TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN EDO STATE PUBLIC SERVICE: 2016-2024

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Abstract

Research Problem
Notwithstanding efforts to promote transparency and accountability, Edo State's public service continues to grapple with issues such as corruption, nepotism, lack of proper record-keeping, and limited public access to information. These challenges undermine the integrity of public institutions, erode public trust, and hinder socio-economic development. Based on the above this study examined transparency and accountability in Edo State public service, from 2016 to 2024.

Method/Theory
The study adopted the descriptive qualitative research approach and was hinged on good governance theory. Data was collected through the interview method. The population of the study was 104, proportional sampling method was used to select 10 per cent of the population to arrive at a sample size of 11. Collected data were analysed using the qualitative desk research approach.

Result
The study found that both organizations have made significant strides in adopting public disclosures regarding their programming, strategic initiatives, and editorial guidelines, thereby enhancing accountability and transparency. The state government's investment in upgrading equipment

and facilities to meet global standards has further boosted these efforts.

Conclusion

Despite the regular internal and external audits conducted, the results are not consistently made public, which represents a gap in full accountability and transparency. Staff training programs are regularly organized, reflecting a commitment to continuous improvement. However, several challenges impede further progress in accountability and transparency, such as political interference, bureaucratic procedures, financial and budgetary limitations, and resistance to change.

Recommendations

The results of internal and external audits of the studied organizations should be made publicly accessible and managements of the studied organizations should develop and enforce strict policies that limit political interference in their operations to help maintain their independence and integrity.

Introduction

Public service serves as one of the agents of the State designed to achieve the purpose and objectives of creating the state. State, anywhere in the world is made for a good life and for the sake of development, where basic services, protection, and other good things are ensured and assured. But sadly, most states, particularly in the developing world have failed to make these objectives realizable as a result of the failure on the part of their public service as agents of change and development. In Nigeria, the performance of public service is ridiculously low, service delivery is conspicuously poor due to lack of transparency and accountability (Ogunbodede and Tolu, 2018).

Transparency and accountability are fundamental pillars of good governance in any society. In the context of public service, transparency refers to openness and accessibility of information, while accountability involves the obligation of public officials to justify their actions and decisions. Accountability and transparency have always been major courses for concern for many years as a result of misstatement of financial statements, fraud, and corruption in the public service. Although some policies and some legislative acts have been made by the government concerning this issue after the establishment of the Nigerian Constitution in 1990 with several amendments over the years; Budget Monitoring and Price Intelligence Unit (BMPIU), the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) Act 2002; the Independent Corrupt Practices and other related offences (ICPC) Act (2000); the Advance Fee Fraud and other related offences Act (1995); the Financial malpractices in Banks Act (1994); among others, still; headlines are still posted about the issue of corruption in the public service, a proper solution has not been found (Ogundajo, Oyedokunand Ajibade, 2019).

Adegite (2010) noted that accountability is a proof that states that work has been done in accordance with the standards and agreed rules and officers report fairly and accurately on performance results along sides mandated roles and or plans. In a lame man's language, Transparency on the other hand means providing clear information about a particular thing.

Transparency and accountability go together because a report can't be clear if it's not accountable. Achua (2009) says "serious consideration is being given to the need to be more accountable for the often-vast amounts of investment in resources at the command of governments, which exercise administrative and political authority over the actions and affairs of political units of people. Government spending is a very big business and the public demands to know whether the huge outlays of money are being spent wisely for public interests". The term accountability is needed in the government financial report to show a clear picture of the financial activities going on in the public sector. Iyoha and Oyerinde (2009) referred to the relationship between statutory and public office holders as that of a principal-agent relationship where the public officers are statutorily required to demonstrate proper accountability, openness, and effectiveness in the management of public funds. This is expected as their stewardship responsibility.

The welfare of the people is as stake as a result of a lack of integrity, accountability, and transparency at the government level (Agbo, 2012). If the financial statement does not show an accurate report and true report, it would affect the well-being of the people because all this report collated together is meant to show the net worth or the national income of the country but if anything goes wrong it affects the development of the country which in that case would indirectly affect the economy. The problem of accountability has been in existence for many years in the public sector and as a result, has affected the Nigerian economy negatively. An instance of ghost workers existing in payroll, embezzlement of public funds, and corruption has been recorded to have occurred and still occurring in the public service. However, the reporting system has been criticized for not reporting government liability and the real state of other finances (Akenbor & Oghoghomeh, 2011). Also, public officers are guilty of not ensuring that their duties are effective and efficient enough to avoid a lack of transparency and accountability. Lack of transparency in the public sector is as a result of poor implementation of law (Madumere & Okegbe, 2014).

These fraudulent practices found in the public sector if not taken care of can affect the economy in the sense that if the financial report is not up to standards or checked properly the current situation of the country leaves the government policy less effective in the economy. There are also instances reported that the financial statements in the public service are reported late and people's view concerning this matter is that the financial statements are reported late because of manipulations of the financial statements by those preparing the government financial statement. In 2001, Federal Government public procurement conducted a diagnostic survey, it was reported that Nigeria lost several hundred billion Naira over the last few decades due to flagrant abuse of procedures, monumental corruption, lack of transparency and merit in the award of contracts in the public sector and accountability quandary. (Uremadu, 2004) asserted that lots of billions vanished on frequent basis from government treasury as reported by the Federal Government Public Procurement 2001 diagnostic survey but the question is where has it vanished to?

While previous studies have extensively examined the issues of accountability, transparency, and financial mismanagement in Nigeria's public sector, most of them have largely approached the subject from a general national perspective, focusing broadly on systemic corruption, financial reporting deficiencies, and weak institutional frameworks

within the Nigerian public service. For instance, studies by Achua (2009), Iyoha and Oyerinde (2009), Agbo (2012), and Akenbor and Oghoghomeh (2011) primarily concentrated on public sector financial accountability and reporting systems, emphasizing issues such as manipulation of financial statements, weak reporting standards, corruption, and poor stewardship of public funds at the federal level or across the public sector generally. Similarly, Madumere and Okegbe (2014) focused on the role of legal and institutional weaknesses in promoting lack of transparency within government financial management.

The distinctive contribution of this study lies in itsinstitution-specific, sub-national, and governance-oriented analysis of transparency and accountability, focusing on the operational practices of Edo Broadcasting Service and Observer Newspaper in Edo State between 2016 and 2024. This perspective provides a deeper understanding of how accountability and transparency mechanisms function within state-level public service institutions and how they influence public trust and service delivery.

Statement of Problem

That there is a serious problem of accountability and transparency in the public service is not only well known but fairly documented. General and specific observations within the service and comments from international bodies like the World Bank (WB), and Transparency International (TI), all seem to suggest that the problem is not only real but also enduring (Aruwa, 2003). However, the issue of accountability in Nigeria is a fundamental problem because of the high level of corruption in all levels of government in the country.

Notwithstanding efforts to promote transparency and accountability, Edo State's public service continues to grapple with issues such as corruption, nepotism, lack of proper record-keeping, and limited public access to information. These challenges undermine the integrity of public institutions, erode public trust, and hinder socio-economic development. Without robust mechanisms to address these issues, the effectiveness and credibility of the public service are compromised, leading to a cycle of inefficiency and underperformance.

Accountability reflects the need for the government and its agencies to serve the public effectively under the laws of the land (Okoh and Ohwoyibo, 2009). Appah (2010), pointed out that with the number and monetary value of public sector activities has increased substantially. This increase in activities has brought with it an increased demand for accountability of public officers who manage these activities of the public. Kaufman (2005) argues that an emphasis on accountability by citizens is one aspect of the growing emphasis on eliminating corruption and promoting transparency in government.

According to Olowu (2002), the quest for accountability and transparency became popular when public sectors could no longer deliver effective services as a result of corruption and dwindling resources occasioned by the absence of transparency and accountability. The influence of international Non-governmental organizations was also significant in the agitation for transparency and accountability, their influence became necessary based on the need to properly utilize funds given to low-income countries by these International NGOs for development purposes.

The continued increase in government expenditure over the years without much impact on society has further necessitated the need for accountability and transparency in public

service. This is because the more the services the more accountability and transparency are required.Transparency and accountability play a vital role in public service as they combine to galvanize effective service delivery, particularly in public sector organizations.They have a symbiotic relationship with governance. The need to ensure the effective practice of the duo, i.e. transparency and accountability in the public service to ensure an optimum level of functioning and effective service delivery makes this paper imperative.

Objectives of the study

1. To assess the current state of transparency and accountability within Edo State public service.
2. To identify key challenges and factors contributing to the lack of transparency and accountability in Edo state public service.

Conceptual Clarifications

Transparency

Generally, transparency means openness, communication, and accountability. Transparency in public services means when a public office holder is open everywhere and every time as possible when it comes to issues of decisions and actions they take. In furtherance to this, they should be able to give reasons for their actions and inactions (Idada, 2016). When transparency is radical in management, it involves decision-making being carried out publicly.

Adetoye (2002) views transparency as openness in the day-to-day operation of the civil servants on the one hand and the institution referred to as public service on the other. It simply translates to the fact that members of the public must be able to see and understand how decisions concerning them are made and implemented. Vital aspects of the activities of the service must not be shrouded in secrecy especially those that are of public interest (Policy, 2023).

According to Kailasam (2004), transparency means sharing information and acting openly. He is of the view that free access to information is a key element in promoting transparency. Such information must be timely, relevant, accurate, and complete for its effective utilization.Iyoha (2006) cited in Idada (2016) perceived transparency as openness, communication, and accountability. He viewed transparency as sharing information and acting plainly. It allows stakeholders to gather information that may be critical in uncovering abuses and defending that interest.

Various scholars have defined government transparency as the publicizing of incumbent policy choices, and the availability and increased flow to the public of timely, comprehensive, relevant, high-quality, and reliable information concerning government activities. Transparency has been generally supposed to make institutions and their officeholders trusted and trustworthy (Adetoye, 2002; Kailasam, 2004; Aigbomian, 2016; Idada, 2016 Iyoha, 2006).

Transparency International (2015) defines transparency as a way of shedding light on plans, rules, processes and actions. It is a way to know why, how, what, and how much. Transparency ensures that public officials, civil servants, managers, board members, and businessmen act visibly and understandably and report on their activities, this therefore implies that the general public can hold public servants accountable for their actions and inactions. Transparency is one of the surest ways to guard against corruption. Transparency provides

assurance to the organization that systematic information are provided in an orderly manner and according to laid down rules, principles and procedures. Transparency enables an organization to answer basic questions such as, of whom is information being demanded? What specific information? and for what purpose? Transparency International (2015). Transparency is characterized by the following: (a) A disclosure system. (b) Access to information. (c) Openness to public participation. (d) Absence of undue secrecy. (e) Readiness to face and accommodate legitimate scrutiny. (f) Humility on the part of executive office holders through readiness to answer questions raised by citizens. Transparency is therefore an instrument of accountability. Transparency is impossible or very difficult where freedom of access to public information is not guaranteed in law or statute (Nagriwum, Wiredu, Gbolo, Kuunyig, Seth &Amokase, 2023).

Accountability

The term accountability is linked to the idea of stewardship. The term could also be viewed as a summation of giving account of actions taken and being held answerable; and to give account would, by itself, be inadequate unless there is a means of holding the actor responsible. Accountability as a term most times refer to a conceptual umbrella which cut across various prominent concepts like equity, transparency, responsiveness, integrity, democracy, efficiency and responsibility (Enofe, Aigboduwa, Audu&Idemudia, 2015). The term accountability has been adopted to represent the popular term used to describe any mechanism that makes powerful institutions responsive to their particular public (Mulgan, 2003). Akindele and Adeyemi (2011) in their work, argue that the concept of accountability has been differently defined by scholars. Accountability has been conceptualized as way of being answerable or liable for one's actions or inactions, conduct in office, or position. Accountability as a term has also been defined as the process of getting elected officials and other officeholders accountable and more responsible to the people who got them elected or appointed them for their actions while in office. They further opined that accountability connotes the state or quality of being liable and required by a specified person or group of people to report and justify their actions in relations to specific matters or assigned duties.

Accountability is the obligation to demonstrate that work has been conducted following agreed rules and standards. The officer reports fairly and accurately on performance results vis-à-vis mandated roles and plans (Adegbite, 2010). It means doing things transparently in line with due process and the provision of feedback. Many social relationships carry an element of accountability within. Accountability is all about being answerable to those who have invested their trust, faith, and resources in the public servants. Accountability is an obligation to answer for the execution of one's assigned responsibilities. Accountability in the public sector is the requirement to provide explanation about the stewardship of public money and how the money has been used. Accountability is not just about the responsibility of public officers and the institutions to the people they support to serve but also includes willingness on the part of the office holder to submit to scrutiny at the appropriate office he/she is holding. Accountability as a concept has been further classified into the following: Individual Accountability, Managerial Accountability, Fiscal Accountability and Administrative Accountability (Adagbabiri, 2015). Administrative accountability refers to the responsiveness of appointed public officials to

the (elected) political executive as well as to the public or the governed; because of the permanency of tenure and expertise (acquired to cope with the explosion in scientific and technological knowledge), appointed officials are in a position of power vis-à-vis the laymen politicians (for the most part) in the executive and legislative branches. It is the accountability of government (public officials both elected and otherwise) to the voting public through the ballot box. It is the giving account of governmental actions/inactions to the general public who through their votes afford them such positions and enable the public to believe in such government or give continuous support in future elections.

Public Service

The public service is the part of the economy that is owned and controlled by government and provides basic services to the citizens. It is how the government relates and delivers amenities to the public. Such amenities include, but are not limited to welfare, infrastructure, security, social justice, education, health care and a means of regulating the economy (Okoduwa2007). Individuals who work in government departments and agencies are known as public servants.

The Nigerian public service is the most critical instrument of the modern state and the working hands of government. It is saddled with the responsibility of implementing government policies and programmes for the attainment of sustainable development. The primary responsibility of any public service is to deliver services to citizens at affordable rates. The ability of a government to legitimately tax and govern people is premised on its capacity to deliver a range of services required by its population which no other player will provide (Olowu, 2002). It is to be noted that the environment in which public service operates will no doubt, have a major effect on the service (Adetoye, 2002).

Research Questions

The following questions were asked in investigating this study:

1. What recent initiative(s) has/have been implemented to enhance transparency and accountability in Edo Broadcasting Service/ The Nigerian Observer?
2. How accessible is information regarding Edo Broadcasting Service/The Nigerian Observer operations and decision-making processes to the citizens of Edo State?
3. Are there regular audits of Edo Broadcasting Service/ The Nigerian Observer accounts, and are the results made available to the public?
4. What training programs are available for staff of Edo Broadcasting Service/ The Nigerian Observer to enhance their understanding and practice of transparency and accountability?
5. What are the main challenges faced by Edo Broadcasting Service/The Nigerian Observer staff in implementing transparency and accountability measures?

Methodology

The study adopted the qualitative descriptive research method which allowed for a detailed analysis of transparency and accountability in Edo State public service. The population of the study was the staff of the two government-owned communication agencies in Benin City: Edo Broadcasting Services (EBS) (68) (Osa,

2018) and Nigerian Observer Newspaper (36) (IinkedIn, 2004), giving a total of 104. The proportional sample method was used to select 10 per cent each from the two television stations to give a sample size of 11, which is 7 from EBS and 4 from Nigerian Observer. The interview method was used in collecting primary data from the sample.

Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored on Good Governance Theory. The Good Governance Model (or Good Governance Theory)emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s through the work of international development institutions, particularly the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). These organizations developed and popularized the concept as part of governance reforms aimed at improving public sector management in developing countries.The concept of good governance gained prominence in 1989 when the World Bank published a report on governance challenges in Africa. In the report, governance problems were described as a "crisis of governance", emphasizing that ineffective public institutions, lack of accountability, and corruption were major obstacles to development (World Bank, 1989).

Later, the World Bank (1992) further institutionalized the concept by defining governance as "the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development". This formulation laid the foundation for the Good Governance Model, which emphasizes transparency, accountability, rule of law, and efficient public administration.Similarly, the United Nations Development Programme(1997) expanded the framework in 1997 by identifying key characteristics of good governance such as participation, transparency, responsiveness, effectiveness, equity, and accountability.

Core Principles of the Good Governance Model

The good governance model is built around several interrelated principles that guide public administration. These principles include:

1. Transparency

Transparency refers to openness in government operations and decision-making processes. It requires that information relating to policies, budgets, public expenditures, and administrative actions be accessible to citizens. Transparency enables citizens to understand how government decisions are made and ensures that public officials are subject to scrutiny (Hu, 2017).

2. Accountability

Accountability means that public officials and institutions are answerable for their decisions, actions, and use of public resources. It requires mechanisms through which government actors can be held responsible for their performance and misconduct. Accountability mechanisms may include audits, legislative oversight, public reporting, and judicial review (Rahim, 2019).

3. Rule of Law

The rule of law ensures that public administration operates within a legal framework that is fairly enforced and applied equally to all individuals and institutions. It prevents arbitrary use of power and ensures that government officials act within established legal boundaries (Adagbabiri, 2015).

4. Participation

Participation refers to the involvement of citizens, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders in governance processes. Citizen participation enhances democratic legitimacy and ensures that government policies reflect public interests.

5. Efficiency and Effectiveness

Good governance promotes efficient use of public resources and ensures that government programs achieve intended results. Effective governance focuses on delivering public services in a timely, cost-effective, and responsive manner.

The Good Governance Model provides an analytical lens for examining transparency and accountability practices in the Edo State public service between 2016 and 2024. The theory suggests that where good governance principles are effectively implemented, public service institutions are more likely to demonstrate transparency in decision-making and accountability in the management of public resources (Ekundayo, 2017). Conversely, weak governance structures may lead to corruption, inefficiency, and lack of public trust.Thus, the Good Governance Model serves as a useful theoretical framework for explaining how transparency and accountability mechanisms shape administrative performance and public sector integrity in Edo State.

Literature Review

Challenges of Accountability and Transparency in Nigeria's Public Service

During the colonial administration in Nigeria, bureaucrats were concerned with the maintenance of colonial law and order and collection of taxes and levies. As indicated earlier, the public sector in Nigeria is still fairly new; the civil service was regionalized in 1954, in consort with the requirements of a federal system. These regional civil services were more effective than the federal civil service even after independence, partly because of ethnicity.

From the time of independence till the military takeover, there were some issues in the administration. After the military takeover of the government, the civil service became more dominant in the public policy process. The civil service rose to the challenge of the political change the country was experiencing and the top civil servants assumed political responsibilities. These bureaucrats were responsible for policy formulation and Implementation, while the military was preoccupied more with the civil war and managing coup d'états. The civil service was praised for being effective in ensuring a speedy recovery after the civil war, and in transforming the country into a new era of economic prosperity after the discovery of oil (Okotoni2001). This era also witnessed the emergence of higher level of civil servants, who were known as Super Permanent Secretaries. They were influential and had bureaucratic power to make policy decisions.

In 1999, the Nigerian constitution gave a provision for a mandatory federal and state public service sector. The sector comprises the civil service and the public bureaucracy. The civil service is made up of the line ministries and extra-ministerial agencies. The public bureaucracy is the expanded public service which includes services of the state and national assemblies, the judicial branch, the security agencies (army, air force police and navy), paramilitary services (immigration, prisons), parastatals and agencies including social services, commercially oriented agencies, regulatory agencies, and educational institutions (Suleiman2009). The civil service employees are millions of government officials whose main

goal is to implement government programs and policies. In 2003, a reform of the public sector was introduced to change the structure and procedures of the sector focusing on the allowance and salaries of civil servants.

Unfortunately, this reform did not result in the change that was anticipated. The civil service is important as it coordinates the federal ministries, advises political officials, formulates and implements government policies, gathers and supplies data for policymakers, and ensures continuity of services and public relations services. All these roles are important to the smooth running of any administration. Civil servants are responsible not only for preserving these properties but also for ensuring the proper and effective utilization of them. Thus, the bureaucracy can make or mar any administration. The public bureaucracy is entrusted with public property, either tangible or intangible. The Nigerian public sector is experiencing inefficiencies in performing its roles for several reasons, in recent times, services provided by the public sector have been unreliable and most time unavailable (Lawal, 2014).

Edo State public service has undergone significant reforms in recent years, aimed at enhancing its efficiency and effectiveness. According to a report by the Nigerian Bureau of Statistics (2020), Edo State has made significant strides in improving its public service delivery, with a notable increase in the quality of healthcare and education services (NBS, 2020).The state government has implemented various initiatives to modernize its public service, including the adoption of technology and the establishment of a public service training institute (Edo State Government, 2022). These efforts have been recognized by international organizations such as the World Bank, which has praised Edo State for its commitment to public service reform (World Bank, 2021).

The state's public service has also been strengthened by the establishment of a robust performance management system, which has improved accountability and transparency (Edo State Government, 2022). Furthermore, the state has prioritized the development of its human capital, with a focus on capacity building and skills development for public servants (Edo State Public Service Commission, 2022). Despite the significant progress in Edo State public service, the issue of accountability and transparency is still very much a great challenge in the State.

According to Idada (2016), transparency and accountability failed in Nigeria as a result of some ecological factors. These factors vary from corruption, bad leadership, political instability, ineffective pressure groups, and low levels of awareness to poor civic culture. Most citizens are kept ignorant of budgets, financial audit reports and the like. Even in some notable cases, the Constitution is treated to be a highly confidential document (Olowu, 2002). In this regard responsibility, reporting, performance, openness and performance evaluation becomes difficult and unattainable.

There is also the problem of weak institutions. The institutions set up to ensure accountability and transparency in Nigeria are fragile. Most of these agencies have failed to effectively carry out their assigned roles. For instance, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) have been severally accused of corruption and other sharp practices. The same allegation is also applicable to the police, Judiciary, legislature and other similar agencies. Another factor is the idea of get-rich-quick syndrome. As a result of the unnecessary craze for wealth and influence, most Nigerians

do not believe in hard work and the idea of a gradual process of achievement but prefer to get themselves involved in shady and unethical practices to make easy and quick money, particularly in public sector organizations. In addition, societal decadence also serves as a contributing factor to the failure of accountability and transparency. The society celebrates wealthy people without concern for their source of wealth. Nigerians expect their friends, relations and associates in public offices to use such offices as avenue to make money rather than to serve the people and nation at large. In most cases, public officeholders are wrongly advised to see their office as an opportunity to make fortunes and become the mover and shaker of their community at the expense of the public (Mohammed, 2013). All these shameful acts cannot guarantee accountability and transparency but constrain effective service delivery (Agbatogun, 2019).

There is a high level of confidentiality and excessive hoarding of information in public service. This tends to further encourage and assist the public servants to perpetrate unethical practices. When information is unavailable to the public, there is little or nothing to be done in terms of whistleblowing. Information is a sine qua-non to accountability and transparency. Importantly, public service rules and regulations are not effectively enforced. The public servants have over the years developed the belief and idea of "nothing will happen" and capitalize on it to get involved in illegal and unethical engagements which are detrimental to the objectives and philosophy of public service. Put differently, there is a high level of impunity in public service. This goes a long way to negatively affect the performance of public service and consequently jeopardize effective service and probity as the culture of "everybody doing what he/she likes" is highly promoted (Ogunbodede and Tolu, 2018).

Omodero and Okafor (2016) reported that the level of accountability is very poor in Nigeria's public sector as a result of a lack of comprehensive, relevant, quality and reliable public financial reports. Similarly, Acho and Abuh (2016) reported that allocations of resources in the Nigerian public service are not adequately utilized.

Analysis of Responses to Interview Questions Administered to Respondents about Transparency and Accountability in Edo State Public Service

Question 1: What recent initiative(s) has/have been implemented to enhance transparency and accountability in Edo Broadcasting Service/ The Nigerian Observer?

Responses from interviewees:

Operational Practices which include regular public disclosures about programming and strategic initiatives are part of the recent transparency enhancement efforts in EBS. There are established internal policies and procedures aimed at ensuring transparency within EBS, these include procurement processes, financial management, and ethical guidelines. There has also been upgrade of the station's facilities to meet global standard.

EBS has a governance structure that includes a board of directors and an executive management team responsible for oversight and decision-making. This structure is designed to ensure accountability at various levels within the organization.The Nigeria Observer's Editorial Policies is an initiative that has enabled the organization to often publish their editorial guidelines and ethical standards, allowing

readers to understand how news is selected and reported

The Nigeria Observer has adopted the initiative of Journalistic Independence, that is independence from external influences, including political, corporate, or other interests. The organization also publishes public statements or reports on maintaining editorial independence contributing to transparency.

The Nigerian observer adheres to ethical journalism standards, such as those set by national or international journalism bodies, which is a key aspect of accountability. The Nigerian Observer also regularly reviews and upholds these standards.The state government has recently upgraded the equipment of the Nigeria observer and turned it into a printing/entertainment hub for the State.

Question 2: How accessible is information regarding Edo Broadcasting Service/The Nigerian Observer operations and decision-making processes to the citizens of Edo State?

Responses from interviewees:

EBS provides information to the public through its official website and social media platforms. There are periodic updates on programming schedules and corporate governance practices.EBS encourages feedback from the public through various channels, including call-in programs, social media, and official complaints procedures. This feedback mechanism is a vital part of the EBS accountability process, allowing the public to voice concerns and suggestions.

The Nigerian Observer embarks on regular public engagement with the community through public forums, social media, the organization's website, desk officer at the organization's location at Airport Road in Benin City or town hall meetings shows a commitment to accountability. This engagement allows the newspaper to understand and address the needs and concerns of its readership.

Question 3: Are there regular audits of Edo Broadcasting Service/ The Nigerian Observer accounts, and are the results made available to the public?

Responses from interviewees:

Internal and external audits and evaluations are conducted periodically to assess the financial and operational integrity of EBS. These audits help identify areas for improvement and ensure that resources are utilized effectively. The findings from these audits are addressed promptly to maintain accountability, the results are not sometimes made public.

Nigeria Observer has a Reporting Mechanism in which regular reporting to relevant governmental bodies and stakeholders is part of Nigeria Observer's accountability framework. These reports cover financial performance, operational activities, and compliance with regulatory requirements. The reports are not always made public.

Question 4: What training programs are available for staff of Edo Broadcasting Service/ The Nigerian Observer to enhance their understanding and practice of transparency and accountability?

Responses from interviewees:

The Nigeria Observer newspaper staff have recently undergone a training program on technology and the use of modern facilities.

There have been restructuring activities and training of staff to meet with best global standards in rendering services.

Question 5: What are the main challenges faced by Edo Broadcasting Service/The Nigerian Observer staff in implementing transparency and accountability measures?

Responses from interviewees:

EBS, being a state-owned entity, is often subject to political interference and influence. This can hinder the establishment of independent oversight mechanisms, as political leaders might resist initiatives that could expose misconduct or reduce their control over the broadcaster.

EBS staff are often entrenched in bureaucratic procedures and a culture resistant to change. Some employees and management at times resist new initiatives that demand greater openness and accountability due to fear of increased scrutiny or additional workload.

Nigeria Observer faces financial and budgetary limitations that restrict the ability to invest in necessary technologies, training, or hiring of specialized personnel for oversight roles.

At times there is resistance to external oversight from bodies such as civil society organizations or independent auditors. We might perceive these entities as threats rather than partners in enhancing transparency and accountability.

Findings

From responses to question 1; the findings indicate that both EBS and The Nigerian Observer have implemented several initiatives aimed at improving transparency and accountability. Interview responses revealed that EBS engages in regular public disclosures regarding programming and strategic initiatives, while internal policies guiding procurement, financial management, and ethical conduct have also been established. These institutional mechanisms demonstrate an effort to institutionalize transparency within operational processes.Furthermore, the existence of a governance structure consisting of a board of directors and executive management team in EBS indicates a structured oversight mechanism designed to ensure accountability in decision-making. Such governance arrangements are consistent with the principles of good governance which emphasize clear institutional structures and internal control mechanisms for effective public sector management (Grindle, 2017).

Similarly, The Nigerian Observer has introduced initiatives such as public editorial policies and ethical guidelines, which provide clarity on how news content is produced and disseminated. By making editorial standards accessible to the public, the organization enhances transparency in its editorial processes. The emphasis on journalistic independence from political or corporate influence further demonstrates a commitment to maintaining professional integrity and public accountability in media operations.In addition, respondents indicated that the Edo State Government has upgraded the equipment and infrastructure of both organizations, transforming The Nigerian Observer into a printing and entertainment hub while modernizing EBS facilities. These reforms suggest a government-driven effort to strengthen institutional capacity and improve service delivery in the state-owned media sector.

From responses to question 2; both organizations provide channels through which citizens can access information regarding their operations and decision-making processes. EBS disseminates information through its official website, social media platforms, and programming schedules, thereby allowing the public to stay informed about its activities.In

addition, the availability of feedback mechanisms such as call-in programs, complaint procedures, and social media interactions indicates that EBS encourages public participation and engagement. These channels provide opportunities for citizens to express concerns and contribute to discussions about media operations, thereby strengthening institutional accountability.

Similarly, The Nigerian Observer engages the public through community forums, social media platforms, the organization's website, and direct interaction with desk officers at its Airport Road office in Benin City. Such engagement mechanisms demonstrate an attempt to maintain a responsive relationship with the public and ensure that the concerns of citizens are considered in editorial and operational decisions.These findings align with governance literature which suggests that information accessibility and citizen participation are key indicators of transparency in public institutions (Kaufmann, Kraay, &Mastruzzi, 2019).

Responses to question 3 shows thatinternal and external audits are conducted periodically in EBS, aimed at assessing financial and operational integrity. These audits help identify inefficiencies and ensure that public resources are properly utilized. However, interview responses reveal that audit results are not always made publicly available, which suggests a limitation in the transparency framework of the institution.

Similarly, The Nigerian Observer maintains a reporting mechanism to government authorities and relevant stakeholders, which includes reports on financial performance, operational activities, and compliance with regulatory standards. While this indicates the presence of accountability procedures, respondents noted that these reports are not consistently disclosed to the public, thereby limiting the extent of transparency.This finding suggests that although accountability mechanisms exist internally, public disclosure of financial and operational reports remains limited, which may weaken public trust and external oversight.

Responses to question 4 reveals that staff of The Nigerian Observer have recently undergone training programs focused on technological development and the use of modern media facilities. Similarly, respondents indicated that there have been restructuring activities and staff development initiatives aimed at improving professional standards and aligning institutional practices with global media standards.

These training programs are essential for strengthening transparency and accountability because they enhance staff competence, improve professional ethics, and encourage adherence to modern governance practices. Capacity-building initiatives also help public servants understand the importance of openness, ethical conduct, and responsible management of public resources.

Responses to question 5; revealed that one major challenge is political interference in the operations of EBS due to its status as a state-owned organization. Political influence may limit the independence of the institution and hinder the establishment of effective oversight mechanisms. This finding is consistent with existing literature which suggests that political control over public media organizations can undermine institutional autonomy and transparency (McQuail, 2013).

Another challenge highlighted by respondents is bureaucratic resistance to change among staff members. Some employees may resist reforms that require greater openness or increased scrutiny, particularly when such reforms introduce additional responsibilities or expose institutional weaknesses.Financial

constraints were also identified as a significant challenge, particularly for The Nigerian Observer. Limited funding restricts the organization's ability to invest in advanced technology, staff training, and specialized oversight personnel needed to strengthen transparency mechanisms.

Furthermore, respondents indicated that resistance to external oversight from civil society organizations or independent auditors sometimes occurs, as such oversight is perceived as a threat rather than a collaborative effort to improve institutional accountability.

The findings of this study are consistent with the principles of the Good Governance Theory, which emphasizes transparency, accountability, participation, and effective institutional management as essential elements of public sector administration. The findings revealed that the Edo Broadcasting Service and The Nigerian Observer have implemented several transparency and accountability measures such as governance structures, editorial policies, internal audits, public engagement platforms, and staff training programs. These initiatives reflect the principles of transparency and accountability emphasized in the good governance model. According to Kaufmann, Kraay, and Mastruzzi (2019), institutions that adopt mechanisms such as public disclosure, oversight structures, and citizen engagement are more likely to promote good governance and improve public sector performance.

However, the study also identified challenges such as political interference, limited public disclosure of audit reports, financial constraints, and resistance to external oversight. These findings align with previous studies which argue that governance reforms in public institutions are often constrained by political influence and weak institutional capacity. For example, Grindle (2004) observed that while governance reforms promote transparency and accountability, their effectiveness often depends on the political and administrative environment within which institutions operate.

Similarly, Adebayo (2018) found that many public institutions in Nigeria have introduced accountability mechanisms, but their effectiveness is sometimes weakened by bureaucratic resistance and limited financial resources. The present findings therefore support existing literature which suggests that while transparency initiatives exist in many public organizations, structural and political challenges can limit their full implementation.

Conclusion

This study examined transparency and accountability in the Edo State public service between 2016 and 2024, with particular focus on the Edo Broadcasting Service and The Nigerian Observer. The findings revealed that both institutions have introduced several initiatives aimed at strengthening transparency and accountability. These include the establishment of governance structures, adoption of editorial and ethical guidelines, public engagement mechanisms, periodic audits, technological upgrades, and staff training programs. Such initiatives demonstrate efforts by the Edo State Government and the institutions to align their operations with modern principles of public sector governance.

However, the study also found that despite these improvements, some challenges continue to limit the full realization of transparency and accountability. These challenges include political interference, limited public disclosure of audit reports, financial constraints, bureaucratic resistance to change, and occasional reluctance toward external oversight.

These factors reduce the effectiveness of existing accountability mechanisms and may weaken public trust in government-owned media institutions.

The study concludes that while significant progress has been made toward improving transparency and accountability in the Edo State public service, particularly in state-owned media organizations, further institutional reforms, stronger oversight mechanisms, and greater openness in information disclosure are necessary to sustain good governance and enhance public confidence in government institutions.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following are recommended:

1. To enhance transparency, the results of both internal and external audits of the studied organizations should be made publicly accessible. This practice will build greater public trust and accountability.
2. Managements of the studied organizations should develop and enforce strict policies that limit political interference in their operations to help maintain their independence and integrity.
3. Managements of the studied organisations should simplify bureaucratic processes to improve efficiency and responsiveness in enhancing transparency and accountability measures.
4. Management of the studied organizations should seek alternative funding sources, such as public-private partnerships, t alleviate financial and budgetary constraints, providing the necessary resources to maintain high standards of transparency and accountability.
5. The studied organizations should implement comprehensive change management programs to help overcome resistance to change by involving staff in the development and implementation of new initiatives, ensuring they understand and support the need for these changes.
6. The organizations should expand community engagement initiatives to further bridge the gap between these organizations and the public, fostering a more transparent and accountable public service environment. This can include more frequent public forums, surveys, and interactive sessions to gather public feedback.
7. The Organizations should maintain a robust schedule of training programs focusing not only on technical skills but also on the principles of transparency and accountability, ensuring that all staff members are aligned with the organization's goals.

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