

The Concept of Approaches in the Social Sciences, In Particular Public Administration

Dr S.B.M. Marume¹, Mr. R.R. Jubenkanda², Mr. C.W. Namusi³,

¹*BA, Hons BA, MA, MAdmin, MSoc Sc, PhD*

²*BSc, MSc. Econ, MSc, DPhil (Candidate)*

³*BAdmin (Hons), MPA, DPhil (Candidate)*

Abstract: *Arnold Brecht (1967:57), one of the leading 20th century-political scientist, maintains that clarity and unambiguity of all terms and concepts used in a study are the first requirements of logical reasoning. It is against this background that the three academics have decided to examine systematically the concept of approaches which has been erroneously used interchangeably and synonymously with the concept of methods in the social sciences, for example, sociology, economics, political science, business administration, strategic management, international politics, strategic studies, psychology, and so on. The purpose of this article is to demonstrate that (a) methods and approaches are two different terms with different meanings and (b) different classifications of the concept approaches in the social sciences.*

Keywords: *methods, approaches, empiricism, normativism and logical positivism.*

I. Introduction

Those social scientists and researchers are mindful of the need for proper and consistent terminological uses and semasiological analyses will always remember the significance of the following maxim in the study of the social sciences that:

“Until the social scientists and researchers can produce their own terminologists, semanticists and semasiologist, tales of scientific objectivity and neutrality will always glorify the mature sciences.

Source: S.B.M Marume :1988 and 2015

In this regard it may be necessary to note that:

Clarity and unambiguity of all terms and concepts used in a study are the first requirements of logical reasoning.

Source: Arnold Brecht: Political Theory, 1967:57

It is against this background that the three academics have decided to examine the concept of approaches which has been erroneously used interchangeably with the concept of methods in the social sciences.

II. Approaches

2.1 The meaning of the terms ‘method’ and ‘approach’

A distinction exists between methods and approaches. The first important thing to note is that whereas a method is concerned with how (modus operandi) the subject –matter-any subject-matter is handled, an approach is basically a matter of value preference in viewing and selecting subject-matter. Thus a method is objective and value-free a device. An approach is generally subjective and value-laden. Secondly, a person’s approach to his/her subject-matter (problems) is determined by what s/he considers important, relevant, or significant in gaining knowledge in a particular sphere. Thus, whereas methods may to some extent be viewed as objective, value-free mechanisms, approaches are inherently subjective and value-laden. Thirdly, the crux of the matter on our studies is to distinguish always between an approach to the aspect and an approach to the whole field of public administration. Fourthly, various approaches are now examined in sufficient good detail.

2.2 Various classifications of approaches in public administration

The first classification of approaches is based upon the objective of study the individual scholar seeks to emphasise such as:

- philosophical approach;
- legal approach;
- historical approach;
- scientific approach;
- case method approach
- institutional and structural approach; and
- behavioral approach

Source: S.B.M Marume: 1982, 1988 and 2015

The second classification indicates:

- philosophical approach;
- legal approach;
- historical approach;
- scientific approach;
- case method approach

Source: M Laxmikanth; 2006:7-8

Thirdly in addition to the above, there are also various other approaches to the study of public administration. These are:

- structural approach;
- ecological approach;
- human relations approach;
- development approach;
- behavioural approach;
- public choice approach;
- systems approach; and
- comparative approach

Source: M Laxmikanth; 2006:8

Fourthly, the empirical and normative approaches

Angles such as normative approach and empirical approach; that is, from the fact-value standpoint: approaches can be classified into two:

- Normative approach: concentrates on what public administration should be, that is, suggests the ideal administrative situations; and
- Empirical approach: sets its eyes on description and analysis of actual administrative situations.

Source: M Laxmikanth; 2006:8

The fifth classification involves the most comprehensive classification entailing:

- empirical (empiricism) approaches;
- logical positivist; and
- normativist (normativism) approaches

Source: P.S Botes: 1981

2.2.1 Comprehensive approaches empiricism, normativism and logical positivism:

On the basis of literature available, all approaches to the study of public administration (and to most other fields of social phenomena) may be broadly classified into three classes as:

- (a) Empirical (empiricism);
- (b) Normative (normativism);
- (c) Logical positive approaches.

Explanations of the three approaches:

Empiricism

- (a) Empiricists confine themselves to the questions "What is the actual state of affairs."
- (b) Empiricists analyse and systematise reality and
- (c) Allow results the results to speak for themselves.

Normativism

- (d) Normative approaches are also called theoretical (sic), value-laden, moral subjective and evaluative approaches.
- (e) They are value-centric approaches.
- (f) Normatives concern themselves with terms: values and norms, good, bad must, should and ought to be, and
- (g) They prescribe evaluations.

Logical positivism

- (h) Logical positive approaches avoid involvement with question of value or subjectivity.
- (i) They concern questions of why, how, rationalism grounds or bases of arguments and logic with some mathematics, statistics and logic methods.
- (j) Inductive and deductive methods.
- (k) Concerned with systematic reality.
- (l) Results: speak for themselves.

General Characteristics of approaches

All approaches may be empirical, normative or positivist; partly normative and partly positivist. If we regard the other approaches as special approaches included in the comprehensive approaches as most of them are- they must inevitably have some of the characteristics of the comprehensive approaches.

In discussing the comprehensive approaches to the study of public administration we should point out that different subsections of the field often require in the basic approach a different focus or emphases from that used in the field as a whole, with the result that it is impossible to apply precisely the same approach to every aspect of the subject-matter.

Please note: It is important to realise that a phenomenon in human society has many dimensions and that an isolated approach can contribute only in part of our knowledge and understanding of that phenomenon.

2.2.2 Explanations of a few selected approaches

Various approaches to the study of public administration are explained below:

(a) The legal approach (also called the juristic or constitutional approach):

- Public administration a comprehensive and integrative social discipline which has outgrown the tutelage of Political Science and Constitutional and Administrative Law, has left its mark on some of the approaches we come across.
- One of these is legal approach.
- Until fairly recently public administration was taken to be part of administrative laws, or constitutional law.
- Being considered a part of public law, Public Administration paid special attention to the status and mutual relations of public institutions and also to the powers of public functionaries in their dealings with the public.
- It neglects the dynamics and the psycho-sociological background of public administration.
- Institutional studies of public administration often tend to be formalistic, erudite and doctrinaire, and so overlook essential core of administrative behaviour and identifiable social activities.

(b) Philosophical Approach

It is the most comprehensive as well as the oldest approach. It considers all facets of administrative activities. It is based on the normative approach and concentrates on what ought to be. Its objective enunciate the ideals (principles) underlying the administrative activities. Plato's Republic, John Locke's Treatise on Civil Government, Thomas Hobbes's Leviathan, Shantiparva of Mahabharata, Swami Vivekananda, and Peter Self have advocated this approach.

(c) Historical Approach

It studies public administration through the historical developments in the past having its impact on the present. It organises and interprets the information pertaining to administrative agencies in a chronological order. L.D. White has described American federal administration in its formative period through his four remarkable historical studies entitled The Federalists (1948), The Jeffersonians (1951), The Jacksonians and The Republican Era. Kautilya's Arthashastra and books on Mughal Administration and British Administration give glimpses of the past administrative system of India. This approach is closely related to the biographical approach to administration.

(d) Case Method Approach

It deals with the narration (detailed account) of specific events that constitute or lead to a decision by an administrator. It seeks to reconstruct the administrative realities and acquaints the students of public administration with them. It became popular in USA during the 1930s. Twenty case studies titled Public Administration and Policy Administration edited by Harold Stein were published in 1952. In India also, the Indian Institute of Public Administration (New Delhi) and the National Academy of Administration (Mussoorie) have published several case studies. According to Dwight Waldo, the case method is going to be permanent feature of the study and teaching of public administration. In addition to the above, there are also various other approaches to the study of public administration. These are;

- (i) Structural Approach
- (ii) Human Relations Approach
- (iii) Behavioural Approach
- (iv) System Approach
- (v) Comparative Approach
- (vi) Ecological Approach
- (vii) Developing Approach

(viii) Public Choice Approach

Summary on approaches

- (a) In the teaching of the subject Public Administration at universities it is advisable to continually try to evaluate as many different approaches. As teachers we are forced to revert to a sort of an eclectic approach but we do not deny that our subject-matter is value laden and that in the selection of methods and approaches it is impossible to be scientifically neutral.
- (b) In studying a subject such a public administration with its numerous facets and multidisciplinary field, we need scientific precision and a systematic approach. The construction of a logical theory requires a basis of meaningful terms and an orderly methodology in scientific practice. To obtain a significant theory we may use a number of approaches, provided everyone is either normative or positivistic.

III. Conclusion

From the fact-value stand point, these various approaches to the study of public administration can be classified into three:

- (a) Empirical approach which concentrates on what public administration 'is', that is, it describes and analyses 'actual' administrative situations; and
- (b) Normative approach which concentrates on what public administration 'ought to be', that is, it suggests the 'ideal' administrative situations.
- (c) Logical positive approach which avoid involvement with questions of value or subjectivity.

Bibliography

- [1] Arnold Brecht: Political Theory: The foundations of the Twentieth- Century Political Thought: New Jersey: Princeton University, 1976.
- [2] J.J.N Cloete; Introduction to Public Administration: Pretoria: J.L van Schaik, 1986.
- [3] S. B. M. Marume, Public administration: epistemological and methodological aspects of African social research studies : Academic work No. 17: unpublished PhD thesis proposal: California University for Advanced Studies, State of California, September 30, 1988.