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Obi Yves Mary Virginia

Ph.D., Department of Public
Administration, Chukwuemeka
Odumegwu Ojukwu University,
Anambra, Nigeria

E-governance and teachers recruitment in Anambra state schools system: The Soludo experience

Obi Yves Mary Virginia

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Abstract

The study investigated the effectiveness and appropriateness of e-governance practices for public service delivery in Anambra state using the 2022/23 teachers' recruitment exercise conducted by His Excellency, Professor Charles Soludo. It examined whether the e-governance administration of Anambra state teachers' recruitment exercise was adequate and effective; and if e-governance advanced transparency, fairness, and equity during the recruitment exercise. Online survey method, a researcher-structured questionnaire, and a sample of 306 participants derived from a population of 6,120 using Ejifugha (1998) sampling technique were adopted. A systematic sampling method was adopted to collect data from participants while tables and SPSS tool were used to analyse the data. Results of analyses reveal that e-governance practices were adequate and effective for the teachers' recruitment, and that poor network connection together with network crash hindered the process. It further observed that e-governance did not enhance transparency, fairness, and equity due to political, nepotism, and parochial issues. The research among others recommends government intervention and investment in ICTs and e-governance management frameworks, and the re-visitation of the employment exercise using the e-governance generated results for purposes of transparency, fairness, and equity.

Keywords: E-governance, teachers' recruitment, ICTs, CBT, public service delivery, Anambra state

Introduction

The emergence of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) changed not only the structure, instruments, forms, and speed of information dissemination but also the pattern and systems of production, distribution and exchange of goods and services in the public and private sector. ICTs became instruments and means of goals' actualisation, changed the patterns, processes, and duration of production of goods and services (Heeks, 2011) [24] and therefrom became an indispensable tool for management. Institutions of governance at all levels adapt it in their management of material, human, and financial resources (Bedi, Singh & Srivastava, 2001; Holmes, 2001) [11, 25]. Thus, ICTs revolutionized the dynamics and patterns of human activities and brought changes to government's patterns of relating with citizens, planning, and executing programmes (Ibikunle & Sarumi, 2012; Akman, *et al.*, 2005) [26, 4]. The changes became a worldwide project of reforms since the turn of the 21st century (Basu, 2004) [10]. As at 2001, 88.9% of 190 UN member states with internet connection that have the capacity to deliver information and services adopted ICTs powered system as a form of governance as code-named e-governance (UN/ASP, 2002) [43].

This application of technology as instrument and means of interaction between groups and individuals, and government and citizens for purposes of simplifying and improving the management of resources for better actualisation of goals termed e-governance, characterises governance in the 21st century. The concept e-governance, therefore, refers to the application of ICTs in human resource management, fiscal administration, programme and project management, and delivery of various forms of services in different sectors of the society (see Ibikunle & Sarumi, 2012; Ojo, 2019) [26, 33]. Backus (2001) [8] conceptualised it as the application of ICTs as means of interaction between government and its citizens, government and businesses, as well as between various inter and intra government organs/agencies to simplify, quicken and improve transparency, accountability and effective and quality service delivery. Similarly, other scholars such as Baidyabati (2012) [9], Ojo (2014) [34], Estevez & Janowski (2013) [19], Fatile (2012) [20], view e-governance simply as the use of ICT by

Corresponding Author:

Obi Yves Mary Virginia

Ph.D., Department of Public
Administration, Chukwuemeka
Odumegwu Ojukwu University,
Anambra, Nigeria

Institutions such as government to execute the planning, implementation, and monitoring of their programmes, projects, and services. ICTs as used here include the internet, the World Wide Web, the internet, cell phones and computers, and other electronic accessories.

One can distil from the above definitions that the general goals of e-governance include ensuring transparency, accountability and responsive, timely, and effective service delivery. Other goals include improving the quality and cost-effectiveness of operations, democratising the process by ensuring public participation in policy formulation and implementation, entrenching standards and best practices, and elimination of red-tapeism/middleman syndrome in public service (Ndou, 2004) ^[30]. In addition, ICTs enable government to digitally code, process, store, and transmit information to a wider population of the people with ease and speed irrespective of distance. Further, it tends to provide the masses access to information concerning government policies and activities.

These goals and/or roles of e-governance led to its adoption in Nigeria public service as a form of reform and panacea to its prevailing age long deficiencies, inefficiency, and ineffectiveness (Obi, Uzor & Chukwurah, 2020) ^[31]. The Nigerian public service is characteristically poor, inefficient and ineffective, inconsistent with citizen preferences and costly, rigid, and lacks accountability, transparency, and commitment (World Bank, 2012) ^[45]. Precisely, in 2001, the federal government announced the adaptation of ICTs in its services as a policy of national importance (see Olatokun & Adebayo, 2012) ^[35]. Subsequently, government enacted the National Information Technology Development Act of 2007 and established an Agency with powers to “plan, develop and promote the use of information technology in Nigeria” (Olatokun & Adebayo, 2012, p. 499) ^[35]. To consolidate this, government established the Ministry of Communications Technology in 2011 with the powers to streamlining ICTs development and progress in line with the national plan for e-governance (Omerie & Omeire, 2014) ^[36]. Further, government established the National Media Commission to supervise the policy while the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) was established to supervise the ICT policy (Modu, 2021; Fraser-Moleketi & Senghor, 2011). The National e-Government Strategies Limited (NeGST)-a tripartite joint venture involving government-represented by NITDA, private and financial investors and technology partners with ownership share of 5%, 15% and 80% respectively (Fatile, 2012; Omeire & Omeire, 2014) ^[20, 36] was formed as a viable unifying national framework for the adoption and implementation of e-governance across government agencies and their customers.

The above structures offer great opportunities for integrated, accountable and efficient public service delivery and citizens’ satisfaction. They provide the “link between ICTs applications, optimization of government operations and achievement of important social development goals” (Obi, Uzor & Chukwurah, 2020, p. 51) ^[31]. Fundamentally, the e-governance regime offers opportunities for the collection, storage, processing, and diffusion of enormous quantities of information at minimal cost, and enables networking, interaction and communication between government agencies and the citizens in the course of policymaking and implementation (Crede & Mansell, 1998) ^[13]. This tends to maintain and strengthen good governance, delivers

maximum value for taxpayers’ money and at minimum cost and time, facilitates responsiveness, eliminates corruption, reduces nepotism and favouritism; engenders transparency, accountability, equity and fairness in public service delivery (Gupta & Jana, 2003; Muchie, 2011; Danfulani, 2013) ^[22, 29, 14]. It improves the coordination of public sector procedures and management (Dasgupta, & Gupta, 2008) ^[15] and helps government to reduce errors and improve consistency of outcomes (Ainabor, 2011; Ambali, 2010) ^[3, 5], achieve effective public service delivery (Worrall, 2011) ^[46].

On the part of labour or workforce, e-governance led to workers’ empowerment, improvement and skills development. Its adoption has led to the modernisation of service delivery processes, and acquisition of new sets of skills and basic technical knowledge required to thrive in the internet regime through in-service training and further studies (Adekunle, 2018; Elnaga & Imran 2013) ^[2, 18]. Equally, it has also changed the configuration of public sector workforce, created skills gaps in many organisations, and serves as instrument for job advertisement, recruitment, training, and placement (Waddill, 2018; Thite, 2018) ^[44, 39].

Scholars argue that the impact of e-governance on human resources and its management is dual in nature. Its adoption normally leads to human resource redundancy and the downsizing of workforce, outsourcing and ‘offshoring’ policies, adoption of part-time employment and work from home policies and more flexible conditions of service (Palmer, Dunford & Buchanan, 2017) ^[38]. These tend to weaken labour unionism and industrial relations system; undermine job retention and longevity, employee commitment and performance output (Bersin, 2015; Accenture, 2015; Angrave *et al.*, 2016) ^[12, 1, 7]. Computers and robots increasingly replace most of the manual work/services such as courier activities (Palmer, Dunford & Buchanan, 2017) ^[38].

Nevertheless, the inability to deploy the appropriate ICT infrastructure and lack of adequate internet connection hinder the effectiveness of e-governance and appropriate sharing of information between government agencies, the masses and job applicants in Nigeria (Ibikunle & Sarumi, 2012) ^[26]. Further, Nigeria lacks the requisite infrastructure that permits government and its citizens to adopt different access methods, cellular phones, satellite receivers, kiosks, etc. in the management of their relations and information. In addition, majority of the public servants particularly those occupying the administrative/command positions are not ICT compliant. There are few staff with adequate ICT skills with inadequate human resources training for those that lack the skills while e-governance requires hybrid human capacities. Similarly, apart from computer crime and freedom of information Act, government has not been able to initiate policies, rules, and legislative changes required to address the issues of electronic activities such as electronic signatures, electronic archiving, data protection, intellectual property right and copyright issues. Thus, there is no guarantee for privacy, security and legal recognition of electronic interactions, and electronic Signatures in Nigeria. Equally, public institutions in Nigeria limit their activities to a simple transfer of their information and services online without taking into consideration the re-engineering process, which it elicit. These factors seem to have significantly limited the impact of e-governance in Nigeria, and have elicited innovations and procurements, and policy changes in the bid to addressing them in the last decade.

However, these innovations and procurements, and policy changes, their impact on e-governance, and challenges have received little or no attention in the literature. Consequently, and using the recently concluded teachers' recruitment exercise conducted by the administration of Professor Charles Soludo, the governor of Anambra state, this paper attempts to fill the gap. During the 2022 Workers' Day celebration in Awka-the state capital, the governor directed the Head of Service and the state ministry of education to recruit 5,000 new teachers into the primary and secondary schools system. As part of the directive, the governor stated, "This process must be transparent and merit based" (Ugwu, 2022, p.1) ^[41]. However, at the end of the recruitment exercise involving over 40,000 applicants, which was computer/internet based or administered through e-governance, there were allegations of scam, lack of fairness, corruption, and nepotism (Ozaji, 2023) ^[37]. Advertisement and submission of application were carried out electronically, 31,800 qualified applicants were shortlisted and online recruitment or CBT examination conducted on Saturday, June 4, 2022 with most of the shortlisted candidates participating. However, Ujumadu (2022) ^[42] and Obianeri (2022) ^[32] noted that some applicants did not receive invitation to participate, the examination website failed to open in many locations an hour into the examination time, while the site even crashed in the course of the examination. Due to these shortcomings in the first examination, a 2nd CBT examination took place and thereafter, oral interview and certificate verification was conducted to conclude the exercise.

The average of candidates' CBT examination and interview results formed their recruitment score and government fixed 60 points as cut-off mark or benchmark for the appointment. The complete documentation of all these was released by government on the recruitment portal/website, yet, many of the successful applicants were not employed (Ozaji, 2023) ^[37]. Obianeri (2022, p. 3) ^[32] reporting one of the aggrieved applicants noted, "Majority of us who scored above 70% have this same issue. Some of us scored 90%, without being chosen, while people who scored 50% were taken. Nobody is telling us why it is so and why our names were removed at the last minute". Consequently, this inquiry, seeks answers to the following questions:

1. Was the e-governance administration of Anambra state teachers' recruitment exercise by Soludo's regime adequate and effective?
2. Did e-governance advance transparency, fairness and equity during the Anambra state teachers' recruitment exercise by Soludo's regime?

Methods

This paper adopts online survey method of data gathering due to the adoption of e-governance system with high-level communication technologies during the Anambra state

teachers' recruitment exercise by Governor Soludo's administration. Unlike other forms of survey, online survey is digital, less expensive and does not require the deployment of a large number of human resources and administrative clearance and does not consume time. To generate data using this method, a softcopy of the comprehensive CBT and interview results of the 40,000 applicants was downloaded from Anambra state ministry of education website and through careful examination, a total number 6,120 successful applicants that forms the population of study were identified.

To determine the sample size, this paper applied Ejjifugha (1998) ^[17] principle, which holds that if the population is in the few hundreds, the sample size should be 40%, if it is in the many hundreds, it should be 20% of the population, but if the population runs in thousands, 5% of the population should constitute the sample. In the present study, with the population as 6,120, the sample = 306. The sample size is divided into two equal parts of 153 respondents that were systematically drawn from candidates for primary and secondary schools' system respectively. In each case, the respondents were serially selected from the list of successful candidates.

The researcher contacted the proposed respondents and introduced the purpose of the inquiry through email addresses obtained from the Anambra state ministry of education website. With their consents, a softcopy of researcher's structured questionnaire, which formed the primary instrument of data collection, was emailed to the respondents after validation and positive reliability test. The data generated with the questionnaire was thereafter analysed using tables, percentage formula, and SPSS version 20.0 software to determine the central tendencies and deviations of their responses to research questions for purposes of inference.

Data analysis and findings

Respondents' socio-demographic information

Out of the 306 respondents, 82 (i.e. 26.8%) are male and 224 (i.e. 73.2%) are females; 123 (i.e. 40.2%) are married while 183 representing 59.8% are single or divorced. An analysis of their age bracket reveals that 142 respondents representing 46.4% fall within 18-27 years, 151 representing 49.3% fall within 28-37years, while 13 respondents i.e. 4.3% fall within 38 years and above. The data equally reveals that 56 respondents i.e. 18.3% posses National Certificate of Education (NCE), 229 i.e. 74.8% posses B.Sc./B.Ed./HND, while 21 respondents representing 6.9% posses M.Sc. /M.Ed. in addition to first degree. From these statistics, the respondents are reliable.

Research Question 1: Was the e-governance administration of Anambra state teachers' recruitment exercise by Soludo's regime adequate and effective?

Table 1: Results of SPSS Analyses of responses to questions

S/N	Sub-Research questions	Grand Mean	Stand. Deviat.	Standard Error	Tests of Between-Subjects Effects	Sig.	Pairwise Comparisons
1.	You learnt about teachers' recruitment advert by Anambra state government and submitted your application through internet/www platforms.	4.42	.721	.022	519.111	0.000	@ 95% confidence Interval, no adjustments
2.	You encountered network connection and ICTs difficulties during the process of applying for teaching appointment with Anambra state ministry of education.	4.14	.897	.027	804.231	0.000	@ 95% confidence Interval, no adjustments
3.	The examination website failed to open early during the exercise in most places, while it crashed in the course of the examination.	4.01	.144	.226	128.013	0.000	@ 95% confidence Interval, no adjustments
4.	The selection processes during the teachers' recruitment exercise i.e. CBT exams, interview and release of results were distorted by network and therefore, ineffective.	2.01	.118	.226	109.221	0.002	@ 95% confidence Interval, no adjustments

Source: SPSS analysis of responses to research questions

Results of analysis of responses to sub-questions 1-4 in table 1 shows that majority of the respondents agreed (considering their responses grand mean of 4.42, 4.14, and 4.01) that the e-governance administration of Anambra state teachers' recruitment exercise by Soludo's regime was adequate and effective. The grand means of these responses reveal sig. differences of 0.000 whereas the difference is significant @ 0.005 and the pairwise comparison of the differences reveals no modification. Nevertheless, majority of them with a grand mean of 2.01 with a standard deviation

of .118 that showcased a sig. difference of .002 disagreed with the statement that network problems rendered e-governance ineffective during the recruitment exercise. Consequently, e-governance administration of Anambra state teachers' recruitment exercise by Soludo's regime was adequate and effective.

Research Question 2: Did e-governance advance transparency, fairness, and equity during the Anambra state teachers' recruitment exercise by Soludo's regime?

Table 2: Results of SPSS Analyses of responses to questions

S/N	Sub-Research questions	Grand Mean	Stand. Deviat.	Standard Error	Tests of Between-Subjects Effects	Sig.	Pairwise Comparisons
1.	Many appointment letters were not released because their owners were not qualified.	2.64	.118	.356	164.520	.004	@ 95% confidence Interval, no adjustments
2.	The reasons advanced for withholding many of the appointment letters were political, nepotism, and parochial in nature.	4.14	.897	.027	804.231	.000	@ 95% confidence Interval, no adjustments
3.	E-governance mechanism was equally applied to resolve discrepancies and crisis that characterised teachers' employment exercise by Soludo's regime.	1.01	.338	.834	211.017	.001	@ 95% confidence Interval, no adjustments
4.	The adaptation of e-governance by Soludo's administration for the employment of teachers in Anambra state enhanced the principles of fairness, transparency, accountability and equity in the state public service.	2.64	.118	.356	164.520	.004	@ 95% confidence Interval, no adjustments

Source: SPSS analysis of responses to research questions.

SPSS analysis of responses to questions on whether e-governance advanced transparency, fairness, and equity during the Anambra state teachers' recruitment exercise by Soludo's regime in table 3 reveals that majority of the respondents (with grand means of 2.64, 1.01 & 2.64) disagreed. The grand means of these responses reveal non-sig. differences of 0.004, 0.001, & 0.004 because the difference is significant @ .005 and the pairwise comparison of the differences reveals no modification. Nevertheless, majority of them with a grand mean of 4.14 with a standard deviation of 0.897 that showcased a sig. difference of .000 agreed with the statement that the reasons advanced for withholding many of the appointment letters were political, nepotism and parochial in nature. Consequently, political, nepotism and parochial factors were the major hindrances or limitations of the impact of e-governance on HRM in Anambra state.

Discussion of findings

One of the major findings of this paper holds that e-

governance was adequate and highly effective in the management of human resource recruitment during Anambra state teachers' recruitment exercise conducted by Soludo's regime. Although poor network connection and website interrupted the process, proper remedy was provided to cushion their effects. E-governance provided easy and accessible platform that enabled the applicants to submit their application, participate in the examinations, view results, and receive instructions from the ministry from different locations regardless of distance, at low cost, short time frame, and less risk. This finding is in tandem with previous observations made by scholars such as Dawes (2010), Amujiri (2021) [6] using different environments to the effect that e-governance enhances public service delivery, eliminates wastes, saves, time and permits inclusiveness in administrative processes.

Further, this paper observes equally that lack of or poor network connection hindered the progress of the teachers' recruitment exercise in Anambra state. This finding corroborates the finding made earlier by Ibikunle & Sarumi

(2012) ^[26] using different environment to the effect that lack of appropriate ICT infrastructure and adequate internet connection hinder information sharing between government agencies, the masses and job applicants in Nigeria. The implication of this finding is that the federal government needs to upgrade and expand the country's ICT facilities for an enhanced performance in this era of e-governance. This will guarantee effective services and information delivery in human resources management.

The third and a major findings by this paper is that in spite of the effectiveness of e-governance, political, nepotism, and parochial factors undermined its impact on the recruitment of teachers' by Anambra state ministry of education. This finding is at variance with earlier findings by Ibikunle & Sarumi (2012) ^[26] which identified lack of appropriate policies, rules, and legislative changes required for effective e-governance regime; lack of appropriate ICT infrastructure and adequate internet connection; prevalence of non-ICT compliant staff, lack of adequate ICT skills, and inadequate human resources training as major hindrances. However, the findings of this paper seems collaborate earlier findings made by Jäger & Petry (2018) ^[27] and Thomas (2020) ^[40] among others to the effect that certain environmental factors such as infrastructure, culture, skills acquisition, policies etc. influence e-governance and its impact on service delivery. Nevertheless, none of the studies observed that political, nepotism, and parochial factors hinder the effectiveness of e-governance. This, therefore, forms a major contribution of the paper to the academia.

Conclusion and Recommendations

E-governance was adequate and highly effective in human resource management in Anambra state vis-à-vis teachers' recruitment exercise conducted by the ministry of education under Professor Soludo administration. However, poor network connection and website disruption hindered the process, which led the ministry of education to reschedule the CBT examination as a panacea. This study, therefore, contributed immensely in the area of exploring the challenges of e-governance platform towards effective public service delivery in Third World countries such as Nigeria. The importance attached to this is defined by the poor state of ICT and infrastructure development in Nigeria. Essentially, the study identified political, nepotism, and parochial factors as constituting significant challenges for the effective implementation and impact of e-governance initiatives towards public accountability, fairness, transparency, and equity. The prevalence of these factors, which undermine the effectiveness of e-governance evidences the rudimentary nature of the growth and development of e-governance practices in Nigeria. However, this does not undermine the relevance and need of e-governance in the transformation and growth of public service delivery in Nigeria. Nigeria's public services have essential benefit to derive from the practice of e-governance in the area of human resource management, information dissemination, efficient service delivery, transparency, accountability etc. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between e-governance, human resource management and effective public service delivery in Nigeria.

Consequently, this study recommends strong government commitment to the acquisition of ICTs infrastructure and the support for e-government initiatives in Nigeria. This

requires the expansion of the scope of state fiscal activities to include mandatory funding of e-government projects across the three levels of governance i.e. federal, state, and local government. Allocations for such ICTs infrastructure and e-government initiatives in their budgets should be commensurate with expected outcomes that are defined by existing communication, public service management, and governance policies.

Considering the state of the economy, government should explore foreign assistance in procuring and installing capital-intensive projects. Adjunct to this, the government should embark on the local production of some equipment like computers through pro-friendly environmental policy and frameworks, grants, and aid to private concerns.

In addition, the public service commissions responsible for human resources at all level of governance should introduce in-service training, enlightenment and skill acquisition workshops and seminars for all ICT non-compliant staff and others for purposes of modernisation and effective implementation of e-governance. Further, ICTs skill and education should be adopted as one of the essential criteria for promotion and employment of certain administrative cadre in the public service.

Finally, Anambra state ministry of education should re-visit the 2022/23 teachers' recruitment exercise using the e-governance generated result with a view to restore fairness, transparency and trust in the process; and satisfy the principle of merit.

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