E-GOVERNANCE AND SERVICE DELIVERY IN NIGERIA: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

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ABSTRACT: The study aimed at examining the problems and prospects of adopting e-governance to achieve effective and efficient service delivery in Nigeria. To achieve the objective of the study, the researcher made use of content analytical technique whereby the study heavily relied on secondary data obtained from articles published in reputable journals, official publications, relevant books, etc. At the end of the analysis, the paper found that challenges of inadequate infrastructure, cybersecurity risks, and digital literacy gaps underscore the need for strategic interventions to overcome barriers to the effective implementation of e-governance initiatives. On the other hand, the study discovered that e-governance holds a lot of prospects for the country such as providing information job vacancies, an e-policing system, a medium for information dissemination, and economic development among others. The paper therefore recommends, among others, that Nigeria should take advantage of the opportunities presented by digital technologies to address her service delivery challenges and guarantee the welfare of the citizens, the government should provide ICT infrastructure, there should be an enactment of ICT laws in the country, the government should show commitment to making e-governance achieve successes in the country, etc. The study concludes that e-governance is the sine qua non for the actualization of simple, moral, accountable, responsive and transparent administration in the country.

Keywords: Governance, Transparency, Accountability, Service Delivery, Cybersecurity

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria, like many countries globally, has embraced e-governance to enhance the effectiveness of public administration, service delivery and public participation. E-governance refers to the application of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for delivering government services, exchange of information, communication transactions, integration of various stand-alone systems and services between government-to-customer (G2C), government-to-business (G2B), government-to-government (G2G) as well as back-office processes and interactions within the entire government framework (Rana & Dwivedi, 2015).

In Nigeria, e-governance has become increasingly indispensable as a means of mitigating the challenges that plague governmental operations and service delivery. Nigeria, with its vast population and considerable political and economic influence in Africa, provides a compelling backdrop to analyse the significance of e-governance. The adoption of e-governance in Nigeria has directly contributed to efficient and effective public service delivery (Mutula & Van Brakel, 2007). E-governance offers a platform through which Nigerians can access public services and

partake in the decision-making process without bureaucratic hindrance. Thus, effective implementation of e-governance can engender democratic ideals, enabling citizens to contribute to the political process and fostering transparency and accountability.

Another crucial aspect of e-governance is its transformative potential for Nigeria's socio-economic landscape. By fostering digitisation, it can lead to substantial improvements in various sectors of the economy. In addition to creating avenues for economic and entrepreneurial opportunities, this digitisation can enhance productivity and spur economic growth (Nkwe, 2015).

However, e-governance in Nigeria is not without its challenges, chief among which is the digital divide. This problem, heightened by socio-economic disparities, limits accessibility to e-governance utilities, creating inequality in resource distribution and public engagement (Ukoha, 2016).

E-governance in Nigeria, besides offering efficient and innovative service delivery, fosters public participation, transparency, and accountability. Despite existing challenges, its broader socio-economic impact makes it indispensable for Nigeria's future progress. Continued efforts are needed to bridge the digital divide and promote inclusive growth, thereby harnessing the potential of e-governance to facilitate socio-economic development in Nigeria.

The Concepts of Governance and e-governance

Governance designates the complex mechanisms, processes, relationships and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, mediate their differences and exercise their rights and obligations (Kohler-Koch & Rittberger, 2006). An institutional modus operandi, governance essentially denotes the specific means by which public policy decisions are made and subsequently implemented (Kohler-Koch & Rittberger, 2006).

Drawing from this perspective, governance is not merely about the establishment of government institutions but rather, it centres around the shared processes that guide and steer society's activities. It necessitates participation, coherence, and accountability in terms of societal interactions (Rhodes, 1996).

Theoretical underpinnings of governance evolved over time and are predominantly shaped and influenced by a myriad of socio-economic and political contexts. The labyrinth of governance supersedes hierarchies and traditional bureaucratic archetypes, transforming into a multidimensional and multifaceted spectrum of governance platforms established within private and public sectors (Pierre & Peters, 2005).

Network theory significantly intertwines with governance, presenting the complex interplay of interactions and connections across different stakeholders. The viability of 'horizontal governance' underscores the significance of amalgamating public-private interdependencies to promote synergies and collaboration (Stoker, 1998). The growth of technology and digitisation has considerably moulded the landscape of governance, advocating socio-technological changes in governance. The emergence of 'e-governance' defines the strategic integrations of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in public services to optimise efficiency (Dunleavy, 2006).

Adopting a global perspective, 'global governance' encapsulates international rules and norms that influence states, multinational corporations, and international organisations to engender predominantly global societal outcomes (Rosenau, 2002). Global governance encourages international cooperation to tackle challenges that exceed the capacity of individual entities (Rosenau, 2002).

Lastly, 'good governance' is an esteemed principle of governance that emphasises transparency, accountability, and the rule of law. Consistently striven for, it dictates standards of public administration and informs development discourse (Grindle, 2007). Spanning diverse fields, the concept of governance innately echoes broadness and diversity. As society continues to evolve and adapt, so must our understanding of governance. Each perspective represents instrumental approaches to decoding its complexity, ultimately contributing to the robust intellectual and practical construct of governance.

E-Governance

The world has witnessed a phenomenal transition from traditional control to electronic control, commonly referred to as e-governance. This essay aims to explore the concept of e-governance, its importance, advantages, disadvantages and prospects. E-governance is a term that arose from the incorporation of electronic systems in governance implementation (Backus, 2001). The United Nations (2004) describes e-governance as the application of information technology to government affairs to create governance that is "simple, ethical, accountable, responsive and transparent." This includes a wide range of technological tools, such as the Internet, mobile applications, and other digital platforms, designed to promote efficient governance and increase accessibility to government services (Heeks, 2006). Moreover, e-government is not simply the delivery of government services or the digitization of information via the Internet but involves complex changes in organizational structures, business processes, and the way governments interact with citizens and conduct business (Tapscott, 1996). Over the years, e-governance has proven effective in improving government operations, promoting citizen participation, and expanding public sector services. E-governance offers notable benefits, including improved and efficient administration, increased transparency and accountability, cost savings, enhanced government services, and citizen empowerment (Bwalya & Healy, 2010). These developments not only contribute to the ease and efficiency of transactions but also contribute significantly to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals endorsed by the United Nations (2004).

However, despite its numerous benefits, e-governance poses certain challenges. Key among these are the digital divide, privacy and security concerns, and lack of adequate infrastructure (Zouridis & Thaens, 2018). Also, some citizens and public administrators could face difficulties adapting to the rapid technological changes associated with governance.

In order to tackle these challenges, it is imperative for governments to design interventions and policies that promote accessibility, privacy, and security in e-governance. It is also important for public administrators to be equipped with the necessary digital skills to fully harness the potential of e-governance. Looking to the future, the continuous growth of technology will undoubtedly broaden the scope of e-governance. Elements such as big data, artificial intelligence, blockchain technology and 5G will further drive the transformation of the public sector (Janssen & van den Hoven, 2015). Therefore, we can anticipate a future where e-governance becomes a global standard for public administration

There is no gainsaying the fact e-governance is already paving the way for a transformative approach to public administration. The successful implementation of e-governance relies on addressing its inherent challenges and augmenting its potential benefits for sustainable development. Although the journey towards comprehensive e-governance may seem daunting, growing technological advancements and strategic policy groundwork can make it achievable and worthwhile.

Challenges of Governance in Nigeria

A comprehensive and cogent understanding of Nigeria's political landscape necessitates a keen look into the impediments of its governance system. Among the various challenges hindering the implementation of governance in Nigeria are – corruption, security, economic instability, and inadequate infrastructural facilities amongst others.

Corruption

Corruption remains a potent challenge of governance in Nigeria despite a plethora of corrective steps undertaken by different governments over time. Transparency International's corruption perception index in 2019 ranked Nigeria 146th out of 180 countries, highlighting the enormity of the problem. The pervasive corruption exists in both the expansive bureaucratic system and the political sphere. It cripples socio-economic development and weakens the rule of law, thus undermining the government's ability to deliver public goods (Transparency International, 2019).

Table 1: Corruption Perception Index 2019

39	Serbia	91	34	Kazakhstan	113	28	Dominican Republic	137	24	Zimbabwe	158
39	Turkey	91	34	Nepal	113	28	Kenya	137	23	Eritrea	160
38	Ecuador	93	34	Philippines	113	28	Lebanon	137	22	Nicaragua	161
38	Sri Lanka	93	34	Eswatini	113	28	Liberia	137	20	Cambodia	162
38	Timor-Leste	93	34	Zambia	113	28	Mauritania	137	20	Chad	162
37	Colombia	96	33	Sierra Leone	119	28	Papua New Guinea	137	20	Iraq	162
37	Ethiopia	96	32	Moldova	120	28	Paraguay	137	19	Burundi	165
37	Gambia	96	32	Niger	120	28	Russia	137	19	Congo	165
37	Tanzania	96	32	Pakistan	120	28	Uganda	137	19	Turkmenistan	165
37	Vietnam	96	31	Bolivia	123	26	Angola	146	18	Democratic Republic of the Congo	168
36	Bosnia and Herzegovina	101	31	Gabon	123	26	Bangladesh	146	18	Guinea Bissau	168
36	Kosovo	101	31	Malawi	123	26	Guatemala	146	18	Haiti	168
36	Panama	101	30	Azerbaijan	126	26	Honduras	146	18	Libya	168
36	Peru	101	30	Djibouti	126	26	Iran	146	17	Korea, North	172
36	Thailand	101	30	Kyrgyzstan	126	26	Mozambique	146	16	Afghanistan	173
35	Albania	106	30	Ukraine	126	26	Nigeria	146	16	Equatorial Guinea	173
35	Algeria	106	29	Guinea	130	25	Cameroon	153	16	Sudan	173
35	Brazil	106	29	Laos	130	25	Central African Republic	153	16	Venezuela	173
35	Cote d'Ivoire	106	29	Maldives	130	25	Comoros	153	15	Yemen	177
35	Egypt	106	29	Mali	130	25	Tajikistan	153	13	Syria	178
35	North Macedonia	106	29	Mexico	130	25	Uzbekistan	153	12	South Sudan	179
35	Mongolia	106	29	Myanmar	130	24	Madagascar	158	9	Somalia	180
34	El Salvador	113	29	Togo	130						

Security

The unrelenting security crisis, particularly in the form of Boko Haram insurgency and herder-farmer conflicts, underpins another major challenge of governance in Nigeria. The inability to establish a comprehensive, long-term solution significantly undermines political stability and socio-economic progress in the region. Thousands of casualties, mass displacement of people, and psychological distress among civilians are testaments to the gravity of the situation (Council for Foreign Relations, 2020).

Economic Instability

Despite being Africa's largest economy, Nigeria is plagued with severe economic instability. Statistically, over 40% of Nigeria's population lives below the poverty line, according to the National Bureau of Statistics report in 2020. The excessive reliance on oil exports, foreign debts, unemployment growth, and inflation are among the daunting economic challenges faced by the government. These issues highlight the government's struggle to formulate and implement robust economic policies (National Bureau of Statistics, 2020).

Poor Digital Literacy

Another challenge of e-governance in Nigeria is the poor digital literacy of citizens. Many Nigerians lack the necessary skills and knowledge to use digital technologies and platforms effectively. This makes it difficult for them to access and use e-government services, such as online tax payment and e-voting.

The poor digital literacy of citizens is also a barrier to the adoption of e-governance by public officials. Many government officials lack the necessary skills and knowledge to implement and manage e-governance initiatives effectively.

Inadequate Funding

Another significant challenge of e-governance in Nigeria is inadequate funding. E-governance initiatives require significant investment in infrastructure, technology, and human resources. However, the government's budgetary allocation to e-governance initiatives is often inadequate, and funding for these initiatives is not always a priority.

The lack of funding affects the quality and effectiveness of e-governance initiatives. For example, the lack of funding for cybersecurity measures makes e-governance platforms vulnerable to cyber threats.

Inadequate Infrastructural Facilities

Furthermore, the palpable inadequacy of infrastructural facilities in Nigeria is a noteworthy challenge of governance. The underdevelopment of infrastructural facilities such as transportation, power supply, and healthcare services, fundamentally restricts Nigeria's socio-economic potential. The World Bank puts an estimate of cumulative infrastructure spending needed to fill this apparent gap at $100 billion annually (World Bank, 2019).

The inefficacy in addressing these challenges paints a telling picture of the governance predicament in Nigeria. Sound and pragmatic leadership committed to transparency, improved security strategies, robust economic policies, and systemic investment in infrastructures are the critical narratives needed to overcome these challenges and foster advancements in governance.

Prospects of E-Governance in Nigeria

Through the annals of history, governance methods have transformed, with advancements in information technology providing novel prospects. At the forefront of these prospects is the concept of e-governance, delivering administrative services digitally. This essay explores the promising prospects of e-governance in Nigeria, focusing on its potential benefits and challenges, while examining relevant case studies and future expectations.

At the core, e-governance represents the application of information and communications technology (ICT) in delivering government services to citizens (Backus 2001). Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation, is undoubtedly ripe for a comprehensive implementation of e-governance owing to its abundant youths versed in technology use.

The potential benefits of e-governance in Nigeria are vast. Notably, it could yield improvements in public service delivery by streamlining administrative procedures and fostering transparency within governmental operations (Okot-Uma, 2000). An example in this realm is the Nigerian Immigration Service, which has fully digitised passport applications and introduced payment platforms online, making travel document processing more efficient (Nigerian Immigration Service, 2021). Additionally, e-governance poses a potential avenue for Nigeria to tackle one of its major challenges—corruption. By digitising procedures, thereby reducing human discretion, opportunities for unethical behaviour may be minimised (The World Bank, 2016)

However, despite these potential benefits, the implementation of e-governance in Nigeria also presents notable challenges. Infrastructure gaps, primarily the absence of a reliable electricity supply and broadband internet access, remain formidable obstacles (Nigeria Communications Commission, 2017). Moreover, the scourge of cyber threats introduces an intricate dimension to the transition to e-governance. To overcome these hurdles, strategic partnerships with ICT firms and robust cyber-security measures regime must be implemented. Further, capacity-building programmes targeted at government officials, focused on digital literacy skills, are equally crucial. The e-governance prospect in Nigeria is promising yet not without critical challenges. It holds tremendous potential for modernising Nigeria's public administrative system while posing a potentially potent antidote to corruption. However, overcoming infrastructural and technological hurdles, primarily reliable electricity supply, broadband internet access, and cybersecurity, are paramount to fully harnessing the e-governance potential in Nigeria.

Effective Strategies for E-Governance Implementation in Nigeria

In today's digital age, e-governance takes centre stage in Nigeria as it promises improved efficiency, convenience, accessibility, and service delivery in public administration (Alo, 2018). However, the successful execution of e-governance in Nigeria faces numerous

obstacles. Below are some effective strategies to overcome such barriers and achieve the full benefits of e-governance.

Partnership with the Private Sector

Establishing partnerships with the private sector is fundamental to successfully implement e-governance. This collaboration can enhance technological innovation, facilitate e-government growth, supplement governmental expertise and hedge against public-sector inefficiencies (Bwalya and Mutula, 2015). A quintessential example is the collaboration between the Nigerian government and System Specs, the private financial technology company behind the Remita e-payment platform, which streamlines the collection and payment of government revenues (Ogunsemor, 2020). Therefore, building strong public–private partnerships (PPP) facilitate the successful implementation of e-governance.

Investments in Infrastructure

Comprehensive investment in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) infrastructure is crucial for e-governance. Digital literacy, ubiquitous Internet access, reliable electricity, and secure digital platforms are necessary preconditions for e-governance (Abass et al., 2015). The Nigerian government's National Broadband Plan 2020-2025 honours this approach, intending to boost broadband penetration for effective e-governance implementation (NCC, 2020). Moreover, the Nigerian Communications Commission's initiatives to bridge the rural-urban digital divide further underscore the importance of infrastructure investment (Mohammed, 2020)

Capacity Building and Training

Capacity building and training is another key strategy for successful e-governance implementation. Public servants and citizens must possess the requisite digital skills needed to interact with e-government platforms (Edoun et al., 2018). Nigeria's Digital Economy for a Digital Nigeria policy underlines the significance of digital capacity building, aiming to digitally empower citizens and encourage e-participation in governance (Federal Ministry of Communications, 2019).

Public Awareness Campaigns

Enhancing public awareness about e-governance is vital for its adoption. Many Nigerians are unaware of available online government services or lack the confidence to use them due to fear of cybercrime and privacy infringement (Kalu et al., 2020). Comprehensive campaigns that increase awareness, confidence, and understanding towards e-governance services would augment digital engagement, redefining public service administration towards a participatory governance model.

Legal and Regulatory Frameworks

The development of comprehensive legal and regulatory frameworks is paramount for successful e-governance. Legal provisions should address issues such as online transaction security, data protection, privacy rights, and digital crime to foster trust, certainty, and compliance in e-governance (Edoun et al., 2018). Nigeria's Cybercrimes Act 2015 and Data

Protection Regulation 2019 are critical steps in this direction, providing the necessary legal and regulatory frameworks for robust and secure e-governance (NITDA, 2019).

In conclusion, Nigeria's journey towards effective e-governance is contingent upon robust private-public partnerships, comprehensive investments in ICT infrastructure, dedicated capacity-building initiatives, creative public awareness campaigns, and strong legal and regulatory frameworks. By fervently pursuing these strategies, Nigeria can leapfrog into an era of efficient, participatory and innovative digital governance.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the discussion on e-governance in Nigeria highlights a complex landscape of challenges and prospects that shape the digital transformation of governance processes in the country. The challenges of inadequate infrastructure, cybersecurity risks, and digital literacy gaps underscore the need for strategic interventions to overcome barriers to the effective implementation of e-governance initiatives. However, amidst these challenges, there are promising prospects for the advancement of e-governance in Nigeria that offer opportunities for improving government service delivery, enhancing transparency, and fostering citizen engagement. In order to address the challenges facing e-governance in Nigeria, there is a need for a multi-faceted approach that involves investment in digital infrastructure, cybersecurity measures, and capacity-building programs. Improving internet connectivity, expanding access to technology in underserved areas, and enhancing data protection mechanisms are essential steps to creating an enabling environment for the successful deployment of e-governance initiatives. Additionally, promoting digital literacy among citizens through education and training programs can empower individuals to effectively engage with digital platforms and services, thereby bridging the digital divide and ensuring inclusivity in the digital transformation process.

Looking ahead, the prospects for e-governance in Nigeria are promising, driven by the increasing internet penetration rate, the proliferation of mobile devices, and government commitment to digital transformation through initiatives like the National e-Government Masterplan and the National Broadband Plan. Leveraging these opportunities can facilitate the expansion of digital services, improve government efficiency, and enhance transparency and accountability in governance processes.

While challenges persist, the prospects for e-governance in Nigeria are bright, offering a pathway towards a more efficient, transparent, and citizen-centric governance system. Hence, This paper concludes that e-governance in Nigeria faces challenges such as infrastructure, cybersecurity, and digital literacy gaps. However, the prospects of e-governance are promising, with opportunities for better government service delivery, transparency, and citizen engagement. To overcome these challenges, a multi-faceted approach is necessary, including investment in digital infrastructure, cybersecurity measures, and capacity-building programs. If Nigeria can take advantage of the opportunities presented by digital technologies to address these challenges, the country can harness the power of e-governance to drive inclusive growth, foster innovation, and build a more responsive and accountable government, with efficient and effective service delivery aimed at guaranteeing the welfare of the citizens.

Recommendations

E-governance will guarantee effective service delivery with optimum productivity in Nigeria if the following recommendations are adopted and implemented:

1) To ensure effective implementation of e-governance, it is crucial to establish a reliable and strategic framework. Government ministries, departments, and agencies must create e-governance implementation committees that will develop modalities for the successful implementation of the project. Additionally, performance evaluation units should be established to regularly review the progress made towards achieving targets, identify areas of success and failure, and provide feedback mechanisms to report on the effectiveness of the implementation.

2) For e-governance to be successfully implemented in the country, the government must provide the necessary infrastructure, including broadband services, internet networks, and regular power supply. These critical infrastructure components are essential for driving e-governance in the country and must be made available by the government.

3) To achieve effective service delivery through e-governance, government institutions must demonstrate a high level of e-readiness in performing their responsibilities. This involves providing functional computers, employing highly skilled personnel in ICT, and offering training opportunities to update workers on modern trends in ICT. These measures are considered essential in utilizing e-governance to its full potential.

4) The government should establish a functioning and functional Ministry of ICT Affairs with a mission to oversee ICT implementation in the country.

5) For e-governance projects to be successful in Nigeria, there needs to be firm determination and dedication from political leaders.

6) Adequate funding is paramount for the success of e-governance in Nigeria. Hence, the government must make funds readily available to ensure the effective implementation of e-governance and efficient service delivery throughout the country.

7) For successful implementation of e-governance, a reliable and strategic framework is crucial. Government agencies should establish e-governance implementation committees to formulate effective strategies. Additionally, performance evaluation units must review progress regularly, identify successes and failures, and provide feedback mechanisms to report on the effectiveness of implementation.

8) In order to prevent others from engaging in corrupt practices, those found guilty of corruption during ICT procurement and other e-governance contracts must be punished severely. This is necessary to discourage others from taking similar actions.

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