

REFOCUSING PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN NIGERIA FOR INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP

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ABSTRACT

The study carried out a survey of extant literature to discover that public universities in Nigeria are still confronted with several challenges especially funding irrespective of improved funding in recent times. The study contends that public universities are better placed in the present to manage their problems than hitherto but that depends on the proprietary capacity of the management teams of the various institutions to convert present gains. The study also found that most of the challenges facing public universities hover from the external to the internal. At the core of the external is the absence of electric power supply; while undue prolongation of academic programmes especially at the post graduate level constitute especially unannounced reasons for tertiary-level students' migration. The study also found that public universities suffer heavily from bureaucratic over-centralisation and over reliance on government funding with adverse impacts on their capacity for innovativeness. The study thus recommends that public universities would need to open up to the potentials within them via inclusive or participatory management strategy like the management by objectives technique as a model for aggregating inclusive style management and by which to unleash the potentials of the worker trapped in the doldrums of alienation. From investments in poultry farming to the establishment of mini industries, and the like, public universities would have engaged not only in fund raising but would have made learning practicable while concurrently adding to capacity-building as students majoring in related disciplines will be exposed to practice which could enhance their initiative to

productivity. Such a trend would not only yield profits but would also restore public confidence in the public university system. As such the paper beckons on public university management to free their institutions from Drucker’s “activity trap” and rise up to define alternative approaches to uplifting the low competitiveness of public universities.

Keywords: management by objectives, alienation, public universities, Nigeria, workers, tetfund

1. Introduction

Quite a consortium of studies on the state of public universities in Nigeria has raised concerns on the deteriorating quality of the sector within the country.(Babalola, 2007; Usoro, 2010; Clark and Asukoya, 2013;Odeleye, 2012; Anya 2013). Among them Moja (2000) concedes that public universities of the present is not comparable to the Nigerian public universities of the 1970s that had the quality of education comparable to standards offered by high ranking universities in Europe at the time.

In this regard, the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) in its 2014 report on global flow of tertiary-level students migration indicated that a whopping 52,066 Nigerians were studying in various countries all over the world with the United Kingdom topping the chart as top destination of the mobile students (UNESCO, 2014).

The report however had no data on the number of foreigners studying in Nigerian universities. The column “total number of mobile students hosted” was blank in comparison to several relatively less endowed countries like Ghana which within the same UNESCO report plays host to 15,683 foreigners; Algeria 7,953 foreign students while Zimbabwe played host to as much as 352 foreign students. (UNESCO, 2014). Clark and Asukoya, (2013) specifically cite the “generally poor quality” of Nigerian universities as reason for this migration.

The 2012 National Universities Commission report on the state of some selected universities in Nigeria espoused much evidence on the dismal state of some public universities of which Chiemeaka and Nwangwu (2015) tagged “a disturbing level of decay in public universities in Nigeria” and to which Anya (2013) reacts that instructional and learning facilities within Nigeria’s public universities were in very bad shape with manpower deficiency pervasive in most of the universities

The primary objective of this qualitative study is to suggest policy initiatives by which public universities in Nigeria may revert to the era of glory witnessed within the Cold War phase of public university development (1950-1980) within which most first generation universities thrived productively and were comparable to notable universities around the world.

The choice of public universities from among other levels of tertiary institutions follows from two broad reasons:

- i. The fact that public universities constitute the uppermost macrocosm of knowledge repository from which the government can readily borrow to evolve new policies or amend existing ones.
- ii. The fact that this study aims to make salient contributions that may be practicably applied within Nigeria’s public universities and tertiary education sector as a whole.

It is also pertinent to highlight some of the manifest benefits of public university education as follows:

- i. public university education results in proper exploitation and utilisation of national goods and also helps in the development of economic resources.
- ii. public university education is prelude to multidimensional inventions and discoveries as well as offer solutions to emerging problems in society.
- iii. public university education aids in the acquisition of intellectual and numeric skills necessary for both individual and national advancement.
- iv. public university education is key to planning at both individual and national levels.

- v. public university education enables specialisation in diverse fields of study which enables multidimensional national development

It is however not clear whether public universities in Nigeria offer a kind of “flag-independence” type of education in which what counts for value is simply the certificate issued on graduation and whether academic services actually gear towards equipping beneficiaries with requisite skills for self-sufficiency in lieu of the generally assumed poor quality of graduates from Nigerian public universities.

Yet, we may vouch that, in the present, agitations for improved funding of the public university sector may be said to have been reasonably met with the high impact intervention packages from the Industrial Trust Fund and the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (Tetfund). (Tetfund, n.d.).

Undeniably, with the enactment of the Tetfund Act of 2011 virtually all tertiary institutions in Nigeria have been sprawling with equipped new buildings, Internet Communication Technology (ICT) buildings and more while academic and non-academic staff have been further equipped with book development grants, research grants, conference attendance grants, as also staff retraining grants all visible for all to see.

Despite the gains, Tetfund public universities are still riddled with a myriad of problems ranging from external to internally constituted problems like paucity of academic staff and undue prolongation of academic programmes especially at the post-graduate level.

2. Problem Statement

Several persistent confrontations within the public university system in Nigeria occasioned the need for this paper, but from among them two are especially highlighted.

These concern the absence of regular electric power supply and the issue of flagrant perpetuation of post graduate programmes in public universities in Nigeria.

According to African Union, (2006) estimates, over 30 percent of Africa’s skilled professionals live abroad; about 70,000 Africans trained in Europe remain, while over 10,000 Nigerian experts

trained in the United States have chosen to remain in there and not return home. (African Union, 2006).

These figures corroborate with World Bank estimates cited in Blair and Jordan, (1994) that some 23,000 qualified academics bail out of the African continent annually in search of prospects for better working conditions.

The African Union sums up by alerting “there are more African scientists and engineers working in the United States alone than there are in the entire continent” (African Union, 2006).

The glaring brain drain no doubt is occasioned by poor working conditions at home and among these poor working conditions for Nigeria is the absence of regular power supply above all other conditions.

For an individual, the inconvenience, expense and health hazard associated with running generators as alternative to electric power supply is overly debilitating.

For public universities absence of power supply towers above all challenges that may ever be conceived per problems confronting public universities because it belittles in no small measure all the effort that has thus far been made in the construction of internet communication technology centres sprawling all around in various tertiary institutions courtesy of TETFund among other manifest and latent adverse effects.

On another scale, the poor absorptive capacity of public universities offers practicable justification for the forced migration of thousands of tertiary-age level students to foreign tertiary institutions. Worse still, this ‘flight’ is accompanied by billions of naira in capital flight all betraying the fact that there is not as yet a master plan for a sustainable development of the education sector in Nigeria.

But the poor absorptive capacity of public universities remains at the surface per reasons for low patronage of public universities especially for most post graduates who can manage to find their way out of the country.

The primary drivers for students' migration are not unconnected to poor infrastructural facilities such as electric power supply. Yet, the unwarranted prolongation of especially Masters programmes and terminal degree programmes is undefined to such an extent that it could be said "there is no determinate end for a post graduate programme in a public university in Nigeria."

Beyond the trauma occasioned by undue prolongation of these programmes the customers of the education services are expected to pay fees however long the programme lasts and for idle years within which nothing significant takes place academically.

To this end, Daily Trust newspaper (2016) affirms that Nigeria fueled the UK education sector to the tune of N246 billion in student fees and bills in 2010 alone, which was over 60 per cent of the Federal Government's 2012 education budget which according to Omole (2016) stood at N400.15bn.

Daily Trust (2016) further reports that Nigerians studying in British and American universities spent over N137 billion on tuition and living expenses in two academic sessions alone, amounting to 34 per cent of the Federal Government's allocation to education for the period.

In a rapidly advancing e-world where the ball pen has largely been substituted by the keyboard of computers perhaps the greatest challenge of public universities is uninterrupted power supply that can guarantee especially round the clock access to the internet by which extensive research can take place.

The management of public universities in Nigeria could lead the revolution of establishing independent sources of electricity from which other African countries can borrow as virtually all levels of productivity in the modern era is dependent on electricity.

3. Literature Review and Theoretical Premise

3.1 Literature Appraisal

Quite a plethora of literature has arisen on how to realise the full potentials of public universities in Nigeria in the face of several problems which many assume to be strictly paucity of adequate finances.

However, following from an assessment of the modes of funding of Nigerian universities and their implications on performance, Ogbogu (2011) identified that although the federal government provides about 90 percent of public university funds, the former often fails to meet up with expectations due to economic and political depression. Ogbogu therefore suggested that universities need to be opened to innovations and more pragmatic strategies in sourcing for non-government funds.

Efemini (2014) on his part drew a similar conclusion in requesting that public universities need to alter their funding models “to overcome the circle of underfunding and dependence on inadequate government resources”.

From another dimension Ogunrotifa (2012) appraised the civil service in Nigeria and submitted that the service is fraught with lack of measurable objectives; inadequate evaluations; mismanagement of time; inadequate facilities; disorganisation; personnel mismanagement; and over centralisation; and that such internal weaknesses has led several public organisations to define their output as money disbursed rather than service delivered.

Bello (2007) argues that university administrators should diversify their resource base, develop creative ability and legitimate initiative to generate funds to make them less dependent on government subvention.

Tracing the origin of civil service in Nigeria, Anazodo, Okoye and Chukwuemeka (2012) advanced that the model of civil service bequeathed to Nigeria by her colonial master (Britain)

was narrow in structure and objectives. It was basically structured to enable the colonial masters to successfully extract the much coveted financial and material resources required in the latter's home country.

Colonialism was therefore marked by lack of accountability and absence of transparency. This model is further void of all innovativeness and has carried on to the present age.

Still according to Anazodo et al. (2012) at independence in 1960 when Nigerian nationals took over the administrative leadership, no attempt was made by emerging 'comprador' elite to restructure the civil service to suit local developmental needs.

The 'comprador' elite bureaucrats who occupied leadership positions in the civil service imbibed the colonial schema of wealth acquisition for self-aggrandisement and self-superiority other than improving the lot of the country.

In his reaction to the diametrical cultural differences between Africans and the Europeans, first generation Nigerian journalist and nationalist John Payne Jackson (1848-1915), cited in July Robert (2004) established that:

the life of the native of west Africa is of a communal order. The life of the European in Europe and elsewhere is individualistic. (Payne cited in July, 2004)

Indeed the colonial legacies of segregation, individualism and top-down command and control approach led the African away from the native ways of handling issues which consequently led to the absent mindedness or the "government work not be my father work" character with which the civil service in Nigeria came to be associated and which drove communal ways-of-doing and innovativeness away altogether; a trend Adebayo (1994, p. 41) describes as "government being 'done' to people, rather than a people being governed by consent.

Colonial style-bureaucracy has its advantages no doubt as it is especially meant to safeguard and ensure accountability. But the question that begs for answer is 'how successful has the model

yielded to ensuring accountability in Nigeria’ where corruption has persisted to almost irrevocable proportions.

Africans and no less Nigerians are a communal people within their respective ethnic cleavages and show more loyalty to community than to individualism; more commitment to consent than to being squared into the box of over-centralisation.

Public service in Nigeria is essentially tied to the strict top-down bureaucratic approach foisted on the civil service by erstwhile colonial masters leaving low prospects for innovation and responsiveness in changing circumstances.

3.2 Theoretical Premise

3.2.1 Marxist Theory of Alienation

The top-down approach of the civil service may be interpreted within the guiding light of the first degree of alienation of the worker considered within Marxist alienation theories as ‘alienation of the worker from the object of his labour’ or the estrangement of the worker from the product of his work. (Ollman, 1976; Fromm, 1961).

According to Ollman (1976) the theory of alienation is the intellectual construct by which Marx explicates the devastating effect of capitalist production on the physical and mental state of the worker within the social process of which he or she is a part.

For Marx “the object which labour produces, stands opposed to him as an alien thing, as a power independent of him, the producer”. (Marx, 1844; Marx, 1867; Fromm, 1961) By this counsel Marx succinctly implies that the worker invests both his life and labour into the object he produces, yet the worker does not own the fruits of his labour, which are appropriated by the capitalist master.

The worker becomes more estranged the more he produces. Everything he makes contributes to a world outside of him to which he does not belong. For instance, the moment a table is produced from a log of wood by the labourer it emerges as a commodity with a price tag while the connection to the actual hands of the labourer is severed and the amount of real labour expended to produce the table is totally disregarded as the price enters erroneously as a reflection of the object's true worth. Both the logger who cut the wood and the carpenter who built the table are completely forgotten.

Similarly, the worker who provides useful information or ideas for the achievement of organisational goals suffers the same fate as the labourer whose labour transforms raw materials to finished products if his contributions are not duly recognised.

By and large, excluding the worker from the decision making process of management carries with it two major effects - alienation' and following there from a possible injudicious attendance to duty on the part of the former.

By injudicious attendance to duty is meant that the alienated worker could most likely resort to stifling vital information that may be valuable to the enterprise on one hand and on the other hand, he attends to duties without requisite job satisfaction which veritably affects the quality of the services he renders.

Only a well-articulated participatory management model suitable to the Nigerian cultural milieu is capable of revitalising ingenuity for managing confrontations within public universities besides eliminating the effects of alienation flagged by the capitalist command and control system.

The forum for proactivity and innovativeness has been enhanced following the grant of autonomy to public universities by the government as invoked in the autonomy policy issued at the inception the new millennium by the then Obasanjo administration. (FME, 2001).

Public universities in Nigeria constitute the highest citadels of learning and need to take their pride of place in the scheme of things in society. From them, society expects the uppermost standard possible; from the best engineers to the best managerial experts the planet can possibly offer. It is thus incumbent on the professed experts to evolve alternatives to managing all manner of confrontations in their various institutions including seeking alternatives to regular electricity supply.

3.2.2 Appraisal of the Management by Objectives Technique

The search for a ‘best’ approach to management beyond Fredrick Taylor’s (1911) ‘carrot and stick’ veritably led to the emergence of the ‘management by objectives’ (MBO) technique which offers solutions to the questions of organisational vitality and creativity.

This managerial philosophy and technique was endorsed and popularised by Drucker (1954) who defined the concept as a systematic and organised approach that allows management to focus on achievable goals and to attain the best possible results from available resources by aligning goals and subordinate objectives within the organisation.

Although several management models and theories of motivation have arisen since Taylor, most of them have either attempted to build on aspects of the MBO or affirm its efficacy. As such the MBO has been variously endorsed and has been further developed by several management theoreticians, like Odiome, (1965); Locke (1968); Carroll and Tosi (1973); Morrissey (1970); Kondrasuk (1981); Hodgetts (1990); Ebert and Griffin (1991) to mention a few.

Among several findings, Drucker was intrigued by the fact that some employees actually knew more about certain subjects than their bosses or colleagues, yet laid low at their workplace. He thus endorsed that every business enterprise needs is a principle of management that will give full scope to individual strength and responsibility and at the same time provide a common direction for vision and effort, while establishing teamwork to harmonise the goals of the individuals with organisational goals. (Leigh, 2009).

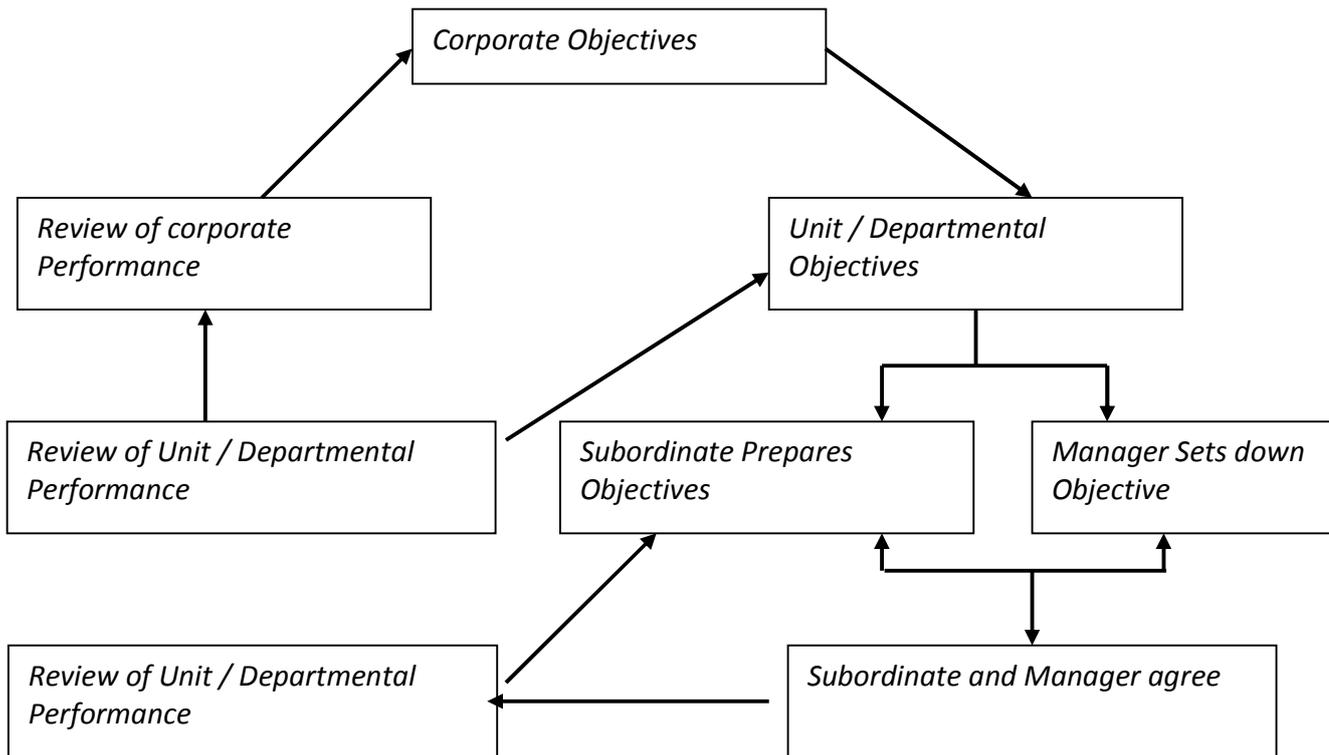
3.2.2.1 The MBO Process

Hodgetts (1990, p. 385) identifies six stages in the MBO process as stated below:

- i. First, the manager identifies the goals to be pursued over the next evaluation period expressed in terms of profit revenues, margins, competitive position, employee relations, and more.
- ii. Second, the organisational structure is clearly described - who heads a given department? and more; in doing this however an appraisal of previous effort is gauged in terms of what was expected of each person in comparison to results obtained.
- iii. Thirdly, the manager and subordinate(s) jointly set objectives for the next evaluation period and put them on paper for record purposes.
- iv. Fourth, an annual goal-setting worksheet is designed to help each subordinate reach these objectives.
- v. Fifth, during the MBO cycle subordinate(s) are checked upon. In particular, a unit manager appraises efforts at attaining set targets, and offers aid if required or amendments as required.
- vi. Last, results are reviewed against goals after which objectives are outlined for the next review period.

This feedback process is further illustrated below

Stages of the MBO Process



Source: Riggs, Bethel, Atwater, Smith and Stackman (1980, p. 502)

According to Lenkowsky (2005), Drucker advocated that for companies to be better managed they would have to provide a sense of status or community for their managers and employees by involving the latter in governance, while decentralising factories to make them less distant. Drucker also called attention to the competitive threat from Japanese corporations, the rise of which he attributed to their deepened alignment of labour with management.

The MBO technique has been variously tested and found to be very effective. For instance Hunter (1991) carried out a meta-analysis on MBO and goal setting participation in decision making, and found that productivity increased with the level of top-management commitment to MBO.

Several other management theoreticians have over the years improved on various aspects of the MBO. Among them Locke (1968) who following from hundreds of field work spanning over several years identified a link between goal-setting and employee performance. He found that, for 90 percent of the time, specific and challenging (but not too challenging) goals led to higher performance than easy, or "do your best," goals.

Locke's findings further showed that the "more difficult and specific a goal is, the harder people tend to work to achieve it because a goal that's too easy is not motivating. Hard goals are more motivating than easy ones, because it feels more of an accomplishment to achieve something you've worked hard for." (Locke, 1968; Locke and Latham, 1990, 2002, 2006).

Discussion of Findings

The rigid command and control structure and character of the civil service bequeathed by the colonialists do not tally with Africa's unique ways-of-doing which is prominently communal. Tertiary education managers need to free their institutions from Drucker's "activity trap" and rise up to define alternative approaches to solving their problems in which case transparent participatory management has been suggested.

Several ideas, sensitive information, and meaningful contributions are lost forever because subordinates are grossly neglected due to paucity of participatory management, hence the need for MBO.

MBO is both a philosophy and an approach of management that explores how humans are organised across business, government, and nonprofit sectors of society via shared responsibility away from sentiments of secluded centralisation.

By participatory and inclusive management workers will cease to be commoditised and used as simply another factor of production. Inclusiveness would engender employee empowerment and job satisfaction besides organizational effectiveness it would procure.

Relevance of the Study

This study offers an extended discussion on why a concerted effort at salvaging public universities in Nigeria is imperative via the management by objectives technique. It is however noteworthy that quite a consortium of assessments have been carried out on this sector especially on public universities. But most of these ended up defining the problems effectively but rarely raised practicable solutions by which the institutions may plausibly redress their problems.

Recommendations

It is incumbent on relevant governing bodies and other stakeholders in the public university sector to propound standards for the effective adaptation of the MBO technique.

Public universities in Nigeria need to be more proactive to become less dependent on external funding.

Random grants and funds can be intercepted for gainful projects from poultry farms to mini industries as most of the institutions are blessed with abundant expanse in land space.

Drucker's caveat that "MBO works if you know the objectives, 90% of the time you don't" may serve as the greatest source of funds open to public universities in Nigeria.

It is thus incumbent on the management of public universities to carry their institutions to great heights or kill them by continued begging for funds.

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