

Critical Challenges of Higher Education Management and Administration in Nigeria: A Case Study of Niger Delta University, Wilberforce Island, Bayelsa State

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Abstract

The fulcrum of this paper is hinged upon identifying and tackling the widening challenges of Higher Education Management and Administration in Nigeria, using a case study of an area of relatively less educationally developed population in the Niger Delta region. The paper weighs the pros and cons of the management and administration of the increasingly populated Bayelsa State University known as Niger Delta University. It recognizes generally the variegated challenges faced by managers and administrators of every other Higher Education Institution in Nigeria and interprets them in the light of the present revolutionary Higher Educational frenzy prevalent, all over the country. The Change-oriented Leadership Model matches into the theoretical framework of analysis used. A descriptive research design with both primary and secondary-based sources sufficed for the research. The research methodology combines a quantitative and historical approach that is both theoretically and conceptually innovative. The findings reveal that the task of Higher Education Management and Administration pose fundamental challenges to academic growth and development which cannot be underestimated. The analysis therefore suggests that tackling the critical challenges of Higher Education Management and Administration in Nigeria requires a holistic approach that involves meeting up with the demands of handling a large bulk of information from an ever-increasing Higher Education student population. The conclusion holds that Higher Education Management and Administration in Nigeria have improved over the years but that their ever-growing challenging requirements sit rather uneasily between and among other factors including environmental peculiarities, technological revolution and educational globalization.

Keywords: Administration, Higher Education, Management, Niger Delta University (NDU), Nigeria.

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Introduction

Proper management and administration are the hallmark of every successful institution. Over the years, the Nigerian Higher Education system has been beleaguered with many challenges. Myriads of problems have been militating against the effective management and administration of the Nigerian Higher Education system. These problems and challenges have ranged from financial crisis emanating from poor funding, poor infrastructure, brain-drain, erosion of Higher Education System's autonomy, graduate unemployment, volatile and militant students' unionism, secret cults, examination malpractices, to sexual harassment, among innumerable others. Different government administrations, both Federal and State Governments have at different times tried to address and re-address these endemic problems of the Nigerian universities. The Nigerian government has done well generally, in different administrations, to review upward the pay-package of academics, grant the university autonomy and make plans and projections on the nation's manpower needs in a bid to integrate this into the university programmes. These government efforts have gone far towards a continuous revamping of the Nigerian Higher Education system.

However, the system of management and administration of the Nigerian Higher Education have seemed to be laden with multiplicity of challenges despite the government efforts. These incessant challenges come as a result of the education system being influenced by the vagaries of the fast-changing globe. There have seemed to be no drastic measure for the persistent systemic challenges of Higher Education management and administration as a result of educational globalization in Nigeria and world over. The trend has turned and the buzz is now about leadership; management and administration among many other issues emerging within the fast-changing global state of affairs (Cohen and March, 1986). These critical issues have to be tackled with proper management and administration which entail focusing on supporting, evaluating and

developing academic staff quality as its core, which includes coordinating the academic curriculum and learning programs, monitoring and evaluating study practices, promoting staff professional development and supporting collaborative work cultures (Bush, 2011). Hence the fresh and recurrent challenges emerging in the Nigerian Higher Education System requires a holistic approach.

Therefore, Higher Education management and administration world over requires an approach that would accommodate constant change which characterize the global education system. This will inform the rationale for the adoption of Change-oriented model of education management theory in handling the current challenges.

Change-oriented Educational Management Theory:

Change-oriented leadership model has been deemed pertinent in educationally turbulent environments. It is a style of leadership which concerns about identification of threats and opportunities through monitoring the environment, proposing new strategies as well as building new visions, innovative thinking encouragement and risk taking for advancement of change initiatives within the educational system (Yukl, Gordon and Taber, 2002).

Based on the comparison made by Yukl (2004) between transformational, charismatic and Change-oriented leadership, the latter leadership style has some specific features that do not exist in transformational and charismatic leadership and thus, Change-oriented leadership is conceptualized as a more comprehensive leadership style in a turbulent educational environment.

It must be noted that change-oriented leadership is based on the belief that human society keeps on evolving continuously, therefore learning lessons of the past and anticipating what is going to happen in future become the necessary beginning point. Trend analysis seems to be the first step (Baldrige, 1971). Change-oriented leadership seeks to improve the entire education system of a country or a school organization which has been afflicted with hindrances, conflicts, and turmoil that have prevented it from progressing forward and becoming better. Therefore it is deemed completely pertinent to this study. Change requires resources, retraining, management, and commitment and that is the import of the application of this theory in management and administration of Higher Education system in Nigeria.

Critical Challenges of Management and Administration in Niger Delta University

The Niger Delta University (NDU) was established by Law of Bayelsa State on May 15, 2000. It was particularly established to address the disadvantaged status of the State as an “educationally less developed State” and significantly to contribute to the educational and socio-economic development of Bayelsa State, Niger Delta in particular and Nigeria in general. The University which started academic activities in the 2001/2002 Session graduated its first set of students in the 2004/2005 Session and its student population has constantly grown over the years.

The initial challenge of Management and Administration in NDU began with how to set up and manage a campus on a non-motorable site, to attain a respectable level of cost efficiency while keeping quality of delivery high and increasing the economic value of the host community and the entire society.

In respect of the foregoing, NDU considered within the context of developments in the larger Higher Education system and, apart from its peculiar problems had to respond to the dynamics of the national and global systems affecting higher education in general.

In considering some of the critical challenges that have been confronting the management and administration of Higher Education system in Nigeria, especially as it relates to the Niger Delta University, the list would be inexhaustible. For the sake of focus, a few points have been carefully selected and discussed below. These points are partly integrated with the highlights of the Paper Presentation at the 2nd Funai Leadership Development Seminar, 5 – 6 June, 2013, which was titled *Challenges and Innovation in Higher Education Management in Nigeria: Reflections & Lessons in the Light of Recent Experience* by Prof. Sola Akinrinade, Pioneer Vice-Chancellor, Osun State University, 2007 – 2012.

They included the following:

- i. Challenge of Creating Competitive Institutions in a Globalized World.
- ii. Challenge of Providing Access without Compromising Quality.
- iii. Challenge of Competition from Other Providers and Inadequate Human Resource Capacity.
- iv. Garbage In, Garbage Out: Challenge of Poor Input from the Lower Systems.
- v. Challenge of Inadequate Funding and Reluctance of Beneficiaries to Share in the Cost of Providing Quality Education.

These points above are treated based on the facts gathered from the challenges of Higher Education Management and Administration at the Niger Delta University.

In an interview session held with Dr. Stanley Ogoun, the Acting Dean, Faculty of Management Sciences and Chairman of Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) at the Niger Delta University over the challenges of Management and Administration of the

State Institution, the following points as identified above informed a succinct analysis (see www.olorisupergal.com) that is adapted for this writing.

Challenge of Creating Competitive Institutions in a Globalised World:

In the global village, the products of Nigerian Higher Education institutions have to compete with the graduates of other institutions world over. In times past, the graduates of most Nigerian Education institution particularly the first generation higher institutions could easily hold their heads high anywhere in the world as they received education that compared with the best and were taught by lecturers that would hold equivalent positions in any institution in the world.

At the minimum, nationally, graduates of Nigerian Higher Education institutions have to compete for the limited vacancies in the public and private sectors of the economy. In order to deliver products capable of competing favourably and fitting into the limited vacancies available in the societal system, the Higher Education System has to be properly structured.

In the case of the Niger Delta University, the fact that some academic staff who were engaged from 2013 for the purpose of accreditation visit from the National Universities Commission (NUC) were not paid affected both the University and its would-be products. In that very year (2013/2014 Academic Session), the Faculty of Law was denied accreditation. However, the university had to engage staffers on sabbatical contracts and adjuncts to be able to cover up that gap but for non-payment of salaries, the sabbatical staffers had all gone back to their various universities still unremunerated. This implies that for there to be a State-owned institution that would compete favourably and effectively in the globalized society including Nigeria, the Government must continuously involve in its management and funding.

Challenge of Providing Access without Compromising Quality:

There are limited spaces out there for potential entrants to the Nigerian Higher Education institutions. Statistics revealed that by 2012, the first set of the products of Universal Basic Education (UBE) introduced by the Federal Government all over Nigeria, were ready to enter the university. Until about a few years back, when increases in admission spaces were announced by the National University Commission (NUC), there were less than 200,000 spaces in all Nigerian universities combined, while over 1 million applicants had been writing the University Matriculation Examinations annually for the five years previous in a row. The increases in admission spaces made possible by a combination of increase in quota for older institutions and the emergence of new State and private universities, only expanded the total space available to about 300,000 – thus, the system could only cater for well under a quarter of applicants. This is one major root of corruption in the system as both parents and intending students continuously try to compromise the system in order to secure a place (Aluko, et al 2011).

The do-or-die struggle for admission in the Niger Delta University (NDU) had at a point become such that even most of the indigenous candidates found it almost impossible to measure up to the stipulated admission cut-off marks raised as a result of the challenges from other competing institutions outside and invasion and domination by non-indigenous entrants. This remained the case since candidates had no near-by choice of Higher Institution than going out to meet a tougher frenzy of admission struggle to enter other State's or Federal higher institutions.

However, the situation has been urgently addressed in recent years with the approval and establishment of Federal institutions like Federal University of Otuoke, Federal Polytechnic Ekowe and Federal Science and Technical College, Tungbo. This is followed by some State institutions like Bayelsa State College of Education, Sagbama, Bayelsa

State College of Health Technology, Otuogidi-Ogbia and the private institutions like the newfangled University of Africa, Toru-beni which has allegedly been projected as a private institution of Governor Seriake Dickson located in his village. Other private institutions include Institute of Science and Technology, Imgbi-Yenagoa, Niger Delta City Polytechnic, Ogbia, to mention but a few. With these, admission problems resulting from the challenge of providing access without compromising quality have been fairly tackled. The competition is left to rage among the institutions.

Challenge of Competition from Other Providers and Inadequate Human Resource Capacity

The human resource challenge is not limited to the teaching staff: there is manifest gross incapacity in the administrative and other non-teaching cadres including technologists and even finance staff. Other providers are competing for the best talents available both students and staff; while many new institutions are aggressive in their recruitment programmes (Cuthbert, 1984).

Emergence of both Government and private universities with various forms of ownership represents a major challenge to public institutions and to the university system at large Crawford, M. (2009). It is evident in the Nigerian Higher Education System that increase in number of tertiary institutions has not been matched by a commensurate expansion in the workforce for those institutions. As of 2007, the Nigerian university system required at least 8000 additional PhD holders in most disciplines in order to service the then 80 universities (Osime, 2007). That was then. The demand of the present academic system requires immeasurable skilled hands.

In the case of NDU academic research, the Federal Government scheme, Tertiary Education Trust Fund known as TETFUND and ETF, Education Trust Fund have been

sponsoring some aspect of the conferences, at least once in a year. There has not been subvention from the State Government, no overheads, no grants or assistance so far (Ogoun, 2017).

Being an obvious fact, Niger Delta University has fairly old and retired professors from other universities that have been on ground to supplement the requisite manpower to run a full blown university. And to that intent, most of the staffers, like in the civil service after the creation of Bayelsa State in 1996, were drawn from outside (Rivers State and Delta State). Most of the utility academic staffers of NDU are on a stand-in to support the training of the less educationally developed population of the region and to ensure the fulfillment of the vision of the founding fathers of Niger Delta University. NDU still suffers from inadequate human resource capacity insofar as the major staffers have not been permanent.

Garbage In, Garbage Out: Challenge of Poor Input from the Lower Systems:

In Niger Delta University (NDU), some Science Faculties and Departments have limited facilities and structures that would enable effective study and delivery of the required course content by the lecturers to the students in concern. However, with the help of the National University Commission (NUC) periodic accreditation, this challenge is getting surmounted by year.

Concerning the struggle over flushing out the poor input and nuisance from other lower systems, the University System has virtually developed a strong, water-tight mechanism. Every Department in NDU has internal rules and regulations that guide their student's progression from one Academic Level to another. In the Faculty of Engineering for instance, students are required to pass the Year 1 introductory courses of Mathematics, Physics and Chemistry among others in order to proceed to the next academic Level. Faculty of Medical Sciences and Faculty of Law also have their own rules to that effect.

The essence of this has been to maintain a standard of quality students and at the same time sieve out the incapable ones through their Withdrawal-As-a-Result-of-academic-Failure, popularly known as WAARF in the school.

Challenge of Inadequate Funding and Reluctance of Beneficiaries to Share in the Cost of Providing Quality Education:

Public Higher Education Institutions are competing with other government priorities for funding (World Bank 2000). Reluctance of beneficiaries to share in the cost of providing quality education has also been an issue. This was the case that resulted to the closedown of Lagos State University (LASU) at the increment of the school fees. The Bayelsan Government had also suggested the idea of payment of tuition in NDU, and had made reference to Lagos State University. This would definitely be difficult, if not impossible for a State like Bayelsa with no industries, a purely civil service State, to afford tuition of exorbitant amounts. The scheme has been envisaged as never to have been feasible from inception. Notwithstanding this fact, the Governor of Bayelsa, Seriake Dickson had persisted in a stakeholders' meeting that the salaries of NDU would no longer be sustainable, that the University management should think of ways and means of generating fund to sustain the University. He assured that Government would be willing to guarantee a facility for the University to take and set up holding company and go into profitable ventures that will generate enough fund. This would enable the Government support the University by giving a little subvention while the other balance would come from the University. But this model as already envisaged would not be workable in a place like Bayelsa. Furthermore, the law setting up the Niger Delta University did not envisage profit making as part of its core mandate. It is supposed to be an institution that is designed to address social services and particularly the development of critically needed manpower around the State and the Niger Delta region (Ogoun, 2017).

During the tenure of Governor Alamiyeseigha, subvention of about 30 million had always been left to cater for the miscellaneous school affairs which included the administration of the Licensing Office at the State Capital, Yenagoa as well as the ferry-boat transportation of the staff to the main campus at Amassoma, since the road was still under construction. Now, nothing of that sort exists. The road construction has since been completed and transportation had been left solely in the hand of commercial operators. No more Licensing Office, the school has relocated to its permanent site. Perhaps this could be why the government had shrunk from shouldering the responsibility of giving subvention and overheads.

The fund which the management has depended upon has been from the students fees account. Already the Niger Delta University management runs different mini-campuses distanced from the main campus. There is the Old Campus which is the first developed site of the university, Main Campus – newly developed a distance from the old one, College of Health Science – downtown the university community, Medical Student's Hostel at Ogboloma in Gbarain and Faculty of Law at Ovom, Yenagoa. All these campuses have equipments that are powered by diesel-engine and the cost of managing diesel-generated campuses have been currently exorbitant.

Therefore inadequate funding and reluctance of beneficiaries to share in the cost of providing quality education have been among the clogs in the wheel of a successful Higher Education management and administration in Nigeria (World Bank, 2000). This is considered evident in the light of the present management and administrative predicament of the Niger Delta University.

Solutions, Recommendation and Conclusion:

Having gone through the whole gamut of some critical challenges facing the management and administration of Higher Education System in Nigeria and the Niger Delta University, in particular, it behooves the paper to suggest some solutions and make a recommendation by way of contribution to knowledge. Below are some suggestions and recommendations.

Attraction and Retention of Talents and Experts:

Highly skilled and competent staff are always scrambled for among Higher Education institutions (Miller, et al 2001). To maintain a matchless standard and surpassing level of academic performance, the managers and administrators of Higher Education Institutions in Nigeria including those of the Niger Delta University, should encourage their talents and experts through the following practices:

- Providing teaching and research facilities
- Sustaining a system of remuneration that compares favourably with a fairly standard system world over.
- Networking with other institutions nationally and internationally to make available resources and facilitate the development of research partnerships between the institution's staff and their colleagues in other parts of the world.
- Rapid assessment of staff, particularly external assessment: Vice-Chancellor's direct involvement in making calls to external examiners and use of conference assessment system and quick payment of honoraria to assessors, among others.

Conclusion

Going through the strategies to contain the challenges of Higher Education Management and Administration in Nigeria, it has been discovered that there are various approaches that new institutions may wish to adapt and/or adopt depending on the environment in

which they operate. The recommended approach is change-oriented style of management. This proposes that each Higher Education Institution should develop along its own peculiarities, reflecting the visions of the leadership to accomplish its distinct mission and that of the larger society, in tandem with the current trend of continuous change in the globalized world.

Niger Delta University for instance, is targeted at empowering a region of educationally less developed population. Federal Polytechnic Oko, too has its vision, mission and values ranging from lifelong learning, discovery academic engagement and commitment to creativity and service to the society and entire humanity at large.

Therefore, tackling the critical challenges of Management and Administration of Higher Education System in Nigeria should be within the context of environmental peculiarities of the institutions involved. This is attainable; it only requires a holistic approach. Hence the ever-growing challenging requirements of Higher Education management and administration in Nigeria could be met through an insightful study of the environmental peculiarities, technological revolution and educational globalization.

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