

The Role of E-Governance in the Enhancement of Service Delivery in the Nigerian Public Service

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Abstract

Globally, governments desire to provide efficient and effective services to the public. E-governance is a viable means through which this desire can be achieved and this was why the federal government of Nigeria declared ICT a national policy priority in 2001. This study examined the role of e-governance in the enhancement of service delivery in the Nigerian public service. The objectives of the study included to highlight the models of service delivery through e-governance; examine the benefits of e-governance in service delivery in Nigeria, identify some challenges to e-governance implementation in Nigeria and make policy recommendations on how to address the challenges of e-governance implementation. The qualitative method of data analysis was employed. Secondary data were gathered from reputable sources such as reports, journal articles, textbooks, official publications and the internet. Some of the challenges identified include lack of infrastructure, incessant power failure and lack of technical know-how amongst others. Policy recommendations were made to address these challenges, including the provision of adequate ICT infrastructure, improvement in the supply of electricity, and regular training and retraining of personnel on best practice in ICT, amongst others.

Key Words: E-governance, Public Service, Service Delivery

Introduction

Globally, governments' desire has always been to provide services that are considered to be efficient as well as effective. Successive Nigerian governments are no exception in this desire. Since Nigeria gained independence in 1960, efforts have always been made by successive government to provide effective and efficient services to the people. This is why governments had undertaken series of administrative reforms all geared towards efficient and effective service delivery. The reforms include Adebo Commission of 1971, Udoji Public Service Review Commission of 1974, Dotun Philips Civil Service Reform of 1988 and Allison Ayida Committee on Civil Service of 1995 (Idama, 2014). The Nigerian Government recognized the potential of Information Communication Technology as a veritable tool for enhancing service delivery and the need for the country to participate in the race to becoming a digitized society (Awoleye, Oluwaranti, Siyanbola & Adagunodo, 2008). This prompted the federal government to declare ICT a national policy priority in 2001. This resulted in the creation of an information technology policy the following year (Olatokun and Adebayo, 2012). Despite all the efforts however, much is left to be desired as it concerns efficiency and effectiveness in the Nigerian public service delivery (Idama, 2014).

One of the reasons for the failures in service delivery can be attributed to the centralized structure of administration of the Nigeria Civil Service prior to independence.

The colonialists established an ethnocentric service delivery structure (Anazodo, Okoye & Chukwuemeka, 2012). Another reason for the failure in service delivery can be linked to the rigid and over centralized nature of the Nigerian bureaucracy which makes it non-receptive to positive change (Ayoade, 1988). It is worthy of note that majority of countries that have been successful in service delivery are mainly those with flexible and decentralized administrative structures. The reason behind this is that such countries are more concerned about customer satisfaction and as such are more liberal in dealing with the public. Countries in this category include the United State of America, Britain, Germany, Canada and Australia, amongst others. Due to the seeming failure in the reforms and in the quest for efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery in the public service, public organizations in Nigeria have in recent years adopted electronic governance in the delivery of services to the

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citizens. E-governance is a political strategy which adopts modern communication technology to execute government activities and make them known to the public (Ojo, 2014). It is a technology that encompasses telephone, computer and the internet (Idama, 2014). E-governance can also be conceived as the use of information communication technology with a view to providing information to citizens and to connecting citizens with government (Mistry & Jalal, 2012). In general, it is the deployment of technology to drive service delivery.

Globally, governments are known to exist mainly for the rendering of services to its citizens at minimal or no cost depending on the nature of the service(s) rendered. Some of these services include health, education, security, electricity supply, amongst others. The ease with which the citizens can access these services from the government agencies responsible for rendering such services is often used to measure how efficient and effective such government agencies (and by extension the government) are. Since independence, successive Nigerian governments have introduced various reforms which were all channeled towards achieving efficiency in service delivery from public servants to the citizens. However, these reforms have not lived up to the desired purpose of enhancing service delivery for the Nigerian citizens. In the desire to enhance service delivery to her citizens, Nigeria, like many other nations in the world has adopted e-governance in the delivery of service. E-governance in its simple term means governance through the use of technology that encompasses telephone, computer and the internet (Idama, 2014). E-governance can also be conceived as the use of information communication technology with a view to providing information to citizens and to connecting citizens with government (Mistry & Jalal, 2012). Since its adoption in the Nigerian public service, how well has e-governance facilitated efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of service to the Nigerian citizens? This study seeks to examine the role of e-governance in the enhancement of service delivery in the Nigerian public service.

The main objective of the study is to examine the role of e-governance in the enhancement of service delivery in the Nigerian public service. The specific objectives are to:

1. examine the models of service delivery through e-governance.
2. highlight the benefits of e-governance in service delivery in Nigeria.
3. identify some challenges to e-governance implementation in Nigeria.

4. make recommendations on how to address the challenges of e-governance implementation.

The study is a conceptual study and relied on the qualitative research method. Secondary data were gathered from reputable sources such as reports, journal articles, textbooks, newspapers, official publications and the internet.

Literature Review

Conceptualizing E-governance

E-governance is the use of information technologies like the Internet, the World Wide Web, and mobile computing by government agencies which can transform government's relationship with the citizens, businesses, different layers of government, and other governments alike (Chukwuemeka, Okeke & Onwuchekwa, 2018). Again, e-governance can be conceptualized as a unification of information and communication technologies (ICT) in all the operations to augment the potentials of the government to satisfy the requirement of the local public (Ezeobele, Anselem and Nwoha (2021). According to Adelana (2020), e-governance is the application of ICT by the government to enhancing accountability, creating awareness and ensuring transparency in the management of government activities. E-governance can also be seen as the process of improving government process through the use of technology for automation and harmonisation of government activities (Dahiru, Yusuf and Yerima, 2022). Oghuvbu, Gbervbie and Oni (2022) defined e-governance as simply the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in the operations of government businesses. Lastly, e-governance can be conceptualized as an interconnected system in which the government interacts with citizens and provides augmented services to them through electronic applications (Ezeobele, Anselem & Nwoha, 2021). From the definitions of e-governance as given by various authors, we can assert that e-governance refers to the process whereby services are rendered to the citizens of a state by the use of information and communication technology (ICT) as well as other modern electronic devices with the aim of enhancing service delivery to the citizens.

Conceptualizing Public Service

Public service is contained in section 277 (91) of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1979) as well as in section 169 of the Nigerian Constitution (1999 as amended), as encompassing the civil service (Ministerial departments), statutory corporations or parastatals, judiciary, legislature, educational institutions, financially

wholly or principally owned by government at the State, Local and Federal levels, Nigeria Police or Armed Forces and other organizations in which the Federal or state governments owned controlling share or interest (CFRN, 1979; CFRN, 1999 as amended). In Nigeria, the Country's government bureaucracy is the public service. This is because government at whatever level enunciates and implements its policies, programs and projects through the instrumentality of the public service and most public services are service-oriented (Marshall & Murtala, 2015).

Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on two theoretical frameworks namely: The Diffusion of Innovations Theory and Good Governance Theory.

The Diffusion of Innovations Theory

This theory was first developed by Everett M. Rogers in 1962. The theory was first applied to agriculture technology but today, it has been applied to several disciplines, including medicine, education, and management. The Diffusion of Innovations theory explains how, why, and at what rate new ideas and technology spread in societies (Rogers, 1983; Barker, 2004). It is highly relevant in understanding how e-governance as an innovation is adopted in the public sector. The theory helps to explain how characteristics like relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trials and observations affect the adoption of e-governance tools in Nigeria. According to Rogers (1983), it also exposes the stages of innovation adoption which includes knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation, and confirmation, and how Nigerian public institutions are progressing through these stages. Lastly, it identifies and analyzes barriers such as technological infrastructure, digital literacy, and bureaucratic resistance that may hinder the diffusion of e-governance in Nigeria.

Good Governance Theory

This theory emphasizes the importance of effective, efficient, transparent, responsive, inclusive, equitable and accountable governance in achieving public service delivery. E-governance contributes to the elements of good governance by exploring how e-governance can enhance transparency by providing public access to information and by streamlining processes that reduce corruption; discussing how digital tools can make service delivery more efficient by reducing paperwork, speeding up processes, and improving communication between government and citizens; considering how e-governance can promote inclusiveness by enabling broader public participation in decision-making processes

through online platforms; and analyzing the challenges Nigeria faces in implementing e-governance (e.g., digital divide, regulatory issues) and the opportunities it presents for improving governance.

Models Of Service Delivery In E-Governance

There are many models involved in the quest to improve service delivery by public organizations using ICTs. The models include the following:

Government-to-Citizens (G2C) Model: This deals with the role of the government in ensuring that the citizens are able to get information and services electronically. The citizens have freedom to make enquiries about government institutions. Furthermore, the government can assist in disseminating information on the web, providing downloadable forms online, assisting citizens in finding employment, and disseminating information about health and safety issues (Palvia & Sharma, 2007).

Government-to-Government (G2G) Model:

This model is about inter-governmental effort which is geared towards improving communication and quality of service delivery among the three tiers of government in their daily operations. The goal of this model is to improve the efficiency of public service operations. This also aims to leverage on ICT to cut costs of operation and improve administration and management within government organizations (Islam & Ahmed, 2007). The use of E-governance in inter-governmental relations enhances inter-governmental and organizational processes; streamlines coordination and collaboration of government activities; and facilitates and streamlines inter-governmental business operations such as compliance with regulations, service delivery, and improvements (Obodo & Anigbata, 2018).

Government-to-Business (G2B) Model:

The objective of this model is to strengthen communications and connectivity between the public and private sectors to promote business transactions between both parties. It is an online means of communication between different levels of government and the business sector, which aims at disseminating information on electronic-business operations (Sunday, 2014).

Governments-to-Employees (G2E) Model: This is the smallest of the e-governance models. The G2E model relationship is to serve the employees by providing online services such as applying for annual leave online, verifying the balance of leave, and analyzing salary payment records, amongst others (Riley, 2001). This also allows employees to

gain access to important information about compensation, benefits policies, wages and compensation system, training and development, and how to access their benefits (Riley, 2001).

Benefits of E-Governance in Service Delivery

The adoption of e-government stems from the idea of globalization and a fast-changing political atmosphere where government needs to change its mode of interaction with its stakeholders and provision of essential services to the public (Abdulkareem and Ajadi, 2016). If e-governance is adopted properly, it would lead to a reduction in inefficiencies in processes by permitting the sharing of files and data across public service departments, which would in turn lead to a drastic reduction in mistakes occasioned by manual operations, and ultimately result in reduction in the time spent to complete transactions (Ibikunle and Sarumi (2012). E-governance is essential in the provision of services to citizens on one hand and the government receiving the feedbacks on the other hand (Abdulkareem and Ajadi, 2016). E-governance gives the citizens opportunity to directly participate in decision making by allowing them to provide ideas and suggestions in established forums and online communities (Ibikunle & Sarumi, 2012).

In summary, Neelesh, Bhagwati and Ashish (2013) highlighted the benefits of e-governance as follow:

1. It makes the gathering of information much easier for government, businesses and the citizens alike.
2. It gives the citizens freedom to source for information from government departments and be abreast with government activities and thereby take part in the decision-making process.
3. Through the participation of citizens in the decision-making process, e-Governance helps to strengthens democracy.
4. E-Governance leads to transparency and accountability in the activities of government, as a result of automation of services which makes government activities readily accessible to the citizens.
5. It makes government departments and units to be more responsive and responsible to the citizens since government is aware that the citizens can easily access government activities.
6. E-governance makes it possible for official duties to be performed by public officials even outside the office environment due to interconnectivity of computers and other equipment..
7. The practice of e-Governance makes

access to important information by citizens and businesses possible on the go.

Challenges of Implementing E-Governance in Nigeria

As highlighted by Abdulkareem and Ishola (2016), the following are the challenges pertinent to e-governance in the Nigerian public sector:

Incessant Power Failure: This is one major problem affecting the successful implementation of e-governance in Nigeria. The availability of power supply in Nigeria is very unreliable. Virtually the whole country experiences power outages every now and then and this has a negative influence on the proper functioning of the nation's ICT initiative. The cost of alternative sources of power is still relatively expensive in Nigeria and as a result, e-governance is still largely dependent on power supply from the distribution companies.

Infrastructural Challenge: Lack of infrastructure is another challenge to the implementation of e-governance in Nigeria. Infrastructure challenges include lack of standard guidelines for the procurement of right of way, multiple regulations on the same infrastructure, theft and vandalism of ICT equipment, an infrastructural deficit, amongst others.

Lack of Technical Know-how: The operation of e-governance requires some skills and expertise. Some public service officials are yet to be knowledgeable on the use of modern information and communication technology facilities in carrying out their official duties. Some personnel still prefer the old bureaucratic method of manual entry of transactions and filing of documents. This negatively affects the advancement of e-governance in public institutions in Nigeria.

Cyber Security challenges: Internet privacy and security are critical for the successful implementation of e-governance. Internet fraud has been a longstanding issue in Nigeria due to a lack of stringent laws on cyber security. This has greatly dented the image of the country both at home and abroad. It is hoped that the passage of the Cybercrimes (Prohibition, Prevention, Etc) Act, 2015 would help to check the rising menace of cyber fraud in Nigeria.

Digital Divide: Digital divide describes the gap in access to information and communication technology between regions with identical characteristics. In Nigeria, this divide is evident in the differences in ICT accessibility and use between rural and urban populations. Factors contributing to this divide include varying literacy

levels between these areas, infrastructure disparities, poverty, and high internet costs. In essence, the digital divide in Nigeria arises from high rate of illiteracy, deficits in infrastructure, and high level of poverty.

Conclusion

The study examined the role of e-governance in the enhancement of service delivery in the Nigerian public service. E-governance is the adoption of information and communication technology in the rendering of services to the public by the ministries, agencies and departments of government. E-governance brings about speed, efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery. There are however challenges that may hinder the effective implementation of e-governance and thus limit its benefits in service delivery in Nigeria. The challenges include infrastructural deficits, lack of technical know-how, incessant power failure, amongst others. If these challenges are adequately addressed, there would be a considerable improvement in service delivery to the public.

Recommendations

In line with the challenges in the implementation of e-governance outlined in this study, the following recommendations are made to address the challenges:

1. Government should provide the needed infrastructure that will aid the effective and efficient implementation of e-governance in the Nigerian public service. This will include effective broadband connections like Wi-Fi, DSLs, fiber and satellites.
2. Government should ensure that power supply which is a major challenge to effective e-governance implementation in the Nigerian public service is improved considerably as electricity is a major criterion for e-governance to function efficiently and effectively.
3. There should be effective communication and organizational skills among the personnel. Ministries, Departments and Agencies of government must show a high level of e-readiness in their operations. Highly skilled personnel in ICT should be employed and there should be regular training and retraining of personnel on best practice in ICT as well as on the use of e-governance in bringing about efficient and effective service delivery.
4. Government should ensure that the Cybercrimes (Prohibition, Prevention, Etc) Act, 2015 is properly activated and violators of the Act sanctioned to

guarantee safety in the cyberspace and encourage more adoption of e-governance in the public service,

5. The gap in accessibility to internet facilities between the rural and urban centres in Nigeria should be closed so that there won't be barriers in the delivery of services across the country. This can be achieved by providing all the needed infrastructure, education/orientation and personnel in areas that are lacking them.

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