MANAGEMENT CHALLENGES IN WEST AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION: THE NIGERIAN SITUATION

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Abstract

This study investigated the management challenges in West African higher education. Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population comprised all the Nigerian universities representatives who attended the ASUU National Delegate Conference (NDC) 2014, male and female lecturers totaling 450. This number 450 was used as sample (incidental sampling technique) since they are manageable. Three research questions and one null hypothesis guided the study. Instrument for data collection was a researcher made structured questionnaire which was validated by three(3) experts in Imo State University, Faculty of Education. The reliability of the instrument was ascertained using test-retest method and Cronback Alpha Analysis, which yielded a coefficient value of r 0.85 that was considered adequate for the study. The 440 instruments given to respondents who were physically present at lunch brake were collected on the spot. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while t-test statistic was used to test the hypothesis formulated. A mean of 2.50 served as decision rule. The findings of the result revealed the major challenges in higher
education system, the indicators that proved poor management and ways to overcome the challenges. Based on the finding, conclusion was drawn and recommendations made.

Keywords: Management, Challenges, Higher education.

Introduction

The attainment of national development through education has been the desire of many nations. The desire is accomplished through higher education. Higher education is a vital tool for helping West African developing countries to join and benefit from the world globalization. In the globalized world, the growths of knowledge complemented by the diffusion of information and communication technologies (ICT) have been the catalysts for economic, intellectual, social and political development. As opined by Amadi (2011), if knowledge is the electricity of the new international economy, then institutions of higher education are the power sources on which a new development process must rely.

Higher education is crucial to the resolution of some complex problems and the development challenges that face the West African countries. While the ability to access and apply knowledge and technologies will remain a central feature of Africa's renewal and rejuvenation, the West African renaissance will not be possible without higher education that ensures the production of sensitive and committed intellectuals, scholars, writers, artists, designers, dramatists, musicians and critics (Anyagoo and Ihebereme, 2014).

Higher education in this study is used to mean the education given after secondary education including universities, colleges of education, polytechnics, monotechnics. They are often called tertiary institutions of learning. The institutions are owned by either the Federal, State governments, voluntary agencies, religious organizations or private individuals.

Education itself, is an instrument for sustaining and developing the life of people, an instrument of change, stability, cultural and ethical values in a child to grow to the full status of a man sound in mind, health and body; to acquire the knowledge and skill that will enable him to live a useful life; to have high standard of conduct and be an honourable man trusted by his fellows as well as to be a man of peace, courage and sound judgement. To Eze (2011), education is an organized and sustained instruction designed to communicate a combination of knowledge, skills and understanding valuable for all the activities of life.

Education in West African countries cannot achieve its goal without proper management of human, financial and material resources. Obi (2003) described management as involving strategy, innovation, initiating about change, creative problem solving and decision making, actively seeking out alternatives and opportunities, reformulating goals and priorities, redeploying resources, negotiating, resolving conflicts dynamic or active leadership, diplomacy, statesmanship and a high degree of risk taking and entrepreneurship. Management
can therefore be viewed as the international process involving a sequence of coordinated events such as planning, organizing, coordinating and leading in order to achieve set-goals using available resources.

Managing higher education in West Africa in the 21st century is a process with organic efforts in the co-ordination of human, financial, material, intangible resources and liabilities for the realization of both expressed and unintended goals of national education tradition (Nwadiani, 2012).

Management of higher education in West Africa in the 21st century is being ineffective and inefficient due to certain grave challenges militating against it. A challenge is seen as a difficulty which stimulates interest or effort. As such, the researcher is interested in finding out the major challenges, the indicators to prove poor management and the best way to tackle or overcome the management challenges.

The Problem
There have been hues and cries over the poor management of higher education in West Africa in the 21st century. The institutions are faced with numerous challenges ranging from gang rape, armed robbery, cultists, activities, incessant disruption of teaching and learning, poor quality graduates, etcetera. Some researchers and scholars have investigated the extent to which education administrators (the Vice Chancellors, Rectors, Provosts) have managed higher education with its challenges. This study further investigated into the indicators that proved management of higher education in West Africa poor and the best way to solve the management challenges.

Research Questions
Three research questions were posed to guide the study:
1. What are the major challenges confronting the management in the higher education in West African in the 21st century?
2. What are the indicators to prove that higher education is poorly managed in West Africa in the 21st century?
3. What are the ways to overcome the management challenges in West African higher education for improvement of teaching and learning?

Hypothesis
One null hypothesis tested at p < 0.05 level of significance was formulated to guide the study.
HO: There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female lecturers on the ways to overcome management challenges of higher education in West Africa.

Methodology
The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The total study
population comprised of male and female lecturers from the whole federation of
Nigerian universities who came to National Delegate Conference (NDC) totaling
450. The whole population was used as sample (incidental sampling technique)
since they are manageable. A researcher designed questionnaire titled:
Management Challenges in Higher Education (MCHEQ) was used to collect data
from the respondents. The instrument was face and content validated by three
experts from Imo State University, Owerri. Two experts from Department of
Measurement and Evaluation and one from Social Science Education Department:
all in the Faculty of Education. The questionnaire contained 20 items structured on
a 4 points rating scale for strongly agreed (SA), agreed (A), disagreed (D) and
strongly disagreed (SD) with 4, 3, 2, and 1 point respectively. A mean of 2.50 and
above was adopted as the decision rule for the items. The instrument was subjected
to test of reliability using test-retest method and Cronbach alpha statistics. A
reliability co-efficient of r-0.85 was obtained showing high consistency. The
researcher employed the assistants of 5 colleagues who attended the NDC with her
from the same university. They all agreed on the mode of administration and
collection of the instrument. A total of 440 instruments were administered to
respondents physically present at lunch brake were retrieved. Mean ratings and
standard deviation analysis were used in answering the research questions while
the t-test statistics was used for testing the hypothesis at p < 0.05 level of
significance.

Results and Findings
Research Question i
What are the major challenges confronting the management in West African higher
education in the 21st century?

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation on major management challenges in West
African higher education N = 420

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>X</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Decision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Political leadership and tribal sentiments</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>Agreed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Lack of school facilities and equipment</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>Agreed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Poor management control and co-ordination</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>Agreed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Poor financing of higher education and education sector in general</td>
<td>3.97</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>Agreed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Teacher-student ratio and overstretched infrastructures</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>Agreed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Deficient and overloaded curriculum</td>
<td>2.52</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>Agreed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Examination and certificate oriented with mass malpractices and abuse of grades, Students unrestiveness, cultism, indiscipline and decaying moral decadence</td>
<td>2.79</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>Agreed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Inadequate and ill-equipped libraries, science and technical workshops and laboratories.</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>Agreed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Poor provision and usage of IT facilities, internet connections and services for technological development.</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>Agreed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1 showed that the respondents agreed to all the items 1-10: 3.97, 3.64, 3.38, 3.16, 3.06, 2.79, 2.70, 2.70, 2.66 and 2.52 with average mean of 3.06 which was above the decision rule of 2.50. This implies that items 1-10 are among the major challenges confronting the management in higher education in West Africa. Poor financing of higher education and education sector in general scored highest (3.97), while deficient and overloaded curriculum scored least (2.52).

Research Question 2
What are the indicators to prove that higher education is poorly managed in West Africa in the 21st century?

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation on indicators to prove poor management of higher education N = 420

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>X</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Decision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Unemployed school leavers (graduates)</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>Agreed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Incessant strike actions and dislocation of academic calendar</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>Agreed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Some specialized manpower and students to overseas countries in quest of quality education and greener restorations</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>Agreed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Gory sight of decayed, dilapidated and uncompleted structures and facilities</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>Agreed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Poor provision of basic amenities to life - water, power, houses and degeneration standard of education.</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>Agreed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data presented in Table 2 revealed that the respondents’ agreed to all the items (11-15) with mean scores above 2.50. The high average mean of 3.14 implies that the indicators to prove poor management of higher education are common to all and worrisome.

Research Question 3
What are the ways to overcome the management challenges in West African higher education for improvement of teaching and learning?

Table 3: Mean and standard deviation on the ways to overcome the management challenges in higher education in West Africa N = 420

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>X</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Decision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>Adequate funding of education sector</td>
<td>3.09</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>Agreed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>Provision of the necessary infrastructures, facilities, equipment, manpower in quality and quantity</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>Agreed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>Timely intervention to foresee crisis from students, host communities and labour unions on campus</td>
<td>3.86</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>Agreed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>Avoidance of government political interest and political in-service to higher education system</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>Agreed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>Proper motivation to staff and students: employment of best graduates; provision of research grants, sponsorship of further education and incentives materially and financially</td>
<td>3.08</td>
<td>1.23</td>
<td>Agreed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3 revealed that items 16, 17, 18, 19 and 20 obtained high mean scores which are above the decision rule of 2.50 with the average mean scores of 3.55. The high average mean score implies that the respondents strongly agreed that items 16-20 are ways to overcome the higher education management challenges.

Hypothesis 1
There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female lecturers on the ways to overcome the management challenges in West African higher education.

Table 4: T-test analysis on the ways to overcome management challenges in higher education in West Africa.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>X</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t-cal</th>
<th>t-crit</th>
<th>Prob</th>
<th>Decision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male lecturers</td>
<td>288</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>438</td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female lecturers</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 showed that the t-calculated of 1.08 is less than the t-critical of 1.96 at 438 degree of freedom and alpha level of 0.05. Hence the null hypothesis is upheld. This implied that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female lecturers on the ways to overcome management challenges in higher education.

Discussion of Findings
In table 1, 10 items presented to respondents obtained high mean scores (average scores 3.06) which implied that higher education in West African countries have many management challenges. The finding was in agreement with Efedu (2009) who stated that lack of resources, manpower, facilities, examination programme explosion are serious problems on management of African schools. The finding was equally in consonance with Chinedu (2014) when he asserted that the governments of West African countries are aware of all higher education problems but are handicapped by a lack of financial muscle to invest in education at the level hat will make any appreciable difference in the shortest possible time.

The result of data analysis in research question two, Table 2 showed that the indicators to prove poor management of higher education in West Africa are real as their mean ratings indicated thus – poor provision of basic amenities, the massive brain drain, incessant strike actions, unemployable graduates, decayed and dilapidated gory sight of structures. The finding was in line with Ezeuwa (2014) who reported that poor quality education, certificate forgery, infrastructural decay, preference to foreign university by parents and students are indicators of African poor management of higher education. Nwadiani (2012) supportively showed that using indices such as intellectual and knowledge power, skills development and
discoveries, economic potentials, global worth and recognition. self determination and creativity, most consumers of West African education fall below expectation with low relevance manifestation. Tebeje, A. (2013) posited that the deterioration of higher education has a dramatic effect: students and staff (professionals) leave for other promising countries. The capacity of retention of African universities decreases with quality worsening. However, the finding contradicts the assertion of Eze (2011) that strike action is a legitimate weapon in the hands of workers for seeking redress whenever they feel aggrieved.

The result presented in table 3 showed that adequate funding, timely intervention to crisis, provision of necessary infrastructures, equipment, manpower, motivation of staff and students are ways to overcome the management challenges in West African higher education. This agreed with the assertion of Nwachukwu (2007) that inability to provide learning facilities for effective learning experiences amount to criminal neglect on the part of government and the school management. In the same vein, Ezeuwa (2005) had lamented inadequate funding of education as the seemingly nagging situation bedeviling educational management in African states.

As well, the null hypothesis was accepted based on the ground that t-calculated (1.08) did not exceed the t-critical (1.96). This indicated that both male and female lecturers shared the same view in their acceptance of the items on ways to overcome management challenges in the higher education in West Africa in the 21st century.

**Conclusion**

The study has exposed the present management challenges in West African higher education and Nigeria in particular; ways to overcome the perennial challenges were proffered. All the same, despite all challenges and difficulties (finances, brain drain, political interferences, dilapidated facilities), higher education still remained the centre for intellectual production for development in West African states.

**Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. The leaders in West African countries should match their words and promises in higher education with actions (financially, materially and humanly) as to improve and sustain the needed intellectual, technological, economical, political, social and moral development that will save her from the Western world economic and developmental slavery.

2. Professionals and intellectuals leaving the shores of West Africa and Nigeria in particular should have a rethink and bear in mind this axiom 'East, West, North and South, home is home'.

3. The management challenges in West African high education sector should
be a challenge to all. As such everyone not government alone should put hands on deck to overcome and surmount the challenges.

4. Voluntary organizations, companies and wealthy spirited individuals should compliment the efforts of the government in financing higher education.

5. Government in place should honour the best managed institutions either through recognition or otherwise. This will serve as a motivator to other school managers, administrators or the management.

References


