Winning the War Against Corruption in the Public Sector: The Pivotal Role of Office Administrators in Anambra State, Nigeria

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Abstract
The study examined the crucial role of office administrators in combating corruption in the public sector. Three research questions were answered. A descriptive survey research design was adopted in carrying out the study. The population for the study was 226 employees in the public sector, which includes 130 employees and 96 administrators from selected public sector in Anambra State. The instrument for data collection was a 29-item structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was face validated by two experts from the Department of Business Administration and one from Office Management Education, all at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The reliability of the instrument was ascertained by trial testing; 15 copies of the questionnaire were administered to fifteen business administrators from Abia State. Data collected from the trial testing were analyzed using the Cronbach Alpha reliability technique, which yielded reliability coefficients of 0.77, 0.78, and 0.80 lusters respectively. The instrument was designed to elicit the ratings of respondents on a 4-point rating scale as follows: Strong Agree (SA)-4-point, Agree (A) 3-point, Disagree (D)-2 point and Strongly Disagree (SD) 1 1-point. Data was collected using a personal contact approach with the help of 10 research assistants. Out of the 226 copies of the questionnaire administered to 226 Business Administrators, 215 were completed and returned, indicating a 95.1% return rate. The data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer the three research questions, noted as significant and insignificant. Based on the findings, the study, among others, suggested that administrators must demonstrate a strong commitment to integrity and transparency, setting the tone for their organization, thereby leading by example as regards combating corruption.

Keywords: Corruption, public sector, office administrators, culture of transparency, integrity

Introduction

Corruption in the public sector is a pressing concern globally. Office administrators, with the oversight of administrative tasks in their organizations, are strategically positioned to identify and prevent corrupt practices. Corruption in the public sector is a pervasive and insidious threat to good governance, economic development, and social justices (Gupta, Davoodi, & Tiongson, 2020). It undermines trust in institutions, distorts markets, and deprives citizens of essential services. The consequences of corruption are far-reaching, with the World Bank (2018), estimating that it costs developing countries up to $1 trillion annually. According to the World Bank, corruption is deviation from the formal duties of a public role because of private or personal gain. It may be as a result of familiarity, or fear of intimidation. Corruption is any act of dishonesty, wicked and ill ambition against established norms of public and private sector. Corruption involves uncultured behaviour such as bribery, nepotism, embezzlement, racketeering, and use of sweet words to gain illegal judgment from judicial authorities (Benson & Simpson 2016, Hasnas 2015,: Okogbule 2017. Ordinarily, the expectation is that good office administrators should not be involved in any illegal activities both in private and public sectors.

Office administrators play a crucial role in preventing and combating corruption in public sector organizations (Lynn, 2018). They are responsible for managing day-to-day operations, overseeing administrative tasks, and ensuring compliance with extant organizational regulations and policies. Office administrators are uniquely positioned to identify and address corrupt practices, such as embezzlement, nepotism, and bribery according Farazmand (2017). It appears sometimes the importance of office administrators is often overlooked in ant-corruption efforts, which tend to focus on high-level officials and politicians. However, it is the office administrators who can make a significant difference in the fight against corruption. This can be done through examination of the roles or responsibilities of the office administrators thereby minimizing if not preventing the rate of corruption in the offices.

Rosenbloom (2018) argued that office administrators establish and maintain effective internal control, such as proper and prudent financial management system to prevent and detect corruption, monitor transactions, activities, and behavior of their staff and as such report suspicious or corrupt activities to relevant authorities in the effort at winning the war against corruption in the public sector. Office administrators can provide training and awareness programs for staff on anti-corruption policies, procures and best practice. The administrators are to promote a culture of transparency, accountability, and integrity among others within their organizations (Hasana, 2015, Okogbule 2017). Moreover, administrators are uniquely positioned to identify and address corruption practices according to Rainey (2014). They are the first line of defense against corruption, and their actions can either prevent or perpetuate corrupt practices. Despite their importance, office administrators are often overlooked in anti-corruption efforts, which focus on different levels of officials and top politicians.

Office administrators according to Colvard (2018), are professionals who manage and implement policies, programmes, and services in government agencies, non-profit organizations, public or private sector companies that work with government. Colvard states that the goal of public administrators is to serve the public interest and improve the quality of life of citizens and as such manage limited resources and make decisions that are fair, transparent, and accountable. Jay and Albert (2017), emphasize that office administrators are involved in the public sector, oversee federal, state, and local agencies to produce and enforce public policies, and coordinate public programmes. They direct the efforts of public employees to manage the operations for governmental agencies, public sector organizations and nonprofits.

The persistence of corruption in the public sector is a pressing problem that requires urgent attention and effective solution. The current approaches, though well-intentioned, have yielded limited success, and corruption keeps thriving. There is a need for a more comprehensive and strategic approach that addresses public officers' conduct and promotes a culture of integrity and transparency. By understanding the complexities of corruption and developing effective countermeasures, we can win the war against corruption and build a more and equitable society. Hence this study is undertaking to determine the pivotal role of office administrators in combing corruption in the public sector.

Purpose of the study

The study explored the role of Office administrators in winning the war against corruption in the public sector. Specifically, the study sought to identify the:

1. Role office administrators can play in preventing corruption in the public sector.
2. Challenges office administrators face in addressing corruption in the public sector.
3. Strategies office administrators can employ to effectively prevent and address corruption in the public sector.

Research Questions

The following research questions were answered in line with the specific purposes:

1. What roles can office administrators play in preventing corruption in the public sector?
2. What challenges do office administrators face in addressing corruption in the public sector?
3. What strategies can office administrators employ to effectively prevent and address corruption in the public sector?

Method

The study explored the pivotal roles of office administrators in winning the war against corruption in some selected public sector in Anambra State, Nigeria. Three research questions were developed and answered by the study while two hypotheses were tested. Descriptive survey research design was adopted for carrying out the study. Descriptive survey, according Mill (2021), is a primary method of data collection which consists of a set of structured questions where each question is designed to obtain a specific piece of information because the opinion of employees and administrators were sought as to the strategies for exploring the pivotal role of office administrators in winning the war against corruption in the public sector. The population for the study was 226 personnel from different public sector organizations, 130 employees and 96 administrators all in Anambra State. The instrument for data collection was a 29-item structured questionnaire generated from research questions and reviewed related literature. The

questionnaire was divided into two sections. Section A sought the demographic data of the respondent while section B consisted of questions designed to extract needed information from respondents. The reliability of the instrument was ascertained by trial testing, 15 copies of the questionnaire were administered, 10 to employees and 5 to administrator. Data collected from the trial testing were analyzed using Cronbach Alpha reliability technique which yielded reliability coefficients of 0.77 for cluster one, 0.78 for cluster two, and 0.80 for cluster three. The questionnaire was face validated by two experts from Faculty of Social Science (Business Administration) and one from Office Management Education all in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, were used for the face validation exercise. The instrument was designed to elicit the ratings of respondents on 4-point rating scale as following: Strongly Agree (SA), 4-point, Agree (A), 3-point , Disagree (D), 2 point and strongly Disagree (SD), 1 –point. Data was collected using a personal contact approach with the help of 10 research assistants. Out of the 226 copies of questionnaires administered to the office administrators, 215 were completed and returned, indicating 95.1% return rate. The data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation for answering the two research questions. Any item with a mean cut-off point of items with mean values of 2.50 and above were interpreted as significant while items with mean values below 2.50 were interpreted as insignificant.

Results

Research Question 1

What role do office administrators play in preventing corruption in the public sector?

Table 1: Roles of office administrators in preventing corruption in the public sector **(n = 215)**

SN	Roles of office administrators	$\bar{x}$	SD	Rmks
1	Enforcing internal controls and procedures	3.02	1.44	**Significant**
2	Maintaining accurate and transparent financial records	2.56	1026	**Significant**
3	Conducting regular audits and risk assessments	2.80	.883.	**Significant**
4	Managing and monitoring conflicts of interest	2.69.	.914	**Significant**
5	Providing training and awareness programs on anti-corruption policies	2.74	.961	**Significant**
6	Providing training and awareness programs on anti-corruption policies	2.92	.725	**Significant**
7	Develop and maintain anti-corruption policies and procedures	2.69	.742	**Significant**
8	Conduct background checks and due diligence on employees and contractors	2.69	.745	**Significant**
9	Continuously review and improve anti-corruption measure	2.80	.897	**Signific**

10	Identify and mitigate corruption risks in business processes.	2.84	.789	**ant signific ant**
	Grand Mean	**2.77**	**0.91**	**Signific ant**

Note: $\bar{x}$ *= Mean, SD = Standard Deviation, SIGNI = SIGNIFICANT; INSIGNI = INSIGNIFICANT.*

From the data presented in table 1 above, it was revealed that the mean ratings of the responses of the respondents on items 1, 2 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10 are 3.02, 2.56, 2.80, 2.69, 2.74, 2.92, 2.69, 2.68, 2.80, and 2.84, respectively which are above the cut-off point value of 2.50 on 4-point rating scale. This indicates that the ten items of role office administrator's play in preventing corruption in the public sector are significant. The standard deviation values of the 10 items in the table ranged from .725 to 1.23 which indicated that the responses of the respondents were close to the mean and one another.

Research Question Two

What challenges do office administrators face in addressing corruption in the public sectors?

Table 2: Challenges office administrators face in addressing corruption in the public sectors? **(n = 215)**

SN	Challenges	$\bar{x}$	SD	Rmks
11.	Lack of clear policies and procedures	2.93	0.944	**Signific ant**
12	Insufficient training and resources	2.69	.859	**Signific ant**
13.	Fear of retaliation	2.82	.884	**Signific ant**
14.	Pressure from superior to ignore corruption	2.75	.918	**Signific ant**
15.	Inadequate whistleblower protection	2.83	.826	**Signific ant**
16.	Difficulty in measuring effectiveness of anti-corruption efforts	2.58	.866	**Signific ant**
17.	Managing the emotional impact of addressing corruption	2.71	.821	**Signific ant**
18.	Resistance from corrupt individuals	2.72	.821	**Signific ant**
19.	Limited access to information	2.72	.818	**Signific ant**
	Grand Mean	**2.75**	**0.86**	**Signific ant**

Note: $\bar{x}$ *= Mean, SD = Standard Deviation, SIGNI = SIGNIFICANT; I = INSIGNIFICANT.*

The data presented in table 2 above showed that the mean ratings of the responses of the respondents on items 11,12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18 and 19 are 2.93, 2.69, 2.82, 2.83, 2.58, 2.71, 2.72 and 2.72 respectively above the cut-off point of 2.50 on 4-point rating scale. This shows that the item represents some challenges office administrators face in addressing corruption in the public sector. The standard deviation values of the 9 items in the table ranged from 0.73 to 0.99 which indicated that the responses of the respondents were close to the mean and one another.

Research Question Three

What strategies can office administrators employ to effectively prevent and address corruption in the public sector?

Table 3: Strategies office administrators can employ to effectively prevent and address corruption in the public sector **(n = 215)**

20	Lead by example and demonstrate a commitment to anti-corruption efforts	2.62	.924	**significant**
21	Ensure that anti-corruption policies are communicated to all staff	2.53	.729	**Significant**
22	Provide regular updates and progress reports on anti-corruption effort	2.67	.785	**Significant**
23	Ensure staff participation in anti-corruption efforts	2.67	.736	**Significant**
24	Implement a system for monitoring employee expenses	2.74	.813	**Significant**
25	Establish a clear process for handling whistleblower reports	2.60	.896	**Significant**
26	Establish a corruption reporting hotline	2.71	.832	**Significant**
27	Implement a system for tracking corruption trends and patterns	2.68	.721	**Significant**
28	Collaborate with law enforcement	2.93	.944	**Significant**
29	Continuously review and update anti-corruption policies to ensure they remain effective	2.69	.859	**Significant**
	Grand Mean	**2.68**	**0.82**	**Significant**

Note: $\bar{x}$ ***= Mean, SD = Standard Deviation, SIGNI = SIGNIFICANT; INSIGNIFICANT***

The data presented in table 3 above showed that the mean ratings of the responses of the respondents on items 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28 and 29 are 2.62, 2.53,2.67,2.67, 2.74, 2.60, 2.71, 2.68, 2.93, and 2.89 respectively were above the cut-off point of 2.50 on 4-point rating scale. This shows that the item represents some of the strategies office administrators can employ to effectively prevent and address corruption in the public sector if given the opportunities. **T**he standard deviation values of the 10 items in the table ranged from 0.721 to .924 which indicated that the responses of the respondents were close to the mean and one another.

Discussion of Findings

The first research question showed some of the roles office administrators can play in preventing corruption in the public sector. This is in line with Farazmand (2017), who emphasizes that office administrators' roles in reducing corrupt practices to include overseeing administrative tasks, and ensuring compliance with regulations and policies, enforcing internal control and procedures, maintaining accurate and transparent financial records, conducting regular audits, risks assessments, managing and monitoring ethically consistent organizational behavior.

The second question revealed some challenges office administrators face in addressing corruption in the public sectors. This agrees with Khan (2018), who highlights that office administrators play a crucial role in preventing and detecting corruption, but they often lack necessary training, support, and resources to do perform their work effectively. According to Igbuzor (2005), corruption can have far–reaching consequences for organization, including reputational damage, financial losses, and legal liability.

The third research question revealed some strategies office administrators can employ to effectively prevent and address corruption in the public sector. These include administrators leading by example and demonstrating a commitment to anti-corruption efforts, ensuring that anti-corruption policies are communicated to all staff, provide regular updates and progress reports on anti-corruption according to rules and regulations.

Conclusion

The fight against corruption in the public sector is a long-term battle that requires perseverance, commitment, innovation, and collaboration of office administrators, as well as the transformation of public institutions, including behavioral adjustments on the parts of citizens. We must entrench a culture of transparency, accountability, and integrity, where corruption is unacceptable and whistleblowers are supported and protected. By investing in capacity-building, strengthening oversight mechanisms, and enforcing robust sanctions against corrupt administrators, we can create a corrupt free public sector so long as office administrators are involved in combating corruption through leading by example. This in turn will unlock sustainable development, social justice, and human prosperity, ensuring a brighter future for upcoming administrators.

Recommendations

1. Administrators must demonstrate a strong commitment to integrity and transparency, setting the tone for their organization.
2. Employers should engage staff in decision making process, solicit feedback, and encourage reporting corrupt practices whenever it is discovered.
3. Administrators should be involved in combating corruption in the public sector. Since they are experts in the field of administration, they should at regular intervals provide regular training and capacity-building programs for employees on anti-corruption measures, ethics and integrity.

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