RETHINKING HUMAN CAPITAL MANAGEMENT IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCIAL AUTONOMY IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The Nigerian local government system, the fulcrum of grassroot governance, is grossly undermined by highly diminished autonomy. Autonomy is often confined to financial independence, to the exclusion of sound human resource management, without which sound financial management is naught. The objective of this study is therefore, to examine the effect of the procedural compliance by Local Government Councils with the protocols established by Public Service Rules in the acquisition (recruitment, test, selection and placement), development and motivation of manpower on the quality of human resource management in selected Local Government Councils in Nasarawa and Enugu States, Nigeria. Employing a triangulated research design encompassing descriptive and quantitative approaches, the study found, among others, a pervasive deviation of human resource practices from the established Rules. It was therefore, concluded that compliance with the Rules is a *sine quanon* for the achievement of efficient management of Councils' financial and other resources, without which the sustainability of local government autonomy would be impractical. Accordingly, it was recommended, that Councils should prioritise and institutionalise human resource management practices that comply with the Rules, devoid of practices that align with ascriptive-inhibitions.

Keywords: Local government; Human capital management, Financial autonomy; Public Service Rules; Inhibitions

INTRODUCTION

Human capital is an essential ingredient in the production and distribution of goods and services. Because of the overriding importance, the role of human capital in organisations has been overly elevated to a distinct status of a ―factor of production‖ separate from labour and characterized as entrepreneurship in contemporary business literature. To be sure, in management or in administration, the human resource is the centrepoint or fulcrum around which other factors of production revolve. Implicit in the centrality of human resource is that unless a robust attention is accorded to human capital management, the process of production, distribution and wealth creation must naturally come to naught. Fajana (2002) viewed human capital as the acquisition and utilization of men towards the achievement of organizational

goals. The critical role of human resource therefore, is to provide the indispensable mechanism or apparatus for planning, organizing and executing various tasks, in order to achieve the objective of an organization.

Given the existential role of human resource, it follows that equipping an organization with the right workforce is essential. The narrative tritely pushed in the polemics of local government autonomy in Nigeria is that the tier of government is immature, because it lacks fiscal capability and automy. Often, fiscal capacity is used to refer to a local government's ability to generate adequate revenue. However, the complementary managerial skills and competence to apply the available scarce resources, to propel the realisation of the overall objective of governance for development, is relegated.

The diminished capacity of the local government system in Nigeria, with respect to service delivery, has been frequently blamed on poor human resource quality, Shaibu et al (2001). As the most potent inhibitor, the poor personnel and associated managerial incompetence must be addressed from the root, if the systemic problem must be eradicated or ameliorated. Addressing the root cause of poor quality personnel in local government system should begin at exorcising certain vices, including the inappropriate processes and procedures in the recruitment, development and motivation of local government employees. It is therefore, surmised that a critical analysis of the origin, transmission mechanism and effect of improper or undue human resource acquisition, deployment, development and motivation on the management of the Nigerian local government system is imperative and unavoidable. In the effort, ten Local Government Councils (LGCs), five each from Nasarawa and Enugu States, were selected and analysed in this study, covering the period 2015-2025. The choice was informed by the desire to diversify the geographical or spatial scope of the study; and to reflect the dichotomy in the practice of local government administration across the geographical divide. The selected LGCs include, for Nasarawa State: Akwanga, Keffi, Nasarawa, Karu and Lafia; while for Enugu State: Enugu South, Nsukka, Nkanu West, Ezeagu and Udi respectively.

Statement of the Research Problem

In a study conducted by Nwachukwu and Adebayo (2023), some key issues in the economic planning and capacity optimisation for the Nigerian local government system for efficient service delivery were examined. The empirical contribution of Okoli (2019) focused respectively on transparency, accountability and good governance in financial managements in the local government system in Nigeria. The sum total of the various conclusions is that local governments exhibit a profound level of malfunctioning, due to mismanagement and weak governance structure. In any and all observations, studies are obvious that the critical role of the quality of the human resource factor in the mismanagement and accountability, without which good governance can only be shambolic, must be centralised and prioritised. In the view of Fajana (2002), the quality of the human capital in any organisation depends on proper recruitment, training and motivation of the workforce or personnel. Implicit in Fajana's position is that unless the human capital is right, corporate management and governance must be wrong. The pivotal role of human capital in the ―balance sheet‖ of the corporation has also

been well recognised and accorded the rightful place, particularly with the high premium accorded to recruitment, training and motivation of employees.

Unfortunately, however, in the public sector, particularly at the local government tier, the very important staffing function, which traverses the key elements of recruitment, training and motivation seemed to have been grossly undermined, leading to the common cliche that local governments in Nigeria lack the capacity to function efficiency and effectively (Shaibu et al 2001). This proposition seems to underpin the dismissive attitude of the polity about the capacity of the local government system to sustain any autonomy granted it as an independent tier of government. Central to the research problem of this study therefore, is the observed neglect of the critical role which a professionally recruited, trained and motivated workforce can play in the management of the sustainability of local governments autonomy in Nigeria by previous empirical studies. The gap in the debate on local government autonomy, which places extensive emphasis on financial autonomy therefore, misses the point by assuming that local government autonomy is all about financial independence, while undermining the critical role of proper human resource as the pivotal arsenal against mismanagement due to the deficient personnel acquisition and superior management. This gap is the central research problem of this study.

Research Questions

Flowing from the statement of the problem are the following key questions:

i. Are all other resources (financial, materials and time) of a local government not managed by the human capital; that is, are the efficient and effective management of all resources not a function of the quality (proper recruitment, development and motivation) of the human capital asset?;
ii. Can financial independence produce the expected results (governance or service delivery) under mismanagement?, and;
iii. Can mismanagement be curtailed when a sound, well-trained, disciplined and efficient management is instituted and institutionalised in the Nigerian local government system? Answers to these research questions provided insights into the functional relationship between efficient and prudential management of local government resources and sustainable local government autonomy and viability.

Objectives of the Study

The major objective of this study is to examine the effect of recruitment, training and motivation on the sustainability of local government autonomy in Nigeria, premised on the study of the selected local government councils. Other objectives include, to:

i. examine the extent of adherence by the study-LGCs to policy-stipulated processes and procedures of recruitment, training and motivation, according to Public Service Rules;
ii. analyze the effect of any procedural deficits on the managerial capacity of the LGCs and the implications for autonomy of the Councils;
iii. implicate the major obstacles affecting policy-stipulated recruitment, training and motivation of employees by the study - LGCs; and

iv. proffer policy antidotes or anti-bodies for decimating the antigens ascribable to poor human resources management in the local government system.

Statement of Hypothesis

The following null hypothesis is stated, to guide the study:

Ho_1: There were no significant discrepancies between the observed and expected frequencies of policy-specified Public Service Rules on recruitment (advertising, test, interview selection, and placement) procedures and compliance by the study-local government Councils.

CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

The review of literature is structured along the key concepts of the major variables employed in the study. The variables include human capital or resource management, local government autonomy, encompassing recruitment, selection, training, placement and motivation.

Human Capital Management (HCM)

As the most critical element in the ―production function‖, designing and implementing the appropriate human resource management structure is the right trigger for successful corporate management and goal attainment. Human capital management is a process that encompasses staff or workforce recruitment, development, motivation and assessment. Fajana (2002) defined recruitment as a set of activities employed legally to acquire sufficient number of the right people at the right place and time, in order to afford the candidates and employers an opportunity to interact and select each other in the mutual interest of the parties.

Critical among the objectives of recruitment are to: determine and meet the present and future staff needs of an organization; build a pool of applicants at a minimal cost; prune the applicants to a reasonable prequalified number; and reduce the probability of high staff attrition rate.

Generally, the process of recruitment begins with identifying vacancies in each unit or department of an organization through requisitions to fill vacancies furnished by various departmental heads. Approved vacancy positions are advertised for internal and external responses. Shortlisted or prequalified candidates are invited for assortment of aptitude tests and oral interviews, depending on the level or cadre. Successful candidates are offered employment through letters.

Upon assumption of duties, the recruits undergo aspects of training; some are generic; while pother are specific, tailored in line with the job specifications. On the completion of the initial training, the recruits are selectively placed on appriate or suitable assignments, to match the various qualifications, dispositions and aptitudes previously identified at the test and interview stages. Periodic on-the-job training, which may be internal or external, are provided to the employees, in order to keep the workforce abreast with current and future job responsibilities and requirements. This aspect of recruitments which refers to human capital development, is intended to upgrade the skills and competences of employees for enhanced performance and career progression.

Employee-performance is the sum total of the efforts and achievements which employees put in on the assigned tasks in order to achieve the desired results. The outcome of the work should preferably be quantifiable and measurable. Otherwise, it may be difficult to design an appropriate rating system that will suitably provide a reasonable basic for measuring employee performance, for reward and punishment. Ekpeyong (2016) wrote extensively on the difficulty often encountered in performance appraisal exercises in public organizations, due to the absence of quantitative indices that can be deployed in effort at assigning quantitative tasks and measuring outcome.

Corroborating Ekpeyong (2016), Salau (2022) noted that performance is the level of success achieved by employees vis-à-vis organizational goals. It is an indicator of the ability of employees to deliver on task assignments and the associated responsibilities toward achieving the overall goal of the organization and it is a function of proper recruitment, placement and task assignment (Gupta & Joshi, 2023).

To adequately propel employees to higher levels of performance, it is essential that, as much as possible, known and effective motivation packages are provided. The range of the packages traverses proper job placement, initial and continuous training, equity in reward and penal system, paid holiday, medical facilities, career advancement, bonding, job enlargement and empathy, among others. The packages which provide incentives complement the financial benefits that often form the bedrock of engagement, particularly for the middle and higher cadres of employment (Fajana, 2002). Various motivation theories by notable scholars: Victor Vroom, John Adams, Abraham Maslow, Douglas McGregor, Henri Fayol, etc have provided insights into the differing paradigms in relation to workplace applicability.

Local Government Autonomy

Akpa (2013) contributed a paper in which the author examined issues in decentralisation of government at the grassroot development in Nigeria. The argument is that the objective of decentralisation is to provide people at the grassroot greater opportunity for participation in local decision-making, and to thereby enable the local government system muster the autonomy or independence in carrying the locals along, in order to achieve political and administrative independence. The paper suggested that autonomy that guarantees wide participation must be granted by higher tier governmental levels to the managements of local councils.

Local Government Fiscal or Financial Autonomy

Chukwu (2021)‘s contribution focused on local governments‘ fiscal autonomy in Nigeria with case study of local governments in Enugu State. The contributors defined local government autonomy as the freedom of a local government to recruit and manage its own staff, raise and manage its own finance, make bye-laws and policies and discharge its functions as provided by law, without interference from the higher government. Autonomy extends to freedom to improve local taxation, generate revenue within the assigned sources, allocate its financial and material resources, determine and authorize its annual budgets without external interference. Anyanwu (1997) also noted that fiscal autonomy is the foundation in local government autonomy. Nwosu (2021) stated the importance of autonomous recruitment and management of

a workforce as a critical element of local government autonomy; while Okafor (2010) placed emphasis on financial autonomy as most crucial. Anyanwu's position is representative of the ―traditional‖ thinking that financial autonomy is all that matters; while Nwosu's view aligns with the broader position that the human asset, with the sole responsibility of the management of all assets, is most critical, in the bid for corporate goal attainment. Comparatively, all scholars cited are agreed that local government autonomy is desirable, regardless of the emphasis or focus.

Two of the key problems identified by Adeyemo (2015) as militating against the capacity of the Nigerian local government system in service delivery via public-private partnership models include weak financials and low human capacity. The author proposed reforms that would further strengthen the observed weaknesses for improved efficiency. Prior to this observation, the Dasuki Report (1984) had identified lack of necessary technical management of local government personnel as a major barrier to local government financial autonomy.

Toluhi (2010)'s position on the need to bolster local government independence beyond financial sphere was aptly captured in the view that designing and implementing policies at the local government level is fraught with misplacements and misalignments, where carpenters are assigned the role of masons. Where the plan did not work, the failure is blamed on other people. The totality of this position is that where the human factor is deficient, policies and plans are either distorted at the level of formulation or at the level of implementation. From the brief review, the essential nature of superior human resource as a prerequisite for local government autonomy may be discernable.

Staffing in the Public Service of Nigeria

The hallmark of appropriate staffing is ―responsible and transparent recruitment‖. The process traverses advertising available vacancies, testing, selection of candidates and placement of the suitably qualified and successful applicants. By section 2 of the Public Service Rules, recruitment means the filling of vacancies by the appointment of persons not already in the Civil Service of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Such appointments shall be made into available vacancies after due advertisement and upon the candidates possessing the requisite qualifications, as prescribed by the approved Scheme of Service All candidates will undergo various test and selection procedures in order to determine their suitability.

Sustainability of Local Government Autonomy

The ability of a local government council or the local government system to remain and continue in the proper functioning of service delivery to the citizenry under extant, current and future political, social, economic or financial environments defines the sustainability or resilience of the system (Dauda, 2024). Put differently, sustainability is the ability of the local government system to withstand and overcome the challenging storms overtime. Reforms in local government system, particularly the 1976 Reform, were undertaken to strengthen the system for enhanced service delivery to the citizenry.

In the view of Dauda (2024), local government administrative autonomy is the independence of LGCs to employ and manage own personnel and conduct all routine administrative functions,

without undue interference or control of state governments, particularly when the functions are exercised within the ambit of constitutional jurisdiction.

Theoretical Underpinning

Several theoretical paradigms explain how employees are acquired, developed, and motivated to high performance and retained in organizations, regardless of the sector. In this wise, theories including Human Capital, Herzberg's Two-Factor, Abraham Maslow and Alderfer, among others, are relevant. Since developing employees is central to job performance, the Human Capital Theory suffices and is adopted.

Human Capital Theory (HCT) was pioneered by Becker (1964). Central in the theory is that investment in education, training and development increases employees' competence, efficiency and productivity, leading to higher organizational performance. The link between human capital development and local government autonomy is the likelihood of a strong dependent relationship between poor or low quality local government staff on excessive control of the state government, presumably of superior quality staff. To be sure, the dependency is anti-autonomy, because of the ineluctable mentor-mentee or ―infant industry‖ relationship. However, with the development of local governments' human capital resources, the knowledge and competence gap can be narrowed, with the consequent positive effect on autonomy.

The major critique of the theory however, is that it assumes that once an employee receives training, the employee attains a high level of efficiency and productivity. In practice however, some employees have exhibited low efficiency and performance level, even after training and retraining (Noe, 2023). Nevertheless, the relevance of the theory to this study is the insights it provides in understanding how acquisition, training, development and motivation, can improve the initial defect in recruitment process; and improve upon employees' competence, efficiency and productivity for enhanced autonomy, as proposed in the case of local government councils.

Empirical Review

The constraint posed by the low quality of managerial personnel in Nigeria at all levels of government, but with particular devastation at the local government tier, was aptly recognized by the International Labour Organization (ILO)'s Report of 2023. The Organization recommended better recruitment practices and training, in order to improve manpower productivity. The idea is that only when employees are properly recruited and trained can individuals and groups be tasked with high performance expectations, based on measurable key performance indicators, obtained from performance management and appraisals, 260 Degree Feedback, Management by Objective (MBO), reward, recognition and sanction programmes and personal manpower development plans (Armstrong, 2023).

In Indonesia, Soegoto (2017)'s study focused on the relationship between motivation and employees' service delivery quality in the local government system in the survey, with 102 beneficiaries of local government services as participants. A questionnaire was deployed as the major data collection instrument; while correlational and regressional analyses were performed, to elicit the statistical significance in the relationship between motivation practices and quality service delivery. The results ascertained a statistically strong and positive relationship.

Particularly strong positive relationships were established in districts around West Java, with emphasis in Bandung City.

Fatema (2020)'s study focused on how the reward system in the banking system in Bangladesh promoted employee' skills acquisition and development at workplace. The objective was to ascertain the most effective reward system and to thereby derive the most result-achieving strategy for achieving higher satisfaction and enhanced employees' performance. Findings suggested that reward systems had varied, but positively significant effect on employees' satisfaction and motivated beneficiaries to higher performance. It was therefore, recommended that deserving reward systems should be designed to target employees' preferences.

A study conducted by Mahmud and Ogwuzebe (2024) examined the key issues in the performance of municipal public enterprises in Nigeria; with focus on municipal transport corporations. The approach was a comparative analysis of selected successful local government-owned enterprises vis-à-vis the weak-performing or failed enterprises. The findings reported significant differences in management practices among the divergent groups of enterprises. While the successful enterprises employed robust private sector practices in recruitment, selection training, deployment and motivation of employees, the weak or failed corporations adopted —management by sentiment‖ approach in HRM. The study therefore recommended the adoption of new public management approach across board, in public enterprises. On motivation, McKenzie and Thompson (2021) investigated the role of employees' training and development programmes in improving retention, particularly in multinational Canada. The result was that a strong and positive correlation existed between the variables.

The effect of recruitment criteria on the performance of the employees of Fidelity Bank Plc, was analysed by Ekwoaba (2012) using a sample of 130 validated copies of a questionnaire. The finding of the study indicated a significant positive effect. It was thus concluded that the more objective the recruitment criteria, the higher the employees' performance in the Bank.

Ajibola (2023) investigated the instrumentality of training to employees' performance in Nigeria's public sector. The study adopted a qualitative research design, using a sample of 400 employees. The key finding revealed that continuous training in emerging technologies was highly correlated with employees' job performance and retention in Nigeria's underdeveloped information technology public sector.

Opinions from the conceptual and empirical reviews reinforce the view that employees' performance is a function of the quality of recruitment, training and motivation. Whether or not the essential elements had been given due priority or consideration in the local governments of study, and the relative effect on employees' performance, is the crux of this study.

This study by Oboh (2019) examined the impact of a sound human resource management (HRM) on the manufacturing industry in Nigeria. The object was to ascertain he relevance or otherwise of sound HRM practices including recruitment, promotion, transfers, performance appraisal and compensation in advancing organizational performance in AT & T, Benin City. Using a sample of 120 employees of selected manufacturing companies, data collected were

analysed with the aid of descriptive statistics and Chi-square respectively. Findings were affirmative that sound HR practices positively affected employees' performance which, in totality, enhanced the performance of the studied organisations. On the impact of employees' development on performance, Odeka (2020) conducted a study on the Federal Inland Revenue Service, Abuja (FIRS). A total of 255 respondents completed copies of a structured questionnaire based on a 5-point Likert Scale ranking. Job design was reported to exhibit a significant impact on employees' performance. However, job rotation and job enlargement were not significant. The study therefore, recommended the adoption of a holistic employee development in FIRS.

A study conducted by Asibudu (2023) on the excessive control of local governments by state governments in Nigeria blamed the undesirable relationship on the military model of administration that emphasized the unitary system. The study noted that even upon the restoration of democratic rule, elected officials found much convenience in the autocratic approach, and therefore, retained the model. The study recommended demilitarization of local government administration by evolving a shift in the paradigm.

Adibe (2023)'s study compared the difference in the degrees of local government autonomy in Nigeria and India and reported that there is a conflict of interest in Nigeria's experience where elected official both at the state and local levels are unwilling to operate under substantial autonomy, due to the ―gains‖ accruable to the officials. The study recommended a fundamental constitutional amendment that entrenches the coexistence between state and local governments clearly and fully guaranteed local governments, of autonomy.

Research Gaps

Empirical studies cited focused largely on local governments financial or fiscal autonomy, to the effect that attaining financial independence or autonomy to receive, raise and spend money is central and therefore resolves the issue of autonomy. The studies however, undermined the development of superior human capital resources that is critical in managing the finances and all other resources of local governments. The effect of this gap in the pursuit of local government autonomy is fundamental; while bridging the gap is the central mission in this study.

METHODOLOGY

Secondary data were obtained from Human Resources Units of the various LGCs of study, using structured questionnaire and research assistants. Frequencies of occurrence were presented in tables and analysed using percentage tool. The analysis examined the relative frequency of adherence of the Councils to policy-stipulated procedures in recruitment, training and placement of candidates. In this wise, because it was expected that all recruitments should observe the procural provisions, that is, 100 percent compliance, any percentage deviation from the established procedure is benchmarked against the expected frequency or level of compliance (100%).

The samples of two states and 10 LGCs were purposively and randomly drawn, given the common characteristic that most LGCs in Nigeria are deficient in personnel quality (Shaibu, 20011; Toluhi, 2010)

A suitable and frequently used statistical tool in the analysis of the disparity between the observed or actual frequency of occurrence from the expected frequency is Chi-square (x^2), defined statistically as:

$$x^2 = \sum_{i=1}^{n} \frac{(o_i - e_i)^2}{e_n} \text{ (Spiegel, 2008; Gupta, 2013)}$$

where

x^2 = Chi-square

o_i = observed frequency

e = expected frequency

The larger the computed Chi-square value, the wider the disparity between the observed and expected frequencies of observations: the wider the discrepancy between the policy intent and policy implementation or practice, with regard to recruitment, training and motivation by the LGCs.

However, in practice, expected frequencies are computed based on a stated hypothesis. If the computed x^2 value (x_c^2) is greater than the critical value, x^2 tabulated (x_t^2), specified in this study as 0.95 (equivalent of 0.05 significance level), the null hypothesis is rejected at the appropriate degrees of freedom, v (v = k-1) and it is concluded that the observed frequencies differed significantly from the expected frequencies at the corresponding level of significance; otherwise, the null hypothesis, is accepted or atleast not rejected (Spiegel, 2008). This test of significance strengthens the degree of the discrepancy and provides a more reliable conclusion, based on hypothesis testing.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1.0 presents the comparative frequencies of recruitment and extent of compliance by Councils during the study period.

Table 1.0: Comparative analysis of the frequency of recruitment and extent of compliance by Councils 2015-2025

S/N	Local Government Council	Frequency of Recruitment	Frequency of Advertisement	% of Compliance
1	Akwanga	3	1	33.00
2	Keffi	4	1	25.00
3	Nasarawa	4	1	25.00
4	Karu	4	2	50.00
5	Lafia	4	1	25.00
6	Enugu South	3	0	0.00

S/N	Local Government Council	Frequency of Recruitment	Frequency of Advertisement	% of Compliance
7	Nsukka	2	0	0.00
8	Nkanu West	3	0	0.00
9	Ezeagu	2	0	0.00
10	Udi	2	0	0.00

Source: Various Human Resources Departments of the Study Local Government Councils

From Table 1.0, it is discernable that apart from Karu LGC, where vacancies were advertised two times (50%) of the four times during which recruitment exercises was conducted, other Councils were in deficit, in most cases without formally inviting suitable applicants to participate in the exercise.

Table 2.0, a comparative analysis the actual and observed frequencies of compliance with aptitude test and selection is presented and analysed.

Table 2.0: Comparative extent of compliance with policy prescription on test of candidates.

S/N	Local Government Council	Frequency of Recruitment	Frequency of Test	% of Compliance
1	Akwanga	3	0	0.00
2	Keffi	4	0	0.00
3	Nasarawa	4	0	0.00
4	Karu	4	0	0.00
5	Lafia	4	1	0.00
6	Enugu South	3	0	0.00
7	Nsukka	2	0	0.00
8	Nkanu West	3	0	0.00
9	Ezeagu	2	0	0.00
10	Udi	2	0	0.00

Source: Human Resources Department of Study-Local Government Councils

A perusal of Table 2.0 reveals that all Councils defaulted totally in observing the requirements of testing applicants. However, in a few exercises, Councils conducted oral interviews, as highlighted in Table 3.0.

Table 3.0: Extent of Compliance with Interviews and selection by Local Government Councils

S/N	Local Government Council	Frequency of Recruitment	Frequency of Oral Interviews	% of Compliance
1	Akwanga	3	2	66.66
2	Keffi	4	2	50.00
3	Nasarawa	4	3	66.66
4	Karu	4	2	50.00
5	Lafia	4	2	50.00

S/N	Local Government Council	Frequency of Recruitment	Frequency of Oral Interviews	% of Compliance
6	Enugu South	3	1	33.33
7	Nsukka	2	1	50.00
8	Nkanu West	3	2	66.66
9	Ezeagu	2	1	50.00
10	Udi	2	1	50.00

Source: Various Councils Human Resources Departments of the Local Government Councils

It could be observed from Table 3.0 that a relatively higher average compliance level (53.13%) was recorded for the conduct of oral interviews.

On selection and job placement however, no recorded evidence provided useful information on the criteria for placing newly employed candidates on the respective jobs. Feedback from employees did not suggest an understanding of the basis of job placement.

At v = 9, the computed value of x^2 of 20 is greater than the corresponding level of significance (0.05) of 3.33. It was therefore, concluded that there was a significant discrepancy between the observed recruitment practices and the expected practices with regard to advertising, test, selection and placement.

Arising from the analysis, the salient findings of this study are highlighted as follows:

i. There was a considerable deficit in policy prescribed requirement of advertising prelude to all recruitment exercises by public organizations in Nigeria, local government councils inclusive.
ii. There was also a high degree of breach of the requirement of aptitude test for all applicants, to determine the intellectual suitability, among others.
iii. There was a moderate level of compliance with regard to oral interviews requirement.
iv. Overall, the breach of the procedures applicable in public service employment was pervasive.

Discussion

The violation of the provisions of the Civil Service Rules on recruitment procedures by Councils is tritely reported in literature (Shaibu et al, 2001; Fajana, 2002) as it is corroborated by the finding of this study. The usual avoidance of vacancy advertisement may be a deliberate omission designed and intended to exclude the range of suitable applicants, in order to narrow the population of candidates and to decrease the competition and thereby enhance the chances of favoured but weak applicants. This act or action, naturally increases the chances of relatives, cronies and associates who are backed by powerful state officials. Similar conducts were reported in the report of an enquiry into the anomalies complained about in the recruitment exercises in Bendel Line, a parastatal of the defunct Bended State Government in 1986. It was revealed that the recruitment exercise conducted was shrouded in secrecy. Consequently, many of the successful candidates were adjudged unqualified and therefore, unsuitable for the positions of employment.

Failure by Councils to conduct aptitude tests robbed the recruitment exercises of the essential ingredients of intellect, imaginative ability cognitive judgement dexterity and computer appreciation which are required of an applicant in contemporary times. Writing skills, comprension and basic quantitative appreciation which should be possessed by prospective job seekers were also unexamined by dinct of the omission or commission. Consequently, the basic foundation upon which staff development and managerial progression should be grounded, were undermined. This position was corroborated by the finding of a study by Ogwuzebe and Mahmud (2024) to the effect that poor recruitment practices contributed to industrial unrest in the public sector by undermining establishments.

Job placement is a critical phase of recruitment. It is the final stage at which the actual suitability of a candidate is ascertained prior to job assignment. Where there is failure in the performance of this critical role, the consequence of placing square pegs in round holes is often devastating. This is a common incident in public organisations where job placement is done without due consideration for suitability, (Nwosu, 2021). For reason of favouritism or nepotism, it is probable that a medical officer is assigned a financial role, particularly in local government service in Nigeria (Shaibu, 2001). Based on the interview responses, it was probable that job placement was improperly done in many of the Local Government Councils.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From the findings of this study, the essential elements of acquisition, development and motivation of high quality manpower, a *sine quanon* for efficient management of LGCs resources, was largely undermined. Councils were therefore, either ignorant of the establishment, or they were unguided, or they were careless. Either case, the effect was poor recruitment and the resultant adverse effect on the quality of the human resource. Therefore, merely granting autonomy to LGCs, anchored on freedom of revenue collection and utilization, maybe insufficient, and inefficacious in achieving the much desired autonomy. Conclusively, local government autonomy may be impractical without the prerequisite recalibration of the existing deficient recruitment practices.

Arising from the findings and conclusion of this study, the following policy recommendations are offered:

i. Local Government Service Commissions in the study LGCs and Nigeria, should establish a mechanism for effectively oversighting the recruitment function of Councils, by institutionalising an independent bureau to be known as —Local Government Personnel Management Ombudsman‖. Only recruitments and deployments which comply substantially with policy-specific procedures as certified by the Ombudsman, should thus pass.
ii. Local Government Service Commissions should institutionalise a practice in which regular training, job rotation and motivation are effected, to strengthen managerial development, enhanced employee competence and satisfaction across the cadres, in order to minimize the mismanagement of financial and other resources of councils
iii. The headship of the highly professionalised functions in the Local Government Service, such as Finance, Medical and Engineering should be insulated from the —all-

comer syndrome‖, in which it is assumed that in public service, anybody can perform any function.

Limitation of the Study and Suggestion for Further Studies

The major limitation of this study traverses the temporal and spatial constraints. Further studies that enlarge the time scope and number of local government councils will enrich the data and analysis. Besides, there is need to implicate the rationale for the pervasive avoidance or disregard for the Rules by councils in human resource management. This will address the anomaly from the root and strengthen the essential procedural character of sound management.

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