

# THE CHALLENGES OF NEW PUBLIC MANAGEMENT IN NIGERIA: A REVIEW

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## Abstract

*Nigeria just like other developing countries especially, have accepted and are implementing the NPM principles and practices as specified by donor governments and international financial institutions with the hope of attaining efficiency and effectiveness in public service delivery. However, the Nigerian public service still exudes inefficiency and ineffectiveness. It is against this backdrop the study attempts a review of challenges of NPM in Nigerian public service. The study was anchored on public choice theory. This paper, adopting the content analysis approach, generated its data from published and unpublished works, i.e. books, reputable journal articles and magazines. Based on works reviewed, the paper identified socio-political and ideological underpinnings, weak governance capacity, weak market alternatives, poor infrastructure, incompetent staff, lack of political will, negative perceptions of reforms (resentment and resistance) and corruption as prominent factors that have accounted for the continued inefficient and ineffective nature of the public service in Nigeria. The study submits that however beautiful the NPM principles may seem or regardless of its potency in other countries, particularly in developed countries, it should be acknowledged that our environment and circumstances are peculiar. As such, Nigeria should ensure that public service reforms are always considered in respect to our peculiar situation and environment instead of accepting reforms from donor governments and international financial institutions hook, line and sinker.*

**Key Words:** Challenges, New Public Management, Public Sector, Documentary Review, Public Choice Theory

## Introduction

The New Public Management (NPM) approach emerged in the 1980s as a replacement to the traditional model of public management ensconced in old public administration due to inadequacies of the old model. Inadequacies which characterised the old public administration include huge public debts, fiscal problems, high unemployment rate, mismanagement, poor service delivery, nepotism, political patronage, large and rigid bureaucracy, and widespread corruption (Dzimbiri, 2008; Mongkol, 2011). All these culminated into general inefficiency and ineffectiveness, thus exposing the weaknesses of the public sector in adequately catering for the welfare of the citizenry. These inadequacies resulted in agitations for reforms in the public sector.

The failure of the public sector according to Jooste (2008) resulted in a renewed belief in the market as a panacea to the problems ravaging the public sector. Thus, an approach or model which embraces strategies or principles of private sector management became sought after. As a result, the New Public Management (NPM) emerged. The approach of NPM lies in adopting techniques of the private sector aimed at promoting efficiency, effectiveness and performance improvement in the delivery of public services (Kim & Han, 2015). NPM consist of a number of contemporary ideas, principles and practices employed to describe the public sector reform agenda that attained prominence in the 1980s. It is characterized by the adoption of private sector management concepts and styles, the introduction of quasi-markets and contracting processes as well as the application of explicit standards and measures of performance (Glynn & Murphy, 1996).

NPM emerged in Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries

of United States, Britain, France, Australia, Canada, Germany, etc. and gradually spread to other parts of the world, particularly Asia and Africa as a result of the influence of international financial institutions such as the World Bank (WB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Rubakula, 2014).

Towards the end of the second half of 20<sup>th</sup> century, a significant number of developing countries decided to adopt the market-based economy as foisted on them by external donors as a precondition for obtaining financial assistance. In Africa, public sector reforms began with the introduction of structural economic adjustment such as free trade, competition, privatization, and limited state intervention (De Waal, 2007). Ever since, there have been growing number of countries in Africa which have accepted and are operating the NPM practices. Nigeria as a country has also not been left out in this. Aside the adoption of NPM principles in the management of the public sector as prerequisite for accessing aids and financial assistance from international governments and financial institutions, Nigeria's public sector was bedevilled with political patronage, nepotism, widespread corruption, mismanagement, over bloated civil service, etc. Hence, the need for reform to bring about economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the public sector.

### **Statement of Problem**

Although Africa and Nigeria in particular have accepted and are implementing the NPM principles and practices as specified by donor governments and international financial institutions, implementation is still very challenging as submitted by Rubakula (2014) and Puttaswamy (2014) due to poor infrastructure, lack of experience in operating market, lack of managerial capacity and lack of political will. Furthermore, lack of sense of ownership, weak capacity to carry out the reforms and coercive conditionality tied to governance reforms have put African countries in difficult situation (Kajibwa, 2013). Hence, public sector in Africa and Nigeria specifically are yet characterised by political patronage, nepotism, widespread corruption, mismanagement, over bloated civil service, etc. As result, the Nigerian public service still exudes inefficiency and ineffectiveness in the delivery of public services. It is against this backdrop that this study attempts a review of challenges facing implementation of NPM in Nigerian public sector.

### **Objective of the Study**

The study basically attempts a review of challenges of new public management in Nigeria, with particular focus on the Nigerian public service. Specifically, the study seeks to achieve the following:

- a. To identify prominent factors that have posed as challenges to the NPM in Nigerian public service.
- a. To proffer ways on how identified prominent factors posing as challenges to NPM in Nigerian public service can be surmounted.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Conceptual Review**

The emergence of the concept 'New Public Management', according to Barzelay (2001) has origin in 'two seminal articles' by Aucoin (1990) and Hood (1991). NPM is an expression used by scholars and professionals to refer to distinct styles, patterns or strategies of public sector management that have come to the fore in almost three decades, notably in the United Kingdom, United States, Australia Canada, Germany, etc. NPM consists, essentially, of two sets of ideas: economics-based theories and managerialism. The theories which initially underpinned NPM were public choice theory and agency theory, as well as transaction-cost analysis had their origin in the field of economics and were referred to as the 'new institutional economics' (Boston, 1996 cited in Whitecombe, 2008). Public choice theory had influence on institutional design in a number of jurisdictions, and the application of one aspect resulted in the restructuring of government sector organizations to separate policy ministries from operational departments. On the other hand, agency theory spells out the relationship between principals and agents and focused on accountability relationships. The other component of NPM was the

managerialism movement, which imported generic private sector management practices into the public sector in order to improve performance and increase efficiency and accountability (Whitecombe, 2008).

The NPM paradigm emerged as a substitute to the traditional public administration. It was aimed at promoting efficiency, productivity, improved service delivery and accountability in the public sector and emphasizes result-orientation as opposed to the process-orientation of traditional public administration (Hughes 2003). NPM advocates a reduction in the exclusive reliance on public bureaucracy for service delivery in place of increased use of private sector and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as alternative mechanisms of service delivery. NPM supports de-bureaucratization, offloading, downsizing or rightsizing the public bureaucracy, greater reliance on the private sector, service delivery through contracting out and outsourcing, public-private partnership, competition and reliance on market forces, and creation of an enabling environment for the growth of private enterprise (Dzimhiri, 2008). It is characterized by cutting red tape, shifting from systems in which people are accountable for following rules to systems in which they are accountable for achieving results; putting customers first; empowering employees to get results, and producing better government for less (Hughes 2003; Kaul 2000; Dzimhiri, 2008). To Hughes (2003), NPM has five core principles and they are:

- ✚ Downsizing - reducing the size and scope of government
- ✚ Managerialism - using business protocols in government
- ✚ Decentralization - moving decision making closer to the service recipients
- ✚ De-bureaucratization - restructuring government to emphasize results rather than processes
- ✚ Privatization - directing the allocation of governmental goods and services to outside firms

### **Features of New Public Management**

According to Hood (1991), the NPM has the following seven key elements or doctrines:

- ✚ ***Hands on Professional Management:*** emphasises professional management, which involves managers being given substantive responsibility for management.
- ✚ ***Explicit Standards and Measures of Performance:*** involves having a well-defined goals and objectives as well as targets and success indicators expressed in measurable and quantitative terms with the aim of promoting greater accountability in the use of resources.
- ✚ ***Output Controls and Entrepreneurial Management:*** involves the use of performance and programme budgeting mechanisms as against line item budgeting, long term planning and strategic management of organization.
- ✚ ***Disaggregation of Units:*** involves the breaking up of monolithic ministries into corporatized units around products.
- ✚ ***Competition in the Public Service:*** through the instruments of privatization, commercialization and deregulation, NPM promotes competition in public service. The healthy rivalry among producers –both public and private sectors, is expected to bring about improved standards and lower prices in public service delivery as well as breeds innovations in organizational operations.
- ✚ ***Private Sector Styles of Management:*** emphasises flexibility in hiring and rewards which are tied to performance evaluation and not rules. Creativity and ingenuity are largely encouraged as shift away from bureaucracy or traditional public service management.
- ✚ ***Discipline and Parsimony:*** involve the application of information and communication technology (ICT), cut-in on union demands and limiting compliance cost to business, all with the aim to do more with less.

### **Public Service**

The Public Service is commonly described as employees of government who are saddled with the responsible of ensuring proper functioning of government via implementation of government policies. In other words, it refers to persons who constitute the permanent officials of the various



government departments and ministries that are responsible for the execution of government policies and programmes (Adebayo, 1981). Specifically, within the Nigerian context, and in relation to the task of engendering development, Olugbemi sees the public service as “the mill through which those acquired and vastly expanded responsibilities of the country's government(s) are processed (Olugbemi, 1987 cited in Ibieta, 2013). Therefore, the public service in Nigeria is made up of workers in various government ministries, parastatals and agencies. However, workers in the inner core government ministries that are also known as civil service are separated from other parastatals and agencies which include the Nigerian Railways Corporation, the then National Electric Power Authority, Central Bank of Nigeria, National Drug Law Enforcement Agency, Universities, Polytechnics, Colleges of Education, the Armed Forces, Police and other para-military establishments such as the Prisons and Customs Services and the Federal Road Safety Commission (Ibieta, 2013).

### **Empirical Review**

Quite a substantial study exists on NPM, its implementation, impact as well as challenges in both developed and developing countries. This section of the paper is dedicated to the review of a couple of them. Irene (2019) in his study on the new public management and public sector reforms in Nigeria submitted that a number of the NPM key features are still begging for proper implementation in the Nigerian public sector, as such the Nigerian public sector is a mix of the characteristics of traditional public administration and that of new public management. The study, adopting a descriptive method concluded that though a number of reforms in the Nigerian civil service had helped achieve better service delivery to the people, poor implementation of the reform programs has made set goals and objectives largely unachieved.

The study of Umaru (2018) on impact of the NPM Paradigm on the operation of Federal establishments in Borno State, Nigeria revealed that there is a significant improvement in the performance of the staff and the quality of service delivery in the Federal establishments under study. However, the policy was not being properly implemented as both federal establishments and contracted firms still perform similar tasks. In addition, outsource firms given contracts, failed to provide enough qualified staff to augment the short-fall in government establishments. The study, a survey research concluded that the outsourcing of services has nevertheless improved the quality of service delivery in the Nigerian public sector.

In another study by Yusuph & Guohua (2017) on the challenges for implementing New Public Management reforms in Local Government Authorities (LGAs) in Tanzania, it was confirmed that NPM is an array of reforms which have a direct association with Local Government Reform Programmes (LGRP) being implemented in Tanzania since 2000, however, it has not effectively work in Tanzania LGAs. This was attributed to a number of challenges facing LGAs which include complicated nature of its administration and management practices as well as political and accountability structures and systems. The study concludes by recommending that LGAs should be guaranteed complete autonomy in managing its affairs and should be free from political interference. The study adopted the survey research design generating its data from both primary and secondary data sources.

In yet another study by Rubakula (2014) on the NPM and its challenges in Africa, it was revealed that due to various challenges confronting the reform process, NPM reforms have continued to be partially implemented in Africa, however since the adoption, some African countries have demonstrated improvement in their public sectors. The study suggested that in order to address these challenges, deliberate efforts of taking into consideration of local context before implementing any outside based reform be made.

Ibieta (2013) studied on the role of the New Public Management (NPM) as a reform initiative that can facilitate the effectiveness of public sector organizations in Nigeria submitted that a reformed and well-focused public service anchored on the tenets of NPM offer a ready tool for effective public service delivery in Nigeria. Hence, structural barriers and other encumbrances to the implementation of public sector reforms be tackled on a sustainable basis. The study draws heavily on secondary sources of data collection backed by the analytical approach

Though various NPM models have been adopted by many countries of the world, studies on their implementation, impact and challenges, particularly in Nigeria are not exhaustive. However, studies reviewed above have concentrated on analysis of NPM implementation, impact as well as challenges in different government institutions in Nigeria and beyond, none holistically focused on challenges of the NPM in Nigeria's public sector. This study, therefore sought to contribute to the existing literature, particularly on challenges of NPM in the public sector of Nigeria.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The new public management has several theoretical underpinnings, however, for the purpose of this paper, the public choice approach is adopted. The 'new institutional economics' theories, particularly the public choice theory, managerialism and principal-agent theory provide the theoretical foundation upon which the NPM was propounded. The public choice approach to public administration began in the 1960s. NPM largely draws on rational and public choice with emphasis on performance measurement.

The major thrust of the public choice theory is that market considerations offer the optimal mechanism for service delivery and decision making. Vincent Ostrom, a key proponent of the public choice submitted that the traditional doctrines of bureaucratic administration be substituted for 'democratic administration'. He wrote in his book titled 'The Intellectual Crisis in American Public Administration' that "bureaucratic structures are necessary, but not adequate structures for a productive and responsive public service economy". He further averred that 'perfection in the hierarchical arrangement of a professionally trained public service, accountable to a single central authority will shrink the capability of a larger administrative system to respond to diverse preferences of the citizens among many various public goods and services including coping with varied environmental conditions. Ostrom suggests that a variety of different organizational arrangements can be employed to provide different public goods and services, whereby such organizations can be coordinated through various multi-organizational arrangements (Irene, 2019). The emphasis of public choice approach according to Philip & Daganda (2013) are summarized as follows:

- Anti-bureaucratic approach
- Institutional pluralism, that is, plurality of agencies to promote consumers preferences
- Diverse democratic decision-making centres
- Application of economic logic to the problems of public distribution
- Decentralization (dispersed administrative authority)
- Popular participation in administration

However, public choice approach de-emphasises:

- Single-centred administrative power system (homocentric)
- Separation of politics from administration
- Hierarchical administration
- Rational and neutral bureaucracy.

Theorists of public choice generally argued that best outcome can only be achieved in a situation where maximum role is accorded market forces and minimum role for government. Hence, a reduction in governments' participation in the provision of goods and services while markets play a larger role. Public choice theorists further argued that market system are better mechanisms for accountability as against bureaucratic system. Public choice offers competition and choice as key alternatives and has its use flow from the belief that behaviour could be assumed to be modelled (Irene, 2019).

### **Methodology**

The study adopts the content analysis approach where data used for analysis were obtained from published and unpublished works, i.e. books, reputable journal and magazines articles, as well as seminar papers. The choice of content analysis as method of data generation was informed by nature of the study (a review of challenges of the NPM in Nigeria's education sector), as it will pose a very herculean task within the time available to undertake an investigation of this kind via empirical study.

### **Results: Challenges of NPM in Nigeria's Public Sector**

As a result of the inefficiency and ineffectiveness that the Nigerian public sector exudes, the sector has continued to witness reforms upon reforms since its emergence. The introduction of NPM was expected to quickly address the ills in the public sector. However, after over two decades of its implementation, the sector still leaves much to be desired in terms of efficiency and effectiveness in public service provision. Studies have been carried out in order to identify challenges associated with the NPM in the public sector. This section of the paper reviews some of the identified challenges.

Nwali, Johnson & Oganezi (2019) in their investigation on the challenges and prospects of privatization of public enterprises in Nigeria in line with NPM, submitted that corruption, indiscipline, suspicion, transparency and national sovereignty among others were the major challenges of privatisation in Nigeria. Oparanma (2016) in his effort to examine impact of downsizing as an NPM strategy in Nigerian public organisations revealed a sharp fall in morale and productivity of employees and by extension the organisation. He submitted that morale, climate and culture are negatively impacted during layoffs and downsizing. In such situation, survivors of the exercise exhibit some degree of insecurity as they become apprehensive of their fate in the company in the near future.

In another study by Clement & Ejefobihi (2015) on downsizing as a strategic corporate tool for economic growth of Nigeria averred that poor execution and management; inability of organisations to look beyond the traditional 3-C's approach (principles of command, control and compartmentalization) to organization design and management; resentment and resistance to changes within the organisations result in the loss of productivity, efficiency and competitiveness; and employee resentment and concern, loss of morale, lack of innovation and creation are some of the challenges that have bedevilled implementation of the reform.

Agboola & Lamidi (2017) in their investigation of the issues and challenges NPM reforms in Nigeria's democratic governance posited that the adoption of NPM has improved delivery of social service to the citizens, and reduced corruption in the public service through the implementation of e-government and SERVICOM initiatives to the citizens, but that the NPM reforms have been marred by lack of political will, weak capacity and poor infrastructural facilities necessary to execute the NPM reforms appropriately.

Similarly, Okonkwo & Obidike (2016) review of the commercialisation and policy in Nigeria, an offshoot of NPM, revealed that the socio-political and ideological underpinnings behind NPM as conceptualized by the neo-classical and neo-liberal schools of thought; uncooperative attitude of some government officials (enterprises managers and staff); weak market alternatives as applicable to poor developing countries; and weak government capacity have posed serious challenge to the success of the NPM in the Nigerian public sector.

In yet another study on NPM strategy of privatisation and commercialisation in Nigeria by Asaolu, Oyesanmi & Oladele (2014) revealed that although NPM reform of privatisation and commercialisation have improved public sector organisation's performance to an appreciable extent, especially in the aspect of efficient utilisation of resources, higher profits to capital employed ratios, and little slide in debts, as well as total asset ratios, it has however had some drawbacks in terms of increase in price of public goods and services in excess of 200%, sales of the public assets to the few rich; perpetuation of social inequality; rise in unemployment and increase in mass poverty.

Irene (2019), from his investigation on NPM in Nigeria submitted that most reforms programmes failed have failed to meet the expectations of Nigerians because many of the reformers conceive the reform programmes as linear phenomenon instead of complex issues with multidimensional attachments. This submission was corroborated when Olaopa in 2013, described the situation as "paradox of reform dynamism" which according to him the public sector is locked into the necessity of reform initiatives without the appropriate enthusiasm to truly understand, adapt, and execute the intended reform in the pursuit of good governance and better service delivery".

The study of Afegbua & Ejaloniba (2016) on issues in public sector reforms submitted that reforms in Nigeria lacks political backing and supporting its implementation with respect to general



acceptability. This means that it neither commands general acceptability nor enjoys the needed support. Stating further, they asserted that every aspect of the NPM, especially privatisation has been greeted with complaints, condemnation and general outcry, for the simple reason that its principles negate the acceptable norm of collective ownership of public goods and the consequent sharing of responsibilities and benefits as well as the increased poverty level associated with the reform. In a similar vein, Igbokwe (2017) posited that public service reform in Nigeria particularly the NPM have failed to yield significant results as a result of impediments such as bribery and corruption, federal character principle, insecurity, and the discipline of execution and therefore concluded that the problem with reform is not in the theory but in the lack of attention to reform implementation.

From the findings from their study, Sanusi & Ahmad (2011) posited that given the nature and the character of Nigeria's public service coupled with the political and economic environment, NPM reforms may likely if any, achieve minimal results in shaping Nigeria's system of public administration as a result of the structure of public service which is at variance with the ingredients of NPM reforms, especially its market characteristics. Thus, NPM reforms have low practical relevance as far as the crisis of Nigeria's public sector is concerned. This argument was corroborated by Pollitt (1994) where he notes that NPM reform may work better in some context than others. The public service sector covers a wide range of activities, some of which have high technological content (e.g. telecommunication) and others low, some are person-centred (e.g. health and education) and some not; some competitive, some very hard to remould into a competitive format. Thus, it is important to bear all these in mind, because they decrease or increase the chances of NPM being a "good fit" in crisis states. According to Sanusi and Ahmad (2011), the Nigerian public service is characterised by politics, nepotism and favouritism; unqualified manpower; poor condition of services; institutionalized corruption and erosion of ethical values;

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Nigeria just like other developing countries especially, have accepted and are implementing the NPM principles and practices as specified by donor governments and international financial institutions. However, the Nigerian public service still exudes inefficiency and ineffectiveness in the delivery of public services. This was the basis of the paper. The study attempts a review of challenges of NPM in Nigerian public sector. Based on literature and empirical studies reviewed, the paper came to the conclusion that socio-political and ideological underpinnings, weak governance capacity, weak market alternatives, poor infrastructure, incompetent staff, lack of political will, negative perceptions of reforms (resentment and resistance) and corruption are among factors that have accounted for the continued inefficient and ineffective nature of the public service in Nigeria. However beautiful the NPM principles may seem or regardless of its potency in other countries, particularly in developed countries, it should be acknowledged that environment and circumstances are peculiar. As such, Nigeria should ensure that reforms are always considered in respect to our peculiar situation and environment instead of accepting reforms from donor governments and international financial institutions hook, line and sinker.

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