

ATTAINING A BETTER PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY THROUGH E-GOVERNANCE ADOPTION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Governments all over the world, Nigeria inclusive desire ways to provide welfare services to citizens with fewer resources, enhance transparency and accountability of public servants. As a result, the goals of the public service in terms of enhanced service delivery come to mind. This is because it serves as the major machinery through which governmental policies are implemented. However, the public service in Nigeria has witnessed widespread criticism as it pertains to the way and manner in which services are delivered. The inability of the public service to achieve its goals has necessitated the call for reform in the public service. In this regard, e-governance seems to be the probable solution. This paper adopts the ex-post-facto research design and found that there are several barriers arising from the adoption of the usual traditional public administrative system standing against the implementation of e-governance in the public service that would have metamorphosed into better service delivery. It is in line with the above findings that the paper argues that public service delivery could be better achieved through e-governance implementation in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Accountability, e-governance, Nigeria, public service, service delivery*

INTRODUCTION

The public service in Nigeria is the machinery of government through which policies are implemented. However, apart from this key function, it also provides services through the Ministries, Department and Agencies. Over the years, these services have been said to be poor in terms of the way and manner in which they are delivered. This is often classified as the traditional public administration characterised by “paper based long procedures that makes the citizen dissatisfied with the services because of several problems such as delay in the service, corruption and offices are centrally located” (Karim, 2015:49). This development has led to so much clamour for reform due to the time-consuming nature and quality in public service delivery, which has to do with too many procedures and lack of transparency (Arkes, 2015; Amukugo & Peters, 2016). It is against the afore-mentioned that one of the reform tools



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suggested for improving governmental processes and service delivery in Nigeria has been the adoption of e-governance. This is because e-governance implementation is believed to be one of the panaceas in ensuring better public service delivery (Ojo, 2014; Abasilim & Edet, 2015; Gberevbie, Iyoha, Ayo, Abasilim & Ojeka, 2016; Ogunsola & Tihamiyu, 2017).

E-governance in Nigeria was introduced with the formulation of the Nigerian National Policy for Information Technology in March 2001, with the cardinal objectives among others to:

Improve the accessibility to public administration for all citizens, bringing transparency to government processes, bringing the government to the doorsteps of people by creating virtual forum and facilities to strengthen accessibility to government information and facilitating interaction between the governed and government leading to transparency, accountability and the strengthening of democracy. And also by utilising IT opportunities to restructure government, citizens and business interfaces for better governance, improved trade and commerce and administrative effectiveness (Nigerian National Policy for Information Technology, 2001 pp. iii-v).

In order to achieve the objectives of this policy, the Federal Government of Nigeria established the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA), under the supervision and coordination of the Federal Ministry of Science and Technology in April 2001. This was mandated by the National Information Technology Development Act (2007:6) to “create a framework for the planning, research, development, standardisation, application, coordination, monitoring, evaluation and regulation of Information Technology practices, activities and systems in Nigeria.” In the words of Karim (2015:55) e-governance was introduced as a tool that will enhance public service delivery with the following aims:

- Ensure service delivery at the lowest possible time, and if possible, promptly.
- Uphold citizens’ Rights to Information through extensive information flow.
- Save time and labour when processing services.
- Increase the number of clients served through digitisation of all information and services.
- Reduce corruption and increase accountability of government officials by ensuring better flow of information and more transparent processes.

The implication of the above is that NITDA is responsible for the implementation of the e-government/governance initiatives in Nigeria done through the National e-government Strategy Limited (NeGSt) and public-private partnership project (NITDA, 2001). However, despite the possible benefits derivable from e-governance adoption for enhanced service delivery; public service organisations are slow in adopting it. Instead, computerisation of operations and internet services, which most often are not adequate, the over concentration of website creations, which are subset of what e-governance adoption entails are the norms in public sector.

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Previous studies on e-governance adoption in Nigeria focused mainly on its ability to serve as a tool for sustainable grassroots development, possible solution to the challenges of the Nigerian public service, as strategy for mitigating non-inclusion of citizens in policy making, possible solution to achieving accountability and the goals of public agencies and assessment of levels and interrelationships of ICT deployment, web readiness and web presence quality of Nigerian e-government websites (Ojo, 2014; Abasilim & Edet, 2015; Gberevbie, Ayo, Iyoha, Duruji & Abasilim, 2015; Gberevbie et al, 2016; Ogunsola & Tiamiyu, 2017). However, this present study focuses on how public service delivery can be better achieved through e-governance adoption. Therefore, the main objective of this paper is to examine the possible relationship between e-governance adoption and better public service delivery in Nigeria. In addition, the paper is structured into five sections. Section one is the introduction; literature review is carried out in section two; section three addresses the method adopted; section four discusses the strategies for attaining better public service delivery through e-governance adoption in Nigeria, while section five concludes the paper.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Concept of E-Governance and Public Service Delivery

There seem to be no agreement within the academic circle as to what e-governance and public service delivery is or what it comprises. While there are proliferations of definitions, none has sufficiently captured the real meaning of e-governance and public service delivery, although within public service reform discourse, the concept of e-governance and public service delivery has been a recurring decimal in public sector reforms. For instance, Okwueze (2010:497) sees e-governance as “the delivery of information and services on-line through the internet or other digital means.” Shailendra & Sharma (2007:3) see e-governance as “an instrument that will radically help transform the relationship between the government and society. While Sebastian & Supriya (2013:31) perceive e-governance as “the effective use of ICTs, particularly the Web-based Internet applications, for better governance and service delivery.”

In the same vein, Ojo (2014:79) sees e-governance as the “application of Information Communication Technology by the government to enhance accountability, create awareness and ensure transparency in the management of government business.” Arguing within this context, Singla & Aggarwal (2014:12) observe that e-governance is the “application of Information and Communication Technology to improve the efficiency of government services delivery system.” They further stated that it is the interaction that exists between government and citizens and internal government processes to provide effective implementation of government policies with the adoption of ICT. Also, Abasilim & Edet (2015:32) view e-governance as “the shift from the traditional method of carrying out government activities which is mainly hierarchical, linear, and one-way to the use of internet which enables the public seek information at their own convenience and not really having to visit the office in person or when government office is open.”



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The various conceptualisation of e-governance above implies that it has to do with the use of ICT in governmental activities for service delivery. However, Dada (2006:1) opines that e-governance is “not only the computerisation of a government system, but a belief in the ability of technology to achieve high levels of improvement in various areas of government, thus transforming the nature of politics and the relations between governments and citizens.” E-governance is seen to be sub-divided into e-Service (interface with customers in delivering services to society), e-Commerce (cash transactions), e-Democracy (political dialogue with citizen), e-Decision-making (better informed public interest decisions), e-Management (improved management of ICT resources and staff) (Van der Walt, 2003).

As it pertains to the advantages of adopting e-governance, Ndou (2004) posits that it offers the platform for which good governance can be assessed. This is because of the transforming virtues that come with it, especially in the relationship between governments and citizens. He further pointed out that e-governance adoption has the capacity of increasing the involvement of citizens in governmental processes at all levels, it can also help in providing better services in terms of the timely manner in which government services are delivered, thereby making them more efficient, cost effective and encourage accessibility of government services. Furthermore, Ambali (2013:2) states that e-governance can “facilitate access to information, contribute to freedom of expression, lead to greater equity, provide efficiency, enhance productivity and growth, and strengthen social inclusion.” Essentially, e-governance is seen by some scholars as possible means of enhancing public delivery through the following channels:

1. **G2C (Government-to-Citizens):** This focuses primarily on developing user-friendly one-stop centers of service for easy access to high quality government services and information.
2. **G2B (Government-to-Business):** This aims to facilitate and enhance the capability of business transactions between the government and the private sector by Improving communications and connectivity between the two parties.
3. **G2G (Government-to-Government):** This is an inter-governmental effort that aims to improve communication and effectiveness of services between federal, state and local governments in the running of day-to-day administration. It generally aimed at improving the efficiency and effectiveness of overall government operations.
4. **Intra-government:** This aims to leverage ICT to reduce costs and improve the quality of administration and management within government organization (Islam & Ahmed, 2007; Onuigbo & Eme, 2015).

On the other hand, public service delivery as a concept has been at the forefront of public sector reforms discourse. It is associated with new public management (NPM) theory attributed to the works of Pollitt (1990); Hood (1991); Pollitt & Bouckaert (2004). This places high premium on good governance, technological innovation and democratisation. The theory also focuses on

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institutional and organisational restructuring as one of the panaceas of raising the performance of the public sector, which will in turn lead to a better and improved service delivery (Igbokwe-Ibeto, 2015:189). Proponents of this theory stress the need for a paradigm shift from the norms of traditional public administration which places high emphasis on adherence to procedures rather than result orientation (Pollitt, 1990; Sarker, 2006; Hughes, 2012). Some scholars advocate the borrowing of some of the guiding principles adopted in private business organisations, which include: “accountability and transparency, efficiency and effectiveness; reduction of public sector (cost) expenditure; improvement in resource use through labour discipline; flexibility in decision making; competition in the public sector through decentralisation and emphasis on result and not procedure” (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004:66).

According to Oronsaye (2010:31), public service delivery can be seen as “the process of meeting the needs of citizens through prompt and efficient procedures.” This implies that the interaction between government and citizens are such that the needs of the citizens are met in a timely manner, thereby making the citizens key in public service delivery. The implication here is that as the private sector considers its customer as ‘king’, thereby ensuring quality service delivery, the public should be regarded as ‘master’ and the beneficiary of enhanced performance of the public service (Aladegbola & Jaiyeola, 2016:162). Acceptable service delivery can be seen as one of the core responsibilities for the establishment of public organisations. It is identified as “one of the key functions of the public sector.” (Mitel, 2007:2). Okafor, Fatile & Ejalonibu (2014:49) see public service delivery as “the result of the intentions, decision of government and government institutions, and the actions undertaken and decision made by people employed in government institutions.” They posit that it is “the provision of public goods or social (education, health), economic (grants) or infrastructural (water, electricity) services to those who need (or demand) them” (p. 49).

Supporting the arguments above, Ohemeng (2010:115) views public service delivery from the light of its key features as “doing more with less, empowering citizens, enhancing transparency and holding public servants accountable.” Corroborating this further, Coopers (2014:9) itemises seven core objectives for public service delivery namely:

- Speed – The time taken to deliver a service should be the shortest possible for both the customer and the organisation delivering the service, right first time.
- Engagement – The manner in which services are delivered should be seen as customer-centric (i.e. participatory and trustworthy with the customer’s needs at the core).
- Responsiveness – There should be an ‘intelligent’ mechanism in place to address any variation in meeting service levels and to drive changes in the service delivery organisation.
- Value – The customer needs to believe that the service delivery mechanism is cost effective, and value is driven by customer outcomes, not organisational processes.

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- Integration – The service delivery mechanism should be integrated. There should be no ‘wrong door’ policy for the customer.
- Choice – There should be multiple channels for service delivery, so that customers can have ‘channels of choice’, depending on specific needs at specific times.
- Experience – Personalisation of service is necessary to ensure that customers’ experiences are on a par with what they are used to receiving from the private sector.

Arising from the above, it can be concluded that there is a relationship between e-governance adoption and enhanced public service delivery in a country.

METHOD OF STUDY

This paper adopts the ex-post facto research design. This research design is descriptive in nature and relies on secondary sources of data obtained from relevant books, journals, and Internet materials to examine the relationship between e-governance and enhanced public service delivery in the Nigerian public sector. The justification for this research design is based on the fact that it allows the “investigator starts with the observation of dependent variables, and then, studies the independent variables in retrospect, for their possible relationship to have any effect on the dependent variables” (Chukwuemeka, 2006:19).

STRATEGIES FOR ATTAINING BETTER PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY THROUGH E-GOVERNANCE ADOPTION IN NIGERIA

In order to explain how public service delivery can be improved upon through e-governance implementation, there is need to examine those things that can be considered as an impediment to its successful implementation. Previous investigations have shown that e-governance adoption would enhance public service delivery in Nigeria to the extent that the challenges inhibiting e-governance implementation such as lack of infrastructure, poor to the adoption of e-governance by public officials, inadequate knowledge of ICT deployment and poor maintenance culture of the public servants are addressed. According to Olaopa (2014:5) the challenges ranges from:

inadequate funds allocated to the e-governance projects, difficulty associated with streamlining various silos of e-Government projects already existing or being implemented prior to the creation of the Ministry of Communication Technology, disparity between urban and rural dwellers or those with low literacy levels in accessing the internet, potential to erode the privacy of the citizenry, perceived lack of value for money when the huge cost of deploying e- Governance projects is compared to the actual value to the people, false sense of transparency.

Furthermore, Gberevbie et al (2015) identified the lack of the necessary infrastructure (electricity power supply, internet connectivity, telecommunications and computer hardware, optical fiber cables) as some the inhibiting challenges against the successful implementation of e-governance in Nigeria’s public sector organisations. In addition,

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Abasilim & Edet (2015) note that most of the public service employees attitude to change was not favourable to e-governance implementation, which was as a result of their low level of computer literacy and inadequate knowledge that disqualified them in the installation, maintenance, designing and the deployment of ICT infrastructure. What this implies is that as long as these challenges are not fixed, better public service delivery cannot be in view. Thus causing one to ponder on how public service delivery can be better achieved through e-governance implementation in Nigeria? Having this in mind, the following are some of the possible solutions to attaining better public service delivery through e-governance adoption and implementation in Nigeria:

- a. There is need to provide the necessary quantity and quality infrastructure that will aid e-governance implementation, which will engender better public service delivery in Nigeria in line with the study of Gbervbie *et al.* (2015); Gbervbie *et al.* (2016).
- b. The employees in the public service should be given priority and be seen as the key agent that can both facilitate the successful implementation of e-governance in the public and enhance public service delivery in Nigeria. This can be done through continuous training geared towards their reorientation for better work standard for performance in line with the findings of Fatile (2012); Ajayi (2003) and Ifinedo (2005).
- c. The role of the Federal Government cannot be sidelined in achieving a better service delivery through e-governance implementation especially when it has to do with the budgetary allocation assigned to the ICT sector. By implication, a huge investment in the ICT sector will play a vital role in both ensuring the successful implementation of e-governance and enhancing better public service delivery as advocated by Dhillon & Laxmi (2015). Furthermore, the Federal Government must as a matter of urgency enforce that all levels of government adopt e-governance in their administrative processes and also evaluate the policies from time to time to ensure that the main reason for this shift is achieved as put forward by Abasilim & Edet (2015) and Gbervbie *et al.* (2016).
- d. There is need for public organisations in Nigeria to recognise that e-governance implementation is a needed channel for service delivery, particularly in the area of service involving the Police, other security agencies, National Agency for Food, Drug Administration (NAFDAC) and Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC).

CONCLUSION

The aim of this paper is to examine the possible ways through which public service delivery could be better achieved other than the present traditional public administrative system inherited from the colonial government. Through the ex-post facto research design and analysis, the paper revealed that for the public sector to achieve better service delivery there is need to consider the adoption of e-governance. However, for e-governance to achieve its goal of better service

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delivery in the country there would be need to address all that could serve as impediment to its effective implementation in Nigeria.

The implication is that once these identified challenges such as lack of the necessary infrastructure - electricity power supply, internet connectivity, telecommunications and computer hardware, optical fiber cables are not properly addressed, the anticipated reform of governmental processes would be a mirage. Therefore, public managers and all stakeholders are expected to embrace the adoption of e-governance as strategy to achieving the goals of better service delivery in Nigeria.

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