to competitive employment examination and selection of applicants should be based on merit, devoid of ethnic, religious, and other unethical considerations. Merit should also be followed tenaciously in the promotion of public servants.

References

Abati, R. (2016). Nigeria's Character and its discontent *THE NEWS NEWSPAPER* January 31.

Ajaji, K. & Adeniji A. (2009). Access to university education in Nigeria. In B.G Nworgu and E.I

Eke. (eds), *Access, Quality and Cost in Nigeria Education* (Pp.35-60). Published Proceedings of the 23rd Annual Congress of the Nigeria Academy of Education.

Ajayi, K. (2001). "Military regimes and Nigeria public administration" in F. Omotosho (ed) *Contemporary Issues in Public Administration*, Lagos; Bolabay Publications.

Atkinson, J. & Storey, D. (1994). Small Firms and Employment, Employment in the Small Firm and the Labour Market. London: Routledge.

Ayoade, J.A. (2010). Nigeria: Positive pessimism and Negative Optimism, *Valedictory lecture, Faculty of the Social Sciences, University of Ibadan*, Nigeria, September 17.

Ayo, S. B. (1998). "A review of the performance of Nigerian Public Bureaucracy in Kolawole (ed) *Issues in Nigeria Government and Politics*, Ibadan, Dekaal.

Cho, Wonhyuk, et. al. (2013). A cross-country study of the relationship between Weberian bureaucracy and government performance. International Review of Public Administration,18 (3), 115-137.

Dahlstron, C., Lapuente, V.andTeorell J.(2012). "The Merit of Meritocratization: Politics Bureaucracy, and the institutional Deterrents of Corruption" Political Research Quantity 65(3); 656-668.

Deshpande, S., & Golhar, D.Y. (1994). HRM Practices in large and Small Manufacturing Firms: A comparative study. *Journal of Small Business management*, 32(2) 49-56.

Edigin, L.U. (1994). The Dynamics of Comparative Public Administration. Benin City: Nationwide publication Bureau.

Ejumudo, K. B. (2011). Constraints in Staff Recruitment and Selection System of Delta State Civil Service. Department of Political Science, Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria.

Equity Theory of Motivation. Available online at www.http//.en simplenotes.com. (Accessed on 24/12/2019) (2019).

Ezenagu, J. (2018). 10 Problem of Recruitment in Nigeria and possible Solution. Available online at www.infoGuildeNigeria.com. (Accessed 27/10/2019).

Federal Government of Nigeria (1999). The constitution of federal Republic of Nigeria. Abuja: Federal Gazzette.

Forest, T. (1993). *Politics and Economic Development in Nigeria.* West View Press Boulder Colarado.

Gamage, A. S. (2014). Recruitment and Selection Practices in Manufacturing SMEs in Japan: An analysis of the link with business performance. *Ruhuna Journal of Management and Finance*, 1(1), 37-52.

Heatfied, S.M. (2019). What is Human resource? The balance careers. Available online at www.thebalancecareers.com/whatis -a-human resource. (Accessed on17/10/2019).

Henry N. (2012). *Public Administration and Public Affairs*. 12th edition New Delhi: Asoke K. Ghosh.

Ko, Jaekwon and Walter, Aaron Smith (2013). The relationship between HRM practices and organization performance in the public sector: Focusing on mediating roles of work attitudes. *International Review of Public Administration*, 18(3) 299-231.

Mafos, S. (2015). Federal Character Principle and Recruitment in Nigeria Civil Service (2007 2011): An appraisal. Available online at www.academia.com. (Accessed on20/12/2019).

McCourt, W. (2007). "The merit System and Integrity in the Public Service" Development Economic and Public Policy working paper series. Paper No. 20: 1-3. Institute for Development Policy and Management. University of Manchester.

McEvoy, M. G. (1984). Small Business Personnel Practices. *Journal of Small Business Management*, *Vol 22*(4). 1-8.

Megginson, L. (1977). Personnel & Human Resource Administration. Richard D Irwin Inc. Hommond Illinois.

Mustapha, A.I. and Adetunji, O.E. (2018). Deepening the public service organizational culture in human resource procurement in Nigeria: Politics-Administration dichotomy revisited. *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences, Vol 8 No. 8.* International Institute for Science, Technology & Education, www.iiste.org

Mustapha, A.I., Edegware, J.G. and Onya, R. (2018). Supervision and public service productivity in Nigeria: A theoretical discourse. *Public Policy and Administration Research, Vol. 8 No. 4*. International Institute for Science, Technology & Education, www.iiste.org

Mustapha, A.I. and Osaghae, J.O. (2018). Human capital acquisition and the challenges of developmental state: A case of the Nigerian civil service, 2000 – 2015. *European Journal of Business Management, Vol. 10 No. 9*. International Institute for Science, Technology & Education, www.iiste.org

Nigeria Immigration Recruitment Tragedy. Available online at www.http//.en wikipedi.org>wiki 2014 (Accessed on 20/12/2019).

Nwogwugwu, N and Sosanya, O.A, (2015) Effect of Federal Character Principle on Appointment into the Civil Service System: A Study of Federal Ministry of Education. *Arabian Journal of Business and Research* (Nigerian Chapter) *Vol 3*, No11.

Okoh, A.O. (2005). Personnel and Human Resources Management in Nigeria. Lagos: Amfitop Books

Okoroma, S.M. (2006). Educational policies and problems of implementation in Nigeria. Australian Journal of Adult Learning *Vol.4*, No (7).

Oluya, S.I. Olu Buraimoh and Okege O.O, (1998). Compendium of Issues in Citizenship Education in Nigeria. Ibadan: Remco Press ltd.

Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2016), Public Procurement. Available online at http://webhost/cortland.edu.(Accessed on17/10/2019).

Osawe, C.O. (2015). Nigerian Public service performance in a Dysfunctional Ecology: Issues,

Challenges and the Way Forward. *Arabian Journal of Business and Management Research: A review of Public Administration and management. Vol*. 3, No7 (7).

Philips and Everest. (2015). Meritocracy and Public Service Excellent. *International Journal of Civil Service Reform and Practice*. *Vol 5*, 94-98

Sameen S. (2016). Employee Hiring through Informal and Formal Sources of Recruitment and implication for Job satisfaction and intension to leave. *International Journal of Innovation Management and TechnologyVol.7* No 6 (12).

Suberu, R.I and Diamond, L (2004), Institutional Design, Ethnic Conflict, Management and Democracy in Nigeria .

The Nation (2016). Heads roll in Federal Civil Service over employment racketeering. Available online at. www.https: thenationonlineng.net/heads roll in federal civil service over employment. (Accessed on 20/12/2019).

Umoru, H, (2020). Senate to probe alleged sales ofNPA employment letter for3million. February, 24. Available online at www.vangaurdngr.com. (Accessed on 26/02/2020).

UNDP (2015). Meritocracy for Public Service Excellence: Global Centre for Public Service Excellence (Singapore) and Regional Hub of Civil Service in Anstana (Kazkhstan). Available online https://www.undp.org.>...> Global Centre for Public Service Excellence. (Accessed on 7/01/2020).

World Bank (1997). World Development Report 1997. The State in a changing world. New York Oxford university press.

Yagboyaju, D & Oyewo, O (2017). Representative bureaucracy in Nigeria; from federal Character principle to political clientelism. *Africa Journal for the Psychological Studies of Social Issues*, 20 (3), 231-241