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**An Analyses of the Eclectic Nature of the Discipline of Public
Administration: The Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats**

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Abstract

Public administration is without doubt one of the broadest discipline both as a body of knowledge and as a practice in the act of governance. Its undisputable fact that the discipline derives some of its principles, theories, models, laws from other disciplines in social and management sciences, sometime even from the natural sciences. However the borrowing seen to have both positive and negative impact on the discipline. The aim of this study is to observe both positive and negative impact of borrowing on the discipline of public administration and which impact outweigh the other. The study is conceptual in nature, therefore solidly relied on secondary data that were sourced from reviewing of relevant scholarly works in journal, text books, magazines, government official documents, materials from internet. The data collected were analysed through content analysis. The paper concluded that the eclectic nature of the discipline of public administration gives it more strength than weakness. The study recommended that a further rigorous studies to exploit areas of relevance with other discipline for possible adaptation should be routinely conducted by scholars in the discipline.

Keywords: Exposure, *Public administration, Discipline, Eclectic*

Introduction

Generally disciplines borrow principles. Models, laws from other disciplines to enrich themselves. This borrowing is not new in management and social sciences (Barka 2024). Public administration is one of the disciplines that is very much enriched with laws, principles, models and theories. This state of the discipline no doubt influence by its ability to effectively and efficiently borrow from other disciplines in social and management sciences, sometimes even from the natural sciences. Public administration is concerned with all the affairs and activities that take place in government or a political setting. It is concerned with the implementation of the policies and programs of government. To Rowart (cited in Wilson 1885), public administration is the most obvious part of government; it is government in action as well as the executive-in-operation. It is therefore instructive to note that public administration is concerned with the whats and hows of government.

The intellectual root of public administration as distinct field of study can be traced to the pioneering contribution made by Woodrow Wilson in 1880s. It started with the publication of the work of Wilson "The Study of Administration" at Minnowbrook Conference which he advocated

for the separation of public administration as a distinct discipline from political science. This Wilson's idea was supported by scholars like Leonard White, Frank Goodnow among others. This implies that public administration is an upshot of political science, although Zaidu, (2020), Zico, (2014) and Dauda (2021) see the discipline as a hybrid of political science and management.

The growth of the discipline witness series of events, one of which is the development of its principles, theories, models, laws methods and techniques which is characterized by incorporation of principles, theories, models, laws methods and techniques from disciplines such as political science, management, statistics, psychology, economics, sociology, history and even natural science (Garson and Overman 1983: 51). The inputs from those fields provided Public Administration newer and fresher approaches to the study as well as flexibility and dynamism, therefore responsive to technological, social and environmental changes in the society hence capable of meeting human and environmental needs in very situation and stand the test of time.

However, this act of adaptation have attracted criticism from other scholars like Herbert Simon, Freeman Alex believing field is be becoming increasingly vast, lacking an organizing framework, one without focus, one that borrows too much from other' fields with regard to its propositions, techniques and approaches, and one that is fastly losing its own identity and assuming the identities of other disciplines

Therefore, the aim of this work is to identify the ecliptic nature of the discipline public administration, examine how it enrich the discipline with laws, theories and principles and discuss the benefits and problems eclecticism accord to the discipline.

Conceptual Clarification

Public Administration as a Practice

A review of literature shows that an understanding of public administration as a practice cannot be sufficient without first of all understanding the concept of Administration. Like other fundamental concepts in political science and public administration, administration has no universally accepted definition. This is because the different definitions focus on different aspects of the concept and environment of the scholars.

According to Simon (2010) administration is the activities of groups/individuals cooperating to accomplish common goals. He added that administration takes place when two men cooperate to roll a stone that none of them can move alone. Simons' definition laid emphasis on cooperation. For him, it is necessary to have groups/individuals cooperating and such cooperation must have a purpose. Therefore, we can look at administration as the activities of groups/individuals that are aimed at getting something done.

Thus, Nwosu (2010) asserted that administration is inevitable in any given situation where a piece of work that has to be done and requires the efforts of more than one person to accomplish.

A more elaborate and comprehensive definition of administration was provided by Balogun (1983) when he asserted that:

We shall regard as administrative any action that is directed to the analysis of policies, the identification of options and to a substantial degree, the implementation of programs as well as the efficient allocation of resources. In addition to all these calculated decisions, a typical administrative action taken into consideration the enduring and the goals of the organization as well as the environment within which the action takes place (Kabir, 1983:17).

We can therefore say that administration, regardless of its diverse definitions, is concerned with the mobilization, deployment, organization and intensification of group efforts for the attainment of specified aims.

Given the above, administration can be seen as a cooperative effort of a group of people to achieve specific objectives. Public administration therefore could be seen as a cooperative effort of groups/individuals to achieve the aims of the general public. Public administration is more related to the activities of government. Hence, it is seen as the mobilization, deployment and management of men and materials to achieve the purpose of government. As Mbah (2007) puts it, public sector consists of establishments of Federal, State and Local Government agencies that administer, oversee, and manage public programs and have executive, legislative or judicial authority within a given area (Nwosu, 1985).

Williams (1985) emphasized the point when he defines public administration as the technical knowledge of the field which enables the administrator to perform his duty. Public administration as the techniques of management and principles to which operative programs are carried through to success (White, 1986). In essence, public administration is the sum total of all the activities of organizations or groups that are directed towards the accomplishment of the interests of the general public.

Public Administration as a Discipline

Public administration as a discipline is that whose subject matter and terrains of inquiry is concern with how to make the machineries of putting government words into tangible goods and services effectively and efficiently (Dauda 2021). This simply means that the primary concern of the discipline of Public Administration with discovering best way of training men who are into the service of implementing policies and programs of government, therefore making government workforce effective and efficient.

Eclectic Nature of Public Administration

Public administration as a discipline refers to as an eclectic discipline within the context of this work to mean a discipline that is broad, dynamic and flexible. A discipline that has the capacity dynamic accept and adopt concepts, prepositions, models, principles and theories from other

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disciplines. This simply implies that the discipline possess the qualities of flexibility and dynamism that make it possible for it to harbour theories and principles of other discipline that are relevant to the field of inquiry of the discipline. Eclectism of public administration as a discipline simply define the discipline as that which is able to adopt and still adopting prepositions, models, principles and theories from other disciplines and effectively modify them to perfectly address it concern.

An Overview of the Eclectic Nature of Public Administration

Public administration is a discipline that has demonstrated high level of flexibility since it was separated from political science in 1880s, besides the significant amount of ideas the discipline gets from its mother discipline (political science). Public administration gain much from other disciplines, this have made it interdisciplinary in orientation and enable it to expand its concerns over the years (Ezeani, 2006). The discipline borrow some of it techniques and approaches of other disciplines as demonstrated by a good number of empirical works (Ezeani, 2006). The discipline incorporate methods and knowledge from discipline such as political science, management, statistics, psychology, economics, sociology, history and even natural science (Garson and Overman 1983: 51). Inputs from those fields for instance provided newer and fresher approaches to the study of public administration.

Zaidu (2022) also sees the discipline of public administration as body of knowledge that effectively and efficiently domesticate laws, principles and theories international relations, economics, public finance, and public enterprises.

This work x- ray how the discipline of public administration domesticated works of social psychologists, Sociological studies, management scholars, law and natural science among others.

The discipline of public administration have domesticated the works of social psychologists who belief in the tradition of the human relations movement that began with Elton Mayo's studies at the Hawthorne Plant of the Western Electric Company in Chicago in the 1920s (Mayo 1933; Roethlisberger and Dickson 1949). The works of Maslow (1954; 1959), Argyris (1953; 1957) and other psychologists began who offer new perspectives in understanding the behavioral dynamics in the study of workers of organizations. The works of social psychologist have enrich the discipline of public administration with theories of motivating workers to commit themselves to their works. The works of social and industrial psychologists like Abraham Maslow, Douglas McGregor, Frederick Herzberg, Rensis Likert, David McClelland and Chris Argyris is now core to the discipline of public administration.

The discipline of public administration have been able to domesticate the works of sociologist too, for instance bureaucracy, the work of Max Weber had taken a center stage in the discipline of public administration. Sociological studies on bureaucratic behavior and performance gained prominence in the discipline of public administration from the early stage in the development of the discipline.

Similarly, the flexibility of the discipline of public administration offer it the advantage of accommodating principles and theories beyond social and management science. For instance system theory which is one of the foremost theories of public administration has it root from the natural science. The theory has its root from the natural science as found in the work of L. Von Bertalanffy in 1930s (Umar and Dahiru 2020). However, it was domesticated to political science and public administration by the works of scholars like Charles, Benard, and Easton as cited in (Ademolekun, 1986).

Lurthier Gulick a management scholar proposed that Public Administration as a field of analysis needs to be more closely related to the study of business and other forms of administration. He also advocated 'the reexamination and reformulation of basic doctrines and practices of Public Administration. This shows the extent which public administration has linked with management theories and principles.

Public administration enjoys waves of contributions from scholars of other disciplines right from its infant stage, these contribution immensely influence the development of the discipline. Public Administration develop newer techniques of reforming public organizations by employing approaches and methods from other fields such as organization development (Bennis 1969; Golembiewski 1977), which emphasized behavioral science knowledge; the public choice model (Ostrom and Ostrom, 1971) which adopted economic theory in decision making and operations research-based techniques among others. This has further prove the eclectism in the discipline.

In addition, the flexibility and dynamism in the discipline of public administration avail it the advantage of domesticating principles, laws and theories from law. For instance a whole branch of law has been borrowed and coded administrative law by the discipline of public administration. Administrative laws are body of laws that regulate the activities of administrative officers and agencies. Administrative law has been widely accepted and practice in the field of public administration as a discipline, due to wide practice of administrative law in public administration, administrators are now judges of administrative issues or simply adjudicators of administrative cases. This explains why legal terms like mandamus, certiorari, quo warrantor, habeas corpus, prohibition, injunction etc. are household names in the discipline of public administration.

Benefits Eclectism in the Discipline of Public Administration Accords the Discipline

The flexibility of the discipline of public administration has accord it much dynamism to adopt to the constant social and environmental needs of the society and the much vigor and energy which make it a very outstanding and successful discipline. The ability of the discipline to successfully adopt theories, principles, models, methods from other disciplines gives it the advantage of more relevance to the extent that its role in the directing of society cannot be underestimated.

The flexible nature of the discipline of public administration makes it a very vast discipline and make it to attend the stage of intellectual pluralism. Intellectual pluralism implies the ability of a discipline to meddle into other disciplines. This account for why individuals who undergo training in the discipline have knowledge and skills of other discipline. For an individual train in public administration has an insight in accounting because he has received training in public finance management, financial and management accounting, as well as an insight in economics because he has received training in micro and macroeconomic, he can as well meddle into statistic because he has received training in quantitative science.

Similarly, the flexibility of public administration as a discipline has offered it the advantage of steady grow and expansion against the prediction of early critics of the discipline. For instance Herbert Simon opined that the discipline for not having own preposition, that what it has is just proverbs of administration therefore cannot stand the test of time. However, contrary to his position the discipline has grown so influential to such an extent that it contributions to societies cannot go unnoticed.

The flexibility of public administration as a discipline has giving it the ability to grow to a full blown discipline to the extent of having subfields. One of the most recent subfield of the discipline of public administration is fiscal administration. Fiscal administration is concern with wide range of issues affecting government fiscal operation like taxation, public expenditure and borrowing, financial resources allocation, revenue mobilization and spending. Fiscal administration is primarily concerned with formulation, implementation and evaluation of decisions and policies on taxation and revenue administration, financial resource allocation, public borrowings, public debt management and accounting and auditing.

Challenges that Confronts Public Administration due to its Eclectic Nature

Despite the great advantages the flexibility of the discipline of public administration accords it, such flexibility also gives some forms of disadvantages to the discipline. The implications of this elitism to this interdisciplinary discipline has been enormous and up to the extent of making the scope and boundaries of the discipline not clear enough. This has made the field to be become increasingly vast, lacking an organizing framework, one without focus, one that borrows too much from other' fields with regard to its propositions, techniques and approaches, and one that is fatly losing its own .identity and assuming the identities of other disciplines. The assumption here is that Public Administration is a "borrowing" discipline, loosely adopting and integrating knowledge from other disciplines, but confused as to where its area of competence really lies.

Theoretical Framework

System theory has been adopted as the theoretical framework for this study. The theory have its root from the natural science as found in the work of L. Von Bertalanffy in 1930s (Umar and Dahiru 2020). However, it was domesticated to political science and public administration by the work scholars like Charles, Benard and Easton among others as cited in (Ademolekun, 1986). The theory view an entity as a complex whole made of various components which must all function well, collectively and independently for the success of the complex whole. This theory did not only accept the fact that component of a system should work interdependently for positive result but see interdependence among component of any system as unavoidable.

System theory exist in models, those include the organismic model pioneered by Norbert Wiener and William Ashby, this model of system theory, sees human organization as a system similar to the human system. Charles (1979), demonstrated this further to metaphorically regarding the organizational system as a caricature of a human system with interacting parts, he sees organizational structure been like a skeletal of a human body, job in the organization as the human muscles, employees of the organization been like the blood of the human body to demonstrate how the success of a system as a whole depend on smooth function of each of the component units just as no human system survive without skeleton, blood muscle, respiratory system, human organization like the human system etc.

Another model of system theory is the environment model, this model classify system based on the system interaction with the environment, it's in line with this that Bernard (1983) classified system into two viz. open and close system. He further explained that an open system is the kind of system that requires constant interaction with the environment to make it function effectively, while close system is a system that is self-contained and self-sufficient and does not require any other external body to make it work. The black box or conversion box model, is another model of system theory, this model as presented by David Easton sees a system as consist of components. Those component parts interrelated and working dependently towards achieving general goals of the human organization or entity. Those component of an ideal system include input, conversion processor the black box output and feedback.

System theory justify the act of incorporate of methods and knowledge from discipline such as political science, management, statistics, psychology, economics, sociology, history and even natural science by the discipline of public administration. According to system theory the interaction between public administration and other disciplines is not only necessary but inescapable.

Methodology

The study is conceptual in nature, therefore solidly relied on secondary data that were sourced from reviewing of relevant scholarly works in journal, text books, magazines, government official document, material from internet, therefore data in this work were source through an in-depth investigation from multiple secondary sources and perspectives. The data collected were analysed through content analysis

To obtain reliable and verifiable data for this research, a historical descriptive approach was employed, involving data collection from various sources such as journals, textbooks, newspapers, online materials, and more. This method allowed for the analysis of historical and contemporary data to make informed projections about the future. The historical method is a systematic process of collecting and objectively assessing data related to past events. It enables researchers to gain insights into past events through the application of scientific objectivity in explaining these events. The study also made use of documentary analysis to examine secondary data sources, contributing to the overall findings. These research methods were focused on exploring the eclectic nature of the discipline of public administration merit or otherwise of such nature to the discipline.

Findings

The discipline of public administration have demonstrated sufficient level of flexibility and dynamism right from its birth place and time, this has allow the discipline to incorporate methods and knowledge from discipline such as political science, management, statistics, psychology, economics, sociology, history law and even natural science. Inputs from those fields for instance provided newer and fresher approaches to the study of public administration.

Therefore, the discipline is highly enriched with laws, principles and theories which makes it to effectively adopt to the constant social and environmental changes and needs of the society and the much vigor and energy which makes it a very outstanding and successful discipline.

However in the course of the borrowing and domestication of laws, theories, principles and techniques from other disciplines, the public administration challenge of maintaining its own identity and suffered the critics of so much borrowing.

Conclusion

The ecliptic nature of the discipline of public administration has been able to provide the discipline with great amount of advantage, which allowed the discipline to stand the test of time and progressively expand despite critics prediction of it failure right form its very inception. However, the ecliptic nature of the discipline has brought some sort of weakness to the discipline.

However, the weaknesses of the discipline have become a sort of virtues and strengths to it resulting into much intellectual promiscuity and inquisitiveness. This have lead into further inquiries in the discipline resulting in more discoveries and innovations.

Recommendations

Based on the findings made in the course of this study, the study made the following recommendation:

- A further rigorous study to exploit areas of other disciplines relevant to the field of the discipline of public administration by scholars in the field for possible adaptation.
- Care should be taken in the course of borrowing and domestication of laws, theories, principles, techniques from other disciplines, so as not to compromise the entity and area of inquiry of the discipline.

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