
Research

Recruitment Techniques in Akwa Ibom State Civil Service: A Reflection of Charles Linblom's Incremental Model

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Abstract: This study examined Charles Lindblom's Incremental Model and its application in the recruitment process in the Akwa Ibom State Civil Service. The study was inspired by a desire to understand whether recruitment policies and practices take place through gradual adjustments rather than comprehensive reforms, using the Incremental Model by Charles E. Lindblom as the theoretical framework. The study adopted a descriptive research design. Data were obtained from both primary and secondary sources, while descriptive statistical tools such as frequency distribution and percentages were used for analysis. The study revealed that the recruitment process in the Akwa Ibom State Civil Service is largely incremental in nature, characterized by step-by-step policy adjustments, continuity of existing procedures, and gradual adoption of innovations such as merit-based screening and digital recruitment systems. Findings further showed that despite incremental reforms, recruitment practices are still affected by challenges such as political interference, nepotism, bureaucratic delays, and weak institutional enforcement mechanisms. The study also established that while incremental changes improve efficiency and transparency to some extent, they are insufficient to address deep-rooted structural problems in the recruitment system. The study concluded that incremental decision-making remains a dominant and practical approach in the recruitment process within the civil service due to administrative constraints and political realities. However, it is recommended that incremental reforms should be complemented with comprehensive institutional reforms to achieve a more transparent, efficient, and merit-based recruitment system

Keywords: Charles Linblom, Incremental Model, Recruitment Techniques, Akwa Ibom State Civil Service.

INTRODUCTION

It has become a universal acceptance that public policy towards rendering certain services for the people takes different forms based on the need for its implementation, to this, the formulation, implementation, and evaluation forms take different strategies (Eyo, et al., 2025). Again, Charles E. Lindblom, a famous scholar in Public Administration and political science, introduced the Incremental Model of decision-making in his seminal 1959 article titled “The Science of Muddling Through.” In this work, he challenged the dominant rational-comprehensive model, which assumes that decision-makers are capable of identifying all possible alternatives, evaluating their consequences, and selecting the most optimal solution. Lindblom argued that such an idealized model is unrealistic in real-world administrative settings, particularly within government institutions where difficulty, uncertainty, and controls are prevalent. The proposed incrementalism as a more applicable and descriptive approach to understanding how decisions are actually made (Ibrahim, 2024).

The Incremental Model states that policymakers and administrators typically make decisions through successive limited comparisons. This means, they consider only a narrow range of alternatives that differ marginally from existing policies. Rather than engaging in comprehensive analysis, decision-makers focus on immediate problems and adopt solutions that involve small adjustments to the status quo. This approach is shaped by several constraints, including limited access to information, inadequate time for thorough analysis, scarcity of resources, and the influence of political and institutional pressures. As a result, public policies and administrative practices tend to evolve gradually over time rather than through radical or sweeping reforms (Schulz, et al., 2008).

Within the framework of public administration, incrementalism reflects the realities of bureaucratic behavior and governance. Government institutions are often characterized by established routines, legal frameworks, and organizational cultures that resist abrupt change. Therefore, administrators prefer incremental adjustments because they are less disruptive, more feasible to implement, and more likely to gain acceptance among stakeholders. Lindblom’s model also emphasizes the role of negotiation and compromise in decision-making, as policies are often the product of interactions among various actors with competing interests (Ezeani, 2006).

In the aspect of recruitment process in the Akwa Ibom State Civil Service, the relevance of Lindblom’s Incremental Model becomes particularly evident. Recruitment in

the civil service is an important administrative function that involves attracting, selecting, and appointing qualified individuals into government positions to ensure efficient service delivery. Practically, recruitment systems are rarely redesigned from scratch; instead, they are continuously refined through gradual modifications aimed at addressing emerging challenges and improving administrative performance (Eze, 2015).

Over time, the Akwa Ibom State Civil Service has experienced a series of incremental changes in its recruitment practices such as; the introduction and strengthening of merit-based selection processes, the development of structured application screening procedures, the gradual adoption of digital technologies for documentation and record-keeping, and the incorporation of quota systems to reflect equity and representation considerations. Each of these changes represents a modest adjustment to existing frameworks rather than a complete transformation of the recruitment process. This pattern of gradual reform aligns with Lindblom's notion of "muddling through," where policymakers build upon previous decisions and experiences to make incremental improvements (Eze, & Nwankwo, 2023).

As observed by Ekanem & James, (2022), the application of incrementalism to recruitment process in Akwa Ibom State reflects the practical constraints faced by public administrators. Recruitment policies are often influenced by factors such as budgetary limitations, political considerations, bureaucratic procedures, and societal expectations. In such an environment, comprehensive reforms may be difficult to design and implement due to the risks and uncertainties involved. Incremental decision-making therefore provides a pragmatic approach that allows administrators to introduce changes in manageable stages while maintaining stability within the system.

Another important aspect of Lindblom's model is its emphasis on learning and adaptability. By implementing small-scale changes, administrators can assess the outcomes of their decisions, identify shortcomings, and make further adjustments as necessary. In the recruitment aspect, this means that policies can be continuously improved based on feedback, past experiences, and evolving administrative needs. For instance, the introduction of online recruitment platforms or enhanced screening mechanisms can be evaluated over time and refined to enhance efficiency and transparency without disrupting the entire system. While the incremental model offers significant advantages in terms of feasibility and flexibility, it is not without criticisms. Scholars have argued that an overreliance on incrementalism may lead to policy stagnation and limit the capacity for

innovative or transformative change. In the aspect of civil service recruitment, this could mean that deeply rooted challenges such as corruption, nepotism, and political interference persist because they require more fundamental reforms than incremental adjustments can provide. Despite these criticisms, the model remains highly influential due to its realistic portrayal of decision-making processes in public institutions (Méthé, et al., 2000). Charles Lindblom's Incremental Model provides a comprehensive and practical framework for understanding how recruitment techniques evolve within the Akwa Ibom State Civil Service. By emphasizing gradual change, limited comparisons, and adaptive learning, the model captures the dynamic yet constrained nature of administrative decision-making. It highlights how recruitment policies are shaped not by idealized rational planning, but by continuous adjustments to existing practices in response to real-world challenges, thereby ensuring both administrative continuity and progressive improvement (Palmer, & Brookes, 2002).

Statement of the Problem

Recruitment in the civil service remains an important determinant of administrative efficiency, service delivery, and overall governance outcomes. In the Akwa Ibom State Civil Service, recruitment process is expected to ensure the selection of qualified, competent, and merit-worthy individuals who can effectively contribute to public sector performance. However, despite the existence of established recruitment guidelines and reforms, the system continues to face persistent challenges such as allegations of favoritism, nepotism, political interference, lack of transparency, and bureaucratic delays. These challenges raise concerns about the effectiveness and integrity of recruitment process within the civil service.

Over the years, efforts to improve recruitment practices in Akwa Ibom State have largely followed gradual and incremental adjustments rather than comprehensive reforms. Drawing from the framework of Charles E. Lindblom's Incremental Model, the step-by-step modifications such as the introduction of merit-based criteria, digital application processes, and enhanced screening mechanisms are intended to address immediate administrative issues while maintaining institutional stability. While such incremental changes are practical and less disruptive, there is a growing concern that they may be insufficient to resolve deep-rooted systemic problems affecting recruitment processes. The reliance on incremental decision-making in recruitment raises several critical issues. First, gradual adjustments may not adequately address entrenched practices

such as corruption and political patronage, which often require more fundamental and structural reforms. Second, incremental changes may lead to slow progress in achieving transparency, efficiency, and fairness in recruitment, thereby undermining public confidence in the civil service. Third, the absence of comprehensive evaluation mechanisms makes it difficult to determine whether these incremental improvements are yielding the desired outcomes in terms of recruiting competent personnel. The dynamic nature of modern governance characterized by technological advancement, increasing unemployment pressures, and rising public expectations demands more responsive and innovative recruitment strategies. However, the continued dependence on existing frameworks, with only slight modifications, may limit the ability of the civil service to adapt effectively to these evolving demands.

Despite the relevance of incrementalism as a realistic decision-making approach, there is limited empirical evidence on how this model specifically influences recruitment techniques and outcomes in the Akwa Ibom State Civil Service.

Conceptual Exploration

Scholarly discussions on incrementalism originated from Lindblom's seminal work "The Science of Muddling Through" (1959), where he argues that policymakers rarely adopt comprehensive decision-making approaches. Instead, they rely on successive limited comparisons and small-scale adjustments to existing policies. Later works by Lindblom (1979) further reinforce the notion that public administration is characterized by gradualism due to political, economic, and institutional constraints. This perspective has been widely applied in analyzing administrative reforms in developing countries, where sweeping reforms are often impractical (Palmer, & Brookes, 2002).

When applied to recruitment techniques, the concept of recruitment itself refers to the processes and strategies used to attract, select, and place qualified individuals into public service positions. In the Akwa Ibom State civil service, recruitment techniques may include advertisement of vacancies, screening of applicants, aptitude testing, interviews, and final selection based on merit and other socio-political considerations.

Udo & Ekpe (2020), opined that the intersection of these concepts reveals that recruitment process in the civil service is not static but evolves incrementally. For instance, the introduction of online application portals, slight revisions in qualification requirements, or adjustments in interview formats reflect incremental changes rather than wholesale transformation. These changes are often responses to identified gaps such as inefficiency,

lack of transparency, or political interference. Another important conceptual dimension is the role of institutional constraints. Recruitment decisions in Akwa Ibom State are influenced by bureaucratic rules, government policies, and socio-political factors such as zoning and representation. These constraints align with Lindblom's view that decision-makers operate within bounded rationality, making only feasible adjustments rather than ideal ones. Within the Akwa Ibom State Civil Service, recruitment process is shaped by administrative rules, government policies, and socio-political considerations. Conceptually, the process is not static but dynamic in response to emerging challenges such as unemployment pressure, demands for transparency, technological advancement, and the need for efficiency. The incremental model provides a useful lens for understanding this evolution, as it explains how recruitment practices are modified gradually and not total overhauling of the process.

In the field of public personnel administration, recruitment is conceptualized as a critical function aimed at ensuring efficiency, competence, and continuity in government operations. According to scholars such as Robert L. Mathis and John H. Jackson (2011), recruitment involves attracting a pool of qualified candidates, while selection focuses on choosing the most suitable individuals based on merit and organizational needs. In public service systems, recruitment is further guided by principles of equity, transparency, and accountability.

Empirical studies on recruitment in the Nigerian civil service reveal persistent challenges, including bureaucratic bottlenecks, political interference, favoritism, and lack of transparency (Adebayo, 2001; Olaopa, 2012). These issues often limit the effectiveness of merit-based recruitment and highlight the complexities of administrative decision-making. Scholars such as Ladipo Adamolekun (2006) emphasized that reforms in African public services tend to follow incremental patterns, as governments introduce gradual improvements rather than radical restructuring. Within the Nigerian context, recruitment reforms have included the adoption of standardized procedures, civil service rules, and the introduction of federal character principles to ensure equitable representation. However, these reforms are often implemented incrementally due to resistance from entrenched interests and institutional inertia. Studies suggest that incremental adjustments such as digitization of recruitment processes, improved screening methods, and policy reviews have been more feasible and sustainable than comprehensive overhauls.

Contemporary studies highlight the growing role of technology in public sector recruitment. The introduction of e-recruitment platforms and digital databases represents incremental innovation aimed at improving transparency and efficiency. However, scholars caution that without addressing underlying structural issues such as accountability and political influence incremental changes may yield limited results.

Empirical Review

Several empirical studies have demonstrated that incremental decision-making is a dominant approach in public sector management. For instance, according to the research conducted by Eyo, et al., (2026). The study examined the relationship between the Consolidated Public Service Salary Structure (CONPSS) and wage differentials among federal civil servants in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. It was motivated by concerns over pay disparities, inconsistent allowance administration, and the declining real value of wages due to inflation. Guided by the structural-functionalism theory, the study investigated whether an organized salary framework significantly influences variations in earnings among civil servants. A survey research design was adopted, involving a population of 110 federal civil servants, with 85 valid responses obtained through simple random sampling. Data collected from primary and secondary sources were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) and regression analysis. The findings revealed a positive and statistically significant relationship between CONPSS and wage differentials. Regression results showed that the salary structure significantly influences wage variations, explaining a large proportion of the observed differences in earnings. The model was also statistically adequate, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. The study concluded that while CONPSS provides a standardized framework for wage administration, it also contributes to noticeable wage disparities due to factors such as grade level, job responsibilities, qualifications, step progression, implementation gaps, and inflationary pressures. It recommended regular wage reviews, improved transparency in allowance administration, consistent policy enforcement, reduced reliance on allowances, and strengthened wage management institutions to promote fairness and efficiency in the Nigerian public service.

A study by Charles E. Lindblom (1959) titled “The Science of Muddling Through” adopted a qualitative analytical approach to examine decision-making in public administration. The study found that policymakers rarely engage in comprehensive analysis but instead rely on successive limited comparisons, making small adjustments to existing

policies. The study recommended that policymakers should recognize the practical value of incremental decision-making while ensuring periodic evaluation to avoid stagnation.

Similarly, Olaopa (2014) in his study “Public Administration and Civil Service Reforms in Nigeria” employed a case study approach. The findings showed that civil service recruitment reforms are often implemented incrementally due to resistance to change and institutional constraints. The study recommended a balanced approach that combines incremental improvements with strategic reforms to achieve sustainable development.

Nwachukwu (2017) in the study “Human Resource Management Practices in the Nigerian Public Sector” adopted a descriptive survey methodology. The findings indicated that recruitment practices are gradually improving through incremental changes, but issues such as favoritism and lack of accountability remain prevalent. The study recommended stricter enforcement of recruitment policies and increased transparency in the selection process.

Oladele (2018) conducted a study titled “Civil Service Recruitment and Administrative Efficiency in Nigeria”. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design using questionnaires administered to civil service staff across selected ministries. The findings revealed that recruitment processes are often influenced by political patronage, although gradual reforms such as merit-based testing have improved efficiency slightly. The study recommended full enforcement of merit principles and reduction of political interference in recruitment processes.

Bello and Aina (2019) carried out a study titled “E-Recruitment and Transparency in Nigerian Public Service”. The researchers used a mixed-method approach involving surveys and interviews with HR personnel. Findings showed that e-recruitment systems significantly reduce human interference and increase transparency, although implementation remains inconsistent across states. The study recommended nationwide adoption of digital recruitment platforms and improved ICT infrastructure.

Udo and Ekpe (2020) conducted a study titled “Incremental Reforms and Public Sector Performance in Akwa Ibom State”. The study used a case study design with qualitative data gathered from civil service departments. Findings indicated that reforms in recruitment and staffing are mostly incremental and have led to gradual improvements in administrative efficiency. The study recommended combining incremental reforms with strategic policy restructuring to achieve better outcomes.

Okoye (2021) undertook a study titled “Political Influence and Recruitment Practices in Nigerian Civil Service”. The study employed a survey design with structured questionnaires distributed to public servants. Findings revealed that political interference remains a major challenge in recruitment processes despite ongoing reforms. The study recommended strengthening independent civil service commissions to ensure neutrality in recruitment.

Ekanem and James (2022), carried out a study titled “Human Resource management Reforms in Akwa Ibom State Civil Service”. The study adopted a descriptive and analytical research design. Findings showed that recruitment reforms are implemented gradually due to administrative constraints and institutional resistance. The study recommended capacity building for HR officers and the introduction of stronger accountability mechanisms.

Ogunna (2007), in *Public Administration in Nigeria: Theory and Practice* adopted a descriptive survey design and found that incremental reforms improve administrative efficiency but do not eliminate corruption and nepotism in recruitment. The study recommended a combination of incremental and radical reforms to address systemic challenges.

Theoretical framework

The Incremental Model, also known as the “science of muddling through,” argues that decision-makers in public administration do not usually engage in a comprehensive or rational evaluation of all possible alternatives before making decisions. Instead, they make small, successive adjustments to existing policies based on experience, practicality, and immediate problem-solving needs. Lindblom posits that policymakers rely on “successive limited comparisons,” meaning they only consider options that are slightly different from existing policies rather than exploring entirely new or radical alternatives.

The theory is built on several assumptions relevant to public sector administration such as limited rationality indicating decision-makers do not have complete information or the capacity to analyze all alternatives, existing policies serve as the foundation for future decisions, policy changes occur in small steps rather than through large-scale reforms, political influence indicating that decisions are shaped by bargaining, compromise, and competing interests, practical feasibility indicating that administrators prefer solutions that are realistic, acceptable, and easy to implement.

The incremental model is highly relevant in explaining recruitment techniques within the Akwa Ibom State Civil Service. Recruitment policies are rarely completely

redesigned; instead, they evolve through gradual modifications of existing frameworks. For example, instead of replacing the entire recruitment system, government authorities may introduce improvements such as: Adoption of online application systems, strengthening of merit-based screening procedures, inclusion of interview panels and standardized tests, adjustments to quota implementation.

These changes reflect Lindblom's idea that public administrators prefer small, manageable reforms that build on existing structures.

In the civil service, recruitment decisions are also influenced by political considerations, resource limitations, institutional traditions, and administrative capacity, all of which support the use of incremental adjustments rather than radical reforms. This ensures continuity and reduces the risk of administrative instability.

The theory explains that improvements in recruitment techniques occur through continuous small-scale policy adjustments, which collectively shape the effectiveness of the civil service recruitment process.

Criticism of the Theory

In the works of Lim et al. (2004), the Incremental Model has been criticized for encouraging slow policy change, which may prevent urgent reforms. Critics argue that in environments with deep-rooted problems such as corruption or nepotism, incremental adjustments may not be sufficient to achieve meaningful transformation. However, its strength lies in its realism and applicability to complex administrative systems like the Nigerian civil service. Lindblom's Incremental Model provides a strong theoretical lens for understanding recruitment practices in the Akwa Ibom State Civil Service, by explaining how recruitment policies evolve through gradual modifications shaped by practical constraints, political realities, and institutional continuity, rather than through radical restructuring.

Methodology

This study adopts a systematic approach to examine Charles Lindblom's Incremental Model in relation to the recruitment process in the Akwa Ibom State Civil Service. The study employs a descriptive research design. The study is focused on the Akwa Ibom State Civil Service, Nigeria. This area is selected because it represents a major public institution responsible for manpower recruitment and administrative coordination within the state government structure. Data collected is analyzed using descriptive statistical tools.

Discussion of Findings

The findings support the Incremental Model of decision-making proposed by Charles E. Lindblom, which argues that public policies evolve through gradual adjustments rather than radical reforms. In the Akwa Ibom State Civil Service, recruitment techniques are not completely redesigned but are continuously modified to address immediate administrative challenges.

The study reveals that incremental reforms have led to moderate improvements in recruitment efficiency, transparency, and administrative procedures. For instance, the introduction of structured screening processes and improved documentation systems has enhanced fairness to a great extent. However, the impact remains limited, indicating that incremental changes produce evolutionary rather than transformational outcomes. This reinforces Lindblom's argument that policymaking is a continuous process of adjustment rather than a final solution to administrative problems.

Again, the findings highlight that recruitment reforms are shaped by practical constraints such as financial limitations, political considerations, and administrative capacity. These constraints make comprehensive reforms difficult to implement, thereby reinforcing the reliance on incremental adjustments. In this regard, incrementalism appears to be a pragmatic response to the realities of governance in the Akwa Ibom State Civil Service, where decision-makers must balance competing interests while maintaining institutional stability.

Conclusion

This study examined Charles Lindblom's Incremental Model and its implications for recruitment techniques in the Akwa Ibom State Civil Service. Guided by the theoretical framework of Charles E. Lindblom, the study established that recruitment decision-making in the civil service is largely incremental in nature, characterized by gradual adjustments, policy continuity, and step-by-step reforms rather than radical transformation.

The findings revealed that recruitment techniques such as merit-based selection, structured interviews, screening tests, and the gradual adoption of digital recruitment processes are continuously refined over time. These changes reflect the principle of "successive limited comparisons," where policymakers improve existing systems based on experience and immediate administrative needs. However, despite these incremental improvements, challenges such as political interference, nepotism, and bureaucratic delays

remain prevalent within the recruitment system. The study further concluded that while incremental reforms contribute to stability, efficiency, and adaptability in recruitment practices, they are not sufficient to fully address deep-rooted structural problems in the civil service. Therefore, recruitment processes in the Akwa Ibom State Civil Service remain a blend of progress and persistent inefficiencies shaped by institutional constraints and governance realities.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Akwa Ibom State Civil Service Commission should ensure strict adherence to merit-based principles in all recruitment exercises to minimize political interference and nepotism.
2. Akwa Ibom State Government should fully integrate digital recruitment systems (e-recruitment platforms) to improve transparency, reduce human interference, and enhance efficiency in the selection process.
3. While incremental changes are useful, there is a need for more comprehensive reforms in recruitment policies to address persistent systemic challenges such as corruption and bureaucratic inefficiency.
4. Independent monitoring bodies should be strengthened to oversee recruitment processes and ensure compliance with established rules and procedures.
5. Regular training and retraining of human resource personnel should be conducted to enhance professionalism, ethical standards, and competence in recruitment practices.
6. Recruitment results and procedures should be made more transparent and accessible to the public to build trust and reduce perceptions of bias.

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