Electronic Government (Ict) and Public Sector Reform In Nigeria. An Assessment of Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (Jamb)

Chidi E. Nwokike[1], Udegbunam, Priscilla Ifeoma[2] and Okonkwo Ebelechukwu Rebecca[3]

1. Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University Igbariam Campus- Anambra State
Department of Public Administration
nwokikechidi@gmail.com
2 &3 Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka- Anambra State
Department of Public Administration

Abstract: *E-government is one of the key mechanisms set out to reform the public sector in Nigeria and the world at large. Adoption of e-government in Nigeria came with mixed feelings and suspicion. Some were of the opinion that the majority of Nigerians are not computer literate, while others expressed that consistency would solve most of the challenges pointed out. However, the rate at which information and communication technology is taking over every aspect of government activities is a clear indication that e-government has come to stay. On their part, the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board embraced e-government in toto. Despite the numerous good sides of electronic government, there are some challenges confronting the implementation of e-government by JAMB. This study adopted the content analysis method while data were collected from journals, government publications, and the official JAMB website. A review of the literature found that JAMB's adoption of electronic government has made it easier for them to run examinations with a computer-based-test method and to quickly release results over the internet.*

Keywords: e-government, public sector reform, joint admission and matriculation board

Introduction
The world is constantly changing and adding old and new ways of doing things. It was Heraclitus, a Greek and a world-renowned philosopher, who propounded the theory of change. He was quoted as having said that the only constant in life is change. According to him, change is inevitable and a necessity since improvement is the ultimate goal of men. The Nigerian public sector has gone through stages of reforms which were geared towards providing efficient and effective services to the general public. In hindsight, the most important change was the rise of the digital revolution in the early days of 2001 (Lawal and Aluko, 2016).

According to Ishola (2016), e-government can be traced to around the year 2000, when the government of former president Olusegun Obasanjo announced its intention to go digital. The major objective of this move was to enthrone efficiency, effectiveness, transparency, and accountability in the public sector. In order to achieve these goals, the government set up two important agencies: the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) in 2003 and the National e-Government Strategy Limited (NeGST) in 2004 (Lawal and Aluko, 2016).

However, the wave of e-government swept across ministries, departments, and agencies of the government as soon as it was launched. The Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) was not left out. The agency began with electronic registration of prospective candidates in around 2006 until 2014, when it began with computer-based tests (CBT). Before this time, candidates were subjected to written examinations with paper and pens. JAMB equally introduced online payments and checking of results. This breakthrough gave the candidates and their parents an ample opportunity to check JAMB results in the comfort of their homes. As for the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB), this paper is going to look at how e-government works, what it can be good for and what it can be bad for, as well as how people who want to go to school and their parents feel about it.

CONCEPT CLARIFICATION

e-GOVERNMENT
E-government implies electronic government or running of governmental affairs using modern internet facilities. Adeyemo (2010) sees e-government as the use of internet technology as a platform to share information, provide goods and services, and transact business between government agencies or ministries or with citizens. According to Ishola (2016), e-government refers to the deployment of information and communication technology to run the affairs of a government as well as provide public services to the general public. On the same note, Alhabshi (who is quoted in Abdulkareem and Ishola, 2016) says that e-government is an important part of new public-sector management that aims to cut the costs of running the public sector and move it toward service delivery.

Kalu and Masri (2019) said that e-government entails the use of information and communication technology (ICT) to discharge public services in a more convenient, customer-oriented way, and at a reduced cost. Ojo (cited in Kalu and Masri, 2019) defines e-government as thus:

> Application of information and communication technology (ICT) by the government to enhance accountability, create awareness and ensure transparency in the management of governmental businesses.

It refers to digital interactions between a government and its citizens (G2C), a government and its employees (G2E), a government and businesses (G2B), and government-to-government (G2G). These interactions are also called models of e-government or delivery tracks. E-government is generally aimed at improving the ways public sectors are run.

The Benefits of E-Government

One of the major advantages of electronic government is that it ensures and improves efficiency in the management of the public sector. It will enable the government to save more money since the cost of running these establishments is taken care of using information and communication technology (ICT) facilities.

E-government enables the government to communicate properly with businesses. Business organisations and citizens can easily obtain reliable and fast information from the government. Government agencies now offer better services and understand the needs and expectations of businesses and citizens.

Also, e-government affords citizens an opportunity to access government data with ease and speed. It makes the operation of government businesses transparent since all government information is updated on the internet.

Disadvantages of e-governance

E-government can lead to a loss of interpersonal communication, which is a vital aspect of human existence. Men interact with fellow men to share ideas, feelings, and emotions, but this aspect of human interaction is under heavy threat following the introduction of ICT.

It may equally force citizens to lose their privacy and expose them to the dangers posed by internet fraudsters and scammers. Also, e-government is a capital-intensive venture. A large amount of money is needed to train the personnel, install ICT facilities, and maintain them. Technology is dynamic and its advancements come with financial implications.

Another disadvantage of e-government is that these sites that offer access to government data rarely allow many users to access the website. People living in remote villages have difficulties accessing internet facilities.

There are a lot of Nigerians living in both urban and rural areas who do not know how to use a computer and cannot even use one on their own.

Public Sector Reforms

Governments all over the world are working tirelessly to reposition the public sector to suit modern goals and the aspirations of citizens. Public sector reform is defined as a deliberate effort by the government or its agents directed towards making public organisations run better. The National Centre for Parliamentary Studies (2018) defined the public sector thus:

It consists of deliberate changes to the structure and processes of public sector organisations with the objective of getting them to run better. Structural changes include merging or splitting decision-making processes that include changes to systems, quality standards, and a focus on building the capacity of people.

Also, public sector reform entails the acquisition of new ways of running public establishments to make them more productive and serve the general public at a minimal cost. Reforming the public sector will include setting strategies to reduce official corruption, wastage, red tape, and the laissez-faire attitude of workers as well as improving their quick response to public demands with the aid of technology.

Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB)

The Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) is a body entrusted with the responsibility of conducting entrance examinations into Nigerian higher educational institutions such as universities, polytechnics, monotechnics, and colleges of education. The body was established on the 13th of February, 1978 through an act (No. 2 of 1978) of the Federal Military Government of Nigeria. It empowers JAMB, among others, to:

a) conduct Matriculation Examination for entry into all Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education (by whatever name called) in Nigeria

b) appoint Examiners, Moderators, Invigilators, members of the Subject Panels and committees and other persons with respect to matriculation examinations and any other matters incidental thereto or connected therewith.

(c) place suitably qualified candidates in the tertiary institutions after having taken into account:

(i) the vacancies available in each tertiary institution
(ii) the guidelines approved for each tertiary institution by its proprietors or other competent authorities
(iii) the preference expressed or otherwise indicated by the candidates for certain tertiary institutions and courses
(iv) such other matters as the Board may be directed by the Honorable Minister to consider or the Board itself may consider appropriate in the circumstances.

d). collate and disseminate information on all matters relating to admissions into tertiary institutions or any other matter relevant to the discharge of functions of the board.

e) carry out other activities as are necessary or expedient for the full discharge of all or any of the functions conferred on it under or pursuant to this Decree .

The first registrar of the board, Mr. Michael Saidu Angulu, served from 1979 to 1986. However, the current registrar is Professor Ishaq Oloyede, who was appointed in 2016 by President Muhammadu Buhari. The examination conducted by JAMB is called the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination, and its result is valid for a year while the grade ranges from 00 to 400. Also, the body determines the cut-off mark for universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education, which often varies each year. Candidates who may wish to change institutions are allowed to do so for a certain amount lower than the registration fee.

Introduction of Digital Services by the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board
Prior to the introduction of the online purchase of JAMB registration forms, candidates were made to buy paper forms from JAMB offices, Nipost, etc. nationwide. This process often takes up to a month to complete, while some candidates end up not being able to meet the deadline set by the board. In addition, the change of institutions or course of study takes more than three months to get positive or negative feedback, while in some cases, candidates end up losing a whole year because of a mistake made by them or JAMB officials. It was as a result of these shortfalls, and others not mentioned above, that propelled the body to introduce e-registration (popularly called "online registration") across the federation.
The old method of manual registration was officially discarded in favor of a better system that affords the candidate an opportunity to purchase, fill out, and submit the form on the same day. This new method was first launched in the 2006/2007 examination year. Prospective candidates were expected to purchase a scratch card at the cost of N3000.00 (as of that year) and then go online to fill out the JAMB form at any accredited cyber cafe. This process gave the prospective candidates unhindered access to the necessary information required before, during, and after the registration. Before this time, candidates were subjected to suffering or waiting in vain just to get information that would help them throughout the registration. However, with this system, people get useful information through their emails (www.jamb.gov.ng).

On a similar note, the system allows candidates to check results online as soon as the examination body announces the release of results, unlike before, when candidates are made to queue in an unending line just to get a glimpse of their scores. This system gave candidates easy access to check and print their results online in the comfort of their homes.
Another land-breaking event was recorded in May 2014, when a paper and pencil-based examination was changed to a computer-based examination. By implication, candidates are
expected to write the JAMB examination using computers. The system is without some hiccups that were registered in the early years of computer-based testing (CBT). Some of the candidates complained that their computers went off three times, with a concomitant delay in rebooting these computers (Dike, 2019). Another problem was that some of the candidates did not know how to use computers. There were problems with ICT facilities at most designated centers, and people did not like the idea (Danladi and Dodo, 2019).

JAMB Computer-Based Test (CBT) Challenges
At the inception of computer-based tests, initiated by the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB), they were confronted with so many problems. Even after eight years of implementation of the new method of writing entrance examinations into higher institutions, some of these challenges still persist. Below are some of the problems facing the conduct of CBT across the federation.

1. Power supply issues: Nigeria's power supply is epileptic; people only get two hours of power per day. For this reason, CBT centres are equipped with power generating plants to augment this limitation. In some cases, these power generating plants are poorly maintained and can break down in between periods of the test.
1. Some of the business outfits licensed to assist JAMB-registered candidates and conduct examinations were accused of sabotaging the process (Eno-Abasi, 2017). Most cybercafés were alleged to have connived with parents in the process in favour of the awards. Commercial bankers, on the other hand, either intentionally or because of a computer glitch, took longer than they should have to generate an e-registration number for the purchase of scratch cards.
2. Insufficient examination centres posed a serious challenge to the smooth conduct of CBT examinations across the federation. JAMB is still battling to match up with her policy of one computer per candidate. They now have two to three sessions on the day of the examination. Due to a lack of examination centers, an average of three candidates use one computer per session.
3. Registration hiccups and internet connectivity failures have also marred the conduct of computer-based tests in Nigeria. Dike (2021) reported a case at Dosh College, Egbe, Lagos, where candidates complained that their computers went off three times while they were still writing examinations.
4. Many people had to use the nearby bushes as toilets when they took computer-based tests at some centers because there were no toilets nearby.

Recommendations

Based on the problems discussed above, the researcher recommends as follows:
1. The Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) should add more power sources, like solar facilities, to power each center during the examination instead of relying on the national power supply and power plants.
2. Companies and commercial banks that messed up the process should be banned or dropped right away until they agree to work with JAMB's rules.
3. Examination centers should be set up and have high-quality computers and be powered by generating plants and solar facilities so that more people can take the tests.
4. Also, JAMB should look into the challenges encountered by candidates in the course of registration. Registration should be done in a way that does not break apart, and internet services should be given to people who are better at them.
5. The exam body should make sure that any business that is hired to help with the examination has good toilet facilities in the examination hall so that candidates do not have to leave the room for convenience.

Conclusion

E-government has been accepted by most nations following the discovery that its benefits supersede potential threats. The Nigerian government was not left out of this new and reliable trend making waves across continents. JAMB, on its part, is working tirelessly to ensure that information and communication technologies are fully deployed in all its activities. They started with the online registration of candidates and the checking of results for computer-based test exercises. This means that even though there were a lot of things that made it hard for people to take entrance examinations at higher education institutions in Nigeria, this system makes it easy, quick, cost-effective, and transparent. It also makes sure that people can take exams quickly and easily in a fair way.

References

Abdulkareem, A. K. & Ishola, A. A. (2016). E-government in Nigeria: problems and prospects. Ilorin journal of administration and development, 2(1):59-67. https//www. Researchgate.net/ publication/309643623

Danladi,H & Dodo, A. K. (2019). An assessment of the challenges and prospects of computer based test (CBT) in joint admission and matriculation board(JAMB). SSRG international journal of humanities and social sciences, 6(5): 86-91. www.internationaljournalssrg.org

Dike, G. (2021 June 19). Minor hiccups as over 1.4m candidates write 2021 UTME. Sun newspaper. www.sunnewsonline.com

Eno-Abasi, S. (2017, April 9). JAMB's unending challenges. the Guardian. www.guardian.ng

International Centre for Parliamentary Studies (2018). Public sector reform. www.parlicentre.org

Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) www.jamb.gov.ng

Kalu, O. E. & Masri, R. (2019). Challenges of e-government implementation in the Nigerian public service. International transaction journal of Engineering, management, Applied Sciences and Technologies. doi:10.14456/ITJEMAST.2019.2

Lawal, E. E. & Aluko, O. I. (2016). Election management and the democratization process in Nigeria's fourth Republic. Ilorin journal of administration and development, 2(1):59-67. https//www. Researchgate.net/ publication/309643623