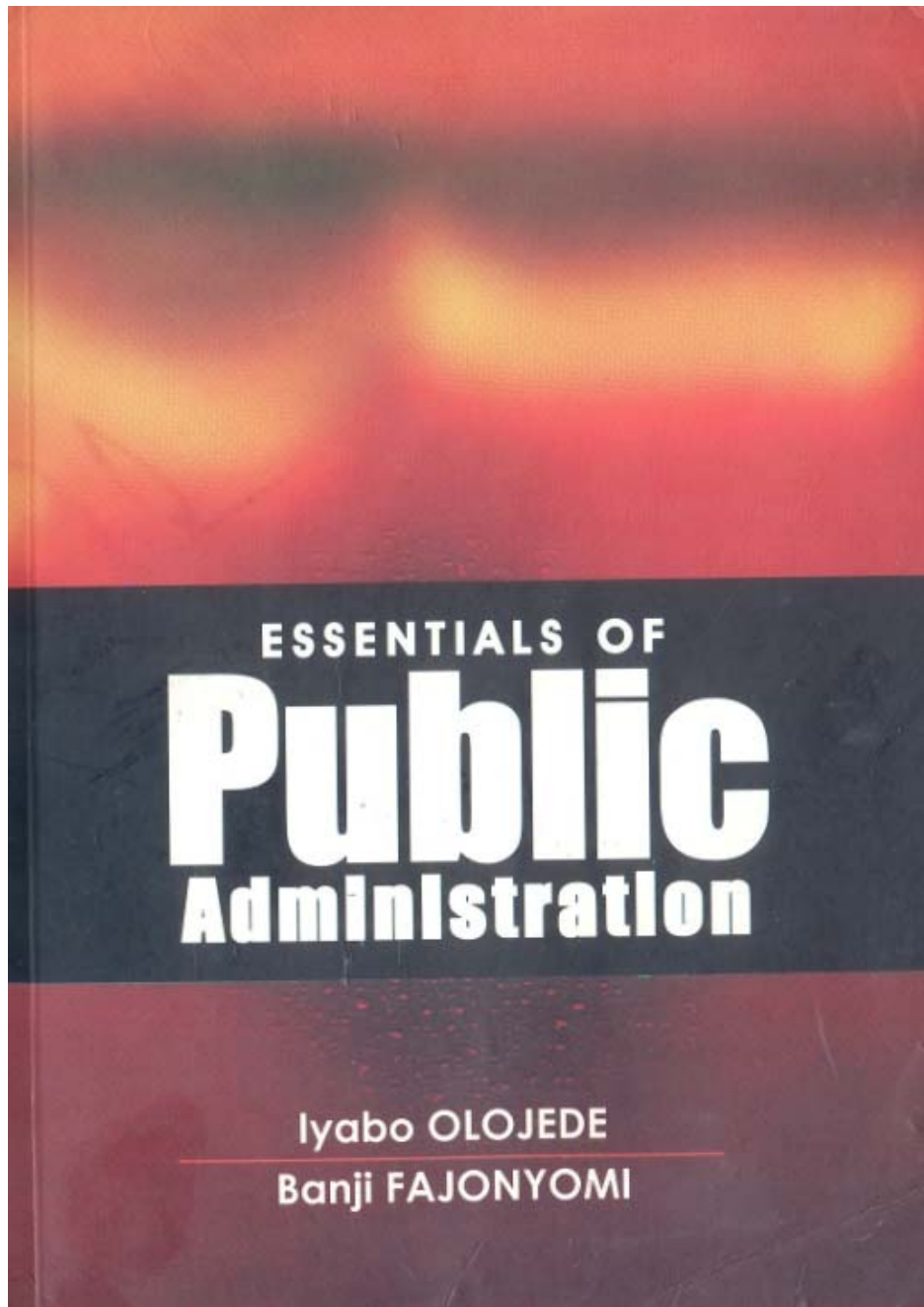


ESSENTIALS OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION – I. OLOJEDE, B. FAJONYOMI



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PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AS AN ACADEMIC DISCIPLINE

FRIDAY FRANCIS NCHUCHUWE

INTRODUCTION

Following Woodrow Wilson's essay in 1887 with other scholars that followed, Public Administration became an area of academic interest. This implies that it became a field of academic discourse or a course for study in most tertiary institutions all over the world. As Henry Nicholas (2001:27) puts it, Woodrow Wilson largely set the tone for the early study of public administration in an essay titled "The Study of Administration" published in the *Political Science Quarterly* in 1887. It is either taken as a separate field of study (course) or as part of Political Science. However, despite the huge interests in it, it had a universally or generally accepted definition. By this we mean that there is yet no one or single definition of it accepted by all. Rather what we have is a plethora of definitions. For the purpose of this chapter, we shall highlight some of them

According to Ferrel Heady (1966:2), Public administration is an aspect of the generic concept administration found in a political setting, concerned primarily with the —.1) Tying out of public policy decisions made by the authoritative decision-makers. This implies -that public administration is nothing but a part of the holistic administration having to do with implementing the policies of decision-makers in government. As Fox et al (1991:2) puts it; public administration is that form of structures and processes operating within a particular society as the environment, with the objective of facilitating the formation of appropriate governmental policy and the effective and efficient execution of the formulated policy. In the views of Goetzee in Bayat and Mayer (1994:4) public administration is a particular type of administration concerned with the execution of the rules, laws and regulations of the government of a country geared towards meeting the needs of the citizens.

According to Akpan (1982:ix) Public administration is nothing but the servant of politics. As he puts it to him, "politicians while seeking power, publish programs and manifestoes of what they think they know how to do and will do and rely on public servants to implement them. Thus to Akpan (1982), public administration is simply the organ that carries out the programmes and manifestoes of politicians in power.

To Ladipo Adamolekun (1983:1), public administration is commonly used to refer to both the activities concerned with the management of government business and the study of these activities. Thus, he sees it not only as an academic discipline but also as an activity concerned with the management of government business.

The Eyclopaedia Britannica (1977:185) defines public administration as traditionally comprising those activities involved in carrying out the policies and programmes of government. According to it, its focus is principally on the planning, organizing, directing, coordinating and controlling of government operations at all levels whether federal, state or local. It went further to state that:

regardless of the system of government monarchical, totalitarian, socialist, Parliamentary or congressional presidential, all countries of the world require a machinery to put into effect the policies of the government at all levels. That machinery is nothing else but public administration.

This implies that Public Administration is found in all political systems no matter their nature and its main essence is to put into effect the policies of government at levels. According to Vieg (Akpan, 1982:27) Public administration is described this way:

At its fullest range; public administration embraces every area and activity governed by public policy. It may even be taken to include the formal processes and operations through which the legislature exercises its power... In a literal sense, Public

administration also includes the functions of the Courts in the administration of justice and the work of military agencies...

What Veig tries to explain here is that contrary to many views, Public Administration is not limited to the executive branch of government alone but that it cuts across other arms of government namely; the legislative and the judiciary and indeed other agencies or parastatals of government.

As Balogun (1987:11) puts it, public administration is the marshalling of human and material resources in order to achieve the objectives of public policy. This brings to the fore two vital aspects in the study of Public Administration, which must go with policy implementations and becomes important areas of attention in the study of public administration.

According to Adebayo (2001:4), Public administration is governmental administration and it is concerned with the study of how a country's administration is organized and how it functions. Stressing further, he notes that its study must lead to the study of the most efficient ways of organizing the executive branch of government, its institutions and its procedures. Adebayo gives a food for thought here in, the sense that he draws attention to the fact that the scope of Public administration should not be limited to policy implementation alone but how it could be made to be more efficient.

Nnoli in Mukandala (2000:44) sees public administration as the machinery, as well as the integral processes, through which the government performs its functions. He sees it as:

- A network of human relationship and associated activities for accomplishing the life of the society with which a government is concerned.
- A system of roles that causes the intentions and programmes of government to be realized in real life.

- A pattern of routinized activities, involving decision making, planning, advising, coordinating, negotiation, conciliations, arbitration, command and data-gathering through which the government carries out its responsibilities.

As Tonwe (1998:42) puts it, public administration consists of all the activities having for their purpose the fulfillment of government programmes and objectives. To him, it is nothing short of the whole of government in action.

Basu (2003:3-4) notes that Public Administration is any kind of administration in the public interest. As she puts it, it is the management of governmental affairs at all levels - national, state and local.

These definitions are by no means exhaustive. The ones highlighted so far no doubt reveal the emphasis the various thinkers and authors lay on different aspects of public administration. There are some thinkers or authors who equate its sphere of activities with the implementation of law and public policy yet some see it as a detailed and systematic application of law while others see it as the fulfillment or enforcement of public policy as declared by the competent authorities. Yet, others see it as law in action or the executive side of government. Similarly, some see it as having a coordinating role - that of getting the work of government done by coordinating the efforts of the people so that they can work together to accomplish set goals (Basu, 2003:3). More still some see it in line of the relationship it has with the political and social systems. For example, Nigro (1965:25) provides a comprehensive definition of Public Administration in this regard in the following manner:

Public administration

- i. is cooperative group effort in a public setting;
- ii. covers all three branches- executive, legislative and judicial- and their interrelationships;

- iii. has an important role in the formulation of public policy and is thus a part of the political process;
- iv. is more important than, and also different in significant ways from private administration;
- v. is closely associated with numerous private groups, and individuals in providing services to the community;

Comments on Definitions

From all the definitions, it is clear that the authors have viewed them from two perspectives:

- (1) The narrow perspectives
- (2) The broad perspectives.

Those in the narrow perspective category simply views public administration as only having to do with those activities concerned with the executive branch of government while those in the broad perspective category consider it to include all governmental activities having for their purpose the fulfillment of public policy.

All said, the following could be deduced as the characteristics of public administration anywhere in the world.

Characteristics of public administration

- i. It is found in a political setting.
- ii. It operates within a political context.
- iii. It cuts across all organs or arms of government.

- iv. It has its own organizational structures and machinery for carrying out its tasks or put in another way it is bureaucratic.
- v. Though its main role is to implement government policies, it is also involved in policy formulation and evaluation.
- vi. It is the totality of government in action or the action part of government.
- vii. It manages government business or all that government wants to do or not to do.
- viii. In carrying out its tasks, it plans, organizes, staff, directs, coordinates, reports and prepares budgets for achieving set goals
- ix. It is the means by which the policy decisions made by authoritative political decision-makers are carried out.
- x. It is any kind of administration in the general public interest.
- xi. It engages in the systematic ordering of public affairs and data gathering.
- xii. It is a cooperative group effort for achieving goals in a public setting
- xiii. It is a network of human relationships and associated activities for accomplishing the life of the society.
- xiv. It is concerned with "the what" and "the how" of government for example, what a government does, how a government organizes its staff, finances and work, etc.

Corson and Harris (1963:I 2) provide a similar overview or summary of public administration this way:

Public administration is:

- (i) decision making;
- (ii) planning the work to be done;

- (iii) formulating objectives and goals;
- (iv) working with the legislative and citizen organizations to gain public support and funds for government programmes;
- (v) establishing and revising organization;
- (vi) directing and supervising employees;
- (vii) providing leadership;
- (viii) communicating and receiving communications;
- (ix) determining work methods and procedures;
- (x) appraising performance;
- (xi) exercising controls, and other functions performed by government executives and supervisors.

As an academic discipline therefore, Public Administration is concerned with understanding its nitty-gritty in terms of structures, personnel, materials, finances, etc, and how it could be made to be more result oriented or efficient and effective.

Furthermore, it has to do with the study of the knowledge, skills, values and behaviour involved in the formulation of public policies and the administration of public services. In the same way as other applied sciences such as communication, business administration, economics and industrial psychology, Public Administration is based on the general truths and principles provided by basic arts and sciences such as languages and literature, philosophy, History, Sociology, Economics, Psychology and Political Science (Bayer and Meyer, 1994:7).

Since its inception as a science and, more pertinently, as an applied social science to be taught at academic level, public administration has seen many a turbulent time during its century of development, causing prominent exponents in the field of theory and philosophy to actively debate its right of existence (Bayer and Meyer, 1994: 6). However,

after a century of research, writing and teaching, public Administration is currently recognized throughout the world as a full-fledged academic discipline with its own epistemological, theoretical and philosophical base (Botes, 1988: 119 -120). Today, the course content of Public Administration is modelled on a framework of reference provided by a rigorous classification of the components of Public Administration as a social and management phenomenon (Bayer and Meyer, 1994:6).

As a field of Study, Public Administration like any other Discipline in the university must meet certain requirements. According to Coetzee (1988: I 49), these requirements include:

i. Recognition

By this is meant that the discipline must have formal and informal recognition. Public Administration as a discipline has both formal and informal recognition. For example, in Nigeria, the government, the ministry of education and indeed the National University Commission (NUC) responsible for university education and curriculum recognize it. Similarly, the certificates and graduates of the discipline are accorded high regard in the society, As it is mostly said, Public Administration remains a living course.

ii. Standards:

It must be a discipline that has standards, which must be complied with. Public Administration has a standard of its own. For example, it is one discipline that is governed by rigors and procedures or ways of doing things.

lii A body of rules:

It must have a body of rules, which must be complied with. If anything at all, public administration is infested with a body of rules, which regulates its general applications and conduct.

iv. Relevance:

The discipline must be of relevance to the society. Again, if anything at all public administration is about the well-being of the society and it is fundamentally relevant to it.

v. Prevalence of a Body of Literature/ Empirical Research:

Public administration is no doubt one discipline that is continually engaged in research. However, there is the dire need to make it continuously efficient and effective.

vi. Theory Building:

There must be the possibility for theory building from practice. Public administration as a discipline has over the years evolved a lot of theories that can be used to make explanations and a prediction of administrative phenomenon, which has been helpful in its study.

vii. Length of Time:

There must be a length of time or duration for the study of the discipline as it is the case with other Disciplines.

viii. Approval:

The subject must be approved as a university discipline by the education authorities. In Nigeria for example the National University Commission (NUC) is responsible for this.

There is no doubt that the discipline of Public Administration complies with all these requirements, generally and in Nigeria, in particular.

Significance or Importance of Studying Public Administration. The study of Public Administration is significant in so many ways. Some of them are listed below:

1. It exposes students to understand how policies are formulated and implemented.
2. It exposes students to understand who public administrators are and their roles or duties.
3. It exposes students to understand what government does or does not.
4. It exposes students to understand what it takes to be Public Administrators.
5. It exposes students to understand the constraints of government policies and why the policies of government succeeds or fail.
6. It exposes students to understand who gets what, and why in their immediate surroundings.
7. It exposes students to understand those elements or ingredients that can make Public Administration to be more result-orientated or efficient and effective.
8. It exposes students to understand why Public Administration is necessary at all and its relevance to the society.

Present Curriculum of Public Administration in Nigerian Universities:

The present Curriculum of Public Administration in Nigerian universities is as follows:

1. The concept and nature of Public Administration.
2. Similarities and differences between Public and Private Administrations.
3. Functions of Public Administration.
4. Schools or Conceptual Approaches to the study of Public Administration.
5. Models in Public Administration:-
 - System Model.
 - Decision Making Model.
 - The Classical Model.
 - Human Relations Model.
 - Sociological Model.
6. Classification or Typologies of Organisations
7. Bureaucracy - Nature, Strengths & Weaknesses
8. Public Administration in National Development - Growth and Development
9. Reforms of the Civil Service
10. Changing role of socio-economic and political transformation on Public Administration.
11. International Public Administration and its relationship with Domestic Public Administration.

The curriculum is well suited to present the student with variegated opportunities. For example, a graduate of Public Administration with a B.Sc or B.A will readily fit into any public or private organization. Such graduates for example, could work in the personnel, finance, materials management, supply and purchase, security Departments

or better still could control the whole organization in terms of being its Managing Director, General Manager and what have you. In the political arena, a graduate of Public Administration could fit into holding any political office. For example, the student could aspire to become the President, Governor, Minister, Commissioner, Local Government Chairman or Director/Chairman of Government parastatals among others. Similarly, such a graduate could become head of any association for example, Chairman of Political Parties or any other association for that matter.

Public Administration is also studied at the post-graduate level, full time and part time. For example, there is the postgraduate diploma (PGD), Masters in Public Administration (MPA and M.Sc) and the Doctor of Philosophy. The degrees are geared towards enhancing the capacity of professionals and Academicians in the field of Public Administration. The Courses are usually taken after a successful undergraduate career though not compulsory that one must have graduated in Public Administration but in related fields. Most of the course curriculum for the Masters and Doctoral levels are derived from that of the under-graduates. Most of the Universities also offer Diploma courses in Public Administration. The essence of this is to prepare students or other interested parties towards a career in Public Administration. The curriculum is also derived from the curriculum of the under-graduates. The bottom line of the curriculum in Public Administration is that it should have adequate theories, concept and principles in policy and management in order to meet basic requirements and satisfy the expectations of the society in managerial duties.

Public Administration and other Disciplines

As a field of study, Public Administration is in tandem with other disciplines. For example, it is in tandem with Political Science or politics, Economics, Sociology, Psychology. Business Administration, Law, Accounting, Banking and Finance, History among others. We shall examine some of them:

1. **Public Administration and Political Science:** Political Science and Public Administration are no doubt related. Indeed, Public Administration derives many of its theories from the sub-field of Political Science. But beyond this, Political Science deals with the phenomena of "state" or government and the expression of state will. Public Administration deals with the execution of that will. Thus, Public Administration is a significant part of the process of "Will" making and its implementation. It could make or mar any political system depending on the way it is handled. One thing is to formulate a good policy and another thing is to effectively implement it. This therefore becomes the linkage between the two concepts. Thus the understanding of a political system could create a better understanding of the performance of its Public Administrative system. As the saying goes, without Government policies there will be no public Administration.
2. **Public Administration and Economics:** Economics is about scarce means and given ends. It studies how scarce means can be utilized to achieve given ends. It is common knowledge that no organization can effectively achieve its aim or objectives (ends) without sufficient or adequate means to do so. Economic means here implies money or finance. The economic situation in a given country can have serious consequences on its Public Administrative system. The study of Public Administration will therefore not be complete without understanding the availability or otherwise of the means of carrying out its task and how to acquire it.
3. **Public Administration and Sociology:** Sociology is the study of Society and man who lives in it. Public administrative practices are carried out for the benefit of man and the society. Indeed, without society and man, there will be no need for Public Administration and Government. Society therefore has a great influence on Public Administration. The level of support given to the Public Administrative system could make or mar it. For Public

Administration to be effective or successful therefore, adequate knowledge of the needs of the society is vital. If for instance, the society is dissatisfied with the implementation of government policies or the Government itself, it could become apathetic and refuse to cooperate with the administrators in implementing the policy. Similarly, Administrators are a product of their sociocultural milieu. Current social attitudes mould their attitude to life and work, which in turn moulds their administrative behaviour (Basu, 2003: 51). Consciously or unconsciously, every administrator's decisions will carry the stamp of the environment he lives in and its social philosophy, cultural biases and peculiarities (Basu, 2003:51). In this circumstance, it becomes imperative to study society deeply so as to understand Administrators and the public administrative systems.

4. **Public Administration and Law:** In simple terms, Law implies rules and regulations through which a body or organization or country operates or is governed. Government itself is Law as all its operations are premised on law. Public administrative duties are also premised on Law or a system of rules. For example, there is administrative Law described as authoritative rules, which regulate the conduct of those in administration (Ujo, 1999:26). Thus, to really appreciate Public Administration, the laws governing its operations must be understood. A good public administrator for example must be vast in administrative laws. Both are therefore inseparable.
5. **Public Administration and History:** History as it is commonly said is the study of past events. The study of the administrative system of any country would remain incomplete without a proper historical background. Thus the knowledge of history helps a great deal in understanding past activities of public administrative system. As the saying goes, to understand the present and be able to predict the future, one must understand the past. For

example, the origin and growth of the various present administrative institutions can be studied only with the help of history (Basu, 2003:47).

6. **Public Administration and Psychology:** Psychology usually refers to the behaviour of people in a given society or environment (Ola and Offiong, 1999:7). The people are usually concerned with how their government is operating and its effect on their lives. This has great influence on their behavioural patterns. For example, the study of Psychology alongside Public Administration will afford the Administrators the opportunity to understand the psyche of the public at given times and why they behave the way they do. Similarly, the behaviour of employees can easily be understood with the study of psychology alongside Public Administration.

Factors affecting the study of Public Administration as a Discipline

Like other disciplines, there are quite a number of problems or constraints affecting the study of public administration as a discipline especially in Developing countries and they include:

1. Inadequate funds for research especially in a developing country like Nigeria.
2. Dearth of books.
3. Uncertainty and confusion over the status of the discipline as an art, science or a profession.
4. Institutional shortcomings (inadequacy of public administration departments).
5. Lack of communication between public administration scholars and the practicing administrators.
6. Poor library for academic studies and research.

7 Inaccessibility to official documents.

8 Wide scope of the subject.

In summary, the discipline of Public Administration is a very important one for national growth and development. Indeed, it is the process on which political, economic and social stability rest in any society (Adebayo, 2001:2).

Types of Public Organisation

Having discussed public administration as a discipline and its essence, it is necessary to examine the major types that are prevalent in modern societies or political systems that students will come across as they grow along the line. Tonwe (1998: 151–184) listed three of the types and they are-

1. Government department or ministries.

2. Public corporation.

3. Government Company.

1. **Government Department:** this is also known as ministries as it is in the case of Nigeria. It is usually a creation of the executive arm of government and it is the first and nucleus of all administrative structures in the political system. Another name for it is the civil service. Until some decades ago, it existed without any competing units. However today, they are various governmental units or administrative outfits competing with it, though they are of different objectives.

Example of ministries in Nigeria includes-

- Federal or state ministries of agriculture and water resources.
- Federal or state ministries of health.
- Federal or state ministries of education.
- Federal or state ministries of commerce and industry

- Federal or state ministries of sports.
- Federal ministry of Aviation.
- Federal or state ministries of information e.t.c.

Any student of public administration will no doubt get to know about government ministries because of its importance. Its main features are as follows:

- i. Departments are a creation of the chief executive in apolitical system.
- ii. They are under the Chief Executive or the Ministers or commissioners as the case may be who is answerable to the cabinet or Parliament in a parliamentary system and to the President in a presidential system.
- iii. It is strictly hierarchical, that is to say it operates with different levels of authority.
- iv. They are guided by certain rules and regulations laid down by the government.
- v. They are wholly funded by government as they can neither borrow nor sell shares
- vi. Employees working in the departments are government servants and thus enjoy constitutional protection.
- vii. There is complete government control over the activities of the department.
- viii. The employees are generally referred to as civil servants
- ix. The employees are usually anonymous
- x. The employees are also expected to be politically neutral
- xi. Services provided are usually for the generality of the people
- xii. They are not commercially oriented or profit making
- xiii. Their employees enjoy continuity in office except for serious offences
- xiv. They lack nomenclatures like General Managers and Board of directors

- xv. They are expected to be politically neutral
- xvi. They are expected to be impartial among others.

2. Government Companies: These are also government organisations or public administration by virtue of the fact that government controls majority of its shares. By this we mean government has a controlling share capital of not less than 51%. As the name implies they are like other limited liability companies registered under the company act. They have Articles and memorandum of Association and above all are fully commercial oriented in that they have profit motive, thus requiring that all payment are made for the services they render or goods supplied. One unique difference between this type of public organisation from the Departments is that while the Departments provide more or less free services in line with the social welfare functions of government, the companies collect money intoto for services rendered. Though their control and regulation rest with the government, it combines the operating flexibility of a privately operated company.

Characteristics of Government Company

- i. It has most of the features of a private limited company organized in the private sector.
- ii. Government holds majority of the share capital of 51% or more.
- iii. All the Directors, or a majority of them are appointed by the government, depending on the extent to which private capitals are involved.
- iv. It is a corporate body created under the Companies Act. For example, in Nigeria, it is the Companies Act of 1990.
- v. It can sue and be sued. It can enter into contracts and acquire its own property.

- vi. Its creation is based on the decision of the Executive without legislative specific approval.
- vii. It enjoys special grants as takeoff fund from the government, and thereafter from private shareholders and loans or through revenue derived from the sales of its goods and services.
- viii. It is generally exempted from the personnel, budget, accounting, audit laws and other procedures applicable to government departments.
- ix. Its employees, excluding the officers taken from government departments on secondments are not civil servant.
- x. Similarly, they are not politically neutral, or do they enjoy permanence in office among others

3. **Public Corporations:** This is yet another form of public organisation that the students will come across as they take Public Administration as a discipline. They are simply government organization set up to cater for essential services that are of huge capital outlay but highly beneficial to the people. Government for this reason monopolizes them. The cost of services provided by them are usually subsidized by the government in the interest of the masses even though they are into full commercial operations. Unlike Departments and Companies, Public Corporations are usually chartered under federal, state or local laws.

Characteristics of Public Corporation

- i. It is incorporated under a special statute of the legislature, which lay down its purpose, powers and functions.
- ii. It is a corporate person capable of suing and been sued, entering into contracts, acquiring and owing properties in its own name.
- iii. Its activities are primarily of business or industrial nature.

- iv. It is run on business lines and not in accordance with departmental procedures and practices.
- v. It possesses the flexibility and initiative of private concerns like Government companies.
- vi. It has its own budget and finance separate from that of the national budget and finance.
- vii. It enjoys administrative autonomy from the control of the Chief Executive.
- viii. Its personnel do not form part of the civil service but are recruited independently.
- ix. It is essentially state owned, though commercially oriented.
- x. The audit of public corporation is different from that of Department. While public corporations are subject to commercial audit, government departments are subject to government audit.
- xi. Public corporations are not basically meant for profit motive but are meant to render essentially social services which are subsidized.

These characteristics will no doubt enable students of Public Administration to be acquainted with the various types of Public organizations, which they must contend with in the course of pursuing public administration as a course. There is no doubt that there are other forms of public organizations but they lack universal applications. However, we also have what is generally referred to as Government agencies or bodies or extra ministerial bodies or organisations. They are usually a creation of the executive in the political system and they are usually meant to serve a special task or special purpose. They do not necessarily undermine the activities of the Department or Ministries.

A unique feature of most of them is that once the purpose for which they are established is accomplished, they will cease to exist. In Nigeria for example, there are agencies like

the National Agencies For Food and Drug Administration Control (NAFDAC), National Drug Law Enforcement Agencies (NDLEA), Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC.), Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC), Independent Corrupt Practices and other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) among others. They also exist at state levels. For example, in Lagos state, we have Lagos State Waste Management Authority (LAWMA), Lagos State Traffic Management Authority (LASTMA) among others. Other forms that may exist as mentioned earlier do not have universal applications. Students of Public administration will from time to time come across these various forms as they pick interest in public administration as a discipline.

In summary, we have generally discussed Public Administration as a Discipline and highlighted the salient aspects of it as a course of study. No doubt Public Administration is an interesting Discipline for hardworking people, loving and serious minded people. As Adebayo (2001:2), puts it, the discipline of Public Administration is a very important one for national growth and development. Indeed, it is the process on which political, economic and social stability rest in any society.

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