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MEASURING ADMINISTRATIVE SKILLS IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION IN CROSS RIVER STATE

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Abstract

Effective local government administration is pivotal for grassroots development, yet administrative skills deficits often undermine service delivery in Nigeria. This study measures administrative skills among local government personnel in Cross River State, Nigeria, focusing on leadership, communication, financial management, and ICT proficiency. Employing a descriptive survey design, data were collected through the Administrative Skills Assessment Questionnaire (ASAQ) from 250 local government employees across five local government areas (LGAs) in Cross River State. The sample comprised administrators, clerks, and technical staff, with 60% male and 40% female participants. Findings reveal that 68% of respondents demonstrated moderate leadership skills, while only 45% were proficient in ICT. Financial management skills were notably weak, with 55% scoring below average due to limited training. Key barriers include inadequate professional development (78%) and resource constraints (65%). Rural LGAs reported lower skill levels compared to urban areas ($t = 3.87$, $p < 0.05$). The study underscores the need for targeted capacity-building programs to enhance administrative efficiency. Recommendations include regular training workshops, ICT integration, and partnerships with educational institutions to bolster skills. By addressing these gaps, local governments in Cross River State can improve governance and service delivery, fostering sustainable development.

Keywords: Administrative Skills, Local Government, Leadership, ICT proficiency, Capacity Building

Introduction

Local government administration serves as the bedrock of grassroots governance, bridging the gap between citizens and higher tiers of government. In Nigeria, local governments are constitutionally mandated to deliver essential services such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999). However, inefficiencies in administrative skills often hamper effective service delivery, particularly in resource-constrained regions like Cross River State (Odey & Effiom, 2023). Administrative skills encompassing leadership, communication, financial management, and information and communication technology (ICT) proficiency are critical for ensuring efficient governance and responsiveness to community needs (Akindele & Adeyemo, 2012).

The importance of administrative skills in local governance cannot be overstated. Leadership skills enable administrators to inspire and coordinate teams, while effective communication fosters stakeholder engagement (Yukl, 2013). Financial management ensures prudent resource allocation, a critical factor in Nigeria's local governments, where mismanagement is a persistent challenge (Olowu & Wunsch, 2004). Meanwhile, ICT proficiency is increasingly vital in the digital age, enabling data-driven decision-making and service automation (Adeyemo, 2011). In Cross River State, these skills are often underdeveloped due to limited training opportunities and infrastructural deficits (Effiom & Ubi, 2021).

Recent studies highlight the global shift toward competency-based governance. For instance, Noordegraaf (2015) emphasizes that modern public administration demands versatile skill sets to navigate complex socio-economic challenges. In Nigeria, however, local government personnel often lack access to professional development, with only 20% receiving regular training (Akindele & Adeyemo, 2012). This gap is particularly pronounced in Cross River State, where rural LGAs face additional challenges like poor internet connectivity and inadequate funding (Odey & Effiom, 2023).

The literature underscores several barriers to administrative skill development. Olowu and Wunsch (2004) note that bureaucratic inefficiencies and political interference hinder capacity building. Similarly, Egbe and Egbe (2019) found that low ICT adoption in Cross River State's LGAs limits administrative efficiency. Conversely, successful interventions in other regions, such as Lagos State's e-governance initiatives, demonstrate that targeted training and technology integration can enhance administrative performance (Adeyemo, 2011). These findings suggest that measuring and addressing skill gaps in Cross River State could unlock significant improvements in local governance.

This study aims to assess the administrative skills of local government personnel in Cross River State, identifying strengths, weaknesses, and barriers to effective administration. By combining quantitative data with qualitative insights, the research provides a comprehensive analysis of skill levels and proposes strategies to enhance administrative capacity, contributing to improved governance and sustainable development.

Literature Review

Administrative skills are the cornerstone of effective public administration, enabling local governments to fulfill their mandates efficiently. Leadership skills, as defined by Yukl (2013), involve strategic vision, decision-making, and team motivation, all of which are essential for coordinating community development projects. Communication skills facilitate stakeholder engagement, ensuring transparency and accountability (Grunig, 2013). Financial management skills are critical for budgeting and resource allocation, particularly in Nigeria, where fiscal mismanagement is a recurring issue (Olowu & Wunsch, 2004). ICT proficiency, meanwhile, is increasingly vital for modern governance, enabling automation and data management (Heeks, 2006).

Global Perspectives on Administrative Skills

Globally, administrative skills are recognized as critical for public sector performance. Noordegraaf (2015) argues that public administrators must possess hybrid skills to address complex governance challenges. For example, Singapore's public sector training programs emphasize leadership and ICT skills, resulting in a 30% increase in administrative efficiency (Tan & Low, 2017). Similarly, the United Kingdom's Civil Service Competency Framework prioritizes digital literacy, leading to improved service delivery (Cabinet Office, 2019).

Challenges in Nigerian Local Government Administration

In Nigeria, local government administration faces significant challenges. Akindele and Adeyemo (2012) highlight that inadequate training and political interference undermine administrative capacity. In Cross River State, Egbe and Egbe (2019) found that only 15% of local government staff are proficient in ICT, limiting their ability to leverage e-governance tools. Financial management is another weak area, with 60% of LGAs reporting budget mismanagement due to skill deficits (Odey & Effiom, 2023). Rural LGAs are particularly disadvantaged, with limited access to training and technology (Effiom & Ubi, 2021).

Opportunities for Skill Development

Despite these challenges, opportunities exist to enhance administrative skills. Adeyemo (2011) notes that Lagos State's e-governance initiatives, which include ICT training and digital platforms, have improved administrative efficiency by 25%. Similarly, open-source tools and mobile-based training programs can address resource constraints in rural areas (Heeks, 2006). The Nigerian government's Public Service Reform Programme (2017) advocates for capacity building, but implementation remains inconsistent (Federal Ministry of Budget and National Planning, 2017).

This study builds on these insights, measuring administrative skills in Cross River State and identifying strategies to address gaps. By focusing on leadership, communication, financial management, and ICT proficiency, the research provides a holistic assessment of administrative capacity in local governance.

Theoretical Background

The study on harnessing advanced software technologies to enhance scientific literacy and exposure in post-primary education in Cross River State, Nigeria, is anchored in Constructivist Learning Theory. This theory, rooted in the works of Piaget (1970) and Vygotsky (1978), posits that learning is an active, constructive process where learners build knowledge by integrating new information with existing experiences. In the context of scientific literacy, constructivism emphasizes student-centered, interactive learning environments that foster critical thinking and problem-solving through tools like advanced software technologies (e.g., virtual labs and e-learning platforms) (Jonassen, 1999). This framework is apt for this study, as it supports the use of technology to create engaging, inquiry-based learning experiences that enhance students' understanding of scientific concepts in resource-constrained settings like Cross River State.

Major Assumptions of Constructivist Learning Theory

- Active Learning: Learners construct knowledge through active engagement rather than passive reception (Piaget, 1970).
- Prior Knowledge Integration: New knowledge is built upon learners' existing experiences and understanding (Vygotsky, 1978).
- Social Interaction: Learning is enhanced through collaboration and interaction with peers and tools (Vygotsky, 1978).
- Contextual Learning: Knowledge construction is most effective in authentic, real-world contexts (Jonassen, 1999).

- Scaffolded Learning: Teachers and tools provide temporary support to guide learners toward independent understanding (Bruner, 1986).
- Metacognition: Learners develop self-awareness of their learning processes, enhancing problem-solving skills (Duffy & Jonassen, 1992).

Application to the Study

- Active Learning: The study explores how software technologies, such as PhET simulations, engage students in hands-on virtual experiments, aligning with the assumption that active participation enhances scientific literacy (Piaget, 1970).
- Prior Knowledge Integration: By using software that allows students to explore familiar scientific concepts interactively, the study ensures new knowledge builds on existing understanding, as seen in the enthusiasm for simulations (Vygotsky, 1978).
- Social Interaction: E-learning platforms like Google Classroom facilitate collaborative learning, supporting peer discussions and group projects, which enhance scientific understanding (Vygotsky, 1978).
- Contextual Learning: Virtual labs simulate real-world scientific scenarios, making learning relevant to students' environments despite limited physical resources in Cross River State (Jonassen, 1999).
- Scaffolded Learning: Software tools provide guided activities (e.g., step-by-step simulations), acting as scaffolds to support students' progression toward complex scientific concepts, aligning with Bruner's (1986) scaffolding concept.
- Metacognition: The study's findings suggest that interactive software encourages students to reflect on their learning, fostering critical thinking and problem-solving skills essential for scientific literacy (Duffy & Jonassen, 1992).

Constructivist Learning Theory provides a robust framework for understanding how advanced software technologies can transform science education, promoting active, contextual, and collaborative learning to enhance scientific literacy in Cross River State's post-primary schools.

Methodology

Research Design

A descriptive survey design was employed to measure administrative skills among local government personnel in Cross River State. This design was chosen for its ability to capture both quantitative and qualitative data on skill levels and barriers.

Population and Sample

The population included all administrative and technical staff in the 18 LGAs of Cross River State. Using a multi-stage sampling technique, five LGAs (Calabar Municipal, Calabar South, Akpabuyo, Odukpani, and Yakurr) were randomly selected. From each LGA, 50 employees (administrators, clerks, and technical staff) were purposively sampled, resulting in a total of 250 participants. The demographic profile is presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Demographic Profile of Participants

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	150	60.0
	Female	100	40.0
Age	25–35 years	90	36.0
	36–45 years	110	44.0
	>45 years	50	20.0
LGA Location	Urban	150	60.0
	Rural	100	40.0
Job Role	Administrators	80	32.0
	Clerks	120	48.0
	Technical Staff	50	20.0

Data Collection

Primary data were collected using the Administrative Skills Assessment Questionnaire (ASAQ), developed based on Yukl's (2013) leadership framework and Heeks' (2006) ICT competency model. The ASAQ comprised four sections: (a) leadership skills, (b) communication skills, (c) financial management skills, and (d) ICT proficiency. Each section used a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Very Poor, 5 = Excellent). Open-ended questions explored barriers to skill development. The instrument's reliability was confirmed with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.85. Data collection occurred in April 2025, with ethical approval from the Cross River State Local Government Service Commission.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, and means) and t-tests to compare urban and rural LGAs. Qualitative responses were thematically analyzed to identify key barriers and opportunities. Data were processed using SPSS version 26.

Results

Administrative Skill Levels

Leadership skills were moderate, with 68% of participants scoring 3 or above (M = 3.2, SD = 0.78). Communication skills were slightly stronger (M = 3.5, SD = 0.65), with 70% demonstrating effective stakeholder engagement. Financial management skills were weaker, with 55% scoring below average (M = 2.8, SD = 0.82). ICT proficiency was the weakest area, with only 45% scoring 3 or above (M = 2.6, SD = 0.90).

Table 2
Administrative Skill Levels

Skill Area	Mean Score	SD	Percentage Scoring ≥3 (%)
Leadership	3.2	0.78	68
Communication	3.5	0.65	70
Financial Management	2.8	0.82	45
ICT Proficiency	2.6	0.90	45

Urban vs. Rural Differences

Urban LGAs (Calabar Municipal, Calabar South) reported higher skill levels (M = 3.4, SD = 0.70) compared to rural LGAs (Akpabuyo, Odukpani, Yakurr) (M = 2.9, SD = 0.85) ($t = 3.87$, $p < 0.05$). ICT proficiency showed the largest disparity, with urban areas scoring 30% higher.

Barriers to Skill Development

The most significant barriers were inadequate training (78%), resource constraints (65%), and limited ICT infrastructure (60%). Rural LGAs reported higher barriers, with 85% citing lack of training compared to 70% in urban areas ($t = 4.12$, $p < 0.01$).

Table 3
Barriers to Skill Development

Barrier	Total (%)	Urban (%)	Rural (%)
Inadequate Training	78	70	85

Resource Constraints	65	60	70
Limited ICT Infrastructure	60	50	75

Qualitative Findings

Thematic analysis identified three key themes: (1) need for continuous professional development, (2) infrastructural deficits, particularly in rural areas, and (3) demand for ICT training. Participants noted, "We need regular workshops to learn new skills," and "Without computers or internet, we can't improve our work."

Discussion

The results highlight moderate administrative skills among local government personnel in Cross River State, with significant weaknesses in financial management and ICT proficiency. These findings align with Olowu and Wunsch (2004), who note that skill deficits undermine local governance in Nigeria. The urban-rural disparity ($t = 3.87$, $p < 0.05$) reflects broader infrastructural inequalities, as reported by Effiom and Ubi (2021). The low ICT proficiency (45%) is particularly concerning, given the global shift toward digital governance (Heeks, 2006).

Inadequate training emerged as the primary barrier, corroborating Akindele and Adeyemo (2012). Rural LGAs face additional challenges, with limited access to technology and training exacerbating skill gaps. However, successful models like Lagos State's e-governance initiatives suggest that targeted interventions can yield significant improvements (Adeyemo, 2011). The enthusiasm for training expressed in qualitative responses indicates a willingness to embrace capacity-building initiatives, a critical factor for success (Noordegraaf, 2015).

Conclusion

This study reveals that administrative skills in Cross River State's local government administration are moderately developed, with significant gaps in financial management and ICT proficiency. These deficits, compounded by inadequate training and resource constraints, hinder effective governance. Rural LGAs are particularly disadvantaged, underscoring the need for targeted interventions. By investing in capacity building and infrastructure, Cross River State can enhance administrative efficiency, improving service delivery and fostering sustainable development.

Recommendations

- Capacity-Building Programs: Implement regular training workshops focusing on financial management and ICT skills.
- ICT Infrastructure Investment: Prioritize funding for computers, internet connectivity, and e-governance platforms, especially in rural LGAs.
- Partnerships with Educational Institutions: Collaborate with universities to provide tailored training programs for local government staff.

- Policy Reforms: Strengthen the implementation of the Public Service Reform Programme to ensure consistent skill development.
- Mentorship Programs: Establish mentorship initiatives to foster leadership skills among junior administrators.

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