

Administrative Practices' Benchmark for Quality Assurance in Nigerian Universities

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Abstract - *The paper examined Administrative Practices' Benchmark for Quality Assurance in Nigerian universities. As a conceptual paper, the meaning of administrative practices was sought as it relates to the school system. Disciplinary measures and work load were identified as some of the administrative practices which must be put in place for quality assurance in Nigerian universities, since the universities have a role to play in the national development as it must actualize the primary functions of establishing such institutions, which are teaching, research and community service. The paper argues that the sustainability of university education standards lies not only in the hands of government, but also the university management which must provide a good working condition in order to have the best from the lecturers.*

Keywords: *Quality Assurance, Nigeria, Higher Education*

INTRODUCTION

No meaningful development, no matter the level, in any society, can take place without reference to education. Education is the power that sustains the people and community; any systematic deviations in education with regards to administrative practices, programmes, quality and quantity would surely affect the level of reliability and productivity of the people and the society in general.

In Nigerian educational system, there are four sub-sectors namely: pre-primary, primary, secondary and tertiary levels. According to Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN) (2004), tertiary education is the education given after secondary education in universities, colleges of education, polytechnics and monotechnics, including institutions offering correspondence courses. Most importantly, FRN (2004) further presented the objectives and goals of establishing such institutions (tertiary institutions) to include: to contribute to national development through relevant manpower training; to develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of the individual and society; to develop the intellectual capability of individuals to understand and appreciate their local and external environment; to acquire both physical and intellectual skills, which will enable individuals to

be self-reliant and useful members of the society; to promote and encourage scholarship and community service; and to promote national and international understanding and interaction (p.36).

The document also asserted that these objectives and goals would be achieved through several methodologies which include maintenance of minimum standards through appropriate agencies. Hence, the need to search for such standards as benchmarks for quality assurance in university education.

In congruence, Fabunmi (2005) posited that the importance of university education cannot be over-emphasized, in that, it is linked to national development. To this end, Fabunmi argued that it is essential for the university education to be of good quality. Cole (1996) saw quality as having to do with whether something is good or bad. It is about standard (benchmark) of something when compared with other things. It, the author stated, therefore presupposes that there is a standard set against which the outcome is compared. Jaiyeoba and Atanda (2005) also added that quality could be viewed as degree or level of excellence. It is synonymous with standard, efficiency, excellence, relevance and worthiness.

From an educational facet, Gordon and Partington (1993), viewed quality as the success with which an institution such as the university, provides educational environment which enables students (and teachers) to effectively achieve worthwhile learning (and teaching) goals including appropriate academic standard. They also argued that it is generally accepted in a large perspective that quality of any educational system is a function of quality inputs via process. Based on this premise, Adeogun (2001) emphasized that the availability, relevance and adequacy of resources contribute to academic achievement. Hence, the issue of quality assurance becomes very important in the sustainability of the university system. Quality assurance can be conceptualized as the deliberate effort by educational planners and managers to ascertain that quality is upheld from the input state through processing, to the output stage (Fabiya & Fagbohun, 2005).

Furthermore, Nwaoku and Eshiet (2008) explained that quality assurance is very applicable to the production function of universities. It is the management of goods, services and activities from the input stage, through processes, to the output stage of production. The authors further argued that quality assurance aims at preventing quality problems and ensures that only conforming products reach the consumers. To this end, they posited that the characteristics of an effective quality assurance mechanism are; an effective quality management system, periodic audit of the operations of the system, and periodic review of the system to ensure it meets changing requirements. Quality assurance therefore recognizes the need for universities to accept responsibilities for their own management processes through practices such as disciplinary measures and assigning of work load.

As Ijeoma and Osagie (2005) concluded, quality assurance is the concern that certain accepted criteria of minimum standards of quality should be achieved in the production of goods and services. This means that certain techniques and procedures that ensure the quality of products are put in place. Thus, administrative practices become the techniques of establishing the enabling environment for quality assurance in Nigerian university system.

Theoretical Framework

Contemporary leadership theorists (Bass and Avolio, 1993; Leithwood & Juntzi, 2006) in Uzoechina and Obiorah (2009) have evolved two leadership styles namely; *transformational* and

transactional leadership. The transformational leadership style involves the process of influencing major changes in the attitudes and assumptions of organizational memberships and building commitment for the organization's missions, objectives and strategies. In the context of this paper, transformational leadership describes a leader who influences teachers to goal achievement by planning, organizing, directing and integrating the school demands and needs of the teachers in a way that is productive and individually motivating to staff.

The transactional leadership style is an exchange of rewards with subordinates for services rendered (Bass & Avolio, 1993). In a follow-up, Nwosu (2008) concluded that transactional leadership is the accomplishment of goals by mandating, instructing and persuading teachers to comply with school goal requirements. As applicable to this paper, transactional leadership seeks to motivate staff through extrinsic motivation, which involves the use of sanctions, strict adherence and conformity to norms to motivate teachers to goal achievement.

As Uzoechina and Obiorah (2009) argued, the theoretical framework as advocated above is based on two essential points of strategic management and providing leadership, which are of high relevance to this study. The strategic management requires that the school leaders will have to: set objectives for using available resources; identify the activities to be performed; organize the activities into groups; provide people to perform the jobs to achieve the objectives; inspire staff to set individual objectives; motivate and empower staff to initiate work activities; supply incentives to stimulate productivity; set up control to measure the achievement of objectives, and take remedial action if the objectives are not met.

In that direction, providing leadership is very crucial in administrative practices, in that, the school leader exhibits the following traits and practices of: sharing genuine concern; enabling; being accessible; encouraging change; being honest and consistent; acting with integrity; being decisive; inspiring others; resolving complex problems; networking and achieving the confidence and support of various groups, in the organization; organizational goals; focusing efforts; building shared vision; supporting a developmental culture; and facilitating change sensitively (p. 70).

This paper believes that the transactional leadership style when applied by the management of Nigerian universities would lead to quality assurance in the university education system. The questions that

arise hereafter are: what are administrative practices?; to what extent does disciplinary measure benchmark as an index of administrative practices affect quality assurance in Nigerian universities?; and to what extent does workload benchmark as an index of administrative practices affect quality assurance in Nigerian universities?

Administrative Practices: Search for Semantics

The word 'administration' has been defined by different scholars in different distinctions. However, the definition of Akpan (1995) is quite related to this paper. Thus, Akpan stated that administration is viewed as a system, process and procedure or designated as a product of the process. In line with that, Essien (2003) posited that as a process, administration is a basic management process, in that, it serves as a tool of utmost importance to the successful execution of managerial tasks and the attainment of goals and objectives. He also added that administration is a vehicle through which action is carried out and as such to a large measure determines the effectiveness with which major decisions are made, policies formulated and practices are followed and implemented. Nwaoku (2005) then added that administration involves planning activities, which aims at the fulfillment of the goals of the organization concerned. It is concerned with the performance of executive duties, the carrying out of policies and decisions to fulfill a purpose or purposes.

In the university system, the administrative practices of the institutions could be in form of the reward system, decision-making system, disciplinary measures, workload, communication system, budgeting system, planning, implementation strategies, supervising system, among other things. However, this paper limits itself to the disciplinary measures and workload as administrative practices for quality assurance in Nigerian university system.

Disciplinary Measures' Benchmark and Quality Assurance in Nigerian Universities

Discipline is the ability of an individual to conform to the norms of the society while a self-disciplined individual is the one who sets a target for himself and makes sacrifices and efforts to reach the target (Akpan, 1995). Akpan also argued that discipline can be promoted in any organization if certain techniques are applied, in that, different aspects of a school system contribute to the maintenance of school discipline. The author further asserted that the teacher can also help to maintain

discipline by being competent in his/her teaching, punctual to school and lectures, wins the love and affection of others and be up-to-date in dress codes thereby increasing his/her job perfection.

To this end, Hoy and Miskey (1987) argued that these would be achieved through control which is a very essential element of group life. Control, by the authors, is a central aspect of the school (university) life. It is an indispensable tool in maintaining law, order and peace in order to ensure a suitable environment and efficient operations of schools for effective teaching and learning. In that, while control is a problem that all organizations such as the universities in Nigeria face, this problem is especially important and most acute in service organizations, such as the universities that have no choice in the selection of their clients and agencies who participate in the organization. The problem is also of the fact that teachers' control in universities is accentuated in schools because these organizations are often confronted with teachers who may have little or no desire and respect for quality of the services they render to the organizations.

Edem (1987) in Egwuasi (2011) outlined the various techniques of control in order to minimize bad behavior in schools. These are leadership style, teamwork, morale of teachers, good teaching, social climate, board facilities, guidance and counseling and school rates. To this stance, Wallis (1997) in Egwuasi (2011) regretted that coding disruptive individuals is disservice to earnest hard work, teachers of whom must face the resulting intolerable working conditions. The scholar also affirmed that today's administrative practices should be able to innovate and create a workable and acceptable means of filtering the various activities of lecturers, especially as it regards to quality assurance.

In any organization, such as the university, discipline reflects the members' respect for authority, rules and regulations, commitment to them and the maintenance of an established standard of behavior (Uyanga, 1995). Efang (2001) in Egwuasi (2011) was also of the view that behavioural disruptiveness, otherwise termed indiscipline connotes a behavioural deviation from the society approved standard behavior. Gaustad (1992) then argued that every discipline that brings about desirable behaviours has two main goals. These are to: ensure the safety of staff and students, and create an environment conducive for teaching and learning.

Similarly, Duke (1989) in Gaustad (1992) pointed out that the goal of good behavior is necessary, but not

sufficient to ensure academic growth among teachers, in that, effective school disciplinary measures seek to encourage responsible behavior and provide teachers with a satisfying school experience as well as to discourage misconduct.

The position of the authors of this paper, as participants in the university system in Nigeria, is that, the university management through various agencies of management such as the deans of faculties, heads of departments and directors of institutes of education and continuing education should be able to map out strategies that would complement the efforts of the government by checkmating all forms of laziness, truancy, abetting and indulging in all sorts of examination malpractices, inability to deliver qualitative lectures and inability to be up-to-date in modern technological advancements on the part of lecturers. This becomes inevitable because further observations by the authors in the University of Uyo and Benin respectively revealed that as a result of weak internal control and checks, erring lecturers and staff are most often not punished adequately due to godfatherism and favouritism of the management for obvious reasons.

The strategies here should not only be proper sanctions and warnings, suspensions, termination of appointment, dismissal, queries and reprimands though within the ambit of the law but should also be such disciplinary measures such as counseling that would systematically reduce the menace and after several attempts show the way out to those lecturers that do not have any business in Nigerian universities. Once this is done, the disciplinary benchmark would have been established irrespective of whose ox is gourd, and of course, stand the test of time and surely the quality of our universities would have been assured.

Workload's Benchmark and Quality Assurance in Nigerian Universities

Workload is a process where official number of duties is legitimized by possession of specialized spheres of work experience (Ukeje, Okorie and Nwagbara, 1992). The authors further stated that workload makes for organizational efficiency by allowing members to learn skills rapidly, develop high degree of proficiency, use highly specialized equipment and breakdown jobs at all levels into manageable sizes which individuals can learn and manage efficiently. According to Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia (2010), work load can also refer to the energy output of a system, particularly of a person or

animal performing strenuous task over time. From an educational point of view, the Ecolè Polytechnique Teaching Guide in Teaching Workload (2010) stated that teaching workloads vary greatly between teachers according to their status and the labs or sections they report to.

Wolff (2010) argued that being a teacher is not an easy job. Teachers must teach their students, as well as complete paperwork, lesson plans, assessments, other duties which are assigned to them, and at times, this can be overbearing. To this premise, Wolff concluded by stating that these tasks can be hard and frustrating which is an evident of overload of work. In their different studies, Oyedeji (1995), Oladimeji (1996), Ijaiya (1998), Okhawere (1998) and Oluchukwu (1998) all found out that leadership behaviours such as assigning of heavy workload to teachers in schools by school heads and other agencies of administration such as Deans, Heads of Departments, Directors, among others, is highly significant to teachers' morale. This is further supported by the study of Inguarson, Kleinhenz, Baruick, Carthy and Wilkson (2005) which found out that workload of teachers affected their classroom effectiveness. To this end, Reyes and Imber (1992) posited that the level of workload to teachers also affected their evaluative status and commitment to work, which in turn would affect their classroom delivery and quality productivity. They also argued that when teachers have a considerable workload, both teaching and non-teaching activities, their interest and moral attitude would increase and they would develop the desire to work more. Devos and Vanderhegden (2002) then affirmed that it is not on the teaching time that indicates full work of teachers, rather, the engagement of teachers in other activities such as contacts with parents, correcting work, supervision of students' seminars, practical, projects and other administrative obligations, and that these appear to be too heavy for the teachers.

This paper is of the view that since much is expected of the teachers in our universities, adequate considerations should be geared towards assigning of workload to them. Situations where heavy workloads are given to teachers such as in the cases of University of Uyo and Benin, and other universities in Nigeria, where inadequate number of teachers are found in most departments and faculties in the sciences, medical sciences, engineering, pharmacy, environmental studies, among others, is unacceptable. The teachers would not perform magic in such situations but rather, would device means of cutting

corners, by dodging classes, compelling students to buying of textbooks and lecture notes in a bid to forcing the students to study on their own, and not giving out course outlines for obvious reasons. But when moderate workload is assigned to the teachers, then our universities would have been assured of better classroom delivery, completion of course outlines and proper examinations conducted. These, would in the end, lead to quality assurance in our university education system.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper has highlighted some of the problems facing university education system, such as administrative practices, quality assurance and decadence in standard. The central coordination of the university system lies heavily in the hands of the lecturers. Therefore, the administrative practice of the institution is a way of evading her vital role in the development of the individual and the society at large. The universities' managements are therefore advised to sustain the quality assurance of the universities system through the creation of administrative practices benchmark that would motivate the teachers, encourage qualitative teaching and learning, and the attainment of the goals of the establishment of the university education.

The paper concluded further that developing strategies for proper disciplinary measures and moderate workloads are very important aspects of the university system, in that, the application of the concepts objectively in the administration of the system would give an enabling environment for the realization of the national goals for the establishment of university system.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The universities should adopt a more proactive measure of disciplinary measures such as control and counseling in curbing disruptive behaviours by teachers. Teachers should be assigned with moderate workload including teaching and non-teaching activities to enable them perform optimally. The university authorities should ensure that courses are assigned to teachers on the basis of specialization. The teachers should be adequately supervised in order to checkmate their teaching methods and the attainment of at least 75% of the course(s) outline before administering of examinations. University management should employ more objective and evaluate platform of assessing the compliant nature of the teachers to the rules and regulations in the

university. The university management should organize regular counseling programmes for lecturers and staff.

The university management should institutionalize internal control units in all faculties and departments to checkmate the activities of both lecturers and other staff of the university. Adequate number of lecturers and staff should be employed for all units in the university.

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