

CRITICAL ISSUES IN THE MANAGEMENT OF STUDENTS IN NIGERIA TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract

The paper looked at critical issues in the management of students in Nigeria institutions. Education is seen as an instrument for holistic human development and empowerment of citizens of any nation, and is achieved through the implementation of the necessary school curricular and education policy. Therefore Nigeria tertiary education is generally a section of the educational system that is responsible for training and producing the required manpower that is vital for national transformation and economic development. Higher education's role therefore, is to see society as its life that requires continuous inquiry to get better. Basically, this is done through proper management of students. Thus, this study seeks to find out the critical issues in the management of students in Nigeria tertiary institutions. The work defined the concept of management, Nigeria tertiary education system, and management of students' crises in tertiary institution of Nigeria. It went further to highlight the problems of students' management in Nigeria tertiary institution and possible solutions to the problems associated with the management of students in Nigeria institutions. The work concluded that tertiary education system, which is the bedrock of development in the country is bisected with myriads of problems as regards students needs proper management. Consequently, it was recommended that since higher institution is the bedrock of development in the country, government and non-governmental organization should adequately fund tertiary institutions to ensure that necessary facilities needed for better learning experiences are not lacking in higher institution so as to avoid incessant protests among students and also school authorities should always give listening ears to students in all matters affecting students welfare.

Keywords: Concept of management, the Nigerian Tertiary Education System and Management of students crises in tertiary institutions of Nigeria

Introduction

The Nigerian tertiary education is generally a section of the educational system that is responsible for training and producing the required manpower that is vital for National transformation and economic development. Being the frontier of education, it is considered as the main index of national development and transformation whereby all the skills, knowledge and information acquired through this means are now the vehicle for productivity, wealth creation, prosperity, good health and healthy living, competitiveness, communication expansion, scientific and technological advancements. According to Ekundayo and Ajayi (2009), higher education plays a crucial role in the supply of high level manpower for the socio-political and economic development of a nation. They educate future leaders and develop the high-level technical capacities that underpin economic growth and development. However, higher education is regarded as an instrument of social change and economic development whose main purpose and relevance is the provision of much needed manpower to accelerate the socio-economic development and transformation of the nation (Ekundayo & Ajayi, 2009).

Management by very simple definition is the act of controlling or handling public affairs or business enterprise (Okeke and Uwazuruike, 2016). By extension, management is the process of planning, organization, directing, controlling and evaluation to accomplish predetermined objectives through coordination or use of human and material resources. Therefore, management of students in tertiary institutions involves planning, organization, directing, controlling and evaluation of students to accomplish predetermined objectives. Students in the context of this work refers to a group of people attending school such as universities, polytechnics, colleges of education etc, with a view to acquiring knowledge and skills needed to function in their immediate environment and society at large.

Management of students has proven to be a herculean task especially with the incessant students' crisis that has plagued Nigerian tertiary institutions. As long as students are on the campus, they are the non-established; they are without full time employment and are dependent on their families, educational institutions or on their own part time work for survival (David, 2007). Furthermore, because students are non-established, they are foot loose; they are not restrained by either economic or social obligation and have considerable energies to use up. Thus, management of students requires utmost carefulness. These issues involved in the management of students in Nigerian tertiary institutions will be analyzed in this paper.

Concept of Management

The concept of management is as old as the human race itself. The concept of 'family' itself required that life be organized and resources of food

be apportioned in a manner so as to maximize the utility of such resources. Taking proper steps to safeguard the family from attacks by wild animals, planning on where to go fishing and hunting and whom to go with, organizing these groups into chiefs, hunters and fishing bands where chiefs gave directions, and so on, are all subtle ingredients of management and organization. According to Okeke & Uwazuruike (2016), this kind of association called for management. Management is the art or science of achieving goals through people. Since managers also supervise, management can be interpreted to mean literally “looking over” – i.e., making sure people do what they are supposed to do. Managers are, therefore, expected to ensure greater productivity or, using the current jargon, ‘continuous improvement’. More broadly, management is the process of designing and maintain an environment in which individuals, working together in groups, efficiently accomplish selected aims (Rebore, 2003). In its expanded form, this basic definition means several things. First, as managers, people carry out the managerial functions of planning, organizing, staffing, leading, and controlling. Second, management applies to any kind of organization. Third, management applies to managers at all organizational levels. Fourth, the aim of all managers is the same – to create surplus. Finally, managing is concerned with productivity – this implies effectiveness and efficiency.

Management also involves the process of planning, organization, directing, controlling and evaluation to accomplish predetermined objectives through coordination or use of human and material resources. Onye (2010) defines management as an act or science of getting work done with the help of other people within a given time line. From the above definition, we can say that management involves setting goals within a time frame and making sure that it is accomplished by making use of the available resources. On the other hand, Anyanwu (2010) opined that management is a social process where few individuals at a particular period and location, are placed in leadership positions of an organization or system, to make decisions and ensure the effective implementation of the decisions. These individuals are therefore held responsible for the success or failure of that system or organization within the given period and location . thus, it may be right to say that management is what a manager does.

The Nigeria Tertiary Education System

The tertiary education system in Nigeria is composed of Universities, Polytechnics, Institutions of technology, colleges of education, that form part of or affiliated to, universities and polytechnic colleges and professional, specialized institution. They can further categorized as state or federal universities and as first, second or third generation universities. Three levels of university education exists in Nigeria university. First level stage offers a

Bachelor's degree after a minimum of three years and a minimum of six years (e.g. in medicine). The university second level stage offers a Master's degree following one year of Post-Bachelor's study. The university third level offers a Doctorate degree two to three years after the Master's. To gain admission into the first level of university education, one has to pass the competitive university Matriculation Examination (UME) (Ekundayo, 2008). Higher education in Nigeria can be further divided into the public or private, and the university sectors. Public universities owned by the federal and state government dominate the education system. In recognition of the need to encourage private participation in the provision of tertiary education, the federal government issued a decree in 1993 allowing private investors to establish universities following guidelines established by the Government.

The non-university sector is composed of Polytechnics, institutions of technology, colleges of education and professional institutions operating under parent ministries (Akintoye, 2008). The universities, polytechnics and colleges of education and professional institutions operating under parent ministries (Akintoye, 2008). The universities, polytechnics and colleges have a governing board or council appointed by the government and have some internal representatives of the institution as elected member or members. These councils generally govern the affairs of the institution on behalf of the government. The management of each institution is headed by a chief executive officer, that is, the vice-chancellor in the case of universities, the rector in the case of the polytechnics and the provost in the case of college of education.

According to the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2014), the goals of tertiary education include the following:

- Contribute to national development through high level manpower training;
- Develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of the individual and society;
- Develop the intellectual capability of individuals to understand and appreciate their local and external environments;
- Acquire both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to be self-reliant and useful members of the society;
- Promote and encourage scholarship and community service
- Forge and cement national unity; and
- Promote national and international understanding and interaction

The federal government has established supervisory and coordinating agencies for each group of institutions; the National Universities Commission for the

universities, the National Board of Technical Education for the Polytechnics and National Commission for College of Education for the colleges.

Management of Students' Crisis in Tertiary Institution of Nigeria

The current education reforms in education sector in Nigeria in the areas of planning, curriculum innovation and teacher education among others are management mechanism to revamp education industry to instil discipline in various institutions of learning. Government on her own side introduced the free education scheme and bursary award for students of tertiary institutions of learning. Government took these strides to enhance equal educational opportunities. The efforts of government notwithstanding, there have been increase in students' crisis in almost all the higher institutions of learning especially in Nigerian universities (Odu, 2013). Crisis in Nigerian tertiary institutions is not a welcome development. Rather it is cankerworm, hydra headed, disturbing to parents/guardians and citizens of the nation.

Students' crisis in the institutions of learning constitutes a havoc as it often lead to temporary closure of the institution, boycott of lectures, suspension and expulsion of students and student leaders, loss of lives, damage of school properties, disruption of school administration and truncation in academic programmes of the university (Egwu,2003).

Cultism as one of the causes of students' crisis is described as an assemblage of people who share unconventional ideas, and beliefs and involve themselves in eccentric conduct and manifestation mostly shrouded in secrecy; carry out secret cult activities and membership organization, rules and mode of operation are supposed to be unknown and unknowable to non-member cult (Umeh, 2001 & Igodo, 2002). Infighting and internal wrangling by cultists led to the formation of spinster groups such as Seadogs, Buccaneer confraternity, the Vikings, the Black Beret, the Daughters of Jezebel among others (Egwu, 2003). Impulsive desires for supremacy are among the reasons behind cult clashes, murder, maiming, rape, acts of sickening and barbarism in our institutions of higher learning (Odu, 2013). Some of the special features of campus secret cults in Nigerian Universities are nocturnal meetings held at odd place like cemeteries, hilltops or forests, knife and dagger pulling, gun drawing at non-members or members of opposed campus secret cults; torture, distinctive marks on the body; drinking human blood and others. Consequences of these nefarious act lead to indefinite closure of the institutions which the university authority cite as insecurity of lives and properties as reasons for the indefinite closure against cultism. Cult menaces in our institutions of higher learning are gaining momentum daily taking more dangerous dimensions and in fact, running a parallel government with the

university authorities. Measures targeted at stemming the menace of cultism in institution of higher learning appear not yielding positive fruits.

Another fact that aggravate students' crisis in Nigeria universities is communication gap. Effective communication diffuses tension among students and authorities in the institution. Despite this fact, some authorities of Nigerian universities shut their administrative doors to students' complaints and grievances which may likely result to students registering some unacceptable social behaviour such as violent demonstration of 1981. Igodo (2002) stated some psychological consequences of shutting administrative doors on students' complaints and requests when he remarked, "they feel they are being processed by a system to which they strongly object but are powerless to challenge of change". When students are denied the opportunity of being part of policy making decision in related matters of their welfare they feel subjected and dehumanized. Students believe they should have significant voice in determining some issues pertaining their welfare. When they ask to be heard and refused being heard and when legitimate channels are closed there is bound to be crisis.

Problems of Student Management in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions

The story of tertiary education in Nigeria today has largely been a story of mixed fortune. These institutions initially laid claims in making respectable impact on the socio-political and economic advancement of Nigeria. Today, there are doubts whether Nigerian tertiary institutions under the present conditions will be able to continue to lay claims on being central to national capacity to connect with the new international knowledge system and adopt, adapt and further develop the new technologies needed in the wider society (Ekundayo & Ajayi, 2009). Student management crises, some of which have been identified by Ekundayo and Ajayi (2009), and the traces are noticeable as (i) decline public expenditure, (ii) deteriorated infrastructure/facilities/equipment for teaching, research and learning – these are either lacking or very inadequate and in a bad shape to permit the universities the freedom to carry out the basic functions of academics (iii) secret cult.

- i. **Financial Crisis:** there is growing shortage of funds and learning resources in the university system. The major challenge facing the management of students in Nigerian tertiary institutions is inadequate funding. Emmanuel (2015) argued that there was an increase in the proportion of total expenditure devoted to education, but this has been considered to be rather grossly inadequate considering the phenomenon increase in student enrolment and increasing cost, which has been aggravated by inflation. The apparent shortage of fund available to the university system has been responsible for declining library, social and

laboratory facilities in Nigerian universities in recent years. This in no small way makes the governance of the university system a herculean task.

- ii. **Deteriorated Infrastructure:** it is worrisome to note that Nigerian universities are fast decaying. All the resources required for education production process are in short supply. Lecture halls, laboratories, students' hostels, library space, books and journals, office spaces are all seriously inadequate (Emmanuel, 2015). The equipment for teaching, research and learning are either lacking or very inadequate and in a bad shape to permit the universities the freedom to carry out the basic functions of academics.
- iii. **Secret Cults:** Perhaps the most important problem facing tertiary institutions in Nigeria today is how to handle the menace and aggressiveness of cult members. Never before has the potential for the destruction of lives and property on campuses been so great or escalated so fast and horrible as now (Egwu, 2003). In the same vein, Odu (2013) remarked that the issue of cultism among the students has opened a new and very dangerous dimension to the situation of things in our educational institutions. Where cults exist, there is no guarantee that academic programmes and activities would run normally. Hence the university may run the risk of being constantly closed or disrupted. The results of these cult activities as submitted by Odu (2013) have been feeling of fear on campus, killings and deaths, and campus disturbances.

Possible solutions to the Problems associated with the management of students in Nigerian tertiary institutions

It has become obvious that the broad aims of producing high-level manpower for National development for which tertiary education is meant for is not really being achieved as a result of the multifaceted problem bedeviling the management of students in the tertiary education system. It therefore becomes necessary to suggest ways of making the system more effective and efficient in relation to contemporary Nigerian society. The following solutions will help:

- i. **Adequate funding:** The gross under-funding of the educational system in the country has been rendering tertiary institutions incapacitated. Adepoju (2002) remarked that money is an absolutely input of any education system. It provides, the essential purchasing power with which education acquires its human and physical inputs. According to Saint et al (2003), the university system has not had the financial resources necessary to maintain educational quality in the midst of significant enrolment explosion. Apart from the release of fund, there

is the dire need for an effective monitoring of the management of fund presently being allocated to the sector, as efforts should be intensify to improve on what is currently being allocated to the system. As a means of ensuring effective management of fund, Mgbekem (2007) suggested that reliable accounting system should be established in each Nigerian university to guarantee accountability, honesty and transparency.

- ii. **Involvement of students in the decision making process:** To reduce the extent of volatile and militant students' unionism in campus, it is advisable that the students are involved in decision-making particularly on issues that borders on their welfare. Mgbekem (2007) suggested the following as means of curbing students' crisis, (i) university administrator should avoid being high-handed with students (ii) Vice chancellors should make themselves accessible to students (iii) University administrator should establish frequent forums for negotiation, dialoguing and exchanging of ideas between students and university administrators.
- iii. **Combating Secret Cults:** Eradicating cultism in Nigerian universities is a joint effort of all the stakeholders (government, university authority, religious leaders, students, and parents). They should come together and decide on how cases of cultism should be dealt with as research evidences have shown that most cult members are children of the highly placed in the society.

Conclusion

The need for tertiary education stems from the fact that the system is responsible for the development and production of high level manpower within the context of the needs of the nation. It has been seen that the tertiary education system, which is the bedrock of development in the country is bisected with myriads of problems as regards students management. These include: financial crisis, deteriorated infrastructure, secret cults, examination malpractices, sexual harassment, drug addiction and so on.

Recommendations

In view of the foregoing, the following recommendations were made:

- i. Government and non-governmental organizations should adequately fund tertiary institutions to ensure that necessary facilities needed for better learning experiences are not lacking in higher institutions so as to avoid incessant protests among students.
- ii. School authorities should as much as possible observe transparency in their dealings with students, be proactive, listen to complaints

and above all the democratic as opposed to autocracy in all matters affecting students' welfare.

- iii. Finally, responsible students should be nominated to serve in committees (e.g. disciplinary committee) and indirectly use them as information to school authority to timely inform management when students plan riot or intending to take laws into their hands.

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