

Social Networking and Access to Jobs in Sub-Saharan Africa: An Inquiry into the 'Ima Mmadu' Theorem

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Abstract: In Social Networking and Access to Jobs in Sub-Saharan Africa: An Inquiry into the 'Ima Mmadu' Theorem, we carried out an inquiry into the allegation that most employees of the public sectors in most Sub-Saharan African (SSA) countries are people who are connected with influential members of society. This means that such employments were neither based on merit nor through regular employment procedures. Consequently, four objectives were set: to identify the factors that significantly impact on the access to public sector jobs; to find out the fraction of public/civil servants who gained their employments due to their connections with influential members of society; to find out the fraction of public/civil servants who actually gained their employment based on merit and finally, to make recommendations based on research findings. The main hypothesis is that access to public sector jobs in most SSA countries does not depend on connections with powerful members of society. A multi-stage random sampling technique, comprising two stages of sampling, was used to obtain the data. The first stage was a pilot stage. 50 public servants from different government departments were given copies of the questionnaire and asked to freely write down how they got their jobs at the first instance. Their responses enabled the determination of the variables to include in a multiple regression analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) model. The second stage involved the distribution of well-structured questionnaire encompassing all the variables obtained at the pilot stage, and administered to 560 public servants from various government departments. The target is to find out how they all had their jobs at the first instance. This produced interesting outcomes. The regression results show that most of the public servants gained employments into different strata of public departments as a result of their connections with some influential members of society. The main recommendation is that leaderships in SSA countries should ensure healthy process of recruitment into their public sectors so as to ensure equity and fairness thereby giving equal opportunities to the entire citizenry.

Key words: Social networking, public servants, random sampling, questionnaire, recruitment process

Introduction

The term, '*ima mmadu*' was coined by Aniebue Innocent, in the '*tombo connection*', which was a popular radio programme he presented for the Anambra Broadcasting Service (ABS), in the 1980s. Mr. Aniebue used the *ima mmadu* theorem to satirize what actually explains how the access to the good things of life such as plum job, government contracts, political appointments, university admissions, and so on, are only accessible to people who have connections with influential people in society. These are usually government officials, politician appointees, and wealthy businessmen, among others. This theorem was later improved upon at the University of Nigeria. It comes closest to explaining how the access to the good things of life in most Sub-Saharan African (SSA) countries is determined. It is of essence to this work.

A typical case in point is the process of recruitment into public sector jobs in most Sub-Saharan African countries. Each of these countries has well-defined labour laws, which explain in every detail, the procedure for hiring of workers. Such laws are the standard documents which guide the recruitment process. It is also the basis for job seekers to know how to go about their search for jobs in the public sector. When these procedures are adhered to, they enable the achievement of the goals of the employer(s).

In Nigeria, the starting point of the recruitment of people into the public sector is the advertisement of vacancies in national dailies. Thereafter, interested candidates apply within the time frame as contained in the job advertisement. Suitable candidates are shortlisted and invited for interview. This sometimes includes written examinations. The successful candidates are offered jobs with clearly defined terms and conditions for their employment. At the federal level, such employments are based on the so-called federal character principle. This ensures that all the six geo-political regions of the country are represented on equal scale.

At the state and local government levels, the process is still the same: job advertisements, collection of applications; short-listing, interviews, and employment. Again, such employments are expected to reflect the characteristics of the state or local governments, as the case may be. In all these instances, the public service is expected to emphasize uniformity, standardization, and transparency in the recruitment process.

However, there are allegations and accusations that the process of recruitment as contained in the labour law is rarely adhered to. This means that in most cases, the labour laws are violated by those in power for different reasons such as religious affiliations, ethnic cleavages and the interest of self and kin, among others. Badaru (2003) contends that due to the violation of these laws, mediocres and quacks are often hired. If this is the case, the goals of the public service in respect of service delivery and productivity will remain a mirage. This problem has attracted the interest of scholars and practitioners from different spheres of economic and social life. The outcomes of these works are interesting.

Motivation of this work

The process of recruitment of public servants into the public sector of most SSA countries has been the object of discussions among scholars and practitioners within the sub-region. This is for the fact that the citizens complain of the fact that most recruitments are never based on merit but rather on extraneous factors beyond the ideal situation as contained in the labour laws of these countries. In fact, based on observed cases, such accusations are somewhat justified. A critical issue against such practices is the lack of transparency in the hiring process.

Experts and scholars from different spheres of life have carried out several inquiries from different perspectives of life, in a bid to explore the underpinnings of such practices. For instance, Maidoki and Dahaida (2013) alongside Omisore and Okofu (2014) attempted to find out if religious factors could influence the access to public sector jobs in Nigeria. Their findings established a strong relationship between the religious affiliations of an individual and his access to public sector jobs. These findings however were contradictory to that of Adenugba et al (2017) which did not trace any relationship between access to public sector jobs and the religious affiliations of people.

Omisore and Okofu (2014) decried the hiring process. This is due to the noticeable impact of interferences from various sources. In addition, the recruitment practices are often filled with irregularities and manipulations. The scholars explained that as a result of such irregularities, unqualified people and quacks are often hired while well-qualified and vibrant job seekers are relegated to the background. This practice explains why poor performance of the public sector persists. In fact, under the prevailing circumstance, the performance of the public sector could be sub-optimal.

It is also worthy of mention at this stage that the impact of these irregularities in the recruitment process has also been reported and investigated in some other SSA countries. For instance, Otto et al (2018) observed that recruitments into public higher institutions in Ghana were mainly based on recommendation. This means that people who may not have strong and influential people to endorse their application are not likely to be hired. So also, Oaya et al (2017) reported the negative influence of host communities and its impact on organisations. The scholars summarized that such influences lead to organizational inefficiency. This is also in line with the observations of Kanu (2015) in Sierra Leone. Samwel (2017) in the *'Influence of Recruitment, Selection and Retention Performance Outcomes of Registered Family-Owned Business in Mwanza Region, Tanzania'*, equally opined that the use of ineffective recruitment, selection, and retention methods do have negative influences on the performance of business organisations.

One aspect of research which has not been given enough attention so far is the influence of inter-personal relationships on the access to public sector jobs in Sub-Saharan Africa and the implications for the respective economies of these countries. This work represents a conscious effort to improve the works already carried out on related topics and close some gaps in literature.

We shall attempt to provide answers to the following questions:

- What are the factors that enhance access to public sector jobs among SSA countries

- What fraction of public sector employees actually got their jobs based on their connections or assistance from influential members of society?
- What fraction of public servants actually gained their employment through regular employment interviews and hired on merit?
- How can the employment process be streamlined?

Objectives of this work

The broad objective of this work is to find out the relevance of the so-called '*ima mmadu theorem*' or simply in-person interrelationships on the access to public sector jobs in SSA. This objective is broken down into the following simpler objectives:

- To identify the factors that enhance the access to public sector jobs
- To find out the fraction of public servants who actually gained their employment due to their connections with influential members of society such as government officials, politicians, political office holders, among others.
- To find out the fraction of public servants actually hired on merit
- To make recommendations based on findings.

In the context of this work, the terms, public service, civil service and public sector employees are used very loosely to mean the same. This is justified by the fact that the research interest is to find out how the workers actually became employed into government paid jobs and the implications for the public service as a whole.

The work is guided by the sole hypothesis that access to public sector jobs does not depend on connections/interrelationships with influential members of society.

Abridged Literature

The '*ima mmadu theorem*' which embodies in-person aspect of social networking is rare in economic literature since it is a very recent development. Equally important is the fact that its implications for SSA economies have not been exhaustively explored in the literature from this sub-region. Most of the available works merely relate to the relevance of other aspects of social networking to employment opportunities. We shall summarize few of these works.

In the '*Staff Recruitment and Selection Process in the Nigerian Public Service: What should be done*' Omisore and Okofu (2014) attempted to explore the implications of ethnicity and religious affiliations on recruitment into the Nigerian public service. It was found out that both factors significantly influenced the access to public sector jobs. This finding is in line with Maidoki and Dahaida (2013). Omisore and Okofu (2014) contends that there was adherence to the so-called '*Federal Character Principle*'. This means that even within the various ethnic groups and religious groups, there still exists a systematic way by which some members still marginalize others. Furthermore, it was discovered that irrespective of the well-defined process of recruitment as well as the timing, these are rarely adhered to. The recommendation is for the government to operate an efficient administrative system for the benefit of all. This could be achieved by adhering to the labour laws of the country. In addition, this will ensure the hiring of most qualified, technically sound, disciplined and committed workers. It is only when such workers are employed that the government will realize the aspiration of good governance. In contrast to Omisore and Okofu (2014), Yaro (2014) failed to trace any relationship between religious affiliations and access to public sector jobs in Nigeria.

Adenugba, et al (2017) observed much of irregularities in the recruitment and selection of workers in Nigeria. It was identified that factors such as ethnicity, nepotism and neglect for efficiency do have negative impact on employee performance.

Okeke (2017) explored the influence of culture on the career progression of Nigerian women. The findings show that political considerations rather than merit play a key role in Nigeria's public service. This arises from the fact that the leaderships of government establishments are usually appointed based on their class affiliations, ethnic background, religious affiliations and interpersonal relationships alongside other primordial considerations.

Igbokwe and Agbodike (2015) in the "*Recruitment Policies in the Nigerian Federal Civil Service and their Implications on Employees' Performance*" explored the relationship between recruitment practices in the federal civil service and the performance of employees. It traced an organic relationship between recruitment policies/practices and the performance of employees in Nigeria. The conclusion is that due to wrong recruitment practices, the service delivery is wanting. Among others, it was recommended that there should be a clear distinction between the qualifications of applicants and their final results to ensure that the best and most qualified candidates are hired. This

is equally the opinion of Oaya et al (2017) which further adds that if possible, and in order to ensure transparency, organisations could engage the services of employment agencies.

Researchers from some other countries from the Sub-Saharan African sub-region have also explored some aspect of the hiring process in their respective countries and their implications for the economy as a whole. For instance, Otto et al (2018) in a study of the employment process of public higher institutions in Ghana understood that such institutions employ people based solely on recommendation. In addition, it was understood that in terms of approach, the institutions do not start by identifying the available vacancies before embarking on any recruitment exercise. Furthermore, it was observed that there is a delay in feedback information after interviews. As a leeway, such institutions should engage in advertisement and publicity of the available job openings before embarking on any collection of referrals.

Methods and Materials

The study was carried out in Enugu and Anambra States, two south-eastern states of Nigeria. Due to the nature of the work, primary data were generated using questionnaire, through multi-stage sampling technique involving two stages of sampling. These enable the enabled the realization of the objectives.

- **Sampling and sampling procedure**

The first stage of sampling was the pilot stage. 50 copies of an unstructured questionnaire were administered to 50 public servants in Awka, the Anambra State Capital. The targets were public servants employed as from 27th May 1998 to date. These were public servants hired within the current democratic dispensation. Prior to this date, most public servants were hired under the military administrations which ignored all procedures and acted with impunity.

It was the variables derived from the pilot stage that were included in the second state, the main questionnaire. 550 copies of this questionnaire were administered to 550 public servants randomly drawn from Enugu and Anambra States, through simple random sampling. Each state capital was assigned 28 copies of the questionnaire. Meanwhile, Enugu State has 17 local government areas while Anambra state has 21 local government areas. Each local government area was assigned 13 copies of the questionnaire. The respondents were teachers, career civil servants, lecturers, service men (police, road safety workers, immigration officials, and so on). These are a cross-section of public servants drawn from federal, state and local government establishments. At this stage, the questionnaire was well-structured and distributed by trained field officers.

It is worthy of mention that the target of both surveys was to understand how these employees were hired in the first place. In all, 550 copies of the questionnaire were distributed while 506 were returned. 46 copies were either poorly filled, missing or could not be retrieved due to logistic reasons. Ordinarily, this would have been a national survey but for lack of sponsorship and the problem/restrictions associated with COVID-19. These also affected the timing of the work.

- **Analytical Framework**

The main objective of finding out the factors which enhanced the access to public sector jobs is achieved using the ANCOVA multiple regression model which is specified thus:

$$(1) \quad EPY = f(PRS, ABA, INT, SEX, EXP, EDA, AGE) \dots \dots \dots$$

$$+ \quad + \quad + \quad + \quad + \quad + \quad +$$

Where:

EPY = Employment of ith worker who earns jth income

PRS = Personal relationships

ABA = Assistance by paid agent

INT = Interview

SEX = Sex of employee

EXP = Experience

EDA = Educational attainment

AGE= Educational attainment

Equation (1) is put in a multiple regression model viz:

$$EPY_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 PRS_i + \beta_2 ABA_i + \beta_3 ITV_i + \beta_4 SEX_i + \beta_5 EXP_i + \beta_6 EDA_i + \beta_7 AGE_i + \mu_i \dots \dots \dots (2)$$

Equation(2) explains that the employment of the i^{th} public servant is a function of his personal relationship with an influential person, or assistance from a paid agent or he was hired on merit or due to his experience, or could be a product of his age, sex, experience or educational attainment.

The variables, PRS, ABA and ITV were obtained from responses to the questionnaire at the pilot stage. Meanwhile, sex, age, educational attainment and experience were introduced to find out if such variables had any impact on the hiring process. Meanwhile, the rest of the objectives were realized using simple statistics (and percentages).

Research Findings

- Findings on Research Question 1: What are the factors that enhance access to public sector jobs among SSA countries?

The ANCOVA multiple regression model used to resolve the above question produced the following results:

$$EPY_i = 3.272 + 0.053PRS_i + 0.050ABA_i - 0.007INT_i - 0.13SEX_i - 0.11EXP_i - 0.009EDA_i + 0.121AGE_i$$

(237.86) (5.62) (5.60) (-0.35) (-0.41) (-0.36) (-0.32) (16.24)

* = significant at $\alpha = 0.000$; 5%; 10% and 1%.

$$R^2 = 0.86 \quad R^2 = 0.86 \quad RSS = 13.858 \quad ESS = 2.282 \quad F = 0.000$$

The regression results show that personal relationships, PRS; assistance by a paid agent, ABA and the age of the respondent, AGE, are highly significant even at $\alpha = 0.000$. The other variables : interview, INT; sex of respondent, SEX; experience of respondent, EXP and educational attainment, EDA are insignificant. The regression model is well specified and adequate since the regression sum of squares, RSS, is quite larger than the error sum of squares ,ESS. This is confirmed by the high value of the F-test which is 0.000.

This result shows that within the period under study, personal relationships, PRS, assistance by paid agents, ABA and the age of respondents, AGE, to a large extent, influenced the access to public sector jobs.

- Findings on Research Question 2: What fraction of public sector employees actually got their jobs based on their connections or assistance from influential members of society?

From the survey, of the 506 respondents, 436 accepted that in their search for public sector jobs, they were assisted by some influential members of the society such as public office holders, career public servants, traditional rulers, religious leaders, businessmen/women, among others. This represents 0.86 or simply 86 percent of the sample. In addition, some respondents accepted that they also made secret payments of huge amounts of money either to these people or their agents. This equally explains why ABA was highly significant.

- Findings on Research Question 3: What fraction of public servants actually gained their employment through regular employment interviews and hired on merit?

It is on record that of the 506 respondents, only 13 of them contend that their employment was strictly on merit as they neither had a 'godfather' nor any other access to their respective offices prior to their employment, but were employed through regular interviews. This represents a paltry 0.03 or 3 percent of the sample.

Discussion of research findings

The outcome of the research which shows that PRS, ABA and AGE were the variables that significantly impacted on the access to public sector jobs.

The fact that personal relationship, PRS, significantly impacts the access to public sector jobs should not pose a surprise as understood from the survey. This is due to the fact that in Nigeria, like in most Sub-Saharan African countries, what actually determines the access of most people to the good things of life is their ability or opportunity to be connected or related to an influential member of society. This could be a blood relation, a politician or his cronies, or a political godfather, an influential businessman, and so on. Once this is the case, irrespective of any other handicap or lack of the requisite qualification, such an individual can tap on such relationship to access the job of his choice alongside other good things of life. In part, this factor explains why people are rather too eager and desperate to ensure such relationships are established and sustained, despite all odds. This also explains why there is a rat race for political power in most SSA countries since that is the surest avenue to quick prominence.

It is also not surprising that ABA like PRS is highly significant. For instance, on close observation, most of the respondents accept they paid huge sums of money to the agents of political office holders, or directly to the politicians and corrupt public servants who in turn aided their employment. Again, this should not pose a surprise since Nigeria remains the foremost corrupt nation on earth. This is a matter of national shame.

Employment through regular process of advertisement, interview, short listing, and employment is rare. In fact, for organisations/establishments which do organize regular interviews, oftentimes, these turn out to be channels of deceit and a charade and mockery of the whole process. This is due to the fact that in most cases, a list of people already offered jobs had been compiled and the so-called interview is mere pretence to subvert the due process. There are also cases of people being hired without any procedure as the officials contend what was done was simply *replacement* and not *employment*. This is a taboo to the employment process and the term, replacement, without adhering to the due process of hiring, is alien to the lexicon of employment as contained in the labour laws of the land.

The variable, AGE, which significantly impacts on employment is also not a surprise because most of the people actively seeking jobs are young adults and people within their middle age (between 20 – 45 years). As such, such a variable ideally should positively impact on employment, considering the time frame and years of service. The other variables, SEX, EXP and ADA were insignificant, unlike in some cases of researches on related topics.

Implications of Research Findings

The irregularities associated with the employment process, no doubt, have serious implications for the country as a whole. These implications are classified into sub-optimal performance/low productivity, inappropriate job ethics, and impact on development and of course, social implications. The works of three agencies as contained in their websites are germane to this segment. These are the Innovative Talent Group (2018), Gen Recruiting Solutions (2018) and Robert Half (2017).

- ***Sub-optimal Performance/Low Productivity***

The clearly designed procedure for recruitment is to ensure that the caliber of public servants are not only well qualified but also well equipped to deliver on the policies and aspirations of the government. This by extension ensures that the services enjoyed by the public are the best possible. Equally important is the fact that the public servants are the vehicles for the implementation of policies of the government. As such, if the right quality of public servants is in place, they ensure that the national output is enhanced. This explains why the principles of the public service are usually anonymity, impartiality, neutrality and permanence. These principles ensure that the public servant is protected against adverse reactions or victimization from the government officials.

In the event of a violation of the hiring process, the quality of employees in place may not be of the best standard. Their performance, at best, could be sub-optimal since they may not satisfy the requirements for the positions they occupy.

Furthermore, such an organization continuously spends part of its budget on hiring and replacement workers in the bid to get more qualified and better workers. In fact, the costs associated with the hiring of the wrong employees include job posting fees, training expenses, and so on. This involves waste time, money, energy and additional recruitment and training expenses.

- ***Improper Work Ethics***

The wrong hiring process obviously has negative implications for work ethics and standards. When an employee is not hired through the regular process, such an employee may not adhere to the work ethics. On the converse, workers hired through the regular avenues are imbued with the norms and etiquette of the positions they occupy. This is due to the fact that the hiring process was competitive and as such, the organization systematically ends up with the best among the bests. Such an employee is more productive and professional in the discharge of his official functions. This stems from the fact that the hiring process was based on merit in anticipation of his ability to perform.

Organisations that often engage in unethical practices in their hiring process are more likely to have workers who do not even know the real definition of work ethics and the requirements of the positions they occupy. In a country like Nigeria, with the knack for irregularities in its recruitment into the public service, the public service is more of a political arm of the government in power. For instance, some career public servants are card-carrying members of political parties. Sometimes, they could be seen proudly wearing their political party uniforms to their offices. They visibly partake in political party meetings, rallies and campaign tours. These are taboos to the ethics of public service.

- ***Implications for Development***

Wrong recruitment practices into the public service no doubt have obvious implications for development. The whole process of recruitment as contained in the labour laws is designed to enable the public sector employ the right quality of employees capable of formulating and implementing the policies of the government.

In a situation that the public service is occupied by people who do not have what it takes to carry out their functions as expected, the whole society is affected since the best may not be obtained from poorly formulated and haphazardly implemented policies. This negatively impacts on the development of the whole country.

- ***Social Implications***

Due to the irregularities in the recruitment of employees, most government establishments end up with the wrong employees, who lack the wherewithal to secure such jobs in the first place. The good and qualified candidates who possess the skills, qualifications and trainings needed to fill such jobs remain idle. The summary of the social implications is that the society does not expect the best from the government or its agencies. The long term effect is best imagined.

Furthermore, as a result of the wrong employee due to unethical recruitment practices, both teamwork and productivity of the good employees could be hurt, especially for lower-level workers. The good worker may feel overworked, frustrated and underappreciated. Furthermore, bad hires often have wrong attitudes to work. These negative attitudes could even compel the good workers to leave their offices, thereby necessitating replacement. Unfortunately, the leaderships of such offices may not easily terminate such employment contracts especially if they were part of the hiring process.

Is there any justification for the ‘*ima mmadu*’ theorem?

In this study, there is every evidence to accept the fact that much of the employment or access to good things of life in some SSA countries is traceable to in-person relationships, which the ‘*ima mmadu*’ theorem embodies. Therefore, the theorem is not just true but truism. It might be of interest for other researchers to extend the researches into this concept to other spheres of social and economic activities.

Recommendations and Conclusion

The discussions derive from the field work experiences obtained during the survey. It is clear that for a country with development aspirations, the starting point should be the development of an egalitarian workforce. The starting point towards realizing such a formidable workforce is the streamlining of the process of recruitment into the public service, in line with the labour laws of the land. These laws were crafted in such a way that adherence to the processes and procedures ensure that the best set of workers are hired at all times. In order to ensure transparency in the recruitment and adherence to the laws of the land, governments could engage the services of professional recruitment agencies with track records of excellence in both the recruitment and the management of human resources. This recommendation is based on the understanding that the public servants are the crop of employees to innovate, design and implement government policies, given an ideal work environment devoid of political interferences. A neglect of this fact could spell doom for the country.

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