

## A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION SYSTEMS IN SINGAPORE AND MALAYSIA

**IDRIS MUSA (Ph.D)**

Department of Public Administration, Ahmadu Bello University,  
Zaria, Nigeria  
+234803 477 2717

&

**ODEH MERCY ADIJA**

Department of Political Science, University of Jos,  
Plateau State, Nigeria.  
+23483 700 1106

### Abstract

*7775 paper analysed the systems of administration in Singapore and Malaysia from a comparative perspective. Descriptive studies on the system of administration in Singapore and Malaysia on separate basis bounds. However, a comparative approach to the study of the system of administration in these two countries is rare. This paper seek to close this knowledge-gap. The paper sought to comparatively examine the political history, mode of entry into the civil service, condition of service, relationship between the bureaucrats and efficiency in service delivery. The paper is purely qualitative relaying and synthesizing existing literature. It established that though the two countries had similar British colonial experience, political structures and stability differ in each of these plural societies. While Singapore operates a unicameral parliamentary system with a prime minister and elected president, Malaysia operates a federal constitution with a bicameral system with a prime minister and elected monarch. Although both countries operate the British Weberian model of civil service, Singapore has a merit-based, competitive, transparent, accountable, leaner and efficient Bureaucratic machinery. The Weberian bureaucratic values did not match Malaysia system with an ascriptive, less competitive, less transparent, less accountable over bloated and less efficient bureaucracy. The paper concludes that similarities in colonial experience, geographical contiguity and ethnic pluralism in both countries have not translated into similarity in political stability and efficiency in service delivery in Singapore and Malaysia.*

**Keywords:** Bureaucracy, Comparative Perspective, Malaysia, Political Experience, Service Delivery, Singapore

### Introduction

Many scholars had hitherto believed that the traditional Weberian approach to Public Administration could be applied uniformly across the globe. However, after World War II, it was discovered that this assumption was not effective in achieving the quest for rapid national development in developing nations, because, among other reasons, the western-type Weberian model of administration could not produce the same results in the developing countries as it did in the developed nations. Consequently, there was a need for a science of Public Administration, to consider the socio-political and economic environments in which the Weberian Model of administration is applied (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2021). Thus, Comparative Public Administration was birthed, among other reasons, to study and analyse the different administrative systems, taking cognisance of their political, economic, social, geographical and cultural backgrounds and putting all of these on a balance for analysis (Magudapathy, 2020).

To achieve this, Jackson (2019) argues that the various patterns of administrative behaviours across different administrative systems need to be brought together and then subjected to rigorous systematic analysis. Indeed, Magudapathy (2020:67) contends that; *there should be a full exploration of the administrative systems across other cultures, for the purposes of analysis, with empirical findings put together for scientific analysis. By doing this, hypotheses may be drawn on administrative patterns, and those that are found to be universally applicable should be integrated into a general Public Administration theory*

It is worthy to note that descriptive studies on the system of administration in Singapore and Malaysia are a bounds. However, analytical studies on the systems of administration in juxtaposition on Singapore and Malaysia are rare. Qualitative research design relying on an existing literature. Thus, this paper attempts to, undertake a comparative analysis of in Malaysia and Singapore public administrative systems, highlight their similarities and differences and underscore factors that produce successful practices of administration that would expand options and alternative strategies for improving the performance of public institutions in developing nations like Nigeria.

### **Political Evolution of Singapore and Malaysia**

The British, in the cause of extending their dominion in India under Lord Hastings, the Governor-General of India, gave approval to Sir Stamford Raffles to establish a trading station at the southern tip of the Malay Peninsula in late 1818 (Singapore Republic, 1994). Santhi and Saravanakumar (2020), assert that modern Singapore was founded in 1819 by Sir Stamford Raffles, who was initially a staff of the British East India Company. Singapore, Penang, and Malacca (Melaka) were combined as the *Straits Settlements* to form an outlying residency of India (Britannica, 2021). However, the British established a new trading post in Singapore, when the East India Company lost interest in Malaya and it grew very rapidly. They opened the port to free trade and free immigration on the south coast of the island at the mouth of the Singapore River and Europeans, Malays, Chinese, Indians and Arabs came to live and work there (Santhi & Saravanakumar 2020). Later in 1867, Singapore became a Colony ruled directly by the British government. When the Suez Canal was built in 1869, Singapore became even more important as a 'gateway' between Europe and eastern Asia (Santhi and Saravanakumar, 2020). However, the peace and prosperity ended when Japan bombed and occupied Singapore in 1941. British forces returned and brought back Singapore under the British Military Administration in 1945 (Singapore Republic, 1994).

Furthermore, Santhi and Saravanakumar (2020), assert that the British government appointed a commission under Sir George Rendel to review Singapore's constitutional position and to make recommendations for change in 1953. The recommendations were accepted and served as the basis for a new constitution that gave Singapore a greater measure of self-government. The 1955 election was the first political contest in Singapore's history. David Marshall became Singapore's first Chief Minister in April 1955, with a coalition government consisting of his Labor Front Party (LFP), the United Malays National Organization (UMNO), and the Malayan-Chinese Association (MCA). Marshall resigned in June 1956, after the breakdown of constitutional talks in London (Britannica, 2021). Thereafter, Lim Kuan Yew, Marshall's deputy and Minister for Labour became the Chief Minister. The 1957 constitutional mission to London led by Lim Kuan Yew became successful in negotiating the main terms of a Singaporean independence Constitution. Hence, in 1959, Singapore became a self-governing state, Governor, Sir William Goode

became the first *Yang di-Pertuan Negara* (Head of State) and Lee Kuan Yew was sworn-in as Singapore's first Prime Minister in 1959 (Singapore Republic, 1994).

According to Wikipedia(2021), the territory known as Malaysia today was formerly called '*British Malaya*', a term used to loosely describes a set of states on the Malay Peninsula(including the island of Singapore) that were brought under British hegemony between the late 18th to the mid-20th century. Malaya comprised the Straits Settlements, the Federated Malay States, and the Unfederated Malay States (Kheng, 1983). The Federation of Malaya had thirteen states; eleven(11) on the peninsula and two (2) on Borneo Island, which is known to have gained independence from the British in 1957.

Due to their British colonial heritage, the political history of Malaysia is greatly interwoven with that of Singapore. This became more profound on 27th May 1961, when the Malayan Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman, proposed a closer political and economic co-operation between the Federation of Malaya, Singapore, Sarawak, North Borneo and Brunei in the form of a merger (Santhi & Saravanakumar, 2020). While Brunei opted out of the agreement, the main terms of the merger, agreed with Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore, were to have a central government, responsibility for defence, foreign affairs and internal security, while having local autonomy in matters pertaining to education and labour among others. A referendum on the terms of the merger was held in Singapore on 1st September 1962 and showed the people's overwhelming support for the merger. That produced Malaysia, which was established on the 16<sup>th</sup> Of September 1963, consisting of the Federation of Malaya, Singapore, Sarawak and North Borneo (now Sabah). However, the merger proved to be short-lived as Singapore was separated from the rest of Malaysia on 9th August 1965, and became a sovereign, democratic and independent nation. Independent Singapore was admitted to the United Nations on 21st September 1965 (Case, 2017).

Apart from their similar history, there are also similarities in the political institutions in Malaysia and Singapore. For instance, just like Singapore that operates a parliamentary democracy, Malaysia's government is modelled on the Westminster Parliamentary system and the legal systems are both based on common law. The Head of Government in the two countries remain the Prime Ministers. The Prime Ministers set policies in the two countries. However, the differences in the two political systems, is that while the President of Singapore is elected for a six-year term, based on very stringent requirements, including having to fulfil some public sector rules; the Head of State of Malaysia on the other hand, is an Elected Monarch, chosen from among the nine (9) state Sultans every five (5)years (Santhi & Saravanakumar, 2020).

In addition, National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE) (2021) states that Singapore practises a unicameral parliament, which sits for a five-year term. The prime minister and the cabinet are appointed by the President, but they are responsible to parliament. The president has very little power other than his role in appointing the prime minister. The legislature has eighty-nine (89) elected members: thirteen (13) members of parliament (MPs) are directly elected from single-member constituencies, and seventy-six(76) are elected in teams of four to six years to represent the fifteen (15) Group-Representation Constituencies (GRCs) (NCEE, 2021). GRCs were introduced in 1988 to help ensure minority representation in the Parliament by requiring that all teams of the GRC representatives include at least one member of a minority group (non-Chinese ethnicity) (NCEE, 2021).

On the other hand, Malaysia runs a Federal Democratic Constitutional Monarchy, in which the Yang di-Pertuan Agong (the selected Monarch) is the Head Of State. The *Yang di-Pertuan Agong* is elected for a five-year term among the nine hereditary sultans of the Malay states, all situated on the peninsula (Chin, 2011). Each State is ruled by a *Yang di-Pertua Negeri* or Governor. There is a Bicameral Parliament consisting of the Lower House (the *Dewan Rakyat* or House of Representatives) and the Upper House (the *Dewan Negara* or Senate). Members of the Lower House are elected from single-member constituencies, serving for a maximum of five (5) years. The Prime Minister is normally appointed by the Head of State (Yang di-Pertuan Agong) from among the Members of Parliament (MP). He must be someone who commands the confidence of the majority of the MPs. Just like the British prime minister, the Malaysian prime minister can seek to dissolve the Parliament anytime within the five (5) years and call for fresh elections. Members of the Senate, on the other hand, are indirectly elected through a complex formula for a 3-year term; twenty-six (26) of them are elected by the thirteen (13) state assemblies, two (2) represents the federal territory of Kuala Lumpur, one (1) each from the federal territories of Labuan and Putrajaya, and forty (40) are appointed by the king. Besides the federal parliament, each state has a unicameral state legislative chamber (Lau, 1998). In fact, Lim, (2002) explains that in Malaysia, the Executive Branch of the government is governed by the Prime Minister, while Cabinet Members are selected from the ranks of the Parliament. Although, power lies with the Parliament and the written constitution in theory, the Executive branch dominates the entire political process in practical terms. Since independence in 1957, Malaysia has been governed uninterrupted by a coalition known as the Barisan Nasional (BN) or National Front. This coalition is made up of fourteen (14) political parties that represent all the major ethnic groups in the country (Lim, 2002).

### **Bureaucracies of Singapore and Malaysia**

According to Kegley (2008), the distinct characteristics of Weber's bureaucracy which includes, pyramidal hierarchy, uniform and rigid rules, defined procedures, meritocracy, rationality and impersonality are very much adopted in governmental machinery globally today. What seems to be debated is the effect of bureaucracy in effectively delivering public policy objectives to the citizens. Hence, the United Nations (UN) Report, (2008:67) from the UN Economic and Social Council Committee of Experts on Public Administration explained that bureaucracy is "centrally concerned with the organization of government policies and programmes for national sustainable development." Bureaucracy is actually the engine room of governmental administration (Quah, 1996). Thus, bureaucracy in the two nations must be compared in their cultural and national settings, to ensure systematic analysis that would establish best practises, which could be transplanted to stimulate better service delivery to citizens and national development, in the developing nations of the world (Seah, 1971). Due to the similar colonial history of both Singapore and Malaysia, they inherited the Weberian bureaucracy from the British colonial administration; hence, the need to assess its impact on their respective national administrative Systems.

### **The Bureaucracy in Singapore**

Quah (1996), states that Singapore inherited an ineffective and corrupt civil service from the British colonial government. In June 1959, the Singapore Civil Service (SCS) consisted of nine (9) ministries with a total of 28,253 employees (Republic of Singapore, 1961; PSC, 1962). Quah (1996), also observed that the colonial bureaucracy in Singapore was afflicted by four major weaknesses;

- a. As an instrument of the British colonial government, the Singapore Civil Service (SCS) was relatively efficient in performing the traditional functions, such as dealing with regulative and routine matters, but it was not equipped to expedite the implementation of socio-economic development programme. Hence, it was not surprising that only five statutory boards were created by the colonial government and these organizations did not contribute significantly to the colony's development.
- b. Administrative reforms were neglected by the British colonial government, as it initiated only two important reforms which laid the foundation for meritocracy in the SCS. In 1947, the SCS was reorganized and divided into four divisions according to the duties, educational qualifications and salaries of its members, following the recommendation of the Trusted Commission. A second reform was introduced in 1951, when the Public Service Commission (PSC) was established to keep politics out of the SCS, by rejecting the spoils system; and to accelerate the pace of localization in the SCS, by providing qualified local candidates with the opportunity of obtaining appointments in the public service.
- c. Also, SCS was plagued by the problem of corruption during the colonial period. Corruption was first made an offence in Singapore in 1871, with the enactment of the Penal Code of the Straits Settlements. In 1879, a Commission of Inquiry found that corruption was prevalent among both the European inspectors and the Malay and Indian rank and file of the Straits Settlements Police Force. Five years later, another Commission of Inquiry confirmed the existence of systematic corruption in the police forces of Singapore and Penang. During the post-war period, especially in the 1950s, the Commissioner of Police reported that graft was rife in government departments. The Anti-Corruption Branch (ACB)'s ineffectiveness led to its replacement by the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB) in 1952.
- d. The final weakness of the colonial SCS was the 'colonial mentality' of its civil servants and their insensitivity to the needs of the population. The local indigenous-bureaucrats shared many of their expatriate predecessors' values; and the SCS remained the stronghold of the English-educated and was unrepresentative of the local population, especially the Chinese-educated majority at that time (Quah, 1996).

At Singapore's independence in June 1959, the government was forced to transform the colonial bureaucracy it inherited, to ensure the efficient implementation of its socio-economic development programmes. Since it was not easy to rectify the deficiencies of the colonial SCS, the new independent nation introduced a comprehensive reform of the SCS and established statutory boards. The SCS was reorganized into nine (9) ministries in June 1959, with two (2) new ministries viz., the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of National Development, to deal with nation-building and economic development respectively.

Seah (1971:25) contends that apart from the structural reorganization of the SCS and the formation of statutory boards, the government also subjected the civil servants to '**intense psychological pressure**' because it believed that their values were '**irrelevant, if not dysfunctional, in the context of mass politics**'. Accordingly, the government initiated the attitudinal reform of the SCS with the creation of the Political Study Centre in 1959. In his opening address, the then Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew, hoped that civil servants would change their '**colonial mentality**' once they were made aware of the problems facing the country. More specifically, he elaborated on the *raison d'être* of the Political Study Centre by making the administration more sensitive and responsive to the needs and mood of the people. In addition, the government relied on four other methods for changing the civil servants' attitudes and behaviour:

- 1) 'Voluntary' participation by civil servants in mass civic projects during the weekends to enable them get better acquainted with the political leaders and to expose them to other values;
- 2) Recruitment of non-English-educated graduates from the former Nanyang University to reduce the predominance of the English-educated civil servants and to improve the negative image of the SCS as their preserve;
- 3) Tougher disciplinary measures were introduced to deal with those civil servants found guilty of misbehaviour; and
- 4) Selective retention of competent expatriate civil servants and premature retirement of incompetent ones (Quah, 1989).

In short, the government's efforts in attitudinal reforms were aimed at breaking what it regarded to be an isolationist and anachronistic outlook of the Civil Service (Seah, 1971). The meritocratic system introduced by the British colonial government, with the establishment of the PSC was retained by the government. The focus on efficiency as an important criterion for recruiting and promoting senior civil servants was reinforced by the de-emphasis on seniority as the basis for promotion.

In 1961, Prime Minister Lee KuanYew clearly indicated his preference for efficiency and his disdain for seniority in the quest for efficient service. He stated; "The brighter chap goes up and I don't care how many years he has been in or he hasn't been in. If he's the best man for the job, put him there" (*Malay Mail* 1961 quoted in Seah, 1961: 88). Consequently, competent local civil servants were promoted to more responsible positions, regardless of their seniority. This policy remains in force today and accounts for the relative youthfulness of many of the permanent secretaries. Thus, the PSC's role in upholding the principle of meritocracy was by controlling the quality of personnel entering the SCS, and '**keeping the rascals out**' and attracting '**the best and the brightest**' candidates to apply for jobs with the SCS (Lee 1994:70). Lee (1994:5) also reiterated the importance of meritocracy in a keynote address thus; "**A strong political leadership needs a neutral, efficient, honest Civil Service. Officers must be recruited and promoted completely on merit. ... Appointments, awards of scholarships must be made to the best candidates**".

In a study of Economic Development Board (EDB), Schein (1996), indicated that one of the core assumptions of its cultural context was the existence of anti-corruptible, competent civil service that 'operated with an open and consistent set of rules that were vigorously enforced. In his view, having "**the best and brightest**" in government is probably one of Singapore's major strengths in that they are potentially the most able to invent what the country needs to survive, grow and to overcome' problems (Schein, 1996: 221-222).

In tackling Corruption in general, and in the SCS in particular, Lee (1994:5) stated;

*Our first goal in Singapore was to shape the government into an effective instrument of policy. This required strong, fair, and just leaders, who would have the moral strength to command the respect of the people. ... Responsibility for the people under their care required that luxurious living, whilst our people were mired in poverty and backwardness was out. We ensured complete accountability and open separateness between personal assets and public funds. Corruption, which we regard as a cancer, had to be eradicated as soon as detected*".

Haryono and Khalil (2011) concluded that Singapore's government is today renowned for being effective, efficient and responsive to policy and administrative issues. Thus, for

those grappling with the rigidity of bureaucracy, Singapore's effective decentralization, comprehensive and objective performance assessment system, competitive remuneration, systematic training and development programmes, and internal and external feedback channels are clues worth noting.

### **The Bureaucracy in Malaysia**

According to Malaysia History (2020), the Malaysian Public Service formerly known as the Malayan Civil Service (MCS) was established in the late 1700, when the British East India Company acquired Penang. It was patterned after the British civil service, just as in Singapore. Thus, the Malaysian Civil Service inherited its legacy from the British Civil Service with significant changes taking place over the years. During the colonial period, the British introduced structures and practices to help provide various basic services, but their emphasis was on the maintenance of law and order. This was aligned to its economic and political activities during colonialism. Those structures and practices laid the foundation of the current Malayan Civil Service (Malaysia History, 2020).

On his part, Chin, (2011) confirms that the Malaysian Public Service was patterned after the Weberian bureaucratic model just as the case in Singapore. During colonial rule, the civil service attracted the best and brightest scholars from England to be appointed as Administrative Officers. The Northcote-Trevelyan Report of 1845 laid down the public service ethos, which emphasized that a politically neutral civil service meant complete loyalty to the government of the day, regardless of its political tune. The British colonialists, taught that a professional public service should offer impartial and appropriate advice, be devoted to the public interests and obedient to the Minister and Cabinet. Finally, the public service should provide continuous stability when there is a change in government. These basic tenets set the tone of the Malaysian Civil Service since independence.

Indeed, the Colonial Civil Service provided a centralised administrative power, with a common recruitment procedure that allowed officers to be appointed and deployed to the various Malay states. With this centralisation, the recruitment procedures were streamlined to attract qualified candidates for appointment into the service, which marked the beginning of a well organised and professional civil service. Thus, Malaysia inherited a civil service characterised by professionalism and ethos. Unlike some other colonial systems, the British preserved the traditional social structures and political institutions of the day with some adjustments. Even before independence, the British ensured that the Malay aristocracy and political elites were groomed for their roles in the colonial administrative system (Chin, 2011).

However, after attaining political independence, a significant policy of **Malayanisation** of the Public Service was introduced by the Malaysian government. On August 15, 1968, the Establishment Office of Malaysia was adopted as the Public Service Department Affairs Agency; the agency to oversee all matters relating to the restructuring of the nation's public service, so as to better serve the country's developmental agenda (Malaysia History, 2020).

According to Chin (2011) modern Malaysia's Federal Constitution (Article 132) defines its Public Service as consisting of:

- (i) General Public Service of the Federation;
- (ii) Public Service of the States;
- (iii) Joint Public Service;
- (iv) Education Service;

- (v) Judicial and Legal Service;
- (vi) Police Force; and
- (vii) Armed Forces.

The Civil service in Malaysia is further divided into the federal and state civil services. Six states (Kelantan, Kedah, Terengganu, Johor, Sabah, and Sarawak) have their own State Civil Services, while all other states and the Federal Government rely on the Federal Civil Service. This dividing line, however, is more in theory than in practice, since there is a close integration and cooperation between the six State Civil Services and the Federal Service. Officers are regularly seconded to each other and many issues, such as developmental projects, are dealt with collectively. The existence of the six (6) State Civil Services is due more to historical circumstances rather than deliberate design. The key difference between the Federal and State Civil Service is simply who the bureaucrats report to. The Federal Civil Service reports ultimately to the Prime Minister, while the State Services reports to the Chief Minister or *Menteri Besar* of the States concerned (Malaysia History, 2020).

Statutory Bodies and the Local Authorities are also considered as parts of the Public Services. This is because these autonomous bodies resemble the Public Services in many respects, since they adopt the procedures of the Public Services, pertaining to appointments, terms and conditions of service and the remuneration system. Besides that, their officers and staff also receive pension and other retirement benefits, similar to the employees in the Public Services. However, with the implementation of a separation concept under a New Remuneration System, which became effective on 1 January 1993, several Public Sector Agencies were given the freedom to institute their own policies and procedures. The agencies, whose activities were likened to that of private businesses which were in good financial stead, were allowed to determine their own policies and procedures pertaining to appointments, terms and conditions of service.

It is pertinent to note that, the term Public Service does not include special Commissions, such as the Judiciary Commission, Public Service Election Commissions and other similar institutions, whose members are appointed by the King. Nevertheless, the organizations providing support or secretarial services to these Commissions are public agencies whose officers and staff are from the Public Service. The Public Service also excludes off-budget agencies, which are formed under the Companies Act or the Society Act and do not follow Policies and Procedures of Personnel Management in the Public Sector (Wikipedia, 2021). Generally, the public service seeks to be a world-class, in order to meet international benchmarks of performance and excellence in service delivery (Malaysia History 2020).

#### **Similarities and Differences between Singaporean and Malaysian Bureaucracies**

The similarities and differences between Singaporean and Malaysian Bureaucracies lie in their British Weberian-Model. They both practise the Weberian bureaucratic model characterised by hierarchy, uniform and rigid rules, defined procedures, meritocracy, rationality and impersonality etc. The difference however lies in their degrees of compliance with the dictates of the traditional bureaucratic model and the results achieved since their political independence from the British.

According to NCEE (2020), there are sixteen (16) Ministries in Singapore, with each being responsible for a specific area of public policy or government functions. The Public Service Division (PSD), Public Service Commission (PSC), the Ministry of Finance (MOF) and the Ministerial Departments play significant roles in the Staff Management System in the Public

Service (PSD, 2004). Since 1983, it is the Public Service Division (PSD) that has the principal responsibility for formulating and reviewing staffing policies in the Civil Service. Appointment, promotion and disciplinary matters, on the other hand, rest with the PSC, which has also delegated many of its staffing authority to Permanent Secretaries. Moreover, the budget division of the MOF also plays a major role in controlling the size of the number of Civil Servants through budget appropriation. The request for more employees is vetted by the Budget Division of the Ministry of Finance (MOF), which has to give its approval (Tessema, Soeters, & Ngoma, 2009).

Central management agencies such as PSD and PSC safeguard their recruitment and deployment frameworks of the Singapore Civil Service to ensure that civil servants are deployed in accordance with the principles of open competition, meritocracy, incorruptibility, impartiality, and to maximize the individual's contribution to the Service. Staffing professionals play a critical role in assisting line managers effectively recruit, select, place, and retain their workforce. Recruitment into public service is based mostly on a transparent and competitive process (Chew, 2000; Quah, 1995; Iwasaki, 2004).

Also, Singapore skilfully created a system to ensure that the best talents from society are drawn into the public service through government scholarships. The government established a Management Associate Programs (MAPs) to recruit brilliant future senior public servants and co-ordinate mobility of senior public servants in the Singapore public service organizations. There has been a policy of recruiting high quality graduates who are considered to have potential to rise to senior levels in the organization. It uses a fairly elaborate system to assess potential and intellectual ability as an indicator of future capacity to handle complex strategic issues.

Singapore also, uses online recruitment extensively to reach a wide group of potential applicants. The online recruitment method has increased the number of potential applicants, reduced recruitment cost, and improved the effectiveness of recruitment practices, which in turn has increased the quality of hires of Singapore public service organizations. The Singapore public service developed a new Human Resource (HR) system, known as People Matters Management System (PMS), to support and facilitate the strategic devolution of HR management and development in the Singapore Civil Service. PMS leverages on technology to optimize HR management in general and staffing in particular, coupled with self-service functions to further empower the civil servants and managers. The PMS has enabled Singapore civil service to better serve the IT needs in staffing activities.

Singapore carries out aggressive recruitment at entry level, entice high-flyers for further training and generally pay attractive salaries compared with the private sector (PSD, 2004; Tessema et al, 2009). Singapore pays public servants higher than the prevailing wage in the private sector (Weder, 1999). Wages and salaries in Singapore are at par with other industrialized countries including Japan and the United States. The Government monitors the wage policy and other aspects affecting labour conditions through the National Wage Council (NWC), which includes representatives from Government, business and labour Public Service Division (PSD, 2004; Tessema et al, 2009). Singapore public service regularly conducts functional reviews to pinpoint constraints to efficient and effective staffing. Such practise shave exposed some lapses in monitoring and evaluation of staffing activities which are corrected appropriately (PSD, 2004; Tessema et al, 2009). Although employee retention is one of the greatest HR challenges faced by organizations today, Singapore's public sector organizations have high retention rate mainly because of their

ability to put in place the vast majority of the critical factors identified in the conceptual framework.

On the other hand, Malaysia's HR practises is different from that of Singapore. Chin (2010) stated that the single biggest issue facing Malaysia since independence is ethnic politics. In Malaysia, socio-political matters are centred around one particular ethnic group. Even political parties that profess a multi-racial approach, end up championing ethnic issues. The issue of ethnicity permeates every level of the Malaysian society including its bureaucracy. The situation was made worse after 1970, when the government formalized ethnic divisions into two categories: *bumiputeras* and *non-bumiputeras*. Being classified a *bumiputera* brings benefits such as access to jobs in the Civil Service, stability and career development in the Civil Service, scholarships, easy loans for business and state aid, while the reverse is the case if one is classified as *non-bumiputera* (Sivalingam 2013). In 1971, the government launched the New Economic Policy (NEP) to restructure the economy. Kua (2011) stated that while the NEP was a political document, its impact was widely felt in the civil service, as the civil service was the main agency tasked with implementing the NEP. Overnight, the civil service and government-linked institutions, such as statutory boards, became almost an exclusive Malay environment. New intakes in the civil service were almost all bumiputera with a token few non-Malays. Chin (2011) asserted that since the inception of the NEP, the proportion of Malays in the civil service had grown from 60% to 77%. The elite ranks of the civil service, *Perkhidmatan Tadbir dan Diplomatik* (PTD) or the Administrative and Diplomatic Service became 85% Malay; the service had six Malays for each non-Malay. A quota system created by the British for the Malays in the Civil Service (MCS) was also increased to one (1) non-Malay to six(6) Malays.

By attaching benefits to one ethnic group, which incidentally is also the ethnic group that holds political power, a sense of alienation as "second class" citizen syndrome is being created among the non-Malays, which are the Chinese and Indians and other minorities (Chin2011:35). Since the civil service reflects a reality as an almost exclusive Malay enclave, the non-Malays feel alienated from it. As a consequence, they see the entire civil service as a bureaucracy that serves the needs of the Malays and *bumiputera* community. Even if the government was to actively encourage non-Malays to join the bureaucracy, it would most likely be unsuccessful as non-Malays are afraid of being marginalized within the service. These are well-founded fears as the figures clearly show that the upper echelon of the public service is overwhelmingly Malay, with the quota system to protect any meaningful changes. In other words, a non-Malay would not sign on to a career with almost no prospect of reaching the top (Chin,2011).

Consequently, the bureaucratic tenets are being sacrificed due to ethnicity in the Malaysia socio-political system. The politicisation of the civil service is so pervasive that it could be argued that the whole civil service, especially the top echelon, is effectively a branch of the ruling party. The end result of this is a highly politicized civil service, where high-level corruption has been left unchecked for political reasons (Siddiquee, 2006). There is excessive and political interference in the staffing practices. As a result, there is total erosion of traditional civil service values such as political neutrality, probity, rectitude, and objectivity (Das, 1998). Furthermore, Heady (1996) notes that recruitment to the public service in Malaysia is mostly based on considerations other than merit.

Sivalingam (2013) also reiterated that the West minster type bureaucracy has not taken roots in Malaysia because Weberian bureaucratic norms do not reflect Malaysian cultural expectations. Weberian bureaucratic values cannot fully permeate the society because the

Constitution provides special privileges to the Bumiputras (sons of the soil). Article 153(2) of the Malaysian Constitution provides the King of Malaysia with the powers to *"ensure the reservation for Malays and natives of any of the States of Sabah and Sarawak of such proportion as he may deem reasonable of positions in the public service."* This clause created opportunities for patronage and corrupt behaviours. This is one instance where the cultural norm of the majority in society clearly rejects the Weberian merit norm. The Constitutional Clause also placed restrictions on the competitive marketplace.

Authority relations in Malaysia are not entirely based on technical competence but also social acceptability. Moreover, the Islamization of the civil service also meant that the civil service took on a more religious character. A recent review of reforms and initiatives in the civil service from the 1980s to 2016 revealed that the civil service suffers from inefficiency, corruption, and a host of other problems (Sivalingam, 2019). The given narration of political partisanship in Malaysian bureaucracy, is completely absent in Singapore bureaucracy. Although both societies are pluralistic, the political conditions are stable in Singapore and there has been minimal political interference in bureaucratic practises.

### **Bureaucratic Service Delivery in Singapore and Malaysia**

Quah (2016) averred that a comparative analysis of the role of the public bureaucracy in policy implementation in five ASEAN countries confirmed that Singapore is the most effective in its service delivery to the citizens, because of its favourable policy context and its effective public bureaucracy. The emphasis on meritocracy and training in Singapore's public bureaucracy has resulted in a high level of competence of the personnel in implementing policies (Jones, 2016). Conversely, Malaysia is less effective than Singapore, because of its unfavourable policy context and its ineffective politicised public bureaucracy. Malaysia, is ranked second to Singapore, depending on the nature of their policy contexts and the levels of effectiveness of their public bureaucracies.

For instance, the economic conditions have been strong in that GDP growth rate in Singapore which averaged 6.88 percent from 1975 to 2016 (Trading Economy, 2016). Since gaining independence in 1963, Singaporean economy has been growing rapidly and as a result, the country has now one of the highest GDP per capita in the world (Quah, 2012; Chew, 2000).

Indeed Chew, (2020) adds that Singapore experienced sustained economic growth, along with Hong Kong, South Korea, and Taiwan, so much that it was called one of the **Four (4) Tigers of Asian economic prosperity**. Labour-intensive industries were relocated to other ASEAN nations and were replaced by high-technology industries and services. The government of Singapore developed a stable and corruption-free government, marked by strong central development planning and social policies. Despite paternalistic and at times authoritarian governmental practices and one-party dominance, the government has continually maintained its large popular mandate. A Singaporean identity, distinct from that of Malaysia has emerged, as the nation increasingly integrating itself into the global economy (Trading Economy, 2016).

Comparatively, a study carried out by Haryono and Khalil (2011) on Malaysia, showed that the nation is ineffectiveness in service delivery, as a result of unfavourable institutional framework, within which individuals, firms and governments can interact to generate income and wealth. This institutional framework includes the low capacity of its bureaucracy to deliver quality services because it is over-bloated. In fact, with 1.3 million civil servants to a population of twenty-six (26) million, Malaysia has one of the highest

Civil Servants-to-population ratios in the world (OECD, 2020). In 2009, Malaysia's civil servants-to-population ratio was the highest in Asia Pacific. The ratio was 4.68%, compared to Singapore's 1.5 %, Indonesia's 1.79 %, Korea's 1.85 % and Thailand's 2.06 %, all of which have less than half of Malaysia's ratio (Malaysian History, 2020). Much of the budget continues to go into operating a bloated civil service. As much as three quarters of the national budget is spent on paying salaries and other benefits to over 1.3 million civil servants. A post-2011 Budget dialogue highlighted a massive amount (35 % of the total RM162.8 billion operating expenditure) to be spent on emoluments, pensions and gratuities of civil servants (Malaysian History, 2020). There is a need to trim the civil service to reduce the budget deficit in Malaysia.

Despite evident success in promoting sustained development, the Singapore public management model is not without its own challenges which include; employing, training and retaining public service officers with the right skills and attitudes, engaging and catering for the changing needs and rising aspirations of the population, some public concerns about meritocracy, accountability and the high salary in the senior civil service level, some shortcomings in transparency and responsiveness and dealing with uncertainty and complexity in cross-cutting policy issues (Saxena, 2011). Singapore's success in public management may only have limited potential for replicability due to sustained political will on the part of the government, which has remained in power throughout the post-independence period and is wedded to a clear vision of national development in a favourable policy context. This represents a continuity rarely found in other developing countries. Singapore is also a small city-state with a population of just over 5 million and has a relatively homogenous Chinese majority population, despite the presence of minority ethnic groups and a large number of foreign residents (Quah, 2019).

### **Conclusion**

In his comparative analysis of administrative systems, Sayre (1967) stated that the nature of a particular administrative system is linked to the system of government and the social system in which it operates. Bureaucratic models are not packages which are kept ready for export or import; rather, they provide illustrations of options and styles for consideration and for acceptance and adaptation in national contexts. This is particularly relevant when considering the relevance of Singapore's experience in administrative reform for Malaysia, Nigeria and other developing countries. Singapore's rapid economic progress since its independence in 1959 and its transformation from a resource poor developing country into an Asian Tiger (a High-Performing Asian Economy) has attracted worldwide attention and many political leaders and senior civil servants from other countries (World Bank, 1993).

While recognizing the specific circumstances of Singapore becoming wealthy city-state, there are some lessons which may have wider application for developing countries: the importance of integrity and strong anti-corruption measures; meritocracy expressed through selective recruitment of the best talent; results-orientation schemes in which pay and promotion reflect individual performance and contribution to innovation and policy outcomes; and competitive salaries for public servants to mitigate the risk of corruption. There are also more specific institutional reforms that offer additional lessons. These include; operational autonomy for Boards and public sector corporations, while retaining regulatory oversight and policy direction within the central agencies; rewarding individual and organizational performance through incentives and recognition (Saxena, 2011). The practice of continuous innovation and leadership by example are all worth the attention of other developing nations like Malaysia and Nigeria. With the right political will to

depoliticise the civil service and ensure appropriate reforms and national cohesion, public administration in Malays would also be better positioned to achieve better results in nation building and service delivery to the citizens.

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