


“An examination of the relationship between employee resourcing and professionalism: a case study of Nigerian public service”

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ARTICLE INFO	Christiana Kappo-Abidemi, Chux Gervase Iwu and Charles Allen-Ile (2015). An examination of the relationship between employee resourcing and professionalism: a case study of Nigerian public service. <i>Problems and Perspectives in Management</i> , 13(4-1), 195-204
RELEASED ON	Wednesday, 23 December 2015
JOURNAL	"Problems and Perspectives in Management"
FOUNDER	LLC "Consulting Publishing Company "Business Perspectives"



NUMBER OF REFERENCES

0



NUMBER OF FIGURES

0



NUMBER OF TABLES

0

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An examination of the relationship between employee resourcing and professionalism: a case study of Nigerian public service

Abstract

The study examined the concept of professionalism and its relationship to employee resourcing with special emphasis on the effect of application of knowledge, skills and attitudes to staffing within the organization. The population consisted of Nigeria public servants. Both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection were adopted; four hundred and seventy six (476) useable questionnaires were retrieved from respondents and used in the quantitative analysis, while three different groups consisting of between eight to twelve people were involved in focus group discussions. The authors found among others that the Nigerian public service is made up of an aged workforce. Following this, it is recommended that the public service should present better employment incentives to attract young and talented workforce. It is also suggested that the corporate autonomy of HR departments must be respected; employee resourcing should be handled without interference. While a lack of professionalism within the Nigerian public service is noted in this study, the authors hasten to assert that this is partly as a result of the learning environment in Nigeria which is considered unsuitable and ill-equipped for quality learning.

Keywords: professionalism, Nigerian public service, employee resourcing, human resource management, administrative staff college of Nigeria, employee professionalism.

JEL Classification: L210, M120.

Introduction

The concept of public servant professionalism is yet to be defined in literature. Professionalism is, nonetheless, defined in the context of various professions such as law, medicine, nursing, and teaching (Argyriades, 2010). In the various definitions of professionalism among disciplines, the words 'knowledge', 'skill', 'competence', 'attitude' and 'expertise' are consistent (Beaton, 2010; Brandsen and Honingh, 2011). Argyriades (2010) describes professionalism based on the concepts of competence, knowledge and skills acquired through intensive study and practice as well as the practical application of knowledge to uphold code of conduct within an organization. Based on the aforementioned characteristics of professionalism, the common assumption is that employees are expected to deliver high quality services as well as display professional attitudes to their clients on the basis of the skills they have acquired, and the knowledge they have gained (Hammer, 2000). These attributes – delivery of high quality service and display of professional attitudes – are outcomes of a well-managed employee resourcing function of an organization.

Employee resourcing (ER) is a broad human resource management term used for the administration of people within the workplace, which basically starts with the process of recruitment such as manpower planning, advertisement, selection, interview, appointment, placement, induction and mentoring (Iles, 2009). The general notion is that these processes are established and linked to the skills, knowledge and attitude possessed by the prospective employee. Therefore, public servants' professionalism is determined by the quality of service delivered to the public.

Our main aim in this study was to examine the relationship between employee resourcing (staffing including manpower planning, recruitment, selection, placement, induction and mentoring) and professionalism (knowledge, skills, competence). The unit of analysis was the Nigerian public service. Data were obtained from a multitude of course trainees (past and present) at the Administrative Staff College of Nigeria. Our main argument is that the probability of employees delivering quality service will be almost impossible if they do not possess the required knowledge, skills and attitude for the job.

1. The rationale for the study

Over the years, the Nigerian public service has been characterized by very low quality output. Various reasons have been given for the inefficiency (Fatile, Adejuwon and Kehinde, 2011). The study inquired whether, irrespective of the myriad reasons given, the existing workforce in Nigerian public service is actually resourced in terms of skills, knowledge and attitudes needed to discharge duties effectively?

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Also, were these skills, knowledge and attitudes considered in the course of recruitment and placement? These carved the trajectory for determining the relationship between employee resourcing and professionalism within the Nigerian public service.

2. Literature review

2.1. Employee resourcing and professionalism.

Professionalism cannot be discussed in isolation. It has to be incorporated with task performance, efficiency, effectiveness, objectivity, integrity, identity and consistency (United Nations, 1997). Beaton (2010) describes professionalism as the combination of knowledge, skills, trustworthiness and selflessness found in those who commit themselves to a life of service to others. Thompson (2000) perceives professionalism as the body of specialist knowledge which acts as a basis for professional expertise supported by a commitment to high standards, an acceptance of collective and personal responsibility, application of knowledge to seek maximum effectiveness, adherence to values and principles that guide professional practice and a degree of autonomous judgement rather than bureaucratic rule. Sundin and Hedman (2005) suggest that professionalism theory focuses on the relationship between occupational groups, theoretical knowledge, especially the application of knowledge to occupational practise.

The ER process in an organization must be preceded by proper manpower planning in order to ensure that at all times, every department in the organization has effective and efficient personnel as well as appropriate workload. This will give the organization the needed lead on when to recruit, promote, and dismiss (Sanusi, 2002). The process is usually facilitated by human resource management department (HRM) and it enables the department to know the human capacity of the organization. Manpower planning also enhances future planning regarding human resources in the organization while it also prevents skill shortages and the overlapping of employees (Anyadike, 2013; Duggan and Horton, 2004).

Recruitment is the process of attracting and selecting the best candidate to fill appropriate posts in the workplace with the use of 'tools' such as applications forms and resumes, interviews, reference checks, and tests to know and determine candidate knowledge, skill, attitude, competency, and ability (Tiemo and Arubayi, 2012). Mukoro (2005) states that recruitment exercises should clearly state the actual vacant position, pay, and method of promotion.

The Nigerian public service has been the major employer of labor since independence with about

three million employees in both state and federal establishments (El-Rufai, 2011; Lawal and Oluwatoyin, 2011; Mukoro, 2005). Despite the large number of employees, the estimation is that the Nigerian public service has more unskilled labor considering that about 65% of the total employees are in the *lower cadre* category with educational qualification not beyond Ordinary National Diploma level (DESA, 2004; Ogunrotifa, 2012). Meanwhile, unemployment rate among Nigerian university graduates is increasing on a yearly basis (Akinyemi, Ofem, and Ikuenomore, 2012). A worrying question therefore is: how come the public service is unable to absorb some of these graduates to replace the ageing, unproductive, and unskilled workforce? Table 1 analyzes the breakdown of Nigerian public service employees according to their educational qualifications and grade levels.

Table 1. Analysis of the Nigerian public service according to educational qualifications and grade levels

Distribution according to qualification		Distribution according to grade levels	
University graduates	19.1%	Grade level 15 and above	01.4%
Graduates of other tertiary institutions	14.5%	Grade level 07-14	33.3%
Others including lower cadre staff	66.4%	Grade level 01-06	65.3%

Source: DESA, 2004, p. 10.

Considering the table above, it is noteworthy that majority of the workforce is not well educated. In Nigeria, employment into the public service is determined by vacancies, qualifications and the federal character principle (geographical and ethical representation) (Gbervie, 2010) while appointment is done through recruitment, secondment, or transfer (DESA, 2004). It has been observed that the federal character principle of recruitment has had a serious negative consequence on effectiveness and efficiency of the Nigerian public service (Olatunji and Ugoji, 2013). Makinde (2005) emphasized that skewed human resource management processes contributed immensely to the failure of various government projects, meaning that hiring people without the right qualifications to manage a project is tantamount to failure of the project even before it starts. This confirms that influencing recruitment processes in any form such as the notorious practice of *god-fatherism* (influencing appointments based on political connection) and favoritism (not considering merit but ethnicity and familiarity) in Nigeria will only make the employees dance to the tune of whoever it was that influenced their appointment. Olatunji and Ugoji (2013) warn against this by insisting that failure or success of an organization depends on its recruitment processes. Therefore, promotion of effective recruitment (devoid of

sentiment and political interference) plays a vital role in workplace competency and labor force effectiveness (Olatunji and Goji, 2013).

3. Method

Participants in this study were drawn from the 2013 and previous cohorts of public servants' who attended training/courses at the Administrative Staff College of Nigeria (ASCON). The Nigeria Public Service Act only permits officers from grade level 7 and above¹ to participate in training, short courses, or further studies at ASCON. Therefore, the population comprised all employees from grade level 7 and above from all government (state and federal) parastatals. The majority of the participants were from the federal institutions. Banerjee and Chaudhury (2010) as well as Sekaran and Bougie (2013) describe a population as the entire group from which information is expected to be determined.

4. Research instruments

Questionnaires were randomly distributed to participants. Focus group discussions were also conducted with different sets of ASCON participants. Both approaches were used in order to have in-depth understanding of the topic under discussion.

Essentially, this study made use of a questionnaire as well as an interview schedule. The questionnaire comprised open and close-ended questions. The questionnaire had two main sections namely (1) a demographic information section, and (2) ER and professionalism section (regarded as research items in the questionnaire). Likert scale options were given to various statements in order to ascertain the participants' response to the subject (Harmon, Morgan and Harmon, 2001). An open-ended questionnaire/interview schedule was administered in the form of a focus group discussion. The participants were interviewed in groups of 8-12. The questions covered all vital areas (sourced from literature) of professionalism and employee resourcing.

Questionnaires have been considered over the years to be the most suitable instrument for data collection owing to its capacity to capture the responses of a large number of participants as well as working within limited time frames. Interviews and or focus groups have the benefit of eliciting further information from participants in a study. Therefore, whatever is left out in a questionnaire can be requested in one-on-one sessions.

Research with combined elements of quantitative and qualitative approaches is referred to as 'mixed method' research (Creswell, 2006; Johnson et al.,

2007). The use of both the qualitative and quantitative approaches enhanced understanding from both the researchers' and the participants' perspectives. The focus group discussion covered most of the issues that the questionnaire could not adequately address. All the sessions were recorded and transcribed.

The instruments for data collection (questionnaire and interview schedule) were sequentially designed in such a way that data could be obtained from the same population but different participants in order to augment the findings. Driscoll, Appiah-Yeboah, Salib and Rupert (2007) confirmed that sequential mixed method data collection requires collecting data in an iterative process whereby the data collected at one phase contribute to the one collected at a later phase.

5. Population

There are about one hundred parastatals with about three million employees (El-Rufai, 2011). Considering the population of the public servants and the large number of government institutions in Nigeria, we anticipated the challenge of complete representation. Therefore, a common ground was decided as a better chance of meeting a reasonable percentage of the total population that would be reasonably representative of all parastatals. ASCON is considered the most popular training institution for public servants in Nigeria as well as one of the approved centres for promotion assessment for all public servants (Public Service Rule, 2008). Our initial inquiry with the institution confirmed that about one thousand, two hundred (1,200) public servants were trained annually.

Data collection spanned over a period of six months, the reason being that the institution runs various courses at various times, both short and long courses. In order to have a wide range of participants the questionnaire was given to different sets of participants while they were attending the courses.

6. Data analysis

Inferential statistics is used to draw conclusions about research findings and relating them to the whole population of study, which gives an indication of the level of doubt with which the research finding should be treated (Babbie and Mouton, 2001; Sapsford and Jupp, 2006). Therefore, inferential statistics such as frequency calculation, analysis of variance (ANOVA) and reliability test (Cronbach's Alpha) were used in this study to determine the relationship and connection between variables. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) is used to determine the level of significance of variables with three or more groups to compare (Sapsford and Jupp, 1996).

¹ Grade 7 and above encompass senior staff in different professions – incorporating managers, senior executives and directors including directors-general in various spheres of government.

7. Results

The objective of this study was to examine the relationship between employee resourcing and professionalism. The results are presented thus: Firstly, the demographic profiles of the participants indicate that majority (52%) of the population was 41 years and older, while 21.3% were within 36-40 years. This finding is consistent with El-Rufai (2011) who found that Nigeria public service is made up of an aged workforce. The question that bugs the mind therefore is could this aged workforce constitutes the uneducated, unskilled workforce? Majority (67%) of the participants were from grade levels 7 to 10. A meagre 5.4% represented those in grade levels 11-12, while those in grade levels 13-17 made up the 27% of the population. Could this finding indicate a resolve by the Nigerian public service to groom a younger group of public servants considering that it currently has an aged workforce and very small number of middle class (5.4%)? Our perspective is somewhat confirmed by our finding in respect of ‘years in public service/work experience’. We found that those who had been in service for not more than 5 years were second (24%) compared to those who had been around for 21 years and above. The analysis is depicted in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Analysis of demographic data

Age	21-25 years (1.5%)	26-30 years (12.3%)	31-35 years (12.3%)	36-40 years (21.3%)	41 years and older (52%)
Work grade levels	7-8 (31.5%)	9-10 (34.7%)	11-12 (5.4%)	13-14 (11.5%)	16-17 (14.6%)
Work experience	1-5 years (24.4%)	6-10 years (13.2%)	11-15 years (15.0%)	16-20 years (11.7%)	21 years or above (34.9%)

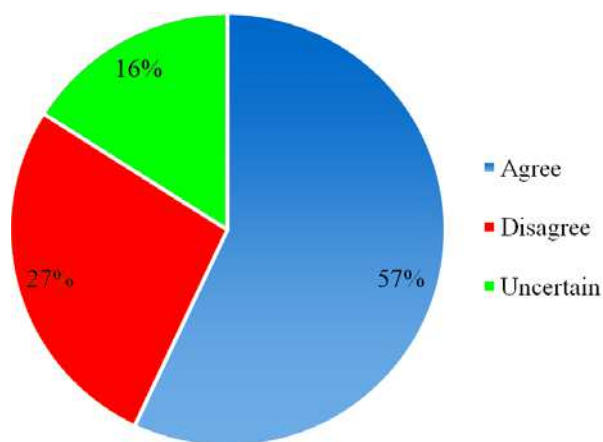


Fig. 1. I was formally notified of the receipt of my application

Figure 1 shows that majority (57%) of the respondents’ initial job application was acknowledged while 27% said their application was not acknowledged. 16% were uncertain if there was a response or not. Figure 2 is the statistical analysis of the percentage of the respondents who were

Secondly, the findings in relation to the main objective of the study are presented under two headings namely ‘Examining the relationship between employee resourcing and professionalism (Quantitative)’, and ‘Relationship between employee resourcing and professionalism’ (Qualitative).

Examining the relationship between employee resourcing and professionalism (Quantitative analysis)

Ten items in the questionnaire were used to examine this relationship. The reliability test for the questionnaire items generated a Cronbach alpha of 0.782, which suggests that the items are statistically reliable. The range of Cronbach’s alpha for reliability is determined between 0 and 1. Any test from 0.5 and above is considered to be reliable (Gliem and Gliem, 2003; Tavakol and Dennick, 2011). Bashir, Afzal, and Azeem (2008), Golafshani (2003) and Sekaran and Bougie (2013) explain reliability as a measurement of consistency and stability using Cronbach’s alpha as a reliability coefficient to determine how well research items are positively correlated. The closer the Cronbach’s alpha is to 1, the higher the internal consistency and the more reliable the measurement.

The first item in the questionnaire sought to know whether the participants were formally notified about the receipt of their application. The relevance of this question to professionalism was to establish if participants actually go through the due process of application before getting the job. The figures below illustrate further.

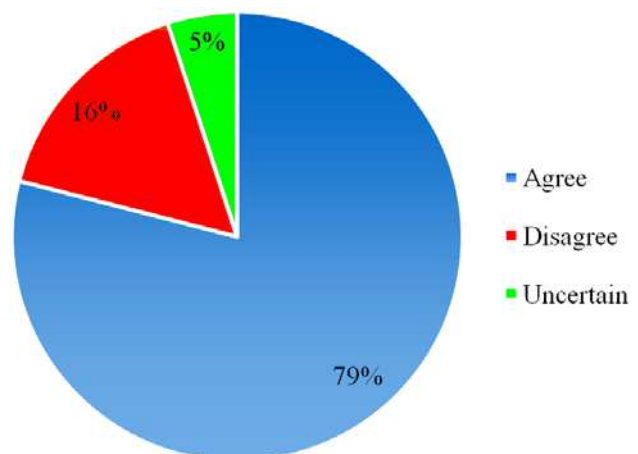


Fig. 2. I was formally interviewed

interviewed or not interviewed before they started working in the public service. As shown above, 79% of the participants said there had been an interview while 16% said there was no interview. 5% were not sure if there had been an interview or not.

The next figures reflect various items used to describe employee resourcing right from appointment to settling into the jobs. The essence of this was to establish if the employer explored

wider options before concluding that the candidate was the best for the job and whether the employer gave employees the needed guidance to fit into the organizational norms.

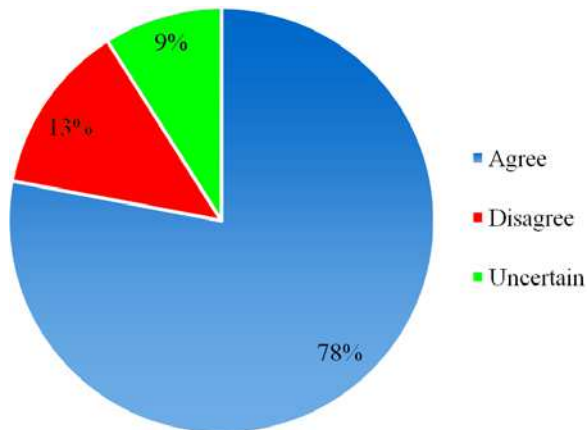


Fig. 3. There were other candidates at the interview

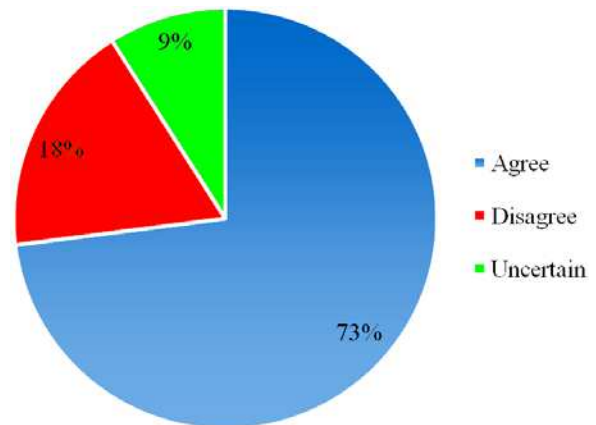


Fig. 4. I was appointed for the post I applied for

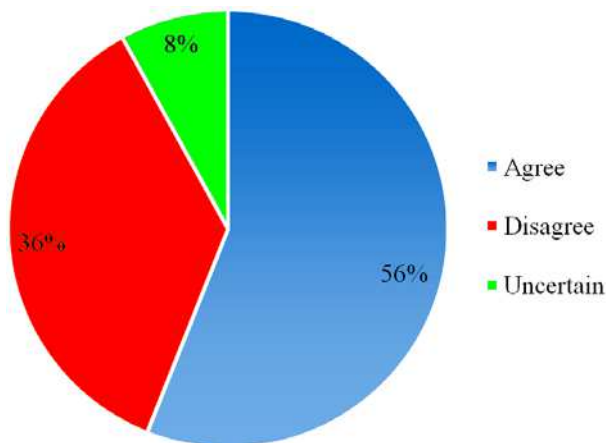


Fig. 5. There was an induction program

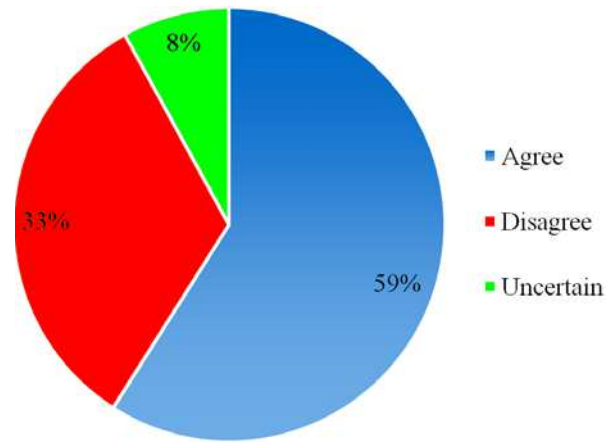


Fig. 6. I was formally mentored

Figure 3 shows that seventy-eight percent (78%) of the respondents said there were other candidates at the interview, while 13% said there were no other candidates and 9% said they were not sure if there were other candidates or not. Figure 4 illustrates the participants' response to the question asked about being appointed for the actual position applied for. 73% said that they actually got the post they applied for. Here, 18% said no, while 9% were not sure if the position they occupy was what they applied for or not.

Figure 5 sought to know how well the organization absorbed and oriented new employees. Here, 56% said there was some form of induction. 36% said that there was no induction program organized, while 8% were 'uncertain'. Figure 6 reports the mentoring program of the Nigerian public service. 59% of the participants said that they were mentored, 33% were not, and 8% were not sure if they were mentored or not. Other items used to examine the employee resourcing are shown below:

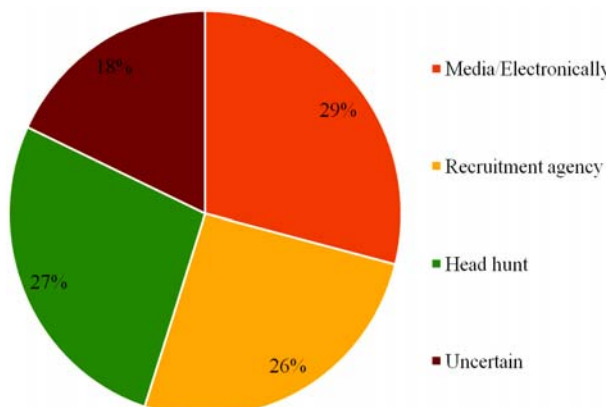


Fig. 7. I got to know about the vacancy post through

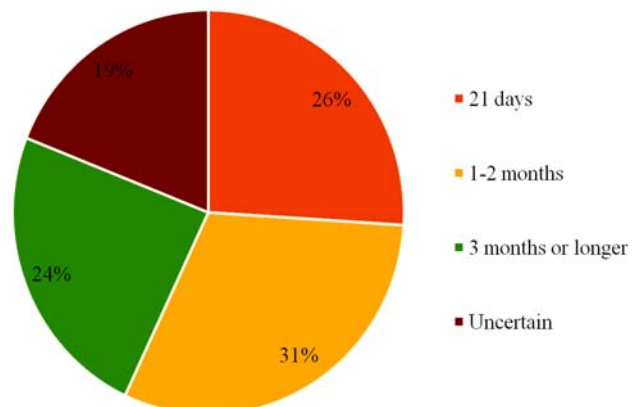


Fig. 8. Response from the interview panel

Figure 7 is the analysis of how participants got to know about the existence of the positions they occupied. In this case, 29% knew about the vacancy through electronic and media sources, 26% got to know through recruitment agencies; 27% claimed they were head hunted, while 18% were ‘uncertain’ about how they got to know about the existence of the vacant positions. Figure 8 illustrates the efficiency and consistency of the interview panel of the parastatal by examining the feedback time frame after they were interviewed for different positions. Here, 26% of the respondents received feedback

within 21 days after the interview; 31% received feedback within 1-2 months, and 24% received feedback within the third month or after 3 months, while 19% were not sure of the time frames.

Given the objective of the study, it was necessary to understand whether proper recruitment processes were followed, hence the above enquiries.

Next, we use ANOVA to attempt a determination of the relationship between employee resourcing and professionalism.

Table 3. ANOVA determination of relationship between employee resourcing and professionalism

		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	f	p-value
Notification of receipt of application	Between groups	2.791	2	1.396	4.005	0.019
	Within groups	144.642	415	.349		
	Total	147.433	417			
Formal interview before commencement of job	Between groups	3.908	2	1.954	5.481	0.004
	Within groups	161.488	453	.356		
	Total	165.397	455			
Presence of other candidate at interview	Between groups	4.570	2	2.285	6.257	0.002
	Within groups	161.406	442	.365		
	Total	165.976	444			
Appointed for actual position applied for	Between groups	3.171	2	1.586	4.392	0.013
	Within groups	159.926	443	.361		
	Total	163.097	445			
Induction before commencement of duty	Between groups	1.220	2	.610	1.660	0.191
	Within groups	164.620	448	.367		
	Total	165.840	450			
Mentored on the job	Between groups	8.789	2	4.395	12.710	0.000
	Within groups	156.981	454	.346		
	Total	165.771	456			
Awareness of vacant post	Between groups	.865	2	.433	1.290	.277
	Within groups	131.527	392	.336		
	Total	132.393	394			
Feedback from interview panel	Between groups	3.773	2	1.887	5.498	0.004
	Within groups	133.138	388	.343		
	Total	136.912	390			
Factors facilitated appointment	Between groups	4.761	3	1.587	4.445	0.004
	Within groups	146.009	409	.357		
	Total	150.769	412			
Job placement	Between groups	2.845	2	1.423	3.981	0.019
	Within groups	159.725	447	.357		
	Total	162.570	449			

Source: Level of significance is $p \geq 0.05$.

Table 3 above shows the analysis of variance (ANOVA) for employee resourcing and professionalism. The level of significance was determined at 0.05. The average mean of all professionalism items was calculated and compared with individual items of employee resourcing (employee resourcing average means cannot be determined due to variation in their measurement scale). As shown above, ten items describing employee resourcing and their relationship with

professionalism were determined. We found a significant difference ($p < 0.05$) in the respondents’ opinions which established that there is a relationship between items under consideration. Table 3 also shows that a relationship exists between notifications, receipts of application, interview before commencement of duty, presence of other candidates at the interview, appointed to actual position, mentoring, feedback from interview panel, factors facilitating appointment, job

placement, and professionalism ($p < 0.05$). The majority of the respondents were properly appointed and equipped to do their jobs while some were not. Responses varied according to the questions. Meanwhile, there is no significant difference between responses to induction before commencement of duty, awareness of vacant post, and professionalism ($p > 0.05$).

8. Qualitative analysis

8.1. Relationship between employee resourcing and professionalism. The process of workforce planning and recruitment in the Nigerian public service is examined in this section. The essence was to establish if there was a relationship between the process and employee professional output. Same research questions were asked to the groups at different times and responses were summarized below.

{i} Question: How does the process of employment into the public service affect employees' attitudes towards work?

It was deduced from all the groups' responses that recruitment process varies from one geo-political setting to another. In some states, recruitment (and subsequent employment) is based on vacancy thus suggesting that placement is not based on the candidate's discipline but due to vacancies existing as at the time of employment. We also heard that political influence is exerted once a vacancy exists. This probably explains why vacancies are closed once appointment was made with or without the successful candidate meeting the requirements of the job.

In the case of distorted processes, such as we have explained above, there is little likelihood of accountability and professionalism given the limited knowledge and/or understanding of what needs to be done to create an efficient, accountable public service. Our view is that current process of employment is not the best and it is not possible to get the best from the employees who are recruited under such processes. Even if the candidate has the right knowledge and skills to perform the job, he or she is not likely to do his or her best simply because he or she knows that there is someone in top management who influenced the appointment and will always fight their battles for them. Essentially, this recruitment process will have a negative effect on an employee's attitude to work.

{ii} Question: What role does the Human Resource Management Department of your parastatal play in manpower planning of existing employees and recruitment of new employees?

-Who decides that there is a need to fill a vacant position?

Human resource management department decides the vacancy in conjunction with heads of departments. However, often, external consulting firms are appointed to facilitate the process. We noted however that HR department within the organization is still responsible for the terms and conditions of appointing the external recruitment agencies and also somehow monitors the process. We also noted that most vacancies are internally filled because, according to the participants, there are many 'idle' (over-populated workforce) people within the organization. At the end of each year there is a manpower budget plan in terms of recruitment, promotion and transfer which will be proposed by the HR department and ratified by a higher authority.

{iii} Question: Is there a proper (written and signed by both parties) employment contract between the public service and its employees?

All participants agreed that all public servants in Nigeria have a written contract signed by both parties, but the response about who drafts the contract shows that almost every employee gets the same contract in terms of offer and acceptance and all other conditions attached to the employment are written in the Civil Service Handbook.

9. Discussion

The recruitment process in the Nigerian public service was examined as well as its consequences on employees' professionalism. The quantitative result affirmed that there is a relationship between employee resourcing (staffing) as shown in Table 3 and professionalism. The study further investigated (using qualitative methodology) the effect of the recruitment process in the Nigerian public service on employees' attitudes to their work. Respondents affirmed that since the due process of recruitment through human resource management practices were not followed, employees were not expected to be professional. It was mentioned that the human resource management departments were rendered ineffective in the process of recruitment in the Nigerian public service because of political interference and nepotism. According to Heathfield (2014), HR managers are strategic partners who contribute to the development of business plans and objectives of an organization. Therefore, HR managers are responsible for aligning the organizational goals and needs with individual employee growth and development within the organization in order to promote professionalism and building a competent workforce (Katua, Mukulu and Gachunga, 2014; Nyameh and James, 2013). This is obviously not the case in the Nigerian

public service. Recruitment becomes a problem when it is handled by amateurs or experts are not given the freedom to do their jobs.

Again, candidates are not recruited on merit and even the federal character principle has not been applied effectively. Competent applicants are sacrificed for the mediocre on the grounds that the latter are well-connected. Professional employees at any organizational level are expected to have a basic qualification required to carry out the job and produce quality services. Knowing that only employees with relevant skills, energy, talents, knowledge and attitudes can be committed to delivery of quality goods and services, it is essential that the labor market requirement is aligned with education and training in order to achieve the expected result (Agabi and Ogah, 2010). Sadly, after finding their way into the service the incompetent applicant still finds it difficult to learn and obey given instructions, knowing that they can always run back to the 'godfather' to sort out their problems. Olatunji and Ugoji (2013, p. 83) rightly pointed out that candidates employed through nepotism hardly function well in an organization as such employees are often absent from work; display nonchalant attitude towards the work and are usually lawless.

Conclusion and recommendations

It is clear that the bedrock of professionalism for employees in the public service is adherence to principle of recruitment based on the merit and application of acquired skills, knowledge and competencies to the posting of employees within the sector. Therefore, it is recommended that the Nigeria public service should:

- ◆ Entrust their recruitment process into the hands of competent HR personnel.
- ◆ Reduce or eradicate political interference as well as god-fatherism in the employee resourcing process.

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- ◆ Considering that our finding indicated that the Nigerian public service is made up of an aged workforce, we recommend that the public service be made more attractive to the younger generation in terms of salary package, work environment, and several other perquisites.
- ◆ Lastly, preference should be given to skills, knowledge and competencies in the course of posting.

While we noted a lack of professionalism within the Nigerian public service, we hasten to assert that this is partly as a result of the learning environment in Nigeria which is considered unsuitable and ill-equipped for quality learning. As a result graduates are found not to be performing up to workplace expectations (Agabi and Ogah, 2010). This has created a shortfall in national human resource planning, whereby suitable candidates (in terms of relevant skills, knowledge and attitudes) are not found to fill vacant positions. Gyang (2011) and Isife et al. (2000) mentioned that it is the responsibility of the state to properly structure schools and education programs because schools are one of the determinants of political, social and economic growth of the state. It will be difficult for students who are not equipped with quality learning to understand the professional concepts of their jobs as employees.

By way of closing, we underscore the necessity for effective handling of the staffing process so that organizations are enabled to match appropriate skills, knowledge and attitudes to job requirements (Nyameh and James, 2013). In fact, we take solace in Itika (2011) who believes that recruitment and selection in an organization is a lengthy process, thus requiring specialist skills for proper planning with involvement of experts to ensure a successful ending (Aijala, 2001). Basically, the process of recruitment is the responsibility of trained and learned HR experts together with line managers.

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