

Achieving Effective Service Delivery by Local Government Employees through Strategic Training Programmes

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Abstract

The thesis of the study is that effective service delivery by the local government employees is a function of a strategic training framework. Extant literature examined captured the importance of training and development programmes in the local government and stated among other things, that training increases employees productivity, reduce costs, boost morale, promote stability, flexibility and service delivery at the grassroots. The arguments are substantiated with *the training and high-performance theory advanced by Gallie and White (1993)*. The study adopts ex post facto design. Data are obtained from secondary sources and analysed using the content analytical technique. Empirical analysis of literature provides the framework for conclusion and policy recommendation. The study advocates for a strategic continuous training plan to enhance the capacity of local government employees and service delivery in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Local government, Local Government Service Commission, training, service delivery*

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Background to the Study

Human resources are the greatest asset of any organization. Due to their central role in actualizing set goals, it becomes important to train, develop and maximize talents, skills and ability of human resources in the organisation. Oakland (2000) admitted that training is the single most important factor in improving quality, once there has been a commitment to do so. Sayles and Straus (1977) observed that training motivates employees to work harder and improve their morale, efforts and performance.

There is a distinction between employee training and development in the organization. Training programmes are designed to provide employees with specific skills that enhance performance. In contrast, development is an effort to provide employees with the abilities the organization will need in the future. In other words, while training programmes meet immediate employee skills need, development programmes are futuristic. Both are significant in determining the survival of the organization. Therefore, Soeze (2002) supports the view of Szilagyl by arguing that “for an organization to perform optimally there is need to train and retrain its labour force to fit properly into various positions, both now and in the future”.

The local government is the third tier of government within a federal system of government. This tier works with an administrative system designed to formulate and implement policies necessary for grassroots development. The local government administrative system is a machinery of elected, appointed and career personnel. Asides the first category, the second and third are coordinated by the Local Government Service Commission. The Commission performs several functions among which include recruitment, training, transfer and discipline of local government employees. The effective performance of the local government is dependent on the capacity of its personnel. This draws attention to their central importance of training and retraining local government personnel. This study set to assess the importance of training of local government personnel on their performance. The study adopts ex post facto design. Data are obtained from secondary sources and examined through content analytical technique. Empirical review and theoretical discourse provide the framework conclusion and policy recommendation. The study advocates the need for a strategic training framework to enhance the capacity of local government employees for efficient service delivery in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

The local government system in Nigeria is faced with a lot of challenges, which affects its capacity to promote rural development and enhance the wellbeing of rural or local people. Local government employees exhibit negative work attitude such as tardiness, absenteeism, lack of interest in attending workshops, and excessive complaints, amongst others. This attitude affects their job performance. Equally, the lack of effective leadership qualities and administrative skills of elected officials and political appointees of the local government further affects the development objective of the local governments in Nigeria. The entire administrative machinery of the local government is affected and the outcome is poor performance. It is necessary to address this through a strategic training framework to enhance the capacity of local government employees for efficient service delivery in Nigeria. This concern forms the basis for this study.

Theoretical Framework

The study adopts the training and high performance theory advanced by Gallie and White (1993). The theory is concerned with the 'skills trajectory' and proposes a distinction between those occupations which are becoming increasingly skilful and others which are deskilling over time. They reinstated the importance of training in the organisational process. Training is described as a perfect way to learn a job or to develop employees' skills. This supports the argument of Schuler and MacMillan (1984) that employee training has the potential to contribute to building capacity required to achieve the set goals of the organisations.

From the arguments above, it can be stated that training local government employees should be arranged frequently and repeatedly for employees requiring crucial skills and techniques; this provides opportunities for practice, which is important whether the skills being learnt are technical or behavioural. After training, it is necessary to support the process with effective motivation to enhance staff retention. This, Kumar and Pansari (2015) described five elements that contribute to staff motivation and engagement:

- a. **Employee satisfaction:** the positive reaction employees have to their overall job circumstances, including their supervisors, pay and co-workers
- b. **Employee identification:** the emotional state in which employees identify as part of the organization
- c. **Employee commitment:** A committed employee guards the organization's secrets and works for its best interests
- d. **Employee loyalty:** creates a positive attitude about the organization, which can motivate employees to do more than expected
- e. **Employee performance:** can be seen in the quality of goods and services the company produces and in customer interactions and feedback.

Staff Training and Local Government Performance in Nigeria

Training is key to enhancing the capacity of local government personnel; elected, appointed or employed directly under the civil service structure. Staff training refers to the process of applying appropriate methodology to those situations in which improved performance can result from effective learning. Flippo (1965) stated that training involves “the act of increasing the knowledge and skills of an employee in doing a particular job.” McCormick and Tifflin (1965) regard training as “any planned organized effort that is specifically designed to help individuals develop increasing capabilities.” Training must be planned, with details on its implementation strategies and expected outcome. These details are captured in the training policy of the organization.

According to Monappa and Saiyadain (1979), the training policy of an organization must reflect the commitment of its top management to training, and such commitment is expressed in the rules and procedure that influence the standard and scope of training in the organization. They added that “training policies are necessary for highlighting the organization's approach to the training function, help in identification of priority areas in training, and to communicate the firm's intent regarding an employee's career development”. In this regard, training policies must be designed with specific guidelines and expectations

based on the peculiarity of job needs. The Personnel Department or its consulting agency must identify or develop training materials and techniques to be used in the programme based on the job description of the employees and the overall goal of the organization.

The local government is a political-administrative unit that is empowered by law to administer a specific locality. Local government councils, through its administrative capacity, enjoys an autonomous status, which entitles it to take certain legislative, administrative and financial decisions though under the conditions and within the limits of law (Anam, 2020). The National Guidelines for a reform of local government in Nigeria in 1976 also define local government as the government at the local level exercised through representative councils established by law to exercise specific power within a defined area.

Anam (2020) added that the local government is a sub-governmental organ or body created by the central government or Act of Parliament to be in charge of political administration of a locality or a local unit in a state. The United Nations Department of Public Administration defines local government as “...a political subdivision of a nation (in a federal system, a state) which is constituted by law and has substantial control of local affairs, including the powers to impose taxes or to exact labour for prescribed purposes. The governing body of such an entity is elected or otherwise locally selected”(UN, 1961). This reflection clearly shows that the local government is a political institution, with viable machinery capable of designing, implementing and assessing the impact of public policies. For the local government to perform optimally efficient, its administrative machinery must be well equipped with relevant skills, knowledge and attitude.

The Local Government Service Commission (LGSC) plays a key role in enhancing the capacity of the local government workforce. LGSC is set up to control the local government personnel service. Such as appointing, posting, transfer, discipline, training and retraining local government staff. The Commission makes decisions on the structure of local authorities and their electoral representation. Besides the Commission, there are other units of the local government management team responsible for personnel functions. These are, the

- i. Local government service board: This is the body that was transformed to be local government service commission.
- ii. Establishment of management committee: They are the committee that handles the personal function of the staff of the local government on a preliminary basis before being passed to local government and local government service commission for defined decision.
- iii. Senior staff management committee: It is the committee that holds preliminary discussions and deliberation or interview on the promotion or confirmation of appointment and discipline of the senior staff on GL and above.
- iv. Junior staff management committee: This is the committee that discusses staff matters affecting staff of the local government on GL 01-06.
- v. Unified local government service: this explains the system whereby staff of local government on grade level 7 and above in the state are administered on the same umbrella without any prejudice and again that is to say that local government service

commission has uniform condition of service under unified system, senior staff of the local government can be posted to any local government.

According to Bagaji (2002), these institutional arrangements are designed to see that there is an improvement in the quality of personnel in the local government system. It becomes the responsibility of the commission to train and enhance the service delivery capacity of local government employees in the country.

Challenges of Local Government Performance and Service Delivery

The local government is faced with several challenges. This challenge affects service delivery. According to Obeten (2018) in Anam (2020), the challenges of the third tier level of governance include but not limited to the following:

Leadership/Policy Challenges:

- a. Some Chairman find it unnecessary to invest in agricultural projects
- b. Lack of political will in the execution of agricultural, educational and health policies
- c. Political hitches in deciding actual project needs of the governed.

Core operations Challenges:

- a. Slow responses to respond to government's policy programmes on health, tourism, education, taxation, urbanization etc.
- b. Poor cold chain systems
- c. Language/cultural barriers

Equipment, facilities and materials challenges:

- a. Dearth of modern farm equipment and tools
- b. Lack of storage facilities
- c. Poor extension farmers' inputs
- d. Lack of visual aids for educational activities
- e. Lack of agrochemicals
- f. Unconducive Office accommodation

Administrative challenges:

- a. Non-availability of accurate personnel data like varying declarations, retirement dates etc
- b. Non-adherence to specified jobs description
- c. Difficulty in the collation of raw data
- d. Absence of due process (everything done in a hurry)
- e. Inadequate supply of stationery
- f. Inconsistent data to enhance monitoring and evaluation

Staffing challenges:

- a. Dearth of junior staff in the service (e.g. Grade Level 01-06)
- b. Inadequate health staff to cover the Communities
- c. Few professionals
- d. Ignorance on staff contributory obligations (e.g NHIS, NHF, pensions etc.)

Learning and capacity building challenges

- a. Misplaced importance of workshops/seminars-often seen as avenues for monetary gains rather than knowledge acquisition
- b. Absence of combined training opportunities for elected and career officials.
- c. Lack of Skilled Staff
- d. Inadequate knowledge for the new budgeting system (MTEF/MTSS)
- e. Absence of reliable ICT (e.g. Internet services, Computers etc)

Budget funding challenges

- a. Non-implementation of approved budget estimates
- b. Delay in the passing of annual Estimates
- c. Absence of imprest for routine administrative matters

External local government challenges

- a. Over bearing political interference in governance
- b. Conflicting revenue generation rights among state and local governments
- c. Difficult terrain to project sites
- d. Low level of farmers literacy
- e. Inter/Intra Communal conflicts
- f. Security threats to some Local Government Areas
- g. Involvement of politicians in Revenue Generation (Obeten, 2018).

To address these challenges and improve service delivery at the local government, it is important to adopt a strategic training framework to train and retrain the local government employees across the country.

Strategic Training Framework for Improved Service Delivery of Local Government Employees in Nigeria

Nigeria has about 774 local government councils and these local governments face similar administrative challenges. One of the primary means of enhancing the capacity of local government employees is through in-service training which is often done through seminars. This is a short term training covering a period of within one day to two weeks, organized for the staff of an organization in order to acquaint them with new knowledge in different fields to enhance their performance at work. A strategic framework is a periodic training and development programme designed to cater to the job need of the staff of the local government, especially at the managerial and policymaking, implementation and evaluation level. The training programme must reflect the commitment of management to training, and that such commitment is expressed in the rules and procedure that influence the standard and scope of training in the local government council. The under-listed training outcome must form part of the core objectives of the training programmes irrespective of where it is held. The objective of such training programme must cover,

- a. Improving performance which must ensure effective service delivery
- b. Updating employees' skills and avoiding managerial obsolescence
- c. Ensuring that there is job competency
- d. The ability to solve emerging problems

- e. Boosting morale and promoting employee motivation and job satisfaction
- f. Developing interpersonal skills and job knowledge
- g. Increasing productivity, reduce costs, and promote organizational stability and flexibility

Conclusion

The paper set out to examine the importance of training on the performance and service delivery of local government employees in Nigeria. It highlighted the lack of an effective and regular training programmes core among the problems facing the local government systems in Nigeria. The study adopts a strategic framework for training and developing the capacity of local government employee across the country. It maintained that this must be seen and done as a wide-range of deliberate efforts and activities employed by the local government through its machinery or external firm to equip her workforce with the relevant skills, knowledge and attitude in order to carryout their duties and tasks effectively and efficiently.

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