

Leadership Empowerment and Effective Management of Nigeria Universities

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the concept of leadership and empowerment. It examines how leadership empowerment can enhance effective management in Nigeria Universities. Some related issues like the leadership empowerment in the university context, effective university management through empowerment and the impact of leadership empowerment on university management were examined. Recommendations were made that if university leaders are empowered, it will promote a high level of competence, sense of meaning, self determination and high influence over their employees. All these will definitely have a great impact on the effective management of the universities.

Introduction

Leadership empowerment is receiving the attention of researchers across the world. Leadership is a complex phenomenon involving the leader, the followers and the situation (Hughes, Ginneth and Curphy, 2009). The leader therefore is to create conditions for the team to be effective and to get results through others, among the roles of the leader. Yukl (2002), perceived leadership as a process of social influence in which one person is able to enlist the support of others in the accomplishment of a common task. It is evident that leadership occurs among people, and it involves the use of influence to attain goals. One can therefore say that leadership is dynamic and involves the use of power to influence people and get things done in any institution.

Menon (2001), defined empowerment as a psychological concept in which people experience more self-determination, meaning, competence, and impact regarding their role in the organization. He further broke down the key points that self-determination enables empowered leaders to experience self determination, which consists of freedom, independence, and discretion over their work activities. While *meaning* depicts leaders who feel empowered, care about their work and believe that what they do is important. William (2006), added another dimension as he perceived empowerment to be power sharing, the delegation of power or authority to subordinates in an organization. Empowerment heightens motivation for task accomplishment because people improve their own effectiveness by choosing how to do a task and using their creativity. Hardy and Leiba – O'sullivan (1998) saw empowerment as the process by which administrators or leaders share power and help others use it in constructive ways to make decisions affecting themselves and their work.

The university is the apex educational institution in Nigeria today, and it is the highest level of human capital development. There is the need to pay more attention to this level of education, right from the leadership to the most junior staff in the establishment, in order to attain the expected educational goals. Ibukun (1997) acclaimed that the main purpose and relevance of university education in Nigeria is the provision of much needed manpower to accelerate the socio-economic development of the nation. Such specialized education at the higher level is regarded as an instrument of social change and economic development as entrenched in the national policy on education (2004).

Empowerment of leaders in the universities

There are myriads of problems in the universities that demand urgent attention if the goals set is to be achieved. The leaders should be allowed to effectively manage the university affairs without any unnecessary intrusion from any quarter. The crux of the problem stems from the erosion of University Autonomy. Ojedele and Ilusanya (2006), Babalola, Jaiyeoba and Okediran (2007) describe university autonomy as the protection of the universities from interference by the government in the day to day running of the institution particularly on some cogent issues like appointment and removal of the Vice-Chancellor, the determination of size and the rate of growth by the NUC. Ajayi and Ayodele (2002) opined that government involvement in the university governance has been strife between the government and the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) for some time now.

In 2009, ASUU and government re-negotiation committee in pursuance of the goal of revitalization of Nigerian universities and objectives set out in the various universities enabling laws and statues, and the Universities Miscellaneous Provision (Amendment), Act 1993 as amended by the Universities Miscellaneous Provisions (Amendment) Act 2003 and the provisions therein, strongly believes that the autonomy of universities and academic freedom should be enhanced and protected. There have been series of intrusion from the government through various circulars emanating from government in the operation of the universities which has resulted to conflict with statutory powers of the university managers which has undermined due process and fair procedures in the operation of the universities. The recent findings on the state of university education in Nigeria as conducted by the World Bank and UNESCO had confirmed the degradation of the Nigerian university system. Nigeria was a dreamed country that should produce world-class university graduates that could compete with their counterparts around the world and hard work was to be her watchword. The autonomy of these leaders have been eroded and education has been politicized by the government to the extent that merit has been sidetracked in admitting students as people in government bombard these leaders with less qualified candidates not allowing them to select students with better score under the guise of who you know.

Leadership effectiveness

The concept of leadership effectiveness is a complex concept that is difficult to define as it captures myriad of components like multiple organizational contingencies and various personal and interpersonal behaviours. Attempts have been made by various people to define this concept in diverse ways. Stogdill, (1974), Bass and Stogdill (1990) catalogued and interpreted almost five thousand studies on the concept and found great variance in its definitions. Burns (1978) opined that "Leadership" is one of the most observed and least observed phenomena on earth as people seem to accept a default position that leadership is simply what leaders do and that leaders are simply people in power over others.

One inclusive definition of leadership effectiveness is the successful exercise of personal influence by one or more people that result in accomplishing shared objectives in a way that is personally satisfying to those involved. Hughes, Ginnett and Curphy (2009) asserted that leadership effectiveness cannot be viewed in isolation but that it is important to understand the three domains of leadership. That is, how the leader, the followers and the situation interacted and that they are all part of leadership process. This is to say that when a leader behaves in a particular way, even when it may appear obviously effective or ineffective, one should not automatically conclude something good or bad about the leader or what is the right way or wrong way leaders should act. It is only good to think about the effectiveness of that behaviour in that context with the followers. One can then infer that leadership effectiveness is dependent on the follower, the situation and the environment. Hoy and Miskel (2008) added that leadership effectiveness is a complicated, multifaceted and subtle topic.

March (2005) reiterated that effectiveness and efficiency levels of institutions are likely to be at the highest when leadership roles are performed by people who are competent, enterprising, committed to the institution, and free or left alone to do their jobs. He also concluded that competence, initiative,

identification and unobtrusive coordination, and decisions about them, are the heart of effective leadership.

Fielder (1967) perceived effective leadership as what a leader does to bring about staff efficiency and effectiveness, and also when he brings about the desired results for the organization or institution. While Draft (2008) saw leadership effectiveness as the degree to which the leader achieves a stated institutional goals in accomplishing what he tries to do. All these definitions point to the fact that effectiveness is what a leader strives to do in any organization using his ability, capability and resources both human and non-human available at his disposal.

Stronge, Richard, Catano (2008) asserted that effectiveness may mean achieving high production. An effective leader wants input from his lecturers to help make decisions and create policies. The lecturers are on the front line and a leader who involves his lecturers will understand more clearly what issues and problems they face, as individuals and a group. These issues may involve curriculum development, using technology in the classroom or the disciplining of students.

According to Marzano (2008), effective leaders possess certain traits, including honesty, fairness and integrity. These traits are recognized by both teachers and students in the classroom. When all individuals feel that they will be treated with fairness and given honest answers to queries, they will be happier and more confident. The leader must also hold himself to the highest ethical standards. If the leader's ethics do not meet these high standards, the universities will suffer.

Draft (2008) defined organizational effectiveness as the degree to which the organization achieves a stated goal, or succeeds in accomplishing what it tries to do. Organizational effectiveness means providing a valued outcome. Mc Shane and Glinnow (2005) perceived leadership effectiveness to be how the leader affects the institution. He further added that leadership effectiveness relies on the satisfaction and well being of the subordinates as subordinates join organization to fulfill their personal needs, so effectiveness is partly measured by this need fulfillment. Leaders effectiveness includes his viability that is, his ability to survive. He must be able to maintain the commitment of his members particularly during the turbulence of the teams development. Leaders effectiveness can also be measured by their ability to secure sufficient resources, and find a benevolent environment in which to operate.

Yukl (1981) opined that the skills possessed by a leader could help to measure his effectiveness. Such as creativity, organizational persuasiveness, diplomacy, diplomacy and tactfulness, knowledge of the task and the ability to speak well. Cinderella (2002) added that research identified leader's several "competencies" that are related to leadership effectiveness as drive or the innate to pursue goals, leadership motivation, integrity, self-confidence, intelligence, knowledge of the work, emotional intelligence.

Effective management of universities in Nigeria

Effective management of university is desirable and it is paramount with university autonomy. The need for autonomy or self-determination is the desire to have choice in what we do and how we do it. In other words, it is the desire to act independently, rather than to have external pressures and rewards determine our actions (Ryan and Deci 2000). Porter (1961) argued that there is need for independent thought and action, autonomy is a basic need. When the autonomy of the leader is eroded, the chance of the leader to be an origin is spoiled by a hierarchical attempt to control him by the visitor who is the governor or the government of the day who interferes in admission policy, the choice of a Vice-chancellor, funding, discipline to mention but a few. When a leader's autonomy is eroded, he has little appetite for site-based management and a sense of self-determination is stolen (Wool Folk 2007).

The internal management of each university is defined by an organogram. The first citizen in the university in Nigeria is the visitor who is the Head of State or the Head of Government that established it. He presides over the convocation ceremonies. The second citizen is the Chancellor, by law take precedence over all other members of the university and when present, presides over all convocations and he confers degrees on students.

At the peak of the management structure of each university, is the governing council, headed by the chairman (Pro-Chancellor) which is saddled with the administrative functions in the area of goal setting, policy formulation, staff discipline, budget approval and liaison activities with the government of the day. Ibukun (1997) asserted that the main body controlling and regulating the internal academic activities of the universities is the Senate, headed by the Vice-Chancellor and the Registrar as the Secretary. The Senate regulates the academic activities of the university through the general guidelines provided by the NUC.

The external and internal managers of university education in Nigeria paradoxically require the latter to assist the former in order to function very effectively. The external level which is the control by the Federal Government through the National Universities Commission (NUC). Ibukun (1997) explained the main objective of NUC as ensuring the orderly development of university education in Nigeria, maintenance of high standard and its proper and adequate funding. Okojie (2007) asserted that the NUC activities in improving quality of university education in the country are comprehensive.

The ease with which performance and autonomy of university managers could be eroded in Nigeria by the political proprieties call for the external moderators, the National Universities Commission (NUC) to empower the internal managers for effective management, there is need for the empowerment of university leaders in the following areas:

Admission of Students:

Before 1978, the Senate of the university determined access to higher education in Nigeria but the Federal Government stripped the Senate of this power through the establishment of Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board centralized admission into Nigerian Universities. Despite this, the government of the day still pressurizes the leaders of the university over admissions, with their various green biros, to admit students whose scores are not so high to study their desired courses there by sidetracking merit.

Appointment of Staff:

These have been so much politicized by the government of the day to an embarrassing state that merit seems to have no place again and due process no longer matter. Appointment and recruitment of staff are done under the guise of temporary appointments without thorough screening of their certificates and they later regularized via appointment and promotion committee.

Appointment of Vice Chancellor and Management Staff:

The involvement of the visitor in the running of the universities has been criticized by various scholars. Appointment of Vice Chancellors and Management Staff now appear to be the prerogative of the government contrary to ASUU and government agreement of 2001, that a vice-chancellor should hold office for one term of five years. There has been situations whereby the visitors have disallowed some vice-chancellors to finish their term but sent them packing due to one grievance or the other as these leaders are appointed, dismissed, or relief of their post as they like. Adesina and Awosusi (2004) remarked that the visitor has become a major feature in the legal structure of Nigerian Universities with both judicial and quasi-judicial power. They added that with both political and government power, the university autonomy has been eroded by the visitor. According to Ajayi and Ayodele (2002), government involvement in university governance has been a point of strife between Government and Academic Staff Union of University over some time now. University autonomy is highly essential for effective management and coordination. The appointment of deans of faculties, provosts of schools have been greatly politicized and influenced by the visitor and the government of the day contrary to section 6.2.5 of the agreement that these officers should be elected in all universities by the respective academic bodies. Idumange (2002) observed that vacillating policies on the part of government did not make for effective coordination and when education is subjected to vagaries and vicissitudes of crude politicking, it becomes a weapon of self-destruction.

Finance:

Educational financing has neither enabled educational development to take place on sound lines nor has it enabled the achievement of different objectives of education and effective management in the universities. The universities in Nigeria have been grossly underfunded by the government, and the managers have been left at the mercies of philanthropists, endowment etc. to embark on capital projects.

Oyeneye (2006) and Adegbite (2007) lamented that there is growing shortage of funds and learning resources in the university system. Inadequate funding has been responsible for the poor state of education in the universities e.g unequipped libraries, laboratories and other infrastructures. The sources of internally generated funds have been intruded into by the government thereby making effective governance of the university a herculean task.

Academic Programmes and Implementation:

Academic programmes have been intruded into in the universities by the NUC contrary to the acts that entrenched and established the universities by the bicameral system of administration by the Council and the Senate. The latter has absolute control over academic policy while the former has control over property and physical assets of the university. Many of the programmes are now being monitored by the National Universities Commission, the Council and its implementation are being disrupted, and the role of the Senate of the University is being usurped. The disruptions make management of the universities difficult. Akinkugbe (2001) opined that any institution that is incapable of designing its own curricular and syllabuses and being constantly innovative about them does not deserve the title of a university.

Supervision of University Activities:

Academic freedom has been curtailed by the politics of the day contrary to ASUU/government agreement of 2001, the law forbade the functions of inspectors to universities but the government comes up with diverse methods to monitor activities in the universities, particularly the physical plants in the universities usurping the role of the university council. Another area of political interference according to Adegbite (2007) is the constitution of the visitation panels by the visitor at will instead of the minimum five years intervals. The main aim of which is to witch-hunt or bully the Vice-Chancellors and the university managers.

Infrastructural Development:

The rate of fast decaying infrastructures in Nigeria Universities call for concern. The resources required to enhance and facilitate education production are ridiculously in short supply. Lecture theatres, laboratories, offices for workers, computers, technological materials etc. are inadequate and where adequate, they are in deplorable state. According to NUC (2004), the presidential visitation panels which looked into the operations of all Federal Universities between 1999 and 2003 reported that physical facilities at the universities were in deplorable state.

For universities in Nigeria to meet the needs and aspirations of the people, and to produce world class university graduates that could compete with their counterparts around the world, university management should be left exclusively to the university leaders.

Conclusion and recommendations

Leadership empowerment and university management have been seen to attract public and expert comments and concern. It came out clearly that without definite empowerment of university leaders, backed up by necessary legal supports, the goals and aspirations of university education would not be achieved and the effective management of the university will be a mirage. However, for Nigeria Universities to record meaningful development, leaders' empowerment must be addressed and embraced by the government. The university leaders should be supported with all the necessary resources needed as leaders for effective management of the universities.

The university autonomy and academic freedom should not be intruded into by the NUC and government in order to promote a high level of competence and performance, a sense of meaning and determination, high influence and to produce world-class university graduates that could compete with their counterparts around the globe.

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