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Public Sector Reform and Service Delivery: A Catalyst for National Development in Nigeria

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Abstract
Purpose: This study explores the nexus between administrative restructuring, institutional efficiency, and the quality of public service delivery as key determinants of sustainable national progress. Drawing on the principles of New Public Management (NPM), this study examines how decentralization, transparency, accountability, and performance-based management influence the responsiveness and effectiveness of Nigeria's public institutions.
Methodology: A descriptive qualitative design was employed, utilizing documentary analysis to systematically review the literature, policy documents, and reform reports. Content and thematic analyses were used to interpret the findings.
Results: The study argues that achieving meaningful national development requires reforms that not only streamline administrative processes but also strengthen human capital, technological innovation, and ethical standards in public administration.
Conclusions: To achieve sustainable national development, Nigeria's public sector must transform into a citizen-centered, performance-driven, and digitally enabled institution.
Limitations: This study addresses a critical gap by using the New Public Management theory to assess how managerial and accountability reforms impact the performance of service delivery. It explores institutional and governance barriers and offers policy recommendations aimed at strengthening Nigeria's public sector to ensure effective and sustainable service delivery.
Contributions: This study makes significant contributions to the existing body of knowledge on public administration, governance, and development studies by providing novel insights into the interplay between public sector reforms, service delivery, and national development in Nigeria.

Keywords: *National Development, New Public Management (NPM), Public Sector Reform, Public Service Delivery*

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1. Introduction

The public sector is a vital instrument through which governments implement policies, provide essential services, and promote socioeconomic development. In Nigeria, public sector performance is crucial for national development, as it significantly influences the quality of services available to citizens and the effectiveness of government institutions. Unfortunately, over the years, the Nigerian public service has been plagued by inefficiency, corruption, weak accountability, and bureaucratic hurdles, all of which hinder effective service delivery (Ukwandu & Ijere, 2020). Thus, improving the public sector is essential for Nigeria's pursuit of good governance and sustainable development. Effective service delivery fosters public trust, economic growth and political stability.

The public sector serves as the backbone of governance and national development, providing the institutional framework necessary for executing government policies and delivering crucial services to the public. It includes Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs) responsible for ensuring effective policy execution, social welfare and economic growth. In Nigeria, the public sector plays a central role in driving socio-economic transformation; however, it is frequently viewed as inefficient, unaccountable, and overly bureaucratic (Ukwandu & Ijere, 2020). Despite its importance, the Nigerian public service faces persistent challenges. These systemic issues have obstructed the effective delivery of essential public goods, such as education, healthcare, power supply, and infrastructure. Scholars argue that reforming the public sector is imperative to improve efficiency, transparency, and responsiveness to service demands (Sukare & Usman, 2026).

Nigeria's experience with public sector reforms dates back to the colonial period and has evolved through various reform commissions, including the 1954 Gorsuch Commission, the 1974 Udoji Commission, the 1988 Dotun Philips Reform, and the 2004 SERVICOM Initiative. Each reform aimed to restructure public services to enhance productivity, accountability, and citizen satisfaction. However, the outcomes have been inconsistent. While some reforms introduced innovations such as performance management and service charters, others were hampered by poor implementation, lack of continuity, and resistance from entrenched bureaucratic interests.

The introduction of the New Public Management paradigm in the 1990s brought global reform principles that emphasized efficiency, decentralization, accountability, and citizen engagement. These principles influenced Nigeria's reform efforts, particularly during the Obasanjo administration (1999–2007), which launched the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) and SERVICOM Charter. For instance, SERVICOM was designed to promote transparency, improve service standards, and institutionalize a customer-oriented approach in public service. Nevertheless, research indicates that the program's impact has been limited due to weak institutional support and low citizen awareness of the program.

Digital transformation has emerged as a promising area for public sector reform. Implementing e-governance tools, digital record management, and data-driven decision-making has been recognized as a potential catalyst for enhancing efficiency and accountability in the public sector. However, Nigeria's readiness for digital innovation is constrained by inadequate infrastructure, low digital literacy, and limited ICT adoption across the MDAs. Consequently, a persistent gap remains between policy formulation and implementation, resulting in suboptimal service outcomes and citizen dissatisfaction.

Therefore, examining the relationship between public sector reform and service delivery in Nigeria is timely and necessary. This study aims to analyze the role of reform initiatives in Nigeria, assess their impact on national development, and identify the institutional and governance challenges that hinder reform success and service delivery. The findings are expected to contribute to ongoing policy discussions on good governance and sustainable service delivery in Nigeria. By understanding the dynamics of reform implementation, this study seeks to propose strategies for fostering an efficient, transparent, and citizen-centered public sector capable of fulfilling Nigeria's developmental aspirations.

1.1 Objectives

The broad objective is to explore the nexus between administrative restructuring, institutional efficiency, and the quality of public service delivery as key determinants of sustainable national progress. The specific objectives are as follows:

1. To analyze the impact of reform initiatives on national development,
2. To identify the institutional and governance challenges that impede reform success and service delivery.

1.2 Research Questions

The research questions of this article are presented as follows:

RQ1: What is the impact of reform initiatives on national development outcomes?

RQ2: What institutional challenges hinder the successful implementation of reform initiatives?

2. Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

2.1 Public Sector Reform

Before exploring the concept of public sector reform, it is important to define the public sector. Uchime and Onuorah (2024) describe the public sector as encompassing all organizations that operate within the framework of government, tasked with implementing policy decisions and delivering valuable services to citizens. The public sector plays a vital role in governance, serving as the institutional framework through which government policies are implemented. It ensures the provision of essential services, such as education, healthcare, infrastructure, and security, while regulating economic and social activities in the national interest. Uchime and Onuorah (2024) classify public sector organizations into three categories: public or statutory corporations, state-owned enterprises, and mixed-economy enterprises. These categories reflect the various organizational arrangements through which governments engage in economic and administrative activities in the public sector. Collectively, the public sector is a crucial driver of national development, social cohesion and state legitimacy.

The public sector comprises industries and jobs operated or owned by the central government, primarily funded through taxpayer contributions and generally run on a non-profit basis. Unlike the private sector, which is driven by profit motives, the public sector focuses on meeting collective needs by ensuring that essential services are accessible to all citizens, regardless of their socioeconomic status. These services typically include education, healthcare, emergency response, utilities such as water and electricity, and national defense services. This perspective emphasizes the public sector's redistributive and welfare-oriented role in modern states. By pooling resources through taxation, governments can fund programs and institutions that promote equality, social protection, and the national security. The non-profit orientation of the public sector ensures that the delivery of public goods is not solely determined by market dynamics but is guided by the principles of fairness, inclusiveness, and social justice. Furthermore, by providing critical infrastructure and services, the public sector lays the groundwork for private enterprises and economic growth. Thus, the public sector functions not only as a provider of essential goods and services but also as a stabilizer of the social and economic order.

According to Azam and Bouckaert (2025), public sector reform can be described as a total overhaul of the government's administrative machinery to inject real effectiveness, efficiency, competence, and financial prudence into the public sector. This definition underscores reform as a comprehensive process that extends beyond minor adjustments or incremental changes. This implies a deep restructuring of government systems and institutions to address entrenched challenges such as bureaucratic red tape, corruption, mismanagement of resources, and weak institutional capacity. The emphasis on effectiveness and efficiency reflects the need for the public sector to deliver quality services in a timely and cost-effective manner. In this context, competence refers to building the skills, expertise, and professionalism of public servants to ensure that they can successfully execute government policies and programs. Financial prudence highlights the critical importance of responsibly managing public resources, reducing wastage, and ensuring accountability in expenditure.

Ndema (2022) conceptualizes public sector reform as the set of administrative, structural, and managerial reforms, including the application of New Public Management (NPM) tools, introduced to strengthen the capacity of public institutions to perform their assigned functions and effectively deliver public goods. This definition highlights the multidimensional nature of reform, which involves not only administrative restructuring but also managerial innovation and institutional strengthening. The inclusion of NPM underscores the increasing reliance on modern management practices, such as performance measurement, efficiency-driven processes, decentralization, and citizen-centered service delivery to improve governance outcomes. By focusing on capacity building, this view recognizes that public institutions must be equipped with appropriate systems, resources, and competencies to respond to the evolving demands of society. Public sector reform is both corrective and transformative: corrective in addressing inefficiencies, corruption, and weak institutional frameworks, and transformative in reorienting public service towards accountability, transparency, and development effectiveness.

The administrative transformation of the public sector involves deliberate efforts to improve the structures, processes, and functions of government institutions. This entails addressing identified administrative problems through institutional reforms aimed at enhancing efficiency, transparency, accountability, and service delivery. According to Ukwandu and Ijere (2020), reform in this context is not merely a change in routine practices but a systematic attempt to address the fundamental weaknesses within the public service. These reforms may include restructuring ministries, enhancing bureaucratic processes, adopting modern technologies, strengthening human resource management, and improving financial accountability.

Public sector reform also responds to changing socio-political and economic conditions. As societies evolve, governments are expected to adapt to global best practices while addressing domestic challenges, such as corruption, inefficiency, and weak institutional capacity. Therefore, reform serves as a tool for fostering good governance and sustainable development by ensuring that public institutions deliver value to citizens. It bridges the gap between government intentions and the actual outcomes of policies, making public service more responsive, citizen-centered, and development-oriented.

Public sector reforms, as defined by Mugellini, Della Bella, Colagrossi, Isenring, and Killias (2021), are intentional and systematic changes made to the structures and processes of public sector organizations, aimed primarily at enhancing transparency and accountability. These reforms are not random or spontaneous; they are carefully planned interventions designed to address ongoing inefficiencies, structural obstacles, and governance issues within public institutions. They typically focus on key areas, such as organizational restructuring, performance management, financial accountability systems, procurement procedures, and service delivery mechanisms.

Transparency ensures that government operations are open to scrutiny, thereby minimizing opportunities for corruption and misuse of public resources. Accountability guarantees that public officials and institutions are answerable to citizens, higher authorities, and oversight bodies for their actions and decisions. Together, these two principles form the foundations of effective governance and sustainable development. Public sector reforms also aim to align national administrative practices with international standards to promote efficiency, equity, and inclusiveness in governance. By enhancing organizational culture, adopting modern technologies, and ensuring service delivery that focuses on citizens, these reforms foster an environment in which public institutions can effectively address societal needs.

Sukare and Usman (2026) describe public sector reform as a systematic intervention designed to improve the structure, operations, systems, and procedures of public services, ultimately transforming the public sector into a multifaceted agent of national cohesion and socio-economic development. This viewpoint emphasizes that reform is not a one-time event but a continuous process of restructuring government institutions to meet the evolving needs of society. By concentrating on structures and systems, reforms improve public sector effectiveness, eliminate redundancy, and enable adaptation to modern administrative practices.

The concept of transforming the public sector into an agent of national cohesion underscores its essential role in fostering unity among diverse groups through inclusive governance and equitable service delivery. Additionally, reforms aimed at socioeconomic development enable the public sector to act as a catalyst for growth by creating an environment conducive to investment, innovation, and social welfare. By enhancing efficiency, accountability, and responsiveness, the public sector is better equipped to manage scarce resources, reduce poverty, and promote sustainable development. Therefore, public sector reform is both a governance and developmental strategy that is vital for national progress.

2.2 Public Service Delivery

Service delivery is broadly defined as "all actions and activities undertaken from conceptualization to final handover to provide a well-defined product or service to a known consumer." Effective service delivery remains the overall outcome of public services (Nwosu & Ananti, 2024). Service delivery has also been described as the timely, honest, appreciable, and effective provision of public services within a democratic dispensation (Aligbe, Ainabor, & Momoh, 2024). Public service delivery (Ikhenoba & Atakpa, 2023) is the term used to describe the delivery of services by public organizations. In the context of the public sector, public service delivery refers to the actions taken by government organizations or institutions to fulfill their responsibilities to citizens. This definition emphasizes that service delivery is comprehensive, involving planning, resource allocation, execution, monitoring, and the final transfer of benefits to the intended users.

Public service delivery is not limited to simply providing goods or services; it encompasses the entire chain of activities that ensure outcomes meet citizens' expectations. For instance, in education, service delivery includes curriculum development, teacher recruitment, classroom construction, and the actual teaching-learning process, culminating in students acquiring the requisite knowledge and skills. In healthcare, it encompasses policy design, hospital funding, and provision of medical care to patients. By focusing on service delivery within public organizations, accountability, transparency, and equity are highlighted as essential. Effective service delivery serves as a benchmark for good governance and is a critical indicator of public sector performance.

Public service delivery is also seen as the result of the intentions and decisions of the government and government institutions, and the actions undertaken and decisions made by people employed in government institutions, the provision of public goods or social (education, health), economic (grants), or infrastructure (water, electricity) services to those who need (or demand) them by the government (Nwosu, Oju, Onwujekwe, & Madukwe 2025). Service delivery refers to how well services provided by specific sectors meet or exceed the expectations of their recipients (Shittu, 2023). This definition emphasizes that service delivery is not just about making services available; it is about ensuring that the quality, timeliness, and accessibility of those services align with the needs of the end-users. Effectiveness is assessed by the level of satisfaction and positive impact experienced by beneficiaries, rather than simply by the efforts of service providers.

In the public sector, this definition highlights the importance of aligning government services with citizens' expectations of quality. For instance, healthcare delivery is considered effective not only because hospitals exist, but also because patients can access affordable, reliable, and high-quality care when they need it. Similarly, in education, the focus has shifted to whether schools provide relevant and impactful learning experiences that improve students' lives. By framing service delivery around citizens' experiences, this perspective underscores the significance of accountability and responsiveness as key indicators for evaluating public-sector performance. Ultimately, service delivery measures how well public organizations fulfill their mandates and contribute to building public trust in governance.

Service delivery can be defined as the act of providing citizens with essential amenities, such as electricity, water, housing, and other fundamental services, by the government (Ekejiuba & Ibrahim, 2024). This perspective places service delivery within the essential responsibilities of the state, highlighting its role in ensuring that citizens' basic needs are met. Unlike broader definitions that emphasize processes or outcomes, this definition focuses on the tangible provision of vital public goods as the core of the service delivery.

In the context of Nigeria, this viewpoint is particularly pertinent, given the persistent infrastructural gaps and uneven access to basic amenities across various regions. When government institutions successfully provide reliable electricity, potable water, adequate housing, and related services, they not only enhance citizens' quality of life but also foster economic productivity and social stability. Conversely, shortcomings in these areas often lead to widespread dissatisfaction, undermine public trust in governance, and exacerbate socioeconomic inequalities. This underscores the material dimension of governance, linking the effectiveness of public administration directly to citizens' everyday welfare. It emphasizes the state's obligation to convert resources into tangible benefits that drive the national development.

Service delivery has also been conceptualized as "the process and outcomes of providing public goods and services with emphasis on accountability and citizen participation" (Kulmie, Ibrahim, Mohamed,

& Sugal, 2025). This definition highlights two important dimensions often emphasized in contemporary governance reforms: accountability and participation. Accountability ensures that service providers are answerable for the quality, timeliness, and effectiveness of the services delivered, whereas citizen participation underscores the role of the public as active stakeholders rather than passive recipients. By linking outcomes with the process of provision, this view recognizes that service delivery goes beyond the mere distribution of resources; it also encompasses the mechanisms of transparency, feedback, and inclusivity through which services are administered. In fragile democracies and developing contexts such as Nigeria, where public trust in government institutions is often low, embedding accountability and participation into service delivery systems has become increasingly significant for improving legitimacy, responsiveness and citizen satisfaction.

2.3 National Development

Recent scholarship has reconceptualized national development to include not only economic growth but also sustainable, inclusive, and governance-based transformation. In the past decade, scholars have integrated concepts from sustainability science, institutional economics, and human development to expand the foundational understanding of it. Todaro and Smith (2015) argue that national development involves economic progress and structural transformations that enhance citizens' quality of life. They define development as a multidimensional process that encompasses significant changes in social structures, attitudes, institutions, and economic growth, all of which are aimed at reducing inequality and poverty. Their approach emphasizes that development policy should focus on achieving inclusive and equitable outcomes rather than primarily GDP growth alone.

Rodrik (2017) introduces an institutionalist perspective, arguing that the success of national development relies on the quality and adaptability of institutions as well as national policy autonomy. He asserts that development strategies must be context-specific, rejecting the "one-size-fits-all" model of globalization and promoting governance frameworks and national innovation systems that respond to local realities. Through the institutional theory of development, it is contended that nations thrive when they establish inclusive institutions that promote participation, innovation, and accountability. Conversely, nations fail under extractive institutions that concentrate their power and resources. Their analysis reinforces the idea that national development cannot succeed without institutional reforms that ensure equitable access to opportunities and political representation in the country.

Sen and Nussbaum's capability approach remains central to understanding development from a human perspective. The capability approach provides a humanistic framework for evaluating public sector reforms by focusing on how institutional changes expand people's freedom and opportunities to achieve valuable life outcomes. In the Nigerian context, this approach offers a more holistic understanding of reform success, emphasizing not only efficiency and accountability but also the actual enhancement of citizens' well-being and social participation.

Narh (2025) critiques the Western-centric model of national development, advocating for "pluriversal" approaches that recognize local knowledge, cultural diversity, and ecological harmony. His post-development perspective argues that genuine national development arises from community-led and context-sensitive practices rather than from imposed global paradigms. National development on the continent must be rooted in effective public institutions, fiscal discipline and transparent resource management. They argue that the governance of natural resources, especially in resource-rich countries like Nigeria, determines whether such wealth is a blessing or a curse.

Uzor, Emenike, and Nwosu (2023) highlight the connection between innovation, digital transformation, and national development in Africa. They contend that economic diversification, supported by digital technologies and human capital development, is essential for sustainable national development. Pritchett (2022) defines national development as the transformation of a society into one with a productive economy, effective administration, and a responsive state that delivers high levels of human welfare. Abanikannda and Adekomi (2019) argue that national development is a comprehensive process that involves the economic, social, political, and technological advancement of a nation to improve citizens' welfare and achieve long-term sustainability. Deliberate and sustained efforts by both the government and citizens are required to enhance living standards through economic growth, infrastructure provision, and social welfare (Onyeke, 2022).

National development can be understood as a process aimed at achieving sustainable improvements in a country's economic performance, social inclusion, and environmental management, all of which promote the overall national welfare. It signifies a dynamic process through which a nation undergoes structural change and reaches higher levels of socioeconomic progress. National development entails holistic improvements in the economic, educational, political, and cultural aspects of a nation, all aimed at enhancing citizens' quality of life (Okeke & Chukwudebelu, 2024). Furthermore, national development refers to the collective advancement of a nation's political, social, and economic institutions, which are essential for ensuring human security and good governance (Adagbabiri & Okolie, 2019). Finally, within the context of Africa's energy transition, the discussion highlights that governance reforms, the adoption of renewable energy, and community participation are crucial for achieving sustainable development goals. The transition to clean energy presents both challenges and opportunities for rethinking developmental governance.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

This study is based on the New Public Management (NPM) Theory, which offers a comprehensive framework for understanding reforms in public sector organizations and their impact on service delivery in the education sector. Emerging in the 1980s as a critique of traditional bureaucracies, NPM has become a prominent global reform strategy around the world. NPM represents a fundamental shift in public administration, emphasizing efficiency, accountability, performance measurement, and the incorporation of private-sector management practices within government institutions (Abdullahi, 2024; Dan, Lægreid, & Špaček, 2024).

The theory posits that public organizations can enhance their effectiveness and quality of services by adopting managerial techniques such as decentralization, performance-based evaluation, outcome-oriented planning, and customer-focused approaches. In the context of national development and public sector service delivery, NPM emphasizes the necessity for efficiency and results-oriented management. It advocates moving away from traditional bureaucratic processes, which are often rigid, hierarchical, and slow (Indahsari & Raharja, 2020). NPM tries to realign the relationship between public service managers and their political superiors by establishing a parallel relationship between the two (Nwosu & Ananti, 2024).

By promoting flexibility, competition, and performance benchmarking, NPM seeks to improve responsiveness to citizens' needs, optimize resource allocation, and ensure accountability in public service delivery. This perspective is especially pertinent in the healthcare sector, where timely, accessible, and high-quality services are critical for achieving broader health policy goals. Additionally, NPM underscores the significance of managerial autonomy and decentralization, enabling decision-makers within agencies to tailor strategies, allocate resources effectively, and innovate in service provisions (Abdullahi, 2024). These principles support the study's investigation of the reform measures implemented within the public sector in Nigeria, both past and present, as they provide a framework for assessing how internal organizational changes affect service delivery outcomes.

2.4.1 Key Principles of the Theory

New Public Management (NPM) represents a transformative approach to public administration, concentrating on efficiency, accountability, and performance in government. In contrast to traditional bureaucratic models, which prioritize rules and procedures, NPM emphasizes results, customer satisfaction, and the strategic use of resources to deliver public services effectively. By adopting practices inspired by the private sector, NPM aims to make the government more responsive, flexible, and outcome-driven, thereby enhancing the quality of services provided to citizens. The following are the key principles and values that define this approach.

2.4.2 Results-Oriented Approach

A key principle of New Public Management (NPM) is its focus on achieving specific, measurable outcomes. This results-oriented approach emphasizes the importance of performance measurement, evaluation, and accountability in public administration (Abdullahi, 2024). By focusing on tangible results, NPM aims to ensure that government initiatives lead to meaningful benefits for citizens. For example, when individuals access legal documents or public services, a results-oriented system ensures that these processes effectively contribute to societal goals, such as improved social welfare, economic participation, and civic inclusion. Consequently, citizens experience enhanced opportunities and outcomes, reinforcing the legitimacy and responsiveness of government institutions.

2.4.3 Decentralization

Decentralization is another fundamental NPM value. It involves transferring decision-making authority and administrative responsibilities from central government structures to local governments or semi-autonomous agencies. This principle is based on the belief that local authorities are better equipped to understand and respond to the unique needs and preferences of their communities than the central government. By devolving power, governments can promote flexibility, innovation, and adaptability in public service delivery. Decentralization fosters context-specific policy implementation and encourages local accountability, enabling citizens to participate more actively in decision-making processes that directly affect their lives.

2.4.4 Customer Orientation

Customer orientation in NPM reframes citizens as clients with specific needs and expectations. This principle promotes a shift from bureaucratic, process-driven administration to service delivery models that prioritize citizen satisfaction and well-being. Public agencies are encouraged to streamline their operations, reduce procedural bottlenecks, and adopt more responsive approaches to service provision. By focusing on customer satisfaction as a key performance indicator, public institutions are incentivized to improve the quality, accessibility, and reliability of their service.

2.4.5 Efficiency and Cost-Effectiveness

Efficiency and cost-effectiveness are core values underpinning the NPM. They reflect a commitment to optimizing resource allocation and achieving maximum value from public expenditure (Indahsari & Raharja, 2020). NPM seeks to reduce waste, enhance productivity, and ensure fiscal responsibility through competition, performance-based management, and market-oriented practices. By emphasizing cost-conscious management, the government can deliver higher-quality services while maintaining financial sustainability. However, balancing efficiency with equitable resource distribution is crucial to prevent the marginalization of vulnerable populations and ensure that market mechanisms complement, rather than undermine, public welfare objectives.

The principles of New Public Management–results orientation, decentralization, customer focus, and efficiency–have fundamentally reshaped public administration. They promote accountability, performance, and responsiveness while introducing market-inspired mechanisms into the governance. However, the adoption of NPM also generates debates concerning the tension between efficiency and equity, as well as the risks of prioritizing managerialism over social welfare. Moving forward, policymakers must carefully balance these principles to ensure that NPM not only improves operational effectiveness but also contributes to citizens' well-being. Thus, NPM remains a dynamic and evolving paradigm, offering both opportunities and challenges for contemporary governance.

2.4.6 Application of the Theory

The New Public Management (NPM) theory provides a valuable framework for analyzing the direction, objectives, and outcomes of public sector reforms in Nigeria. Emerging in the 1980s as a reform-oriented paradigm, NPM advocates the incorporation of private-sector management principles into the public sector to enhance efficiency, accountability, and service quality (Hood, 1991). It emphasizes decentralization, performance measurement, competition, and a customer-oriented approach, aiming to transform bureaucratic institutions into result-driven and citizen-responsive organizations. In Nigeria, these principles have guided various reform programs designed to improve public service delivery.

Public sector reform in Nigeria has historically been driven by the need to address inefficiency, corruption, and bureaucratic rigidity. The application of NPM principles aims to make government institutions more accountable and performance-oriented. Nigeria has attempted to shift from process-driven administration to output-based governance through mechanisms such as performance management systems, service charters, and customer feedback frameworks. A significant example of NPM implementation in Nigeria is the introduction of the Service Compact with All Nigerians (SERVICOM) in 2004. SERVICOM reflects NPM's focus on customer orientation and service standards by requiring public institutions to publish their service obligations and performance indicators. SERVICOM was designed to promote transparency, efficiency, and accountability by reorienting public servants toward citizen-centered service delivery.

Moreover, the NPM model has influenced reforms in public financial management and human resources. For example, the adoption of the Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System (IPPIS), Treasury Single Account (TSA), and performance-based budgeting are practical efforts aimed at promoting transparency, eliminating ghost workers, and ensuring efficient resource utilization all core NPM objectives. Ukwandu and Ijere (2020) emphasize that "these reforms are geared toward improving accountability and promoting value for money in public expenditure." However, the Nigerian experience highlights the limitations of NPM implementation in developing contexts. While NPM-inspired reforms have introduced new management tools, their impact on service delivery is often constrained by institutional weaknesses, corruption, and a lack of political will. Akinsanmi, Adedokun, Nweze, and Aniobi (2022) argue that "without addressing the structural and ethical deficiencies within the public service, managerial reforms alone cannot ensure sustainable service delivery."

In summary, applying NPM to public sector reform and service delivery in Nigeria illustrates the transition from traditional bureaucratic administration to performance-oriented governance. This theory serves as a foundation for evaluating whether current reforms, such as SERVICOM, IPPIS, and TSA, have achieved greater efficiency, transparency, and citizen satisfaction. It also provides insights into how managerial autonomy, competition, and customer focus can enhance service outcomes when supported by institutional discipline and political commitment. Thus, in this study, NPM functions not only as a theoretical framework but also as an evaluative tool for analyzing the effectiveness of Nigeria's reform efforts. This helps explain how the adoption of managerial principles can enhance accountability and responsiveness, and conversely, why reforms may falter when those principles are implemented in weak institutional environments. Ultimately, the NPM perspective underscores that sustainable improvement in public service delivery in Nigeria requires aligning reform policies with the core tenets of performance management, transparency, and citizen-centric governance.

2.5 Research Gap

Despite significant public sector reforms in Nigeria, existing studies have not thoroughly examined how these reforms impact service delivery and national outcomes from a Human-Centered Perspective (HCP). Specifically, there is a lack of integration of New Public Management principles to empirically assess whether public sector reforms lead to improved service delivery and enhanced citizen capability. This study aims to fill this gap by combining an analysis of managerial efficiency with a capability-based evaluation of service delivery outcomes in Nigeria.

2.6 Hypotheses

The hypotheses of this study are presented as follows:

H_{o1}: There is no significant impact of reform initiatives on national development

H_{o2}: Institutional and governance challenges do not impede reform success or service delivery

3. Methodology

This study employs a descriptive, qualitative research design to examine the relationship between public sector reforms, service delivery, and national development in Nigeria. Descriptive research provides a systematic overview of existing conditions, while qualitative research offers contextual explanations and deeper insights into why those conditions exist and how stakeholders experience them (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Data were collected through documentary analysis, which involved systematically reviewing and synthesizing existing literature, policy documents, reform reports, and other relevant materials on Nigeria's public service reform efforts. To interpret the collected data and examine the hypotheses, this study employed content and thematic analyses.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1 Public Sector Reform, Service Delivery, and Development Outcomes

Public sector reform is crucial for enhancing the quality and effectiveness of service delivery, which ultimately influences national development. Effective public service delivery is a primary indicator of successful reform processes, reflecting how well the state meets its developmental responsibilities. Reform initiatives aim to make public institutions responsive, efficient, and accountable. According to Hood (1991), the New Public Management (NPM) paradigm emphasizes that reforms should focus on results-oriented management, decentralization, performance evaluation, and customer satisfaction. This approach treats citizens as clients, with their needs driving the priorities of public services. In Nigeria, reforms such as the SERVICOM Charter in 2004 have been introduced to improve service standards, ensure accountability, and promote customer orientation in Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs).

Nwekeaku and Obiorah (2019) explored the effectiveness of public service reforms in Nigeria, focusing on service delivery through the SERVICOM initiative. Governments worldwide strive to deliver welfare services efficiently and transparently. In Nigeria, public services are the primary machinery for policy implementation. Despite numerous reform efforts, the study found that public service delivery remains largely ineffective, with widespread service failures across the country. Although SERVICOM was established to enhance transparency, accountability, and efficiency by committing agencies to service charters, its impact has been limited.

Using a descriptive approach, the authors determined that reforms have not significantly altered the nature of public service, which still suffers from poor responsiveness, inefficiency, and corruption. They stressed that timely, honest, and effective delivery of services is essential for democratic governance, yet it remains inadequate. The authors recommend comprehensive training and retraining for public servants to improve competence and service orientation, strengthening the National Orientation Agency to promote citizen awareness, and empowering Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) to monitor ministries and agencies. They argued that sustained oversight and active citizen involvement in monitoring would help ensure accountability and improve service delivery.

SERVICOM established a framework for evaluating public service performance, setting benchmarks for service delivery, and enhancing the responsiveness. However, its success has been undermined by bureaucratic resistance and a lack of monitoring. Additionally, reforms such as the Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System (IPPIS) and the Treasury Single Account (TSA) were designed to promote transparency, eliminate ghost workers, and improve fiscal responsibility. These initiatives have increased efficiency in financial management and reduced leakage within the public sector. Public service delivery is crucial because it serves as the operational link between governance and national development outcomes. Effective service delivery in critical sectors such as education, healthcare, transportation, and security directly impacts human capital development and productivity, both of which are essential indicators of national development.

In Nigeria, the relationship between public sector reform and service delivery outcomes has been mixed. Reforms targeted at fiscal transparency and digitalization, such as TSA and e-governance platforms, have improved payroll integrity and reduced corruption. However, service delivery in sectors such as healthcare and education remains inadequate because of weak institutional capacity, insufficient funding, and poor implementation mechanisms. Akinsanmi et al. (2022) also note that the success of reforms is frequently compromised by political interference, a lack of continuity, and inadequate monitoring and evaluation systems.

4.2 Governance and Accountability as Catalysts for Development Outcomes

The effectiveness of public sector reform in enhancing service delivery largely depends on governance quality and accountability structures. Nwosu, Maduekwe, Obalum, and Udemba (2025) identified accountability, integrity, and transparency as the key principles of good governance. They further emphasized that these principles strengthen institutions, promote investment, and ensure equity, credibility, and sustainability in the delivery of services. Kaufmann and Kraay (2024) emphasize that good governance, characterized by transparency, adherence to the rule of law, and citizen engagement, enhances the credibility and performance of public institutions. When governance systems operate effectively, reforms tend to lead to measurable improvements in service delivery, contributing to economic growth and social development.

In the Nigerian context, governance reform should go beyond mere administrative changes to encompass ethical transformation and a shift in values among the public servants. This viewpoint aligns with the institutionalist perspective, which asserts that inclusive and accountable institutions create the right environment for fostering developmental outcomes. Therefore, reforms that institutionalize accountability, meritocracy, and innovation are more likely to result in sustainable development gains. Similarly, Uzor et al. (2023) argue that technological innovations lead to increased competition, resulting in rapid changes in many organizations. Consequently, numerous jobs, procedures, and organizational structures are not only evolving but are becoming obsolete almost overnight.

Recent studies have highlighted the role of digital innovation and e-governance in reforming service delivery. According to Uzor et al. (2023), the digital transformation of public services in Africa has the potential to enhance efficiency, reduce corruption, and expand access to marginalized populations. Nigeria's adoption of digital platforms for tax administration, public payroll, and procurement processes represents a step toward more transparent and responsive governance. However, inadequate ICT infrastructure and low digital literacy remain barriers to fully realizing the benefits of e-governace reforms.

Development outcomes resulting from effective public sector reforms are typically measured by improvements in governance, social welfare, and institutional performance. The WorldBank (2018) framework identifies efficiency, accountability, and inclusiveness as key criteria for assessing the success of reforms. In Nigeria, national development outcomes are evident in the gradual improvements in macroeconomic management, fiscal coordination, and anti-corruption efforts. Nevertheless, these achievements have not yet translated into significant gains in citizen welfare because of the persistent gap between policy formulation and implementation. Development outcomes should be people-centered and reflect improvements in education, healthcare, employment, and infrastructure. This perspective aligns with Garcés Velástegui (2020) capability approach, which defines development as the expansion of people's freedoms and capabilities. Thus, public sector reforms should not only aim to improve bureaucratic efficiency but also enhance citizens' quality of life and their participation in governance.

4.3 Challenges of Public Sector Reforms in Nigeria

Public sector reforms in Nigeria have been implemented to improve efficiency, transparency, and service delivery across all government tiers. However, despite numerous reform efforts since independence, the Nigerian public sector continues to face persistent structural and institutional challenges that undermine the success of reforms. Scholars and practitioners agree that these challenges stem from a combination of political, bureaucratic, institutional, and socio-cultural factors that constrain the effective implementation of reform initiatives in the country.

4.3.1 Political Interference and Lack of Continuity

Political interference is one of the most significant obstacles to successful public sector reform in Nigeria. Successive administrations often initiate reforms to suit their political agendas rather than to strengthen institutions in the long term. The lack of continuity in reform policies means that many programs are abandoned or altered when new governments assume power. For instance, initiatives such as the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) of the 1980s, SERVICOM in 2004, and the National

Strategy for Public Service Reform (NSPSR) have suffered from inadequate follow-through and inconsistent political commitment. Reform efforts are often politicized, with appointments and decision-making processes driven by patronage rather than merit considerations. This undermines professionalism, weakens administrative autonomy, and distorts the objectives of reform. Political instability erodes institutional memory and creates reform fatigue among civil servants who have witnessed repeated cycles of incomplete or reversed initiatives.

4.3.2 Corruption and Weak Accountability Mechanisms

Corruption is a systemic challenge that hinders public sector reform in Nigeria. The misuse of public funds, lack of transparency, and entrenched patronage networks have created an environment resistant to reforms. The implementation of accountability mechanisms, such as the Treasury Single Account (TSA), Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System (IPPIS), and Government Integrated Financial Management Information System (GIFMIS), has led to some progress, but enforcement remains inconsistent. According to TransparencyInternational (2024), Nigeria ranked 145th out of 180 countries on the Corruption Perceptions Index, indicating persistent challenges in governance and transparency in the country. Corruption not only drains financial resources but also distorts the outcomes of service delivery. Well-designed reforms fail when accountability institutions, such as anti-corruption agencies and audit departments, are either weak or politicized. Corruption perpetuates inefficiency in recruitment, procurement, and budgeting, thereby frustrating the reform process.

4.3.3 Bureaucratic Resistance and Institutional Inertia

Another major challenge to reforming Nigeria's public sector is bureaucratic resistance. The Nigerian civil service is often described as hierarchical, rigid, and resistant to innovation. Many civil servants perceive reforms as threats to their job security or privileges, leading to passive resistance or outright sabotage of the new policies. Reform initiatives, such as performance management systems and service charters, have faced implementation hurdles due to weak change management strategies and the absence of incentives for compliance. Bureaucratic inertia slows policy execution and contributes to inefficiency and duplication of functions across Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs). Successful reform requires an adaptive and learning-oriented bureaucracy, which Nigeria's civil service structure still struggles to achieve.

4.3.4 Inadequate Funding and Resource Constraints

Public sector reforms in Nigeria have also been constrained by inadequate funding. Effective reform implementation requires significant investments in human capacity development, technology, and institutional strengthening. However, fiscal constraints and mismanagement often limit the government's ability to sustain reform programs. Reform projects such as e-governance platforms, digital registries, and service delivery monitoring systems require not only initial funding but also continuous budgetary support for maintenance and training. Unfortunately, most reform initiatives in Nigeria are donor-driven or externally funded, leading to unsustainable outcomes when funding is withdrawn. The absence of internal financing mechanisms often results in the discontinuation or underperformance of critical projects.

4.3.5 Weak Institutional Capacity and Human Resource Challenges

The capacity of public servants to implement reform policies effectively remains a major concern. The Nigerian public service suffers from skills mismatches, inadequate training, and low motivation. The absence of a performance-based reward system discourages employee efficiency and innovation. Moreover, recruitment and promotion processes are frequently influenced by nepotism and political patronage rather than meritocracy. NPM-based restructuring and service delivery reforms failed because they did not adequately address human capital challenges. Without continuous training, digital literacy, and ethical reorientation, reforms cannot be translated into tangible improvements in service delivery or national development.

4.3.6 Poor Monitoring, Evaluation, and Implementation Frameworks

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) are essential for assessing reform performance, but remain weak in Nigeria. One reason most public sector reforms fail in Africa is the absence of measurable indicators and feedback mechanisms. Nigeria's reform efforts often emphasize policy design but neglect the implementation and evaluation phases. Reforms are often implemented without a clear framework for measuring outcomes, leading to a lack of accountability in the implementation process. This has resulted in "reform fatigue," wherein citizens and public servants lose faith in reform processes that fail to deliver tangible results. Strengthening M&E systems through data-driven evaluation, digital dashboards, and participatory feedback can significantly enhance reform outcomes.

4.3.7 Socio-Cultural and Ethical Barriers

Cultural factors, such as nepotism, tribalism, and patron-client relationships, also hinder reform success in Nigeria. Public servants often prioritize ethnic loyalty over professional ethics, leading to inefficiencies and discrimination in service deliveries. Reform efforts must be accompanied by value reorientation campaigns that promote civic responsibility, patriotism, and integrity in public administration. The absence of an ethical foundation within public service weakens reform implementation, as corruption, favoritism, and indiscipline become normalized behaviors. Reforms that ignore the socio-cultural context are less likely to achieve the desired institutional change.

4.4 Way Forward: Overcoming the Barriers to Public Sector Reforms in Nigeria

Addressing the persistent challenges that hinder public sector reforms in Nigeria requires a holistic, multidimensional approach anchored on good governance principles, institutional strengthening, digital innovation, and ethical transformation. The following strategies present a practical roadmap for achieving sustainable reform outcomes and enhancing service delivery for national development.

4.4.1 Strengthening Political Will and Ensuring Policy Continuity

A critical determinant of reform success is consistent political commitment across all administrations. Successive governments should prioritize policy continuity by institutionalizing reforms within legal and constitutional frameworks, rather than treating them as temporary political projects. Embedding reforms in statutory instruments and administrative codes ensures sustainability and protects them from political disruptions. Political leadership must also demonstrate a genuine commitment to accountability and transparency, setting the tone for results-oriented public administration. Reform thrives in an environment where leadership is visionary, ethical, and reform minded.

4.4.2 Institutionalizing Accountability and Anti-Corruption Mechanisms

Corruption undermines the effectiveness of reforms and erodes public trust. Therefore, strengthening accountability frameworks is central to the success of reforms. This can be achieved by empowering oversight institutions, such as the Office of the Auditor-General, Code of Conduct Bureau, and anti-corruption agencies, to function independently and transparently. The introduction of digital financial management systems, such as the Treasury Single Account (TSA), Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System (IPPIS), and Government Integrated Financial Management Information System (GIFMIS), should be scaled up and harmonized across all MDAs to prevent leakages. Moreover, citizen-led monitoring through platforms such as the Open Government Partnership (OGP) fosters participatory accountability and improves transparency in resource utilization.

4.4.3 Enhancing Institutional Capacity and Human Resource Development

Building a professional and skilled civil service is fundamental to sustainable reform. Public sector workers must be adequately trained in leadership, digital literacy, and performance management to effectively implement policy reforms. Continuous professional development, reactivation of Public Service Institutes, and partnerships with universities and international organizations to strengthen capacity. Furthermore, adopting a merit-based recruitment and promotion system can improve morale, attract talent, and reduce nepotism in the public sector. Reforms succeed when human resource management aligns with meritocracy, ethics, and performance incentives.

4.4.4 Embracing Digital Transformation and E-Governance

Digital transformation is a key driver of efficient service delivery and administrative transparency in the public sector. The integration of e-governance platforms can minimize human discretion in administrative processes, thereby reducing corruption and bureaucratic delays. Digitalization enhances accountability, enables data-driven decision-making, and widens citizen access to government services. Nigeria should invest in expanding ICT infrastructure, promoting data interoperability among MDAs, and strengthening cyber resilience to support the digital reform. Initiatives such as online service portals, e-tax systems, and electronic procurement can simplify interactions between the government and citizens, fostering a culture of transparency and responsiveness.

4.4.5 Improving Monitoring, Evaluation, and Performance Management

The lack of robust Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) mechanisms has historically hindered reform success in Nigeria. A functional M&E framework anchored on data collection, performance indicators, and feedback loops is essential for measuring reform outcomes and ensuring accountability. Reforms should integrate measurable targets, clear timeframes, and transparent reporting systems. The Nigerian government can adopt Result-Based Management (RBM) and Performance Contracting models to track performance in real time and reward efficiency. Such systems can transform the culture of public service from process orientation to outcome orientation.

4.4.6 Fostering Ethical Reorientation and Public Sector Values

Reforms cannot succeed without a strong, ethical foundation. The Nigerian public service must undergo value-based transformation that promotes integrity, professionalism, and civic responsibility. They should undergo moral rearmament through public ethics training, leadership integrity programs, and anti-corruption education. Promoting an ethical culture should also involve enforcing a Public Service Code of Conduct, coupled with transparent disciplinary mechanisms for misconduct. Encouraging whistle-blowing and protecting informants can deter unethical behavior and promote a culture of integrity.

4.4.7 Promoting Citizen Engagement and Participatory Governance

Citizen participation is essential for making reforms people-centered and accountable. Engaging civil society organizations, academia, and the private sector in reform planning and evaluation fosters inclusivity and enhances legitimacy. Platforms such as town hall meetings, digital feedback portals, and open data initiatives can bridge the gap between citizens and policymakers and improve responsiveness and trust. Participatory governance ensures that reforms address real social needs and enhance the outcomes of human development.

4.4.8 Adequate Funding and Partnership for Reform Sustainability

Sustainable reforms require stable financial backing. The government should allocate dedicated budget lines for reform programs and ensure the transparent utilization of donor funds. Strategic partnerships with international development agencies, private sector actors, and civil society organizations can provide both technical and financial support for implementing reforms. Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) can also enhance efficiency in infrastructure delivery, technology deployment, and service innovation, thereby easing the fiscal burden on the government while ensuring quality outcomes.

4.4.9 Legislative and Policy Reforms

To guarantee the longevity and effectiveness of reform initiatives, legislative backing for key policies and administrative changes is required. Enacting reform-related laws, such as those mandating open budgeting, procurement transparency, and performance audits, institutionalizes accountability practices. Parliamentary oversight committees should also be strengthened to monitor executive compliance with reform goals and ensure that reform implementation aligns with national development plans, such as the National Development Plan (2021–2025) and Vision 2050.

4.5 Results from Hypotheses Examination

4.5.1 $H_{01:}$ There is No Significant Impact of Public Sector Initiatives on National Development

The findings reveal a substantively significant relationship between public sector reform initiatives and national development indicators. Evidence from service delivery outcomes, institutional performance measures, and human development indicators shows that reform initiatives have positively contributed to improvements in access to public services, administrative efficiency, and socioeconomic outcomes.

Consequently, the null hypothesis is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is accepted, indicating that public sector reform initiatives significantly impact national development.

4.5.2 H_{o2}: Institutional and Governance Challenges Do Not Impede Reform Success or Service Delivery

The results demonstrate that institutional and governance challenges significantly affect the success of reform initiatives and the quality-of-service delivery. Factors such as weak institutional capacity, corruption, political interference, inadequate funding, and poor accountability mechanisms were found to have negative and statistically significant influences on reform implementation and service delivery outcomes. Based on this evidence, the null hypothesis is rejected, confirming that institutional and governance challenges constitute major impediments to successful reform and effective service delivery. The rejection of both null hypotheses suggests that public sector reform initiatives in Nigeria are not neutral in their effects. However, when effectively implemented, reforms contribute meaningfully to national development. However, the results also indicate that the presence of institutional and governance constraints can substantially weaken or undermine reform outcomes, thereby limiting improvements in service delivery and in human development.

5. Conclusions

5.1 Conclusion

To achieve sustainable national development, Nigeria's public sector must transform into a citizen-centered, performance-driven, and digitally enabled institution. Reforms should be continuous rather than sporadic, adaptable rather than rigid, and inclusive rather than exclusive. Genuine commitment, ethical governance, and institutional integrity are essential for public sector reforms to improve service delivery, reduce poverty, and ensure long-term national progress. The success of these reforms relies on building resilient institutions that are accountable, transparent, and responsive to the needs of the people of the country. When effectively implemented, such reforms can be a powerful catalyst for broader goals, including sustainable development, good governance, and socioeconomic transformation in Nigeria.

5.2 Research Limitation

This study addresses this critical gap by using New Public Management theory to assess how managerial and accountability reforms impact the performance of service delivery. It explores institutional and governance barriers and offers policy recommendations aimed at strengthening Nigeria's public sector to ensure effective and sustainable service delivery.

5.3 Suggestions and Directions for Future Research

This study provides an academic foundation for future research by identifying gaps in Nigeria’s reform implementation process and suggesting areas for further empirical investigation, particularly in digital governance, public accountability systems, and citizen engagement mechanisms.

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