UTILIZING E-LEARNING PLATFORM IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS FOR A SUSTAINABLE PARTICIPATIVE MANAGEMENT STYLE IN BAYELSA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper examines how the utilization of e-learning platform in tertiary institution can enhance a sustainable participative management style in Bayelsa State, Nigeria. The concept of e-learning, participative management and tertiary institution were discussed. The benefits and challenges of e-learning, how it can enhance participative management style were highlighted. It was recommended that students and staff must have regular access to technologies that supports learning so as to advance their communications skills.

Keywords: E-Learning, Participative Management, Tertiary Institutions

Introduction

Changes in technology have continued to alter possibilities and create new challenges for learning and pedagogy. This developmental trend in technology coupled with the needs and expectations from a range of stakeholders have made it imperative for educational organizations and society at large to constantly upgrade their strategies and policies as a way to remain effective and competitive.

Participative Management refers to as an open form of management where employees are actively involved in organization's decision making process. The concept is applied by the managers who understand the importance to human intellect and seek a strong relationship with their employees. They understand that the employees are the facilitators who deal directly with the customers and satisfy their needs. To beat the competition in market and to stay ahead of the competition, this form of management has been adopted by many organizations. They welcome the innovative ideas, concepts and thoughts from the employees and involve them in decision making process. Akangbou (2020) submitted that the use of e-learning platform improves experiences like digital simulation, manipulations and interactivity. This paper therefore, discusses how the utilization of e-learning platform in tertiary institutions can enhance a sustainable participative management in Bayelsa State, Nigeria.

Participative Management

Participative management (PM) has been used interchangeably to mean shared governance, employee empowerment, employee involvement, participatory decision-making, dispersed leadership, open-book management, or industrial democracy. These coinages have evolved as a result of the long quest to enhance employee contribution to management decisions so as to achieve organizational objectives and productivity. To participate means to work together, and it involves the process whereby two or more persons or organizations work together to complete a task or achieve a goal. Participative management can also mean a purposeful relationship in which all parties strategically choose to cooperate in order to accomplish shared outcome. It is a shared governance approach which makes a balance between faculty and staff participation in planning and decision making. Kassa (2017) noted that a leader who uses collaborative management style rather than making all decisions, seeks to involve other people thus improving commitment and increasing collaboration which leads to better quality decisions and more successful organizations. Participative management requires both change in how management is conceptualized. Mangers in this context are expected to relate differently, absorb and integrate complexities in their institutions. This is essential because, the failure of a nation's higher education system can ruin the achievement of national development.

Tertiary Institution

Tertiary institution, also referred to as third-level, third-stage or post-secondary education, is the educational level following the completion of secondary education. The World Bank, for example, defines tertiary institution as including universities as well as trade schools and colleges. Higher education is taken to include undergraduate and postgraduate education, while vocational education beyond secondary education is known as further education in the United Kingdom, or included under the category of continuing education in the United States. Tertiary education generally culminates in the receipt of certificates, diplomas, or academic degrees. UNESCO stated that tertiary education focuses on learning endeavors in specialized fields. It includes academic and higher vocational education. Nimi-Briggs (2014) defined tertiary institution as a community of teachers and scholars who commit themselves to the dissemination of knowledge through teaching and its acquisition through learning, research and scientific enquiry. The government has majority control of university education. Tertiary education in Nigeria consists of Universities (Public and Private), Monotechnics, and Colleges of education. Bayelsa state has a total number of 4 universities registered by NUC among which federal and state government own 1 and 3 respectively. The state has 2 polytechnics, 1 college of education, 1 school of Nursing and midwifery, 1 college of health technology and 1 institute of tourism and hospitality.

E-LEARNING

E-learning is an umbrella term that describes any type of learning that depends on electronic communication (Edo, 2016). It is a generic term covering a wide set of ICT technology-based applications and processes which includes: computer-based learning, web-based learning, virtual classrooms, digital collaboration and networking'' (Hambrecht, 2010). E-learning involves all learning that is facilitated by various technological devices, and related software and hardware. Definitions of e-learning are more specific in that they dictate that in order for a learning experience to fall within this category, it needs to involve electronic technology. Initially the definitions claimed that e-learning involves the use of electronic media to enhance teaching methods that relied upon techniques that are more conventional. The earlier definitions appear to be inclusive of a vast range of technological innovations delivering an educational experience and included online content distribution (Dickson-Deane, Gaylen & Moore, 2011). The potential of e-learning technologies has enabled tertiary institutions to reach new learners at a distance, increase convenience and expand educational opportunities (Weller, 2017). Teachers and learners no longer have to rely exclusively on printed books, other physical media material available in libraries, and materials in limited quantities for their educational needs (Holmes & Gardner, 2016). Literature has consistently suggested e-learning to be the best alternative to managing constraints to accessing education (Clarke, 2018; Weller, 2017). In other words, it is referred to teaching and learning that is web-enabled. In conjunction, other commonly used terms include: online learning, computer assisted learning or ICT in education. E-learning incorporates both content (curriculum) and instruction (pedagogy). It has become a term representing a new model of education that incorporates academic networks which particularly impact on the learning communities using varieties of learning resources.

Benefits of E-Learning Platform in Tertiary Institutions

Ahmed (2018), outlined the benefits of e-learning as

- Time saved
- Improved accessibility
- Saved Space and paper
- Stronger Security
- Reduce waste disposal costs
- Reduced environment impact

Also Ruthven and Hennessy (2015) summarized the benefits of e-learning as;

- Increased Productivity
- Improved Security
- Easy storage and access
- Reduced consumption of trees, water, energy
- Reduction of pollutant waste such a toner, ink cartridges

E-learning advocates for a system where teachers and students used ICT facilities such as Smartphones and tablets as a medium for instructional delivery during the teaching and learning. Kurumeh and Chianson (2011) observed that critical thinking is the pursuit of relevant and reliable knowledge about the world. This implies asking the appropriate questions, gather relevant information efficiently and creatively, sort the information and draw reliable conclusions that will result to certified personnel in the giving area of training.

Objectives of Participative Management

Participative management acts as a force to motivate employees to meet specific organizational goals. The main idea behind this style of management is not only using physical capital but also making optimum utilization of intellectual and emotional human capital. This is the process of involving people in decision making process to ensure that everyone's psychological needs are met. It in turn, increases the job satisfaction among employees and improves the quality of their work life. Motivated employees are the biggest assets of an organization and participative management is an effective strategy to retain the best talents of the industry.

Participative Management is seen as the quick cure for poor morale, employee attrition, low productivity and job dissatisfaction. However, it may not be appropriate to empower employees at every level but use of joint decision making at certain levels in organization can work wonders (Kim 2002). Moon (2010) explored the main objectives of participative management in organizations as:

- **To Make Best Use of Human Capital:** Participative management does not restrict organizations to exploit only physical capital of employees. Rather it makes the best use of human intellectual and emotional capital. It gives employees an opportunity to contribute their ideas and suggestions to improve business processes and create a better working environment.
- **To Meet the Psychological Needs of Employees:** When employees have a say in decision making process, it gives them a psychological satisfaction. It is a simple force that drives them to improve their performance, create a proper channel of communication and find practical solutions to design better organizational processes.
- **To Retain the Best Talent:** Participatory management is one of the most effective strategies to retain the best talent in the industry. It gives employees a sense of pride to have a say in organizational decision making process. Once they are valued by their seniors, they stick to the organization and become management's partners in meeting specific goals and achieving success.
- **To Increase Industrial Productivity:** In today's competitive world, motivation, job security and high pay packages are not enough to increase industrial productivity. Leadership, flexibility, delegation of authority,

industrial democracy and employee say in decision making are important to increase annual turnover of any organization.

- **To Establish Harmonious Industrial Relationship:** Participatory from of management is an unbeatable tact to establish and maintain cordial relationships with employees and workers union. The success of an organization depends on its human resources. Employee empowerment acts as a strong force to bind the employees and motivate to give them their best to the organization.
- **To Maintain a Proper Flow of Communication:** Two-way communication plays an important role in the success of any organization. Employee participation in decision making ensures proper flow of communication in the organization. Everyone contributes their best and tries to strengthen the organization by contributing their best to improve business processes.

Characteristics of Participative Management

Based on the above articulated clarification of participative management and tertiary institution, this section will outline and discuss the characteristics of participative management as applied in tertiary institutions. Omorobi(2019) identified the characteristics of participative management as

a. Ethical Dimensions
b. Enhanced Channel of Communication
c. Employees Empowerment
d. Recognition of Human Dignity
e. Psychological Satisfaction to Employees

Also in another vein, Kassa (2017) outlined the characteristics of participative management as

a. Continuous Involvement of legitimate stakeholders
b. Effective Decision-making
c. Delegation, distribution of power and empowerment
d. Psychological Satisfaction
e. Improved communication within work environment

Specifically, participative management as it applies to tertiary institution has the following features;

- **Involvement of Legitimate Stakeholders**

An avalanche, both of Nigerian and international literature, stipulates the significance of involving relevant stakeholders in education management regarding effective implementation of participative management in schools. The aspect on stakeholder involvement was advocated by Kassa (2017) and Omorobi (2019) who submitted that effective management and governance of tertiary institutions should not be seen as being the task of the few, rather, it should be seen as an activity in which all stakeholders and members of an educational community are actively engaged and

collectively achieve optimal implementation of participative management in a school. They also conclude that effective management and governance entails doing things and working with people to make things happen. It is thus a process to which all contribute and in which everyone in an organization or a school ought to be actively involved in order to achieve success through the implementation of participative management.

- **Decision-Making**

The heart of effective administrative processes, management and leadership roles in tertiary institutions is decision-making. Clearly, the success or failure of any institution is largely dependent upon groups and teams that are involved in the processes of decision-making and at such; the utilization of the principles and procedures of participative management is a determinant priority (Olorunsola & Olayemi, 2011:78). It is also notable that in schools where participative management is effectively implemented, stakeholders would be adequately involved in decision-making processes, and there would be commitment with substantial support for the realization of institutional goals whereby apathy and opposition will be minimized (Udoh & Akpa, 2007:85).

In Nigeria, decision-making process in tertiary institutions is to a far extent implemented through participative management. It is done as a collective activity but this does not mean that the individual's voice is forgotten. According to Fullan, cited in Singh (2005:18) individualism and collectivism within the implementation of participative management framework must have equal power and accountability. Singh (2005: 19) averred that the implementation of participative management in tertiary institutions is a shift towards the decision-making process which is in line with the values of democracy, transparency and equity. Thus collectivism regarding the implementation of effective participative management in schools is also important as it allows access of all stakeholders to the system.

It is remarkable that through the implementation of participative management in schools, the idea of collectivism has also been supported in collegial models. Bush (2003:64) reveals that the collegial model assumes that organizations determine policy and make decisions through a process of discussion leading to consensus. Maile (2004:93) maintains that heads of institutions may no longer take decisions unilaterally because lecturers and parents within the school governance and management should be fully involved in the implementation of policies that affects all of them. It shows that the devolution of responsibility in schools for the execution of transactions is essential and must be based on transparent decision-making processes to ensure effective implementation of participative management.

An effective implementation of participative management enhances decision-making for all stakeholders. According to Van der Westhuizen,(2008:156) a decision emerging from the implementation of effective participative management may be constructed in the following ways:

a) By means of consensus,

b) Through a majority vote,
c) A decision taken after input from a member of the group who has specialized knowledge,
d) An authoritative decision by the chairman after group discussions,
e) An authoritative decision without group discussion; and
f) Listening to others and then taking a decision.

It could be stated that the notion of decentralization of decision-making powers is based on the assumption that participation of all stakeholders in schools can play a major role in transforming education management and governance (Singh &Lokotsch2005:279).

Delegation, Distribution of Power and Empowerment

The notion of effective participative management implementation involves the delegation and distribution of authority and the empowerment of members within an institution to actively participate in the management and governance of the school environment (Stevenson, 2001:103). It emerges that the shift towards the implementation of participative management in education accompanies the move by central authorities around the world to give autonomy, responsibility and authority to schools. This movement implies that the implementation of participative management is grounded on the principles of democratic participation of stakeholders in education and the decentralization of authority to schools which is regarded as a fundamental change (Bezzina, 2000:299; Harris &Muijis, 2005:133). It is also notable that delegation within the context of implementing participative management in schools is a process in which influence among individuals are hierarchically unequal is shared. This power sharing ensures that hierarchical inequities are inevitably balanced where the leadership adapts to change through the use and implementation of participative management in schools (Kim, 2002:231; Donaldson,2006:7).

Sustaining Participative Management via E-Learning in Tertiary Institution

Okojie (2013) identified the challenges of sustaining a participative management culture in Nigerian campus and other organization as;

- Difficulties in implementation processes, especially technical and cultural changes regarding attitude and aptitude towards new technologies.
- Difficulty in using ICT gadgets for prompt and effective communication.

Eze, Ogwo & Okoloye (2015) reported that E-learning is efficacious in the internalization of information, which one of its most notable capabilities being its utility as an electronic–reader. The effective use of this technique in tertiary institutions at all levels; help to build students' and staff interest, knowledge and experience in the handling of electronic devices. This will also develop the needed attitude and aptitude towards new technologies and hence aiding a the flow of information needed for participative management approach.

Edho (2014) and Ngim (2015) identified the challenges of sustaining a participative management in Nigerian campus and other organization as;

- Expenditure on staff training and organizational changes.
- Technical difficulties and integration of applications electronic signature, etc.
- Constant innovation of computer systems, which requires continuous renewal.
- Adaptation to designs of processes and services to computer formats with easy handling and adequate accessibility
- Cultural barriers in the organization and users.
- Distrust safety storage system in computerized form
- Interest in the use of ICT
- Unequal access to mobile devices and other new technologies
- Lack of knowledge and experience in the use of ICT

A compulsory use of e-learning equips students and staff with the knowledge of sharing electronic information more efficiently, formulate responses to questions and this enhances their sense of accountability. It combines electronic-reading capabilities with web-browsing as well as an assortment of applications that facilitate the integration of information by making accessibility instantaneous (Rossing, 2012). These capability and potentialities in the use of electronic devices enhance class works; allow students to learn when and where they needed to do so. It supports lifelong learning, available anywhere, adaptable, intuitive to use (Keith, 2017) and revolutionize education. This feature of e-learning platform combined with the skills of creative, critical thinking and problem solving acquired from interaction will help users to overcome the challenges of coping with innovations in ICT, Technical difficulties, cultural barriers and adaptation to designs of processes and services in ICT.

Conclusion

The purpose of participative management is to ensure that all employees are part the policy formulation process and adopting e-learning as a means of instructional delivery in tertiary institutions will sustain the process.

Recommendation

1. All stakeholders must work together to evolve new ways of learning and build capacity in the use of e-learning devices in education because of its potential to sustain participative management.
2. Staff must have regular access to technologies that supports learning so as to advance their communication skills which in turn will encourage the right attitude and aptitude for a sustainable participative management.

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