

A Critical Appraisal of Personnel Management System and its Performance in Colonial Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This paper titled “A Critical Appraisal of Personnel Management System and its Performance in Colonial Nigeria” focuses on the application of human resource management concepts in public and private bureaucracies in Nigeria during colonial period. The paper reveals the influence of the dynamics of colonialism in the emerging personnel management system in terms of utilizing the workforce to achieve the colonial political and economic policies. It concluded that the personnel system was structured to benefit the colonial masters at the expense of the colony and its development. Thus, the exploitation and neglect of the natives undermined the performance of the colonial personnel management system in Nigeria.

Keywords:Personnel management, colonialism, performance, effectiveness, efficiency, personnel concepts

INTRODUCTION

Personnel administration is a basic function of management in any organisation. The modern personnel management practices were introduced in Nigeria since colonial era. The issue of discussion is, “Personnel Management under Colonial Rule”. It reflects that there were elements of personnel management in practice in both public and private sector organisations during the colonial period. This paper is specifically structured to examine the various elements of personnel management practiced during colonial rule, and to see the impact of the system as it was, on the efficiency and effective performance of colonial bureaucracy, as well as its implication on post-colonial public and private bureaucracy in Nigeria.

Nigro (1963) defined personnel administration as “the art of selecting new employees and making use of old ones in such manner that the maximum quality and quantity of output and service are obtained from the working force”. To Adamolekun (1986), personnel management is “the management role that is concerned with people at work and their relationship within the organisation.

Nigro (1963) examines critically the following as the core functions of personnel management in any organisation, be it public or private: hiring, determination of job, motivation, remuneration, training, development, discipline, retirement. In contemporary time, emphasis on personnel management include industrial relations which centered on work place relationship between employees interacting in the course of performing job tasks, employees-employers relations, regulated by the state or its agencies. This paper is not aimed at giving the history of personnel management in Nigeria, but to review the extent to which personnel function was carried out in view of the colonial background of administration in Nigeria.

AN OVERVIEW OF COLONIAL RULE

Colonial rule is the system of administration of colony (a colony is a settlement or settlers in a new country, fully or partly subject to the mother country). Nkrumah (1961) defined colonialism as “a system of government adopted by the foreign settler in order to exercise political, military and economic powers over the occupied territory in disregard of the indigenous citizens’ right to self-rule”. The wave of colonialism swallowed Africa after the Berlin Conference of 1885 and the subsequent partitioning of Africa in the early 20th century. But colonial rule in Nigeria started with the annexation of Lagos in 1861 and the constitution of protectorates in Southern Nigeria in the late 19th century and full colonialism in the territory of today’s Nigeria was fully enacted in 1900 and culminated in 1914 with the amalgamation of southern and northern Nigeria.

Up to 1960, when independence was granted to Nigeria by the crown government in Britain, Nigeria was a colonial territory under colonial rule. As earlier stated, the concern of this analysis is neither to examine history of personnel management or history of Nigeria politics, but to critically examine personnel practices during colonial rule as experienced in Nigeria in order to aid certain generalization and conclusions about personnel management under colonial rule. As noted by Rodney (1972), colonial system of administration was undemocratic, autocratic and totalitarian in nature. Natives were not given the chance to participate in the administration process of colonial rule. As rightly put by Rodney (1972), colonialism was “a system of exploitation of colony by the metropol. This colonial perspective shaped every aspect of society life during colonial period.

PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT DURING COLONIAL RULE AS EXPERIENCED IN NIGERIA

The peculiarity of personnel management under colonial rule was a result of the political context within which personnel functions were carried out. The situation accounted for the difference of principles and practice of personnel management in colonial administration machinery and post-independent personnel practices.

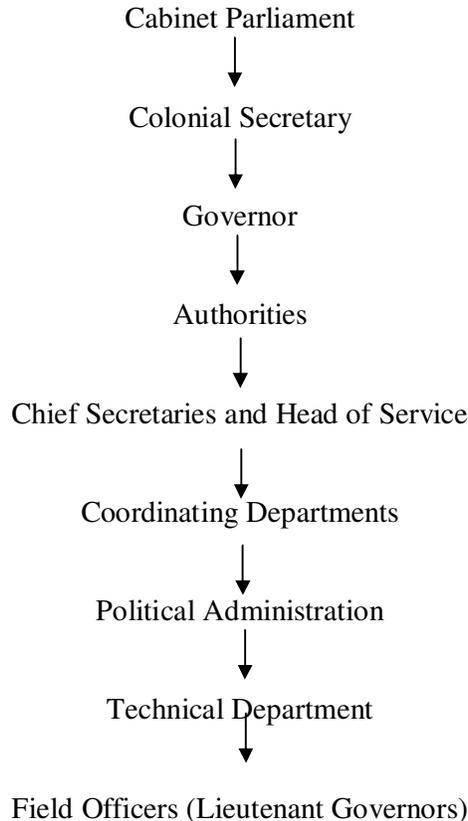
Adoption of British Personnel System

Since Nigeria was a British colony, the personnel system as practiced in Britain was planted in Nigeria with occupation of Nigeria by British colonial government. The British personnel system of public personnel administration, comprising the civil service system, was reproduced in the colonial administration. Henry (1986) explained that the civil service comprises “a body of trained persons who are charged with implementation of decision taken by the authoritative decision makers, the political leadership, spread in multiplicity of government bureaucratic organisations and agencies, the machinery of government, abiding under the principle of neutrality, merit, impartiality and apolitical.

Personnel Structure under Colonial Rule

The structure of the colonial personnel hierarchy in the mainstream departments and agencies of government (the colonial civil service) reflects in toto the structural pattern in Britain. The service, according to Adebayo (1986), was divided into three cadre, stated thus, in descending order of authority and hierarchy: administrative, executive, and clerical class. In terms of the flow of authority from the Home Government to the colony, as applicable in Nigeria, the following hierarchy as given by Adedokun (2000) were noted.

Structure of Colonial Personnel Management



Source (Adedokun, 2000)

The bulk of personnel in the colonial service were British nationals who were very committed and dedicated because of their high sense of national consciousness and loyalty to their country. Furthermore, there existed high commitment to service and the colonial personnel were comparatively very efficient and effective in terms of service performance. It is appropriate at this point to examine specific issues in colonial personnel management in order to reveal the internal dynamics and intricacies in Nigeria colonial bureaucracy.

Forced Labour

The colonial government in their attempt to achieve total utilization of African resources, engaged local natives in the colonies in various forms of forced labour. This became a major attribute of colonial personnel management practice. A testimony by a colonial white settler in Kenya as reported by Rodney (1972: 180), stated thus: “We have stolen this land, now we must steal his limbs. Compulsory labour is the corollary of our occupation of the country”. Colonial powers resorted widely to the physical coercion of labour, backed up of course by legal sanctions, since anything which the colonial government chose to do was ‘legal’. The simplest form of forced labour was that which colonial governments demanded to carry out ‘public works’. Labour for a given number of days per year had to be given free for these ‘public works’ – building castles for governors, prisons for Africans, barracks for troops, and bungalows for colonial officials. A great deal of this forced labour went into the construction of roads, railways and parts, to provide the infrastructure for private capitalist investment and to facilitate the export of cash-crops.

Quite apart from the fact that the ‘public works’ were of direct value to the capitalist, the colonial government also aided private capitalists by providing them with labour recruited by force. This was particularly true in the early years of colonialism, but continued in varying degrees up to the Second World War, and even to the end of colonialism in some places. In Nigeria and some other colonies, it was the tin companies which benefited from the forced-labour legislation, allowing them to get away with paying workers \$5 per day plus rations (Rodney, 1972: 182).

INDIRECT RULE SYSTEM OF PERSONNEL RECRUITMENT

To ensure administration outside the state machinery (civil service), as noted in the structure of colonial administration given by Adedokun (2000), below the Lieutenant Governors were the Local Chiefs, Emirs and Obas who rule over their native territory on behalf of the colonial master. This was due to lack of manpower at the onset of colonial rule in Nigeria. In Nigeria, the British decided to administer the territory through the available traditional institutions. There were well defined traditional administrative systems in Northern and Western Nigeria with the Emirs/Sultan and the Obas, all were incorporated into the colonial system. In the East, due to absence of well-defined chieftaincy institution, warrant chiefs were recruited by the colonial master who acted as agent of the colonial overlord in Igbo land. This was an imposition on the natives who violently opposed the system. Due to this situation, Offiong (1982) concluded that “the colonial government was insensitive to the culture and traditions of the natives and exert their power without legitimacy, employing instrument of coercion to repress rebellion”.

Taxation under Colonial Period

The colonial government forced tax on the African natives. Most Africans joined the colonial service in order to raise money with which to meet colonial tax law. The labour of natives and natural resources were taxed to run colonial government. As explained by Rodney (1972: 179), “colonial taxation system was to provide requisite funds for administering the colony as a field for exploitation”.

Promotion to Higher Level

Colonial government personnel management policy discriminated against the employment of Africans in senior categories. This occurs both in civil service and in private sector organisations. Africans were restricted to “junior staff” level in the civil service, which is the clerical class. This was one of the major problems which motivated the nationalist struggle in Nigeria.

Discriminatory Wage Personnel Policy

The wage policy during colonial period was discriminatory between African employees and their European counterparts. As noted by Rodney (1972: 163), “wages paid to workers in Europe and North America were much higher than wages paid to African workers in comparable categories”. Rodney’s investigation also proved that where European settlers were found in considerable numbers, the wage differential was readily perceived, like in North Africa where wages of Moroccans and Algerians were 16% and 25% respectively, and the left over was for the Europeans. This is what Offiong (1980: 102) referred to as “Starvation Wages”.

PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA UNDER COLONIAL RULE

The development of personnel management in Nigeria, with particular reference to public personnel administration, is inextricably interwoven with political development in general, and the development of Modern Public Administration. From the onset of colonial rule, there have been various changes and constitutional developments which influenced and patterned the colonial personnel management. What determined the personnel management practices during the colonial period was the colonial economic policy (Ubeku, 1975). Major issues of discourse are Federalism, Nigerianisation and Northernisation.

Nigerianisation and Northernisation

Nigerianisation is the process whereby Nigerian natives who are qualified and competent gradually replace British officials. Balogun (1983) also called the process, public service indigenization. The need for indigenization of the public service was in view of nationalistic development in the country. The colonial service operated discriminatory policies of not placing Nigeria at administrative cadre. Therefore, the Nationalists agitated for Europeans to be replaced by Nigerians. It is this process of replacement that was called Nigerianisation. This was effectively carried out where career officers were appointed at the federal level to speed up the process, through recruitment, training and career counselling. Balogun (1983: 177) explained that by 1962 Nigerianisation had progressed to such an extent that the federal public service commission was able to decide that the process must stop.

Northernisation occurred because technically competent personnel were not sufficient in the north, the north did not apply Nigerianisation in the Northern Regional Public Service, as applicable in Eastern and Western Regions. As a result of the Northern fear of domination by Southerners, the North carried out Northernisation policy which was the replacement of non-Northerners by northerners, and where Northerners were not competent, foreigners were preferred to other Non-Northern Nigerians (Balogun, 1983).

The main issue is the implication of these policies on the efficiency and effectiveness of the post-independence public personnel administration in Nigeria. Based on Balogun (1993) critique of these policies, it was observed that ill-prepared and not fully qualified people were placed on managerial, advisory and high political responsibility associated with top civil service. The effect was the inability of the public service to achieve result, corruption, lowering of administrative standard and general inefficiency and ineffective service, resulting in low service performance and decline of productivity.

FEDERALISM AND MULTIPLICITY OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

Federalism was introduced in Nigeria with the constitutional development of 1954. The creation of distinct central and regional governments marked the multiplicity of personnel management systems in Nigeria. Before now, personnel management was organized within the scope of centralized department. But with the introduction of federation as heralded by regionalism, personnel system was autonomous at all levels of government, with three regions (West, East and North) and the Federal Government, there were four (4) personnel systems for the four governments.

COLONIAL INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

Industrial relations is one of the major elements of personnel management. It was not well developed in Nigeria during the colonial period. Yusufu (1984: 6) defined industrial relations as “the whole web of human interaction at work which is predicated upon, and arises out of,

employment contract”. According to Yusufu, the aim of industrial relations is to attain and maintain maximum or optimum levels of productive efficiency and how to share the economic returns.

Yusufu (1984) strongly argued that industrial relations practice as applicable in Europe was also applicable in Nigeria, but only in reference to relationship between employees who are citizens of the home country (European Colonial Masters), but not in regard to African native employees. The British system influenced industrial relations in Nigeria, as Nigeria was a colony of Great Britain. Adamolekun (1986: 123) expressed the views that “industrial relations are usually conducted within a formal legal framework supplemented with certain rules and regulations and, in some cases, by custom and practice”. The key actors in industrial relations are the trade unions and employees associations which were at infancy faced with absence of industrial democracy in autocratic colonial government. Thus, there was no check and balance of management policies to guarantee performance.

The Nigerian Civil Service Union that has been in existence, but dominated by the white, made in-roads after 1918 when the First World War ended. The industrial relations based on union activities increased in tempo by 1920s because of increased competent labour in Nigeria. By 1930s, more unions like The Railway workers Union and Teachers Union came into existence. The implication on public bureaucracy, was the establishment of labour inspectorate in 1939, to handle personnel management issues. Other unions were Nigeria Railway Native Staff Union (1919), Postal Workers Union and Technical Workers Union (Ubeku, 1980).

LEGAL CONTEXT OF INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

The second element as noted above is the legal context within which labour relations take place. The colonial legislations were to ensure the exploitation of the native labour power to achieve the overall economic policy objectives of the colonial government which was to benefit the British and the rest of colonial exploiters in Africa (Lewis, 1963: 14). Hence, it could be said that the legislations were not to ensure industrial harmony. These legislations as identified by Yusufu (1980: 53) include:

1. The Trade Union Ordinance, 1938
2. The Workmen Compensation Ordinance, 1951;
3. The Trade Disputes (Arbitration and Inquiry) Ordinance, 1941;
4. The Labour Code Ordinance, 1945;
5. The Trade Unions Act, 1938;
6. The Factories Act, 1955;
7. The Wages Boards Act, 1957; and
8. The National provident Fund Act, 1957

PRACTICE OF PERSONNEL FUNCTION DURING COLONIAL RULE

Ubeku (1975: 12) outlined the traditional functions of personnel management as:

Recruitment, selection and placement, wages and salaries administration, industrial relations and joint consultation, employee welfare, training and development.

The discussion so far has touched on such functions as forced labour, indirect rule, wages and salaries administration and industrial relations. But in this section, this paper will examine recruitment, employee welfare, training and development.

Recruitment

Recruitment into the colonial personnel administration was carried out in two ways: Firstly, was the recruitment in the home country through the office of colonial secretary principally into the administrative and executive class. There was relatively surplus labour (unemployment, and work in the colony was a major strategy of reducing unemployment in Europe). As applicable in British civil service, entry into the higher hierarchy of colonial service by those from home country (Britain) was by competitive examination and meeting certain stipulated level of education or technical competence.

In the colony, the initial stage employed traditional institution of administration. As the state developed and more natives were educated, the indirect rule system gradually withered away. Employment took the same form as in the Metropol. In the private sector, recruitment was more competitive except where forced labour was employed in plantations (Rodney, 1972).

Employee Welfare

Welfare packages were given to employees of both private organisations and the state during the colonial period, notably among which include health services, housing and transport. But Rodney (1972) and Offiong (1980) argued that these services were meant for the foreign members from Metropol, not for natives, proving that the welfare packages were administered discriminatorily as seen under wages and salaries administration.

Training and Development

Ubeku (1975) defined management development as “the process of developing managers’ knowledge, skills and attitudes through instruction, demonstration, practice and planned experience to meet present and future need of the organisation. Personnel in both private and public organisations were trained and developed. This training did not cut across all categories of employees. The lack of training institutions locally was the result of most training and development programmes taking place abroad in the metropolitan country (Britain in the case of Nigeria).

CONCLUSION

Colonial rule was not democratic but autocratic system of government. The personnel management practice during colonial period was not employee centered, but structured and patterned to aid the success of colonial economic and political policies. In this paper, personnel concepts and techniques such as training, development, recruitment, wages, employee welfare and industrial relations among others, were examined. We also focused on main issues of colonial personnel administration, such as federalism, forced labour, indirect rule, colonial tax policy, Northernisation and Nigerianisation policies. From every object of discussion, personnel management under colonial rule was exploitative just like colonialism itself was exploitative.

Because of the exploitative nature of colonialism, personnel management and practice under colonialism was to ensure the highest exploitation of human resources in the colony for the betterment of the metropol. The modern techniques and tools of personnel management were not fully developed, but in their infancy, and efficiency and effectiveness as indicators of performance were not achieved to the betterment of the colony. This situation posed major challenges to the practice of personnel administration in post-independence Nigeria in particular, and all countries that emerged from colonialism.

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