

LEADERSHIP PRACTICES IN UNIVERSITY EDUCATION AND GOAL ACHIEVEMENTS

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Abstract

University education is where high level personnel or individuals are nurtured, trained and developed for socio-economic and political growth of a nation. The leadership of any University plays a priceless role in achieving its academic goals, especially in the area of dissemination and acquisition of universal knowledge, values; functional, technical and scientific skills essential to global growth and development. The paper therefore examined leadership practices in university education for goal achievements. The paper examined the concept of leadership, styles of leadership and leadership theories. It went further to discuss the importance of leadership in university education for goal achievement, leadership practices in Nigeria universities and ways of improving leadership practices in university education and goal achievement. Based on the content of the paper, the writer recommends among others that the university management should create leadership teams and allot responsibilities officially by giving longstanding institutional form through team structures and other bodies. Also, the government through the university commission should improve recruitment and selection processes so as to encourage representation and to engage high quality candidates with suitable skills.

Introduction

Stakeholders in education and all other concerned individuals in the society in recent years have developed substantial attention on leadership

practices within the educational sector. Leadership practice in any organisation, be it the school organisation or others, is fundamental to its growth and development. Without effective leadership, organisations would not be able to operate or carry out its functions for which it was established and therefore, may collapse. When leaders are able to convince their followers or staff members to act in a particular way and to attain common objectives, within an organisation, they are demonstrating leadership and the followers always execute the orders given by the leaders (Okorie, 2009). Every organisation is established with the aim of achieving certain objectives especially the universities, and this is carried out with the help of human resource. Such objectives such as to provide courses of instruction and other facilities for the pursuit of learning, to encourage the advancement of learning without the distinction of race, sex, or any other factor in acquiring university education and so on. These objectives cannot be met without effective and proper leadership practices. The training of myriads of the personnel for every market economy is ensured by tertiary education (Nwachukwu, 2000). In order to realize these goals, academic excellence must be guaranteed by the University leadership. Academic excellence connotes effective teaching and learning, developmental researches, high impact community services, creativity and innovation, acquisition of self – independent economic skills by University graduates (Ofoegbu and Alonge, 2017).

Nevertheless, Nwadiani (2014) expressed concern on the undesired decay and rots in Nigerian university leadership practices which have posed challenges to university education. University leadership which is proactive, pragmatic and transformational stimulates or helps for goal achievement. Effective university leadership is a concept of typical blend of tasks, goals, objectives, governance structures and value technologies. In other words, this means that the burdensome task of actualizing the vision and mission of any university falls on the vice chancellor. The vice chancellor without any aberration is anticipated to possess effective leadership skills in order to manage the day to day operations of the university. According to Ofoegbu and Alonge (2017), the universities are expected to be centres of academic excellence in teaching, knowledge dissemination and developmental researches. These tripodal roles are hindered in typical Sub Sahara African Universities due to the challenges of poor leadership styles as well as inadequate teaching and learning facilities, lack of modern technological and pedagogical apparatus as well as poor and irregular payments. The graduates are therefore no longer motivated hence their willingness to look for greener pastures within or outside Nigeria. Imogie (2014) added that these challenges faced by Nigeria Universities have affected it negatively in the world

ranking of Universities. It was noted that none of the Nigeria Universities is ranked in the first tenth position among the top 100 Universities in Africa. According to the 2015/2016 Web Ranking of Universities in Africa, University of Benin, Benin City, and University of Port-Harcourt ranked 78 and 81 respectively. Nevertheless, University administrators in Nigeria are not unaware of their responsibilities toward the attainment of the core mandates of the university education. The leadership and administrators of Universities globally are undergoing paradigm shifts. They are very passionate about how to use teaching and learning together with researches to solve the myriads of problems threatening the peaceful existence of man. Such problems include unemployment, poverty, diseases, climate change, global insecurity, global economic depression, political instability and religious intolerance. (Ofoegbu and Alonge, 2017). Livingstone, (2014); McGee, Haworth & MacIntyre, (2015); García-Martínez, Díaz-Delgado & Ubago-Jiménez, (2018) added that good leadership creates way for the delivery of high-quality pedagogical practices (Lunenburg and Ornstein, 2012). Also, Hulpia, Devos & Van Keer (2009) noted that for leaders to achieve specific and significant results, it should be delegated or shared. Delegation of leadership is apparent when all staff work harmoniously with one another, participate actively in decision-making process, set goals, and analyse their performance. In any university, it is expected that there should be three kinds of leaders firstly, process leaders who manage the different phases of the adoption and institutionalisation of an educational initiative; secondly, content experts whose express role is to give advice and to coordinate technical matters; finally, political leaders who possess comprehensive knowledge of how the system functions and the requisite skills to ascertain a seamless execution Biggs and Tang (2011). Therefore, in order to successfully espouse and implement high-quality educational ventures, there must be a range of educational leaders with different responsibilities. Putting into consideration of the above enumerated, this paper focuses on leadership practices in university education and goal achievement.

Leadership

In any organisation leadership is paramount including the university institution. Leadership has a great impact on the achievement of educational goals. The concept of leadership has been defined by many educationists because of the key role it plays in the execution of school programmes, policies and the achievement of educational goals. Leadership is a process of influencing and manipulating people by providing purpose, direction, and motivation while operating to

accomplish the mission and improving the organisation. Leadership is seen by Armstrong (2012) as an important aspect of management which involves developing and communicating a vision for the future, motivating people and securing their engagement. According to Okorie (2009) it is defined as a process by which an individual exercises certain influence over other people and inspires, directs and motivates them to help achieve organisational goals. Jack (2015), Hoy and Miskel (2008) defined leadership as the process of influencing group activity towards goal achievement.

Importance of Leadership in University Education and Goal Achievements

In educational institutions, there must be leaders who should prudently manage the available human, material and financial resources in order to achieve educational goals. In Nigeria universities vice chancellors are the leaders. Without this leader in the university, there will be role conflicts, anarchy in the system and accomplishment of the institutions goals will be a mirage. According to Abraham (2003) leadership is very important in educational institutions because of their peculiar nature and the different categories of personnel that make up the institutions. Okorie (2009) outlined four major reasons why university institutions need leaders as follow:

The Incompleteness of Organisational Design: Due to the complex nature of universities, it is impossible to design the organisation ahead of time in such a way that it will provide for all the contingencies. Hence, leaders are needed to fill the gaps and accommodate the demands of the society in the organisational policies. Without leaders in university institutions, the physical facilities will become a monument and the staff will not be directed on what to do.

Changing Environmental Conditions: University institutions exist in a rapidly changing global environment and survival depends to a large extent on their ability to adapt to their environmental changes. Environmental changes could be technical, legal, cultural, climate, economical or human and they affect the schools in different ways. Hence, it is the responsibility of leaders to adjust and respond promptly to the environmental changes so as to keep the institution in a steady state with their environment.

Internal Dynamics of Organisations: University institutions are becoming more complex by day due to the social demand in education. As the universities grow in size, leadership plays a paramount role in re-adjusting its policies, recruiting

more staff, enrolling students, managing conflict, maintaining and renewing the physical facilities, creating conducive learning environment, maintaining equilibrium internally among others.

Dealing with Human Issues in Organisations: The university institutions are characterised by staff and student personnel who have different backgrounds, needs and aspirations. In other words, there is need for leaders to manage these individuals from different socio-cultural background in such a way that they will be productive, bearing in mind that there is individual difference.

Leadership Practices in Nigeria Universities

In Nigerian Universities just like in other sectors of the Nigerian national life, the upsurge and elevation of unethical leadership practices has been a major issue and concern to the government who is the owner of schools. This is mostly reflected in the service delivery posture of university management and members of staff. For example, evidences of this abound and manifest in favoritism, nepotism, god-fatherism, misappropriation of funds, lateness to work without due approval, absenteeism, nonchalance to work, red tapism, and non-performance of schedule of duties. Also, some workers are not prepared to be accountable for the jobs they are employed to do but would rather prefer to shift the blame for their poor attitudes on to others (Ayorinde, 2016). According to the researcher, universities as knowledge industries thrive on principle of collation of ideas for participatory democracy in decision making. President Summers of the Harvard University once stated that what makes his university retain its leadership position among the community of universities consecutively for more than a hundred years is that they uphold “the authority of ideas rather than the ideas of authority”. In other words, an environment such as it is defined above can only be successfully administered through the committee system which remains the instrumentality of participatory leadership in the university system which has the biggest display of intellectuals and professionals to enrich decision making. It ensures a balance between bureaucracy and democracy which makes university administration an ideal epitome of governance (Ayorinde, 2016). However, the problem here is that the many years of military rule in Nigeria rubbed off the universities its intended goals, thereby allowing the system to be characterised by all manners of autocratic tendencies and cronyism which have overtaken the democratic practice. Currently, certain leadership practices have crept into the administrative structure of university education in Nigeria. This include the creation of directorates that deal with certain needs such as Advancement and

Development matters, Legal issues, Academic Planning, Information and Public Relations and Human Resources. These functions which were formerly under the supervision of the Registrar as Chief Administrative Officer of university institutions are now made directly responsible to the Vice-Chancellor, thereby increasing his span of control and making his job more difficult (Ayorinde, 2016). Furthermore, Ndukwe, Ukeje&Onele (2016) were of the view that there are different shades of unethical leadership practices and activities across Nigerian Universities which have hindered goal attainment. These practices include:

- **Promotion of incompetent staff based on loyalty:** This case is likely to be seen in an institution where godfatherism is practiced, the godfather (who may be one of the university administrators) appoints, recruits, or promotes individuals (god sons) who in turn pays a quota or turn a blind eye to him. And sometimes those appointed, recruited or promoted may not be the right people for the job, they may not possess the skill, quality and knowledge required to do the work, leading to inefficiency and low productivity.
- **Ethnicism/tribalism in appointment of staff and admission of students:** This is a situation where the university management or leadership appoints, recruits or promotes staff based on their ethnic or religious background. Also, in the admission of students, special preferences are given to some students base on tribe, ethnicity and religious background. Kanu and Ursula (2012) in their study enumerated some of these leadership practices in Nigeria university institutions to be:
 - i. **Arbitrary charges by university management and lecturers:** Operating a university has become a gold mine. Fees in some universities in Nigeria (especially state and private owned universities) are far higher than tuition paid in federal universities. Management and lecturers in both public and private universities have devised so many ingenious ways of extorting money from students as well as parents. Illegal fees have been introduced in all level of university education in Nigeria.
 - ii. **Sexual Harassment:** This is a situation where some academics ask for sex in exchange for marks. It is popularly called “sex for grade or sexual harassment”, which is applicable to female students even though the male lectures also complain of being harassed by the female student. Asinya (2012), described the academic recognition issued by some Nigerian universities as “Sexually Transmitted Degrees”. He continued by saying that there are multitudes of bankers, engineers, lawyers, accountants, economists to mention but a few who flaunt sexually transmitted degrees, diplomas and certificates that

were priced and bought (probably with sex) rather than earned through diligent study.

- iii. **Late commencement of lectures/non-completion of course outlines:** Mid way into a semester or term, some lecturers who feel that they are dons of the institutions are still busy with other sundry activities and may not have commenced their academic lectures. Some of them teach these students in a hurry without covering the course outline, it is merely done just for them to write the examination.
- iv. **Commercialization of intellectual property, plagiarism and sale of academic handouts:** In some universities in Nigeria, students are under compulsion to buy handouts and textbooks from lecturers of which failure to do that one is not expected to pass with grades if at all he will pass.
- v. **Over enrollment of students:** The issue of over enrollment of students thereby exceeding carrying capacity of institution has been grossly abused by many university managements. For example, a university is supposed to have a number of students that it is meant to admit per year in line with its infrastructural capacity as regulated by the National universities commission (NUC). However, most universities in Nigeria ignore the NUC specifications. A classroom that is built for 30 students now accommodates more than 150 to 200 students. An overcrowded and stuffy environment cannot be conducive for teaching and learning.
- vi. **Proliferation of satellite campuses:** It came as a sweet relief, when the National universities commission (NUC) directed the authorities of Nigerian universities operating satellite campuses in the country to shut them down. Most of them were established as business centers to boost the schools internally-generated revenue base instead of academic outlets to cater for the academic interest of the public who are limited by distance and some other inherent factors. This has greatly affected the quality of university education in Nigeria (Nwaze, 2011) & (Asinya (2012).
- vii. **Writing of thesis for the supervisees:** Going through the process of writing a meaningful and result oriented research is not usually seen as a small task. Cashing in on student's ineptitude, some lecturers now undertake this academic rigor on behalf of their students for a fee.

Ways of Improving Leadership Practices in University Education for Goal Achievement

Improving leadership practices in university educational institutions must involve procedures; Ojedele and Fadokun (2004) & Jack (2015) highlighted some

approaches in improving university leadership practices for goal achievement, they include:

- **Tri-Dimensional Concept**

Tri-dimensional concept is one of the processes of improving the leadership practice of university educational institution. This concept according to Okorie and Uche (2005) is a unifying concept which looked at the leadership in terms of the job he is to perform, who he is, and the social setting in which the job functions. This concept involves setting specific standard in selection and tracing of the leader.

→ **The Job** → **The Man** → **The Social Setting**

Apart from his major tasks of curriculum development, instructional supervision, provision and maintenance of facilities/equipment and record keeping the leader or the man should have the capacity of both body, mind, emotional and spirit (Okorie&Uche, 2005). He must possess the energy, the intellect, emotional stability as well as spiritual qualities and a positive pattern of behaviour. There is the need for the leader to be able to possess the capacity to link the job with meeting other challenges in his environment. Improvement can also be in the area of constant training, retraining and development.

- **Strategic Planning**

Another area of improving leadership practices in university institutions is through strategic planning. The steering group of a university's strategic plan is usually chaired by the University Vice Chancellor. The task of the university leadership has to do with implementation of responsibilities. To improve the leadership through the strategic planning process, the university leadership must be involved at every step in the strategic planning procedure, since his major role starts at the implementation level. In order to improve the leadership, the issue of action plan and implementation must be taken into consideration in strategic planning (Babalola, 2009). He further posited that the implementation of a university strategic plan requires re-engineering of the structures, staffing and provision of leadership.

- **Creating Enabling Environment**

This has to do with providing enabling environment for the leader to function. An environment free of rancor, where all that he needs to function is provided will create an avenue for him to effective and efficient. These include adequate provision of funding, prompt training of staff, well-stocked library, and information technology facilities. Since the educational leadership involves the execution of policies, sometimes in conjunction with the committee as posited by

Ojedele and Fadokun (2004), he has to ensure that policies are implemented with utmost speed and effectiveness. He must be given the opportunity to make contacts, linkages, exchanges within and outside his environment.

• **Nomothetic and Idiographic Concept**

Nomothetic and idiographic concept is another area leadership practice in university institution could be improved to achieve its goals. By this, the institutional roles and expectation could be collapsed to ensure that the roles are not in conflict with that of the organisation. According to Babalola (2009), the nomothetic style which lay emphasis on the institution and role and expectation corresponds with McGregor's theory X and Blake and Mouton's managerial grid which emphasized more on the needs of the firm as against that of the individuals. Meanwhile; the Idiographic style which lays emphasis on the individuals, their personality and need disposition corresponding with McGregor's Theory Y and Blake and Mouton's leadership style with its focus on the fact that workers will perform better when they are satisfied. On the other hand, Blake and Mouton's leadership style which is the transactional style merges the organisation and members needs with trust and respect. In addition to the above, The Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD, 2007) identified some main policy levers which, taken together, can improve school leadership practices in university education:

a. Encourage distribution of leadership: Distribution of leadership helps to strengthen management and succession planning. Allotting leadership across different individuals and organisational structures can help to meet the challenges facing present-day universities and improve their effectiveness. This should be done in formal ways through team structures and other bodies or more informally by developing *ad hoc* groups based on proficiency and current needs.

b. Support school boards in their tasks: There are indications and evidences that effective university boards contribute to the success of an institution. In order for this to happen, it is important to clarify the roles and responsibilities of university boards and ensure consistency between their objectives and the skills and experience of board members.

c. Ensure appropriate variety for effective training: A broad body of knowledge supported by practice has identified the content, design and methods of effective programmes. It points to the following key factors: curricular coherence, experience in real contexts, cohort grouping, mentoring, coaching, peer learning and structures for collaborative activity between the programme and university.

d. Professionalise recruitment: Recruitment processes can have a strong impact on university leadership quality. While university-level involvement is essential to contextualize recruitment practices, action is necessary at the system's level to ensure that recruitment procedures and criteria are effective, transparent and consistent. Succession in planning, proactively identifying and developing potential leaders can boost the quantity and quality of future university leaders. There should be practical interview of the applicants instead of the traditional oral interview which should be one of the major criteria to ascertain one's eligibility. This will help to recruit them based on merit instead of backgrounds and ethnic nationality.

e. Provide options and support for career development: Providing career development prospects for university leaders can also help avoid vice chancellor burnout and make university leadership a more attractive career option. There are many ways to make the profession more flexible and mobile, allowing university leaders to move between institutions as well as between leadership and teaching and other professions.

Conclusion

The fact that quality leadership is central to educational outcomes due to increased responsibilities and accountability. Several studies have shown that educational leadership promotes effective leadership practices, because an educational institution can only be as effective as its leaders (administrative and academic). Failing to engage in effective leadership practices can put teaching and learning at danger, resulting in a poor quality of university education to the detriment of the students who are supposed to be trained, developed and equipped with the appropriate knowledge, skills and understanding to lead organisations in an increasing global economy.

Suggestions for Improvements

In view of the discussions of this study, the following recommendations were made.

1. Universities should encourage distribution of leadership or delegation of authority as way process to strengthen succession planning and management.
2. University authorities should distribute leadership based on expertise and competency rather than seniority and position, by creating ad hoc groups built on the current challenges or needs of the university.

3. The government through the university commission should improve recruitment and selection processes so as to encourage representation and engage high quality candidates with suitable skills.

4. The universities should create support structures to ensure active participation in university programmes, with opportunities for skills development on topics related to university governance, including university evaluation and university improvement.

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