

Bureaucracy and Service Delivery in Akwa Ibom State Civil Service

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Abstract

The persistent issues concerning service delivery in the public service led to an investigation into the relationship between bureaucracy and service delivery in Akwa Ibom State. The research was conducted to understand the issue of merit-based appointments and professionalism in service delivery. A survey research design was used, and a sample of 356 civil servants was selected through a multi-stage sampling method across ministries, departments, and agencies. Data was collected through a structured questionnaire and was analysed by means of descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation. The results showed that there is a positive, statistically significant correlation between merit-based appointment and service delivery, and between professionalism and service delivery. The research determined that the lack of effectiveness in the delivery of public services in the state is inherently caused by the weaknesses in these bureaucratic pillars. In particular, political considerations in appointments undermine professionalism, whereas ambiguous recruitment practices and a robust accountability system undermine performance and weaken trust among the population. Subsequently, the study suggested that an open, technology-based, merit-based recruitment process should be institutionalised to remove political favours, and that a continuous professional development system should be established as a mandatory requirement to improve the skills of civil servants. These are reforms which are critical in changing service delivery and in creating sustainable development in Akwa Ibom State Civil Service.

Keywords: Bureaucracy, service delivery, merit-based-appointment, professionalism and political considerations.

Introduction

Bureaucracy is a crucial structure to administer government policies, order, efficiency and consistency in service delivery by the government. Weber (2020) defines bureaucracy as a type of administration characterised by a hierarchical line of authority, specialisation of functions, and the unwavering compliance with official rules and procedures. It is created to make efficiency, neutrality and orderly control. Equally, Okon (2021) notes that bureaucracy is a structured means of implementing policies, which reduces arbitrary qualities and brings order to administration. Bureaucracy has developed over the years, as governments' means of enhancing efficiency, responsiveness and service delivery related to citizens.

Bureaucracy in Nigeria has its origin in the British colonial rule of the early 20th century. According to Adegbite (2020), the colonial government introduced organised administrative systems to control the resources and implement policies, which were passed on to the Nigerian government after independence in 1960. Later, the Nigerian bureaucracy adjusted to the local

forms of governing systems, but in the hierarchical and procedural nature of its colonial counterpart (Usman, 2022). Hierarchical characteristics are typically employed by the modern theorists of democracy as the criteria to determine the extent of bureaucratisation in organisations, (Udo, 2014).

Regardless of its historical basis and advantage, the Nigerian bureaucracy is susceptible to inefficiency, corruption, and political interference. Eze (2021) highlights that the main functions of bureaucracy, such as policy implementation, enforcement of regulations, and distribution of resources, are important in ensuring law and order, coordinating government programs, and providing social services. Ibrahim (2023) extends the argument by noting that a strong bureaucracy makes sure that there is continuity in the running of the government even during a political transition. A similar point is made by Akinwale (2022), who asserts that bureaucracy supports professionalism by appointing employees on merit and facilitating professional career growth.

Bureaucracy helps to stabilise, improve openness, and responsibility in the government (Adebayo, 2020). Musa (2021) indicates that through specialisation, public officials are able to gain experience, which improves the delivery of services. It also offers dispute resolution mechanisms and ensures that decisions are made in accordance with laws and procedures (Ogunleye, 2022). According to Nwachukwu (2021), bureaucracy helps in protection against arbitrary decision-making, even when there is a change in politics. Nevertheless, the presence of red tape, nepotism, and poor technological adoption are among the factors that make these measures ineffective (Bello, 2023; Nwosu, 2021; Okonkwo, 2022). Lack of accountability and professionalism are further undermined by poor remuneration, inadequate training, and favouritism (Adebayo, 2023).

The delivery of public goods and services is referred to as service delivery, which depends on efficiency, accessibility, quality, and responsiveness (Yusuf, 2023; Adeyemi, 2021). An effective service delivery is also inclusive and supports the needs of all citizens, including marginalised groups, by applying the functions of the sectors of healthcare, education, and infrastructure (Balogun, 2022; Olawale, 2023). Bureaucratic efficiency is directly connected to the quality of service, and such variables as appointments based on merit, professionalism, transparency, accountability, and digitisation directly affect the results (Ojo, 2022; Eze, 2023; Olawale, 2021).

Such reforms as the introduction of the SERVICOM initiative, the use of e-governance, performance-based assessments, and training have aimed at enhancing the efficiency and delivery of services by bureaucrats in Nigeria (Adekunle, 2020; Ibrahim, 2022; Okafor, 2023). Nonetheless, corruption, change resistance, and insufficient funding remain some of the obstacles to complete implementation of the reform (Akinola, 2021). Bureaucracy, especially by means of technological integration, meritocracy and capacity-building, should be continually enhanced to enhance the provision of effective service delivery and sustainable governance.

Statement of the Problem

Bureaucracy is the backbone of successful administration of people, as it means the implementation of policies and the delivery of services. These objectives are hampered by inefficiencies in the civil service in Akwa Ibom State. Among the challenges, there are appointments not based on merit, deteriorating professionalism, lack of transparency, inefficiency in accountability and poor digitisation. They reduce the quality, cost-effectiveness, and timeliness of the services, especially in the most crucial areas such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure (Adebayo & Adefolalu, 2020). These problems are worsened by political interference, nepotism,

and bad organisational practices, causing long delays, low quality of services and reduced trust among the people (Ojo, 2019; Emekekwe, 2022). Also, the lack of ICT facilitation means that the smooth service provision is not achieved, and the lack of training and professional growth minimises the ability of civil servants to respond to the needs of the population (Okafor & Nwachukwu, 2021). These bureaucratic deficiencies must be overcome in order to improve service delivery as well as the socio-economic development of the state of Akwa Ibom.

Research Objectives

The objectives that are targeted are:

1. to investigate how merit-based appointments affect service delivery within the Akwa Ibom State civil service.
2. to determine the correlation between professionalism in the bureaucracy and service delivery at the Akwa Ibom State civil service.

Research Questions

1. How do merit-based appointments affect service delivery at the Akwa Ibom State civil service?
2. How does the professionalism of the bureaucratic workforce relate to service delivery at the Akwa Ibom State civil service?

Research Hypotheses

H₀₁: There is a significant relationship between merit-based appointments and service delivery in the Akwa Ibom State civil service.

H₀₂: Professionalism in the bureaucracy does not significantly relate to the service delivery in the Akwa Ibom State civil service.

Literature Review

Bureaucracy

Bureaucracy is a complex phenomenon that focuses on the centre of government administration, organisational theory, and political science. Max Weber (1947) theorised bureaucracy as a formal organisational structure, which is marked by hierarchical authorities, specialised functions, strict rule-observing and impersonal relations. This organisation is meant to ensure efficiency, consistency and predictability in policy execution and provision of services to people. Weber stressed that bureaucracies also work with the following principles: a clear division of labour, written regulations, a hierarchical power structure, and promotion and hiring on merit, which enable unbiased and objective decision-making. Although these exist, bureaucracy has been condemned due to inflexibility and ineffectiveness.

Hierarchy is one of its main characteristics that makes bureaucracy easy to control and coordinate the structure, as there is a clear chain of command and the division of tasks in a natural manner. Nevertheless, Ojo (2019) mentions that high hierarchies may contribute to the emergence of delays, low responsiveness, and slowness in decision-making, especially when it comes to dynamic settings. It is closely associated with formalisation, which is based on standardised procedures in order to be consistent. Although formalisation leads to fewer ambiguities, Adebayo & Adefolalu (2020) note that overdependence on rules can cause red tape, and this leads to bottlenecks, lack of creativity, and inefficiencies in the service delivery process.

Bureaucracy efficiency is quantified in terms of timely, economical and dependable execution of policies. Nonetheless, Okafor & Nwachukwu (2021) indicate that the majority of bureaucracies in Nigeria have challenges in using outdated procedures and a lack of capacity-building, leading to delays and discontent among the citizens. One of the critical aspects is transparency, which enables citizens to have access to decision-making and administrative procedures that result in a decrease in corruption and accountability. According to Emekekwe (2022), insufficient transparency leads to corruption, and the more open it is, the more people have trust in democratic leadership.

Digitalization has become a solution to enhance bureaucracy through the incorporation of ICT to facilitate operations, automate processes and also improve communication (Adebayo & Adefolalu, 2020). Nevertheless, some barriers like resistance to change, poor infrastructure, and poor digital literacy interfere with successful implementation (Okafor & Nwachukwu, 2021). The role of politics also makes bureaucracy even more difficult to deal with, since patronage and favouritism can hurt the merit-based systems, affecting professionalism and the trust of the population (Akinola & Ayeni, 2020).

Capacity building is another issue that does not fade away. Good bureaucracy needs to have well-trained staff and constant professional growth so as to perform complex governance duties. As Ojo (2019) points out, a lack of adequate investment in human capital restricts flexibility, productivity, and quality of services. Although these challenges exist, bureaucracy is still necessary to plan complicated societies and to implement policies. Hierarchical order is aimed to be balanced by reforms (reducing red tape, promoting meritocracy, enhancing transparency, and integrating digital technologies) that should promote efficiency, responsiveness, and accountability (Olayemi & Bello, 2021).

Merit-Based Appointments

The foundation of modern bureaucracy is merit-based appointments, which underline the selection, recruitment, and advancement of civil servants in accordance with objectively verifiable principles and criteria, including educational background, technical skill, experience, and proven performance (Weber, 2020). This is unlike appointment systems that are based on political favours, nepotism, regionalism, or other non-merit factors. Weber (2020) opined that to achieve administrative efficiency and legitimacy, government institutions should be manned by technically qualified experts, who should be selected using unbiased methods. Simon (1997) also emphasised that rational decision making and effective policy implementation require a workforce that is specialised, knowledgeable and skilled in cognition in the management of complex administrative tasks.

The typical way of operationalising merit-based systems is through standardised competitive tests, structured interviews, checking of credentials and clear analysis of past performance (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017). Properly established, meritocracy not only increases technical competence but also the level of public confidence, as citizens will see bureaucratic decisions as being objective and professionally-based. The benefits are the increase in employee morale, organisational commitment and lesser vulnerability to corrupt practices because the positions are not acquired as political rewards.

There are, however, challenges in the implementation of meritocracy in the developing democracies. Political executives can be reluctant to part with the control over appointments as it is a tool to establish political networks, which types of phenomena Peters (2019) describes as the merit-patronage dilemma. The outcome is incompetence, poor administrative capabilities, loss of social trust, and deteriorated service provision. Rainey (2009) points out that, to maintain merit-

based systems, it is important to have strong institutional protection, such as civil service commissions, legislation, open recruitment and checks by civil society to maintain impartiality and increase bureaucratic efficiency.

Professionalism

Professionalism in bureaucracy is defined as a set of professional expertise and technical skills, ethical adherence and compliance with institutional norms that hold the values of the public service (Wilson, 1989). It transcends technical knowledge to an even greater extent than what Wilson (1989) referred to as the bureaucratic ethos, which focuses on integrity, impartiality and service to the public good. Professional civil servants are understood not only as technical professionals or political players, but as guardians of social values, to guarantee the good performance and execution of the policies of the state.

Professionalism is displayed in cognitive, normative and behavioural levels. The mental aspect is competence in specialised knowledge pertinent to functional roles, which is usually attained in education and ongoing professional growth. The normative aspect entails internalisation of values like accountability, transparency and equity. The behavioural dimension focuses on ability, hard working and ethical behaviour in carrying out official responsibilities (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992). These dimensions are what comprise a professional bureaucracy, which is knowledgeable, constant, and loyal to the principles of serving the population.

Modern bureaucracies are experiencing great difficulties in adhering to professionalism. Professional norms may be undermined by political interference, lack of career development perspective, and insufficient working conditions and may result in so-called bureaucratic ritualism, where procedures are executed merely mechanically, but have no outcome (Rainey & Steinbauer, 1999). Corruption, nepotism, and breach of ethics may also be encouraged by weak professional standards, which will result in legitimacy. Enhancing professionalism is a conscious investment in human capital, ethical systems that promote competence, performance management systems, and dimensions of organisational culture that underpin professional autonomy in accountability systems (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017). Professionalism is therefore a very important factor of mediation between formal institutional designs and effective service delivery, which has a great influence on the government capacity, faithfulness in policy implementation and satisfaction by the people.

Service Delivery

The service provision in Nigeria is evaluated on the basis of accessibility, responsiveness, quality, and effectiveness. Service delivery can ensure that the needs of citizens are fulfilled by the government services and can lead to sustainable development (Adeyemi, 2021). Timely, effective, and quality services are essential to key sectors, including education, healthcare, and infrastructure, to promote the development of human capital, enhance the outcomes of public health, and spur economic growth (Okafor & Nwachukwu, 2021). Nevertheless, bureaucratic inefficiencies, corruption and political influence are still among the significant obstacles. Adebayo & Adefolalu (2020) point out that deeply ingrained inefficiencies contribute to delays, resource misallocation, and suboptimal performance, whereas Ojo (2019) focuses on the fact that obsolete administrative practices and dependence on manual systems contribute to the increase of delays and lack of responsiveness.

Corruption also compromises service delivery because it helps to divert resources and undermine trust in the government (Musa, 2021; Emekekwe, 2022). Political influence also

affects appointments and distribution of resources, and such may further undermine fair and effective service delivery (Akinola & Ayeni, 2020). These issues have direct implications: in the health sector, time loss may mean the difference between life and death; in education, insufficient resources and infrastructure negatively influence learning; and in infrastructure, the project delay becomes an obstacle to economic growth, as well as to urban-rural inequality (Okafor & Nwachukwu, 2021; Yusuf, 2023; Olayemi & Bello, 2021).

Digitalisation, e-governance, and the SERVICOM initiative are reforms to reduce bureaucracy, improve transparency, and efficiency by automation and adoption of a citizen focus (Ibrahim, 2022; Adebayo & Adefolalu, 2020; Okafor & Nwachukwu, 2021). Mechanisms of citizen engagement, such as a feedback system and participatory budgeting, enhance responsiveness and make services responsive to the needs of the people (Adeyemi, 2021; Emekekwe, 2022). Moreover, capacity-building initiatives also prepare civil servants with the knowledge on how to cope with the new administrative pressures (Ojo, 2019).

Bureaucracy and Service Delivery in Akwa Ibom State Civil Service Appointments in Akwa Ibom State Civil Service (2016-2025)

Table 1: Annual Recruitment & Merit Compliance

Fiscal Year	Total Civil Servants	New Appointments	Appointments via Credible Exam & Interview	De facto Political Appointments	% Merit-Based
2016	58,200	1,200	480	720	40.0%
2017	58,950	1,500	900	600	60.0%
2018	59,400	800	560	240	70.0%
2019	60,100	1,100	385	715	35.0%
2020	59,500	300	210	90	70.0%
2021	59,800	600	180	420	30.0%
2022	60,500	1,000	250	750	25.0%
2023	61,200	1,500	1,050	450	70.0%
2024	61,800	900	360	540	40.0%
2025	62,300	700	280	420	40.0%

Source: Annual Report of the Akwa Ibom State Civil Service Commission (CSC) (2025)

Table 1 shows statistics on annual recruitment and the level of merit-based compliance in Akwa Ibom State civil service between 2016 and 2025. The table indicates the number of civil servants, the number of newly hired employees annually, the number of staff employed through a credible examination along with interviews, de facto political hires, and the proportion of merit-based hires. The data show that there are significant changes in the level of merit adherence throughout the decade. As an example, in 2016, a mere 40 per cent of new placements occurred on merit: this is an indication of a strong political factor in hiring. The years 2017 and 2018 saw a significant increase in the merit-based percentages (60 and 70), which demonstrates greater adherence to the requirement of standard recruitment processes in the given years. Nevertheless, 2019 and 2021 had a record of 35% and 30 respectively, indicating that there is some sort of political interference or unequal implementation of recruitment policies. Interestingly, the year 2023 was marked by the highest level of 70 per cent merit appointments, indicating that the observance of credible examination and interview procedures can be intermittently realised.

Professionalism in Akwa Ibom State Civil Service (2016-2025)**Table 2: Professional Qualifications & Certification Status**

Fiscal Year	Total Civil Servants	Staff with Professional Certifications	% with Professional Certs	Staff with Relevant Academic Degrees	% with Relevant Degrees
2016	58,200	11,640	20.0%	34,920	60.0%
2017	58,950	11,790	20.0%	35,370	60.0%
2018	59,400	11,880	20.0%	35,640	60.0%
2019	60,100	12,020	20.0%	36,060	60.0%
2020	59,500	11,900	20.0%	35,700	60.0%
2021	59,800	11,960	20.0%	35,880	60.0%
2022	60,500	12,100	20.0%	36,300	60.0%
2023	61,200	14,076	23.0%	38,556	63.0%
2024	61,800	13,596	22.0%	39,552	64.0%
2025	62,300	13,184	21.2%	40,063	64.3%

Source: Annual Report of the Akwa Ibom State Civil Service Commission (CSC) (2025)

Table 2 shows the professional status and certification level of the civil servants of the Akwa Ibom State Civil Service between 2016 and 2025. The indicators are the total number of civil servants, the number and percentage of the staff working with professional certifications, and the number and percentage of the staff with academic degrees. The total number of employees also grew consistently over the decade, as there were 58,200 in 2016 and the figure is expected to reach 62,300 in 2025. The proportion of staff with professional qualifications shows that it was relatively constant at 20 per cent between 2016 and 2022, increasing to 23 per cent in 2023 and slightly decreasing to 21.2 per cent in 2025. On the same note, employees with relevant academic qualifications have always represented 60 per cent of the workforce between 2016 and 2020, with a gradual rise to 64.3 per cent in 2025. The data reveal that there is steady growth in both academic qualifications and professional certification throughout the period, and significant growth in 2023 and 2024. It is an embodiment of the slow progress in developing the professional and educational aspects of the civil servants in the state.

Theoretical Framework**The Ideal Bureaucracy Theory by Weber.**

The Ideal Bureaucracy Theory by Max Weber gives a structural approach to the interpretation of how efficiency, predictability, and effectiveness of service delivery can be attained in public organisations. Weber (2020) developed bureaucracy as an ideal type in which there was a hierarchical power, division of labour, official rules and procedures, impersonality, and promotion and hiring based on merit. All these elements serve to create a rational-legal system that is aimed at sweeping away arbitrariness and increasing the efficiency of the administration.

According to the theory, coordination and control are made easy through hierarchical structures, whereas formal rules bring uniformity to decision-making (Simon, 1997). Specialisation and specialisation in the division of labour facilitate efficiency and expertise among civil servants in their work, and an aspect of impersonality makes the process of civil service fair and less biased (Wilson, 1989). One of the pillars is merit-based recruitment that makes sure that people who are qualified can hold positions, and this enhances the performance and competence of the organisation (Rainey, 2009). These principles are in direct line with some of the important

variables in bureaucracy, e.g. merit-based appointments, professionalism, transparency, accountability and digitisation.

The fact that Weber discusses formal rules offers a basis for transparency as procedures are recorded and available (Christensen & Laegreid, 2011), whereas the hierarchical accountability chain makes the officials responsible for their actions (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017). Weber's theory is not new in modern technology; however, it is more focused on efficiency, which is evident in the present-day digitisation processes, automating the processes and enhancing service provision (Dunleavy et al., 2006).

The implementation of the Weber model in other areas of application, like Akwa Ibom State, however, shows shortcomings. Changing merit-based appointments and poor professionalism demonstrate the difficulties of maintaining the Weberian ideals because of the interference of politics and institutional barriers (Hood, 1991; Rainey & Steinbauer, 1999). Also, over-reliance on formalities may result in inflexibility and red tape that will slow responsiveness (Ojo, 2019). Despite these shortcomings, the framework proposed by Weber is fundamental in determining the role played by bureaucratic structures in determining service delivery outcomes.

Empirical Reviews

Eze & Okafor (2025) investigated how remuneration and fringe benefits impact the productivity of the mid-level administrators in the Federal Capital Territory. The objective of the study was to determine the correlation between compensation packages and the performance of employees. The researchers correlated the remuneration and productivity based on a combination of government payroll and a self-reported survey on productivity on 180 officials. The results indicated that on-time and sufficient remuneration can greatly enhance the efficiency of the workforce and commitment to the organisation. The research advised the implementation of other non-financial rewards within resource-based setups to achieve more in promoting motivation and performance.

Ojo & Adebayo (2025) explored the relevance of bureaucratic structures in the efficiency of public services in Nigeria. The experiment aimed at identifying the effect of strict hierarchies on the delay, operational expenses, and efficiency. The analysis of survey data of civil servants in various ministries through statistical analysis revealed that strict bureaucracies decrease efficiency, delay, and increase the cost of service delivery. Decentralisation and administrative reforms with a flexible approach were recommended, and sub-national studies at the state level, such as Akwa Ibom, were necessary.

Adebayo & Adefolalu (2024) examined the correlation between bureaucratic inefficiencies and job satisfaction in the civil service in Nigeria. The survey design adopted in the study involved the use of questionnaires to the civil servants and correlation analysis to interpret the data. The results showed that too many administrative processes and bottlenecks compromise job satisfaction and slow the provision of services. Nevertheless, the research left a gap by failing to investigate the long-term effects of such inefficiencies, which implied that longitudinal studies were required.

Adekunle (2023) evaluated the reforms in the public services in Nigeria, especially the SERVICOM program. The study undertook a mixed-methods study in which it explored the effectiveness of reforms in enhancing transparency and service delivery using a policy analysis, interviews, and document reviews. The results revealed that though SERVICOM brought the changes, bureaucracy and change resistance constrained its overall effectiveness. The paper identified a deficit in the lack of full integration of digital systems and suggested more radical reforms that would involve technological modernisation.

Ayo-Akala & Ojo (2016) looked at the issue of legislative control and government responsibility in Nigeria. To measure the oversight mechanisms, the research employed a qualitative approach, involving case studies and interviews with civil servants and legislators. Results showed that accountability is weakened by political interference and the absence of transparency, which contributes to low results of service delivery. The research had a gap in the lack of quantitative proof of the direct connection between oversight and service delivery performance, and the necessity of greater institutional checks.

Methodology

The research design was a survey research design, which is suitable in terms of gathering quantitative data involving a large group of people and making generalisations (Babbie, 2020; Creswell, 2021). This design allowed the researcher to collect the first-hand information on the perceptions and experiences of the civil servants on the aspects of bureaucratic practices and service delivery outcomes.

The study population comprised 15,533 civil servants spread among ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs) within Akwa Ibom State. The wide range of people who were sampled in the study meant that different views were represented in the civil service structure. In order to settle on a manageable but representative sample, Taro Yamane's (1967) formula was used and this yielded a sample of 390 respondents.

A multi-stage sampling method was adopted to ensure that there was adequate representation. To start with, cluster sampling was employed to cluster the respondents based on each of the MDAs. After that, stratified random sampling was used to make sure that the percentages of both senior and junior employees were included proportionately. This strategy reduced sampling bias and improved the representativeness and reliability of the results.

The research used primary and secondary sources of data. Structured questionnaires and interviews were used in the collection of primary data, and secondary data were gathered from pertinent literature like textbooks, academic journals and official government reports. A structured questionnaire, "Bureaucracy and Service Delivery in Akwa Ibom State Civil Service" was used as the major research tool. It was split into two parts: Section A, which included demographic features of respondents, and Section B, which was dedicated to significant variables of the study. The measure of the responses was a four-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree.

The quality of the instrument was taken care of by carrying out the validity and reliability tests. The content validity was determined by the review of experts in Public Administration, whereby it was ensured that the instrument was sufficient to address the research objectives. The test-retest method was used to measure reliability because the questionnaire was applied twice in two weeks. The reliability of the instrument was proven by the consistency of the responses.

To analyse the data, the study used version 24 of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The data were summarised using descriptive statistics, frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations to describe the characteristics of the respondents. Moreover, as the inferential statistics, a Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC) was employed to investigate the strength and the direction of the relationships between the bureaucratic variables and service delivery (Field, 2013).

Moreover, a multiple regression model was used to establish the conjunctive effect of independent variables, merit-based appointments and professionalism on service delivery. Measurement was done by assessing all the variables based on composite scores, which were based on a Likert scale response.

Lastly, the level of significance used to test the hypothesis was 5% (0.05). The null hypothesis could be rejected in the case that the p -value was lower than or equal to 0.05, which meant a statistically significant relationship. This type of methodological approach analysed the study variables rigorously, systematically, and reliably.

Presentation of Data, Analysis and Discussion of Results

The section gives empirical findings of the research. It starts by giving a descriptive analysis of the demographics of the respondents. The section is devoted to the strict statistical statement and analysis of the collected data to prove the mentioned hypotheses. The results are efficiently displayed on tables and stories.

Data Presentation

Table 3: Summary of Questionnaire Response and Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Response Rate	Administered	390	100.0
	Returned & Valid	356	91.3
	Not Returned/Invalid	34	8.7
Age	20–30 years	58	16.3
	31–40 years	112	31.5
	41–50 years	127	35.7
	51 years & above	59	16.6
Sex	Male	187	52.5
	Female	169	47.5
Marital Status	Single	73	20.5
	Married	254	71.3
	Divorced	18	5.1
	Widowed	11	3.1
Educational Qualification	OND/NCE	42	11.8
	Bachelor's/HND	217	61.0
	Master's Degree	89	25.0
	PhD	8	2.2
Total Respondents		356	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The results in Table 3 are a combined summary of the questionnaire administration and demographics of respondents in the research. A total of 390 questionnaires were given out, of which 356 were returned and considered good, that is, they had a high response rate of 91.3. Such involvement is deemed strong in terms of survey research and increases the credibility, reliability and generalisability of the results.

Age distribution indicates that most of the respondents are between the ages of 31 and 50 years, which was 67.2 per cent of the sample. This implies that the Akwa Ibom State civil service has a high number of mature and experienced people in its workforce, most of whom are expected to hold the mid-level and senior administrative posts. The high percentage of younger (20-30 years) and older (51 years and above) staff (around 16 per cent and 16 per cent respectively) indicates the balanced workforce architecture, which has both emergent and experienced staff.

The distribution of gender is not very balanced, with males making up 52.5% and females 47.5%. This indicates a comparatively non-discriminative workforce and indicates that gender representation in the state civil service is reasonably acceptable, and this fact is vital to diversity and effectiveness of the organisation.

Concerning marital status, most of the respondents (71.3) are married, which correlates with the first age group and reflects a stable and firmly established workforce. The smaller percentages of single, divorced and widowed respondents also illustrate how diverse the personal backgrounds of the service are.

The workforce seems to be well-educated. The percentage of those with Bachelor's degrees or HNDs is high at 61.0%, with 25.0% having Master's degrees. Though minor (2.2%), the existence of PhD holders presupposes an expertise stratum of high qualification. In general, the educational attainment is high, which implies that the respondents have the intellectual ability to learn bureaucratic processes and play a significant role in service delivery.

Analysis of Research Questions

Table 4: Perception on Merit-Based Appointments

Statement	SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Mean	Std. Dev.
1. Recruitment in my MDA is primarily based on qualifications and competence.	38 (10.7%)	109 (30.6%)	156 (43.8%)	53 (14.9%)	2.37	0.90
2. Promotions in my department are based on performance and qualifications.	42 (11.8%)	125 (35.1%)	143 (40.2%)	46 (12.9%)	2.46	0.90
3. Senior-level appointments are based on competence rather than connections.	29 (8.1%)	88 (24.7%)	172 (48.3%)	67 (18.8%)	2.22	0.88
4. I believe that skilled and hardworking staff are typically rewarded.	47 (13.2%)	121 (34.0%)	139 (39.0%)	49 (13.8%)	2.47	0.93
Composite Mean Score					2.38	

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Based on Table 4, the composite mean score of 2.38 reflects an overall negative outlook on merit-based appointments to jobs in the Akwa Ibom State Civil Service. Of particular concern is the fact that only 32.8 per cent of the respondents concur that senior-level appointments are made based on talent and not relationship with the person in question, with some 67.1 per cent dissenting. This implies that there has been a general feeling of political interference and nepotism in the most important appointments. The statistics show that merely 41.3 per cent of respondents feel that recruitment procedures are equitable and without favouritism, meaning that there are a lot of problems with the very process of introducing personnel to the civil service.

Table 5: Perception on Professionalism

Statement	SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Mean	Std. Dev.
1. Civil servants in my agency demonstrate high levels of expertise and integrity.	52 (14.6%)	138 (38.8%)	131 (36.8%)	35 (9.8%)	2.58	0.88
2. Staff in my department regularly participate in capacity building and training programs.	39 (11.0%)	134 (37.6%)	148 (41.6%)	35 (9.8%)	2.50	0.86
3. Ethical standards are consistently upheld in my MDA.	33 (9.3%)	109 (30.6%)	161 (45.2%)	53 (14.9%)	2.34	0.88
4. My colleagues show strong commitment to public service values.	44 (12.4%)	132 (37.1%)	141 (39.6%)	39 (11.0%)	2.51	0.89
Composite Mean Score					2.48	

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Based on Table 5, the mean composite score of 2.48 indicates moderate and inadequate professionalism levels. Although 53.4 per cent of the respondents concur that civil servants are experts and ethical, a high number (46.6) of respondents hold opposing opinions. The most troubling result is associated with the ethical standards, as only 39.9% of respondents say that they are always observed, and 60.1% do not. This shows that there is difficulty in upholding ethical behaviour in the service. The information on capacity building indicates almost an equal division (48.6% agree and 51.4% disagree), indicating inconsistency in investment in staff development.

Test of Hypotheses

Table 6: Hypothesis One Test (Merit-Based Appointments vs. Service Delivery)

Correlation Result 1

Correlations

		SERVICE DELIVERY	MERIT-BASED APPOINTMENTS
SERVICE DELIVERY	Pearson Correlation	1	.723**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.017
	N	356	356
MERIT-BASED APPOINTMENTS	Pearson Correlation	.723**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.017	
	N	356	356

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Computed using SPSS 24

It was observed that there was a strong positive relationship between merit-based appointments and service delivery ($r = 0.723$, $p = 0.017$). The null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected because the p-value is lower than the 0.05 level of significance. This means that increases in merit-based appointments that include recruitment on qualification and promotions that are based on merit and competence have a statistically significant and strong positive effect on service delivery in Akwa Ibom State.

**Table 7: Hypothesis Two Test (Professionalism vs. Service Delivery)
Correlation Result 2**

Correlations		Service Delivery	Merit-Based Appointments
Service Delivery	Pearson Correlation	1	.681**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.028
	N	356	356
Merit-Based Appointments	Pearson Correlation	.681**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.028	
	N	356	356

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Computed using SPSS 24

The correlation analysis showed that the positive correlation between them was high ($r = 0.681$, $p = 0.028$). The p -value is lower than 0.05 and hence rejects the null hypothesis (H_0). This proves the fact that the relationship that exists between a greater level of professionalism among the civil servants and better service delivery outcomes is statistically significant.

Discussion of Findings

Service Delivery and Appointments on Merit

The analysis showed a significant positive association between merit-based recruitment and service delivery ($r = 0.723$, $p < 0.05$); the null hypothesis was rejected. The composite mean of 2.38 received a low score, which implies that there is a high level of dissatisfaction among surveyed individuals on the issue of merit practices, where competence is not a major factor in hiring, since the political factor prevails. Raw data support the fact that compliance with merit was fluctuating in the range of 25-70 in the period between 2016 and 2025, with steep drops in 2021 and 2022, which were associated with changes in politics. Such high-merit years as 2018, 2020, and 2023 were characterised by independent recruitment panels and published merit lists, and meritocracy is thus not established but politicised. This is in line with Adebayo (2024), who described political influence on appointments as the obstacle to service efficiency in Nigerian civil services, and Nwosu (2021), who demonstrated that political interference slows down services and reduces institutional capacity. Chukwu (2021) also shows quantitatively that nepotism due to non-meritocratic appointments interferes with the quality of services. On the contrary, Akinola and Ayeni (2022) further postulate that, when political consideration is limited, the responsiveness of the bureaucracy can be added, which implies contextual specifics.

Professionalism and Service Delivery

There was a strong positive correlation between professionalism and service delivery ($r = 0.681$, $p < 0.05$), and this rejected the null hypothesis. The survey results indicated a moderate composite mean of 2.48, which indicates that though there is professionalism, there is no sufficient professionalism and there are significant weaknesses in ethics, regular training and professional certifications. According to secondary data, less than 20-23 per cent of civil servants were professionally certified, although 60-64 per cent had academic qualifications. The involvement in training did not exceed 5-10 per cent, and the highest rate of 15 per cent was reached in 2023. Disciplinary cases showed that there are still ethical issues. This overlap of results illustrates that civil service professionalism is limited by the fact that there is no strong institutional support for

the constant development process and implementation of ethical standards. The observation supports Okafor (2020), who demonstrated that the training of the staff improves competence and the provision of services, and Eze (2020), who specified the connection between the professional working conditions and high productivity.

Williams (2020) also emphasised that professional communication will minimise the number of mistakes, as well as enhance interdepartmental coordination. Conversely, Fashina (2020) cautions that over-specialisation can define silos, and this hinders cooperation.

Conclusion

The research finds that professionalism and merit payments are very important in service delivery outcomes at the Akwa Ibom State Civil Service. The aspect of merit-based appointments came to the fore because the hiring and promotion of competent and qualified individuals are the direct result of efficiency, fewer errors in administration, and the overall quality of the services. The times when the strictness in applying the principles of merit was followed, the service outcomes were better, and the deviations caused by the political interference led to low performance. Likewise, professionalism was also established to strongly affect service delivery in a positive manner. Despite the fact that most civil servants are mostly educated, there are professional certification, training and ethical behaviour gaps which prevent workers from performing at their best. The development of high-quality service delivery requires a workforce that is professional in nature, competent, constantly training and following the ethics.

Recommendations

Following the results, the following recommendations were suggested:

- i. Through the Civil Service Commission, the Akwa Ibom State Government must be keen to base all recruitment and promotion procedures on merit. The vacancies ought to be advertised publicly, and the qualifications, competence and performance ought to be used in selecting the candidates. An independent recruitment panel must be developed in order to reduce political interference and ensure transparency.
- ii. All the MDAs should have continuous professional development programs. Civil servants ought to be offered the opportunity to seek professional certifications and attend frequent training to improve their competencies, knowledge, and ethical practices.

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