



PROBLEMS FACED BY NON ACADEMIC STAFF OF NIGERIAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES AND THE WAY FORWARD

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Abstract

The Non-academic staff are professionals providing administrative services and support in the Nigerian higher institutions. The statutory roles of Non-academic staff in the administration and management of public universities cannot be overemphasized. It is rather, unfortunate that, the non-academic staff in the Nigerian public universities are facing legions of problems. This paper identified poor staff development, inadequate infrastructural facilities, inadequate working tools, lack of cooperation among non-academic staff unions, poor motivation, less consideration and insecurity among many others as the problems facing the non-academic staff of Nigeria public universities. The paper made useful and worthy recommendations towards better public universities administration and management.

Keyword: Evaluation, Problems, Non-academic staff, Universities.

Introduction

The National Policy on Education (FGN, 2004), defines Higher Education as the Post-Secondary Section of the National education system, which is given of Universities, Polytechnics, Monotechnics, Colleges of Education, Correspondence Colleges and such institutions as may be affiliated to them. The objectives of higher education in Nigeria include: the acquisition, development and inculcation of the proper value orientation for the survival of the individual and societies; the development of the intellectual capacities of individuals to understand and appreciate environment; the acquisition of both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to develop and become useful members of the community; the acquisition of an overview of the local and external environments (FGN, 2004). The National Policy on Education again stated that higher educational institutions should pursue these goals through: teaching; research; dissemination of existing and new information; the pursuit of service to the community; and a store-house for knowledge (FGN, 2004).



The University education is an organized education that deals with production of manpower for the social, economic and political development. The Universities are designed to functions with human and materials resources. The human resources include the academic staff and Non-academic staff. The academic staff are in charge of teaching, researching and carrying out other academic services. The Non-academic staff handles all non-academic services in the universities. The Non-academic staff are the engine room of the universities administrative system because, they handle the administrative programmes of the Universities. The Non-academic staff in the Nigerian public Universities are marginalized, and they are not treated fairly. This is affecting their job performance.

Concept Non-Academic Staff

Non-academic staff are those professional handling various non-teaching services in the higher institutions. Student welfare workers, secretaries, caretakers and cleaners form part of the non-academic professionals. Non-academic staff members are employees who work within the higher institutions and are contributing significantly to the success of higher education. Non-academic possess a wealth of institutional knowledge, charisma and drive to ensure that the universities' missions, visions and objectives are attained. The contributions of non-academic staff highly impacts on the students' experience in the university environment. The cardinal programme of the universities include to produce manpower, conduct research and undertake community service, the non-teaching staff assist with research, teaching and community development. The university system function because of the professionals who provide complementary roles other than teaching and research (Ogunode, Jegede, Abubakar, Martina 2020).

The non-academic staff or administrative staff are senior non-academic or senior administrative staff who occupy different positions and play different roles in the university. Non-academic staff members are strong members of the higher institutions. Non-academic staff handles the day-to-day administration and operations of the university. The non-academic staff perform mainly administrative as well as technical duties. The non-academic staff occupies important offices in the university environment. The non-academic staff function in the following departments within the university: The Registry, Maintenance, Vice-Chancellor's Office, Deputy Vice- Chancellor's Office, Bursary, Student Affairs, Human Resource/Establishments, Cafeteria, Security, Venture, Bookshop among others (Madukoma & Opeke, 2013). The roles of the Non-academic staff in the administration and management of the universities cannot be overstated because they function in all the units, departments and faculties (Ogunode, Jegede, Abubakar, Martina 2020). Ezeigbo, (2016) observed that all colleges, faculties, departments and units have administrative staff members whose importance in the proper functioning of the university cannot be over- emphasized.

Non-academic staff are essential to the development of the higher institutions. The services of the Non-academic staff are crucial for the survival and the sustainability of the university system. No higher institutions can function effectively and efficiently without the services of the academic and non-academic staff. The academic staff need the services of the non-academic staff to be able to carry out their cardinal functions of teaching and research. The Non-academic staff are the engine room of the



universities. The Non-academic staff assist the universities to carry out their mandate effectively. The Non-academic staff are the life-wire of the university system. The non-academic staff are very important members of the higher institutions, their functions aids in the realization of the institutional objectives. The place and roles of the non-academic staff is irreplaceable, the functions of the non-academic staff is crucial in the realization of the higher institutions goals (Ogunode, Jegede, Abubakar, Martina 2020). It is unfortunate that these non-academic staff are facing many problems that are preventing them from performing their functions and responsibilities in the public universities in Nigeria. This will form the basis for the next discourse.

Problems facing Non-Academic Staff of Public Universities in Nigeria

There are many problems facing non-academic staff of public universities in Nigeria. Some of these problems include: poor staff development, inadequate infrastructural facilities, inadequate working tools, lack of cooperation among the union groups, poor motivation, less consideration and insecurity problem.

3.1 Poor Staff Development

Poor staff development is a major challenge facing the non-academic staff of public universities in Nigeria. Training and retraining programme is very important for non-academic staff of universities. Capacity building programmes like workshops, seminars and conferences are meant to develop the skills, knowledge and capacity of workers in the universities. It is unfortunate that many non-academic staff in the Nigerian public universities are not privileged to training and retraining programmes since they have been employed into the universities system. Bakera (2019) observed that the skills expected from an administrator differ depending on the office, section or unit he serves. An administrator working in Central Administration for instance will need to internalize the modes and manners of the job in this place, the structure and cadence of its minutes, the ways to service the committees and sub-committees, what to do, when to do them and how to deliver the services.

The case is not different in the Students' Welfare, Staff Welfare, faculties/Departments/Units etc. The terms of reference are different from one section to another and can only be learnt on the job. It is also important to note that, the acquisition of professional acumen is significant and inevitable if one wants to function effectively in the system. To be a 21st century administrator, requires more than limiting oneself to performing routinized pediatrics. One needs to acquire modern skills that will keep one abreast of new trends in the profession and make one achieve and maintain the gold standard of practice. Bernadette & Ukaegbu, (2017) discovered in his study that a total of 87% of respondents agreed that poor level of implementation of welfare policies on training and development is a source of discouragement which have negatively affected academic performance of both teaching and non-teaching staff and have led to poor service delivery in our universities.

The study advocated for a full implementation of welfare policies on training and development of academic staff by both the Federal government and the Federal University Management by increased



funding, regular monitoring of funds and programme implementation to enhance the performance of the academic staff in the Federal Universities in the South-South Nigeria and the Country at large.

Bernadette & Ukaegbu, (2017) revealed in their study that fifteen (15) laboratory technologists from the five selected Federal Universities under study were interviewed and the following are the list of the basic issues that affected their performances as gathered from them:

a. Lack of regular internal training and external training which are necessary to constantly and regularly update their skills, knowledge and technology to enhance research.

b. Lack of sponsorship for international conferences even when they sponsor themselves, the funds were not remitted thus, the interest in attending conferences are gradually reducing in some of the Federal Universities under study whereas there is an available welfare package for conferences and research development domiciled in the federal University but not implemented appropriately. Romalia (2016) observed that most institutions of higher learning in Nigeria lack staff development programme for training and re-training of staff. Vibrant staff development programme on a continuous basis will help academics and non-academics to clarify and modify their behaviour, attitude, value, skills and competencies. In this way, they grow and develop in their knowledge and thus become more effective and efficient in the performance of tasks. Staff development is paramount because knowledge of today is only sufficient for today. In this era of knowledge explosion and emergent knowledge based economy, staff development should be the priority of any nation. It is unfortunate that many students' affairs officers working in the units across the country have not been given the opportunities to attend workshops. Many staff have not been exposed to capacity development programmes.

3.2 Inadequate Infrastructural Facilities

Inadequate infrastructural facilities is another major problem facing the non-academic staff working in the public universities in Nigeria. According to National Universities Commission Bench Mark (2007) the infrastructural facilities that should be provided for administrative staff include computer systems, conducive office with tables, chairs and other supporting administrative facilities. Ogunode (2020) views infrastructural facilities to include classrooms, offices, exam halls, laboratories, tables, chairs, desks, power supply, water, good roads network within the schools etc.

National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) (2012) observed that physical plants are required for teaching, learning and research. They include classrooms, laboratories, workshops, staff offices and libraries. Others include hostels (in residential institutions), staff quarters, students and staff recreational facilities, sports and games facilities. They also include roads, electricity and water supplies (NOUN), 2012 cited UNESCO, 2006). Ogunode & Abubakar (2020) listed infrastructural facilities for non-academic staff to include offices, table, chairs, power supply, stable water etc. They observed that many staff in students' affairs unit do not have adequate offices for their staff, no adequate chairs, tables and desk in the various offices provide for the academic planning units.

Ogunode et al (2020) observed that another problem facing the non-academic staff of higher institutions in Nigeria is inadequate infrastructural facilities. Many non-academic staff of higher institutions in Nigeria do not have comfortable offices and if they have, it may not be adequate for them



to discharge their responsibilities. Abdul (2013) observed that, in many higher institutions in the country, academic and non-adequate staff do not have offices. Some non-academic staff seat under the trees, move from office to office to while away time. Four to five academic staff share offices meant for two lecturers. Ogunode (2020) observed that inadequate funding is responsible for the challenges of inadequate infrastructural facilities facing the Nigerian higher institutions.

3.3 Inadequate Working Tools

Inadequate working materials is a very big problem facing non-academic staff of public universities in Nigeria. Many public universities do not have adequate Information, Communication and Telecommunication (ICT) facilities for their non-academic staff to carry out administrative functions. There are shortages in the supply of office stationaries. Ogunode & Abubakar (2020) submitted that lack of adequate working tools is another problem facing the majority of Nigerian public universities. Working tools or office equipment like Stapler, Eraser, Push-pin, Drawing pin (U.K)/ Thumbtack (U.S), Paper clip, Rubber stamp, Highlighter, Fountain pen Pencil, Marker, Ballpoint, Bulldog clip, Tape dispenser, Pencil sharpener, Label, Calculator, Glue, Scissors, Sticky notes, 4A Paper, Notebook, Envelope, Clipboard, Monitor, Computer, Keyboard, Folder, Fax, Filing cabinet, Telephone, Swivel chair, Desk, Wastebasket, printer and calculators are inadequate in many students' affairs units across the various universities in the country. The inability of the universities to provide these materials in quantities and quality is affecting the performance of the non-academic staff.

3.4 Lack of Cooperation among the Non-academic Unions in Public Universities.

All the unions of the non-academic staff of public universities in Nigeria lack cooperation towards improving the working conditions and welfare of their members. There are three union groups representing the interest of the non-academic staff in the Nigerian public universities. These unions include Senior Staff Association of Nigeria Universities, (SSANU), Non Academic Staff Union of Universities, (NASU), and National Association of Academic Technologist, (NAAT). These unions always have clashes of interest whenever they are pursuing a goal. The lack of cooperation among the unions is affecting the development of the unions and that of the non-academic staff they are representing. This was manifested in the recently released of 2011-2016 earned allowances by the Federal Government, where the modalities for sharing the money became a problem owing to uncooperative conducts of the unions' leaders.

3.5 Poor Motivation

Non-academic staff of public universities in Nigeria are poorly motivated. The salaries of non-academic staff are not paid as at and when due, and their working condition is poor. Amadi and Urho (2015) identified the condition of service or employment to consist features like working conditions (i.e. working environment, hours of work, over time shift work, flexible working hours), fringe benefits, (i.e. sick pay, subsidized meals, pension scheme, company goods at a discount, company cars) and application of fair judicial procedures. Ogunode et al (2020) observed that the Nigerian higher



institutions non-academic staff are poorly motivated. The non-academic staff are not treated well with the level of their input to the development of higher education in Nigeria. The non-academic staff are being discriminated in terms of salaries, staff development and other benefits in the higher institutions where they work. Non-academic staff are generally dissatisfied with their basic conditions of employment and their working conditions. This has resulted in low morale and low esteem in the profession. Earned allowances are not paid regularly by the government and even when paid in arrears, non-academic staff are given very insignificant percentage like 20% of the amount paid while the remaining 80% goes to academic staff.

Amadi & Urho (2015) stated that the underpayment of university staff vis-à-vis their counterparts in other economic sectors and the discriminating salary structure between the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) and the Non-Academic Staff Union of Universities (NASU) have been a major cause of their dissatisfaction. Ojo (2013) submitted that non-academic staff working in the universities across the country are poorly motivated and not treated fairly like their colleagues, the academic staff who are afforded with many benefits and opportunities. Abdul (2013) submitted that Non-academic staff of Nigerian universities are not well motivated. For example, academic staff enjoyed full TETFund scholarship, effective conference programmes and earned academic allowances and receive extra payment for hazards in their jobs but such cannot be heard for the non-teaching staff who also face many hazards while discharging their responsibilities in the universities.

3.5 Less Consideration

The non-academic staff of public universities in Nigeria are considered as inferior and are treated unfairly like their counterpart in the academic. The non-academic staff are discriminated in terms of occupying the top positions in the universities, their salaries are not same and in other welfare packages like earned allowance that was shared on 30% for non-teaching staff 70% for academic staff. Bakare, (2019) submitted that the negatively skewed government policies favours the teaching class. Also, the administrators are aware that, all the key policy-making positions are occupied by the academic, hence, the saying that when handed the hoe, even a madman will hoe towards himself. The matter is made worse when the Vice-Chancellor who is the administrative head and primarily, an educator, is seen as taking side with the academic and wielding the big stick to curry the favour of members of his class. Coupled with this is the belief in certain academic quarters that though universities had been growing for long, the growth had been mainly in the area of university administration rather than in academic units. It was touted that massive expansion in administration had equally encouraged expansion in what they called empty administration or bullshit jobs thus, deflecting from the real business of universities i.e. teaching, research and community service.

3.6 Insecurity Problem

Insecurity problem is one of the major problem facing the non-academic staff of the public universities in Nigeria. Nigeria is facing insecurity challenges which is affecting all public institutions especially the higher institutions in the country. Many public universities administrators have been killed and



kidnapped within the universities staff quarters. Ogunode et al., (2020) submitted that many non-academic staff have been killed. Scholars at Risk reported that on January 19, 2016, unidentified perpetrators kidnapped the Director of the Centre for Continuing Education at Rivers State University of Science and Technology in Port Harcourt. His whereabouts remained unknown at the time of writing. On May 3, 2016, seven gunmen reportedly entered the campus of the University of Calabar, Cross River state, at night, firing shots to disperse security guards and passers-by. They kidnapped a lecturer and two students from their residential quarters, according to local news sources. Daniel, (2016) submitted that "University of Calabar Lecturer Kidnapped Along with 2 Other Students.

3.7 Lack of Support from Academic staff

Lack of support from the academic staff is another big problem facing the non-academic staff. The university system is designed to functions as a system and team that needs one another for the realization of the universities goals. Lack of cooperation among the different union groups in the university system is a major factors responsible for poor development of the public universities in Nigeria. The various actors who are supposed to work as a team are working differently through their union. Bakare (2020) submitted that the university is designed for teaching, research and community service. It is for the purpose of transferring knowledge, acquiring knowledge and marketing knowledge. The staffers are divided into two broad categories, namely teaching and non-teaching. The two groups are supposedly, partners or bedmates, working towards the realization of the university set goals and objectives. The administration of the university is mostly centered around the Governing Council, Senate, Faculties/Departments/Units for academic decisions, and Registry, Bursary, Library and Maintenance unit for supportive functions. In other words, on the one hand, there are the educators, while on the other, we have the bureaucrats offering all necessary support for the good of the system. In all, the relationship between these two classes is marked by inherent tension and condescension that often-times, heat up the polity.

The teachers who see themselves as more relevant as a result of their calling, at times, tend to be arrogant and high-nosed. The bureaucrats, whose duty is to prop up the system spend more time identifying areas of inequalities between him and the educators, and will not hesitate to unionize his interest (Bakare,2019). The problem between the academic staff and the non-academic staff is concluded by Adeniyi (2009) when he said” “In the beginning, all university staffers were one and treated each other with respect. Today especially in Nigeria, the academic staffs have largely operated in isolation of the other staff, and in reaction, other staff fought and got an identity, thus leading to fractionalization; unhealthy rivalry; over-unionized polity and industrial disharmony at the slightest provocations’. The division between the academic staff and non-academic staff is not helping the development of public universities in Nigeria.

4.0 Way Forward

The roles of non-academic staff in the realization of the university education objectives cannot be underestimated. The government and universities administrators should address the various problems



facing the non-academic staff of public universities in Nigeria. To do this, this paper hereby recommended that:

- A) The government should increase the funding of the public universities to enable the universities administrators provide all the infrastructural facilities needed for effective administration of the institutions;
- B) More conducive and furnished offices should be provided for the administration of public universities;
- C) The universities administrators should provide all the working tools and office stationaries for the non-academic staff to work in their respective offices especially the ICT facilities;
- D) Effective training and retraining programmes should regularly be organized for the administrative staff. The slot given to the non-academic staff by TETFund capacity development should be increased to enable administrators attend workshops, seminars and conferences;
- E) Salaries of the universities administrators working in the public universities should be increase and overtime allowances be paid to them;
- F) The leadership of the non-academic staff in public universities should come together and work in harmony.

Conclusion

The place of non-academic staff in the realization and development of universities cannot be overemphasized. The role of the non-academic staff in the administration and management of public Universities cannot be overstated. It is unfortunate that the non-academic staff in the Nigerian public Universities are facing legions of problems. The article identified poor staff development, inadequate infrastructural facilities, inadequate working tools, lack of cooperation among the union groups, poor motivation, less consideration and insecurity as the problems facing the non-academic staff of Nigerian public universities.

The paper recommends that government should increase the funding of the public universities to enable the public universities administrators provide all the infrastructural facilities needed for effective administration of the institutions; provide more conducive and furnished offices for administration of public universities; provide all the working tools and office stationaries for the non-academic staff to work in their respective offices especially the ICT facilities; training and retraining programmes should be organized regularly for the administrative staff to enhance functionalism and capacity building. TetFund should try and increase the monitary allocation for the non-academic staff for capacity building to enable administrators attend workshops, seminars and conferences; salaries should be increased and overtime allowances paid as at and when due as a motivating factor.



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