

Influence of ethnicity on human resource management in Nigerian tertiary institutions

Ene Inyamu Egwa

College of Education, Oju, Benue State, Nigeria.

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ABSTRACT

Tertiary institutions are citadel of learning that are expected to provide solutions to personal, socio-economic and political problems that the home and other institutions cannot resolve. These institutions in Nigeria are beginning to subscribe to pressure of ethnic influence, a condition that tends to plague the nation as issues of national interest are being perceived from ethnic underdone in the face of gross insecurity bedeviling the nation. This paper takes a cursory look at a few influences of ethnicity on appointment of members of governing council, Vice Chancellorship appointment, staff recruitment and students' admissions. The paper however proffers ways of ameliorating the influence of ethnicity on human resource management in Nigerian tertiary institutions; among these are creating equal opportunities for all, vital requirement like scholarship, integrity, experience should predicate the appointment of vice chancellor of universities and using merit as a criterion for admission among others.

Keywords: Ethnicity, human resource, management.

E-mail: enegwa@yahoo.com.

INTRODUCTION

Human resource management

Human resources in educational sector are indispensable tools who are creative and social beings employed in order to achieve educational goals and objective. Out (2016) describes human resources as people in work organizations, endowed with a range of abilities, talents and attitudes, influence productivity, quality and profitability. People set overall strategies and goals, design work systems, produce goods and services, monitor quality, allocate financial resources, and market the products and services. Individuals, therefore, become 'human resources' by virtue of the roles they assume in the work organization. Employment roles are defined and described in a manner designed to maximize particular employees' contributions to achieving organizational objectives.

Storey (2001) describe human resource management as a distinctive approach to employment management which seeks to achieve competitive advantage through the strategic development of a highly committed and

capable workforce using an integrated array of cultural, structural and personnel techniques. Beer et al. (1984) defined human resource management as a strategic approach to the management of human resources that involves all management decisions and actions that affect the relationship between the organization and employees. While Armstrong (2006) defines human resource management as a strategic, coherent and comprehensive approach to the management and development of the organisation's human resources in which every aspect of that process is wholly integrated within the overall management of the organisation. Human resource management is the process an organization like tertiary institutions go through to manage people in order to achieve its goals.

Tertiary institutions are citadel of learning and are means of social mobility, self-development and self-actualization. They are expected to play a major role in the fulfillment of the Nigerian philosophy of education. According to Anao (2011), the university is widely perceived as a knowledge society where man's social-

economic and wellbeing are advanced. The vision of the tertiary institutions as stipulated by the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2004) are: to contribute to national development through high level manpower training; develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of the individual and society and develop the intellectual capability of individuals to understand and appreciate their local and external environments among others (p. 36). Tertiary institutions in addition to achieving excellence are expected to encourage universality, that is to foster care, respect, integrity, promote equity and justice as well as provide fertile ground for the Federal character principle and other national policies.

Tertiary institutions in recent times are evolving rapidly in response to societal developments such as ethnicity.

Ethnicity

According to Elaigwu (1994) in certain circumstances, different ethnic group may act out a feeling of attachment and loyalty of its member's intersection with others, when the interest of both intersects is over the same values and scarce social goods. Corroborating this, Osaghae (1994) asserted that ethnicity as the employment or mobilization of ethnic identity and difference to gain advantage in situations of competition, conflict or cooperation. Osaghae's definition stresses the unification of a common group of people for the pursuit of a common interest thereby creating a dichotomy between members of existing various groups hence, the discrimination of a non-member of the identified group. In a similar tone, Otite (1998) defined ethnicity as categories of people characterized by cultural criteria of symbols, including language, value system and normative behaviour whose members are anchored in a particular part of the country or state. Otite's differ slightly from Osaghae in that elements such as polarization, patronage and competition are deemphasized. Suberu (1999) viewed ethnicity as the mobilization and politicization of ethnic group identified in a situation of competitive or conflicting ethnic pluralism. Osaghae and Suberu's definitions on a cursory look, emphasize the idea of fostering ethnic domination and loyalty of her members to enhance political aspiration.

Similarly, Nnoli (2007) stressed that ethnicity as a social phenomenon is associated with contact among ethnic groups that exist within the same political system. It is characterized by cultural prejudice and social discrimination. Underlying these characteristics are feelings of pride in the in-group, common consciousness and identity of members of the group and the excessiveness of membership of the group. It is a phenomenon that linked directly or indirectly to forms of affiliation and identification, built around ties of real or putative kinship.

Ethnicity has also been defined as a family's common

ancestry through which identity develops as a result of evolved shared values and customs (Mc Liddrick et al., 1996). This definition of ethnicity consists of individuals or families who are members of international, national, religious, cultural and racial group that do not belong to the dominant group in the society. One thing that is common with the definition of ethnicity is the grouping of people according to their cultural lineage; it is a social group consciousness that influence social, economic and political decision. They can be differentiated from both the dominant group and other ethnic groups by some combinations of their values, expectations, geographical location, language, attitudes, customs, lifestyles, rituals, and celebrations. Foreigners in different countries identify themselves, recognize each other and have a sense of a common group. They are often differentiated by race, geographical location of origin, lifestyles and among others.

Ethnicity as a social phenomenon has a large group of attribute and identification that characterized intervention with the people. It is usually associated with specific social formations and intervention strategy among members of particular tradition, origin, religion or gender. Ethnicity manifests in a contextual discrimination of one group against another on the basis of the differentiated systems of social and cultural symbols. At each of the locations, groups compete for the available economic, material and political resources and institutions and these are often done in a manner that threatens national peace and stability.

INFLUENCE OF ETHNICITY ON HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Ethnicity in Nigeria affects all aspects of national life, most especially resource allocation and management of public institutions. The problem has produced several bloody crises across the country in addition to the 1967 to 1970 "Nigerian civil war". The national crisis negatively affects higher education in terms of how ethnic group compete for the location and management of tertiary institutions hence, the university is most contested. The aggressive competition between the diverse groups in Nigeria for the control of tertiary institutions derives from the assumption that these institutions have significant roles to play in elite formation and recruitment in addition to the fact that, the institutions generate local employment and economic regeneration. Within this framework, ethnic and sub-ethnic groups in the country are sensitive to the location of tertiary institutions, appointment of members of governing council, appointment of their vice chancellors, staff recruitment as well as admission of students. In most cases, the people of the states and communities where the Federal and State tertiary institutions are located see the institutions as their personal properties and would want the

management as such.

Appointment of members of governing council

Indigenes have built an elaborate maze of manipulation, control, infiltration and economic incentive to systematically deceive stakeholders into thinking that sharing seats among the indigenous tribes is prerogative of each tertiary institution no wonder the campaign for quota system and catchment area policies. Conventionally, each ethnic group struggles to be represented in the appointment of members of governing councils of higher institutions (Akpaku, 2013). Ethnicity has become sine qua non for appointment of members of the governing council collaborating this Ahmed (2011) asserted that most of the universities in Nigeria marginalize the minorities of either tribe, religion or gender which are major characteristics of ethnicity. In the same vein, Ogbonnaya (2009) succinctly stated that in most of the Nigerian universities, appointment of the governing council and vice chancellor, staff employment, appointment and promotions are usually done on the basis of ethnic considerations. He further argued that this trend makes it difficult for the appointees to achieve their statutory responsibilities in universities governance. It is therefore important to note that University management has been greatly abused as a result of ethnic infestation at the management cadre of universities in Nigeria.

Appointment of their vice chancellors

Before the infiltration of ethnicity in Nigeria, in the 80s, federal government neutralize or diffuse this sentiment associated with appointment of Vice Chancellors (VC) by posting such selected chief executives to states other than their states of origin. Whawo (2003) citing examples of a few, mentioned Professor Tekena Tamuno, an Okrika from Rivers State served as VC, University of Ibadan, Oyo State; Prof. E. A. Anyandele, a Yoruba, VC, University of Calabar, Cross River State. Similarly, Prof. E. U. Essien was appointed VC, University of Maiduguri, Bornu State while Prof. Donald E. U. Ekong served as VC University of Port Harcourt, River State. In addition, the federal government has adopted the "federal character Principle" as a panacea for solving the problem of majority domination, which was considered a recipe for national integration and cohesion. The appointment of these academic colossus were derived from certain vital criteria like qualification, scholarship, experience, integrity among others, today these fundamental criteria and the bid to diffuse ethnic sentiment have been sacrificed to the prejudice of ethnicity. A survey of the Nigerian Federal and State owned universities now depict a clear case of ethnic bigotry where members of the dominant group of either tribe, or religion have the priviledge of sumounting

these ivory towers irrespective of their qualifications. It is highly speculated that the appointment of VCs and other principal officers of Federal and State universities are influenced by ethnicity.

Relating the impact of ethnicity on Nigeria, Isyaku (2006) posited that ethnicity is a cankerworm that has been destroying the nation's state in all facets of life. He also reiterated that in Nigerian university, the most controversial is the appointment of VCs. Ethnic groups in Nigeria come together to 'fight' one another once a new VC is to be appointed. The influence of ethnicity on VCship appointment dates back to the 1990s. It has been observed that the issue of ethnicity and religious fundamentalism became critical factor in Nigerian politics. As groups fight among themselves over religious issues, land ownership and the need to reform the Nigerian state generally, they politicize the questions of who should head the universities, how staff should be recruited and how students should be admitted. Most of the VCs that were appointed before this period according to Whawo (2003) served outside their states of origin and did well.

Staff recruitment

It is a common practice in tertiary institutions to reserve some seats for a particular tribe; hence each principal office is zoned to a particular tribe thereby denying the minority group or the unprivileged group, the right to those positions, undermining their qualification even when they are the most qualified. Vice Chancellors when appointed are also under pressure when staff of the university are to be recruited. Williams, (1998), Babalola et al. (2007) pointed out that ethnically conscious VCs and registrars of Federal and State universities use their positions to appoint, employ and promote their kit and kin to very sensitive and lucrative positions against the rules and regulations of governing such exercises in the institutions. Assenting this, Isyaku (2006) and Ahmed (2011) observed that appointments, selection, promotion, incentives are no longer objective and competence rather, derived from ethnic undertone in the name of quota system and catchment area policies. However, it has been observed that the idea of this ethnicism is to foster the position of the particular ethnic groups within the faculties and departments in order to ensure long term hold on to power by the head. This perhaps explains why Williams opined that deans of faculties and heads of departments also have the tendency to recommend and support the employment of their kit and kin particularly on the academic staff of their faculties and departments. Since staff compete for the scarce resources within the universities in terms of position, advancement in career among others, they are likely to use means such as ethnicity to get what they want.

All kinds of unethical practices come to play during recruitment exercises like Williams cited in Akpaku (2013)

observed, that in many institutions it is a common practice for some letters application for employment for certain candidates to be “missing” or buried in unidentifiable files, all in the bid to make competition for the post a walkover for the favourites. In addition, Nnekwu and Ogunsanya (2009) asserted that members of the minority group in the universities feel more alienated from their co-workers than those of the dominant group and, members of the dominant group would be in charge of the scarce resources of the universities, such as employment, promotions, scholarship, in-service training, research grants, and above all the position of the principal officers.

Also, Ibukun (1997) pointed out that the lopsidedness in staff employment in the universities occasioned by ethnicity, sectionalism, catchment area and religion, negatively impact on the management of universities. According to him, over flooding a faculty or department with staff from the same ethnic, religious or sectional background leads to poor performance of staff functions, unnecessary loyalty and promotion of dictatorship in faculties and departments. He also added that a department or faculty with preponderance of junior academic staff to the disadvantage of the more and most needed senior academic staff lowers the academic standard of the faculties, departments and overall academic development of higher institutions. Both agreed that the appointment of the vice chancellor and other principal officers when influenced by ethnic politics can be disrupted by vices such as rancor, open confrontation and sometimes elimination of rivalry or even media war which most times have negative consequences on university administration.

Admission of students

Quota system and catchment area policies are cognate policies of the federal government prescribed to bridge the gap between the educationally developed states and the less developed states in addition to providing equal access to educational opportunities. In Nigeria, quota system comprises academic merit which is determined by University Matriculation Examination Board, and is allotted 45%, educationally less privileged state is allotted 20%, catchment area 25% and 10% to the discretion of the Vice Chancellor (NUC, 1999). In terms of education, Nigeria is divided into Educationally Developed States (EDS) and Educationally Less Developed States (ELDS). EDS include Oyo, Lagos, Ekiti, Osun, Ondo, Edo, Delta, Imo, Akwa Ibom, Cross-River, and Anambra States while ELDS include Adamawa, Bauchi, Bayelsa, Benue, Bornu, Ebonyi, Gombe, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Kogi, Kwara, Nasarawa, Niger, Plateau, Rivers, Sokoto, Taraba, Yobe and Zamfara (Moti, 2010). The ELDS have a reserve of 20% of the spaces.

Writing in favour of quota system, Ogbemudia (2004)

described it as an aggressive measure to boost admission into universities. He argued that every community or part of the state will feel the impact of the institution and see it as belonging to them and their families will have access to university education. Many who, otherwise, may not have gained admission, were able to do so through the quota system as JAMB does not only insist on scores but different scores for different quotas.

The Federal Government of Nigeria introduced the quota system in an attempt to provide equity in the universities but this has been grossly abused. Isyaku (2006) and Obielumani (2008) observed that the policies paved way for ethnicity which plays significant part during the appointment of staff members into both academic and non-academic positions, as well as influence admission procedures. Enemu cited in Ogbonnaya (2009) argued that quota system is a practice of favouring some faculties, departments and candidates at the expense of others in university admissions, promotion in offices, appointments, employment, on the basis of state of origin, tribe, nepotism, or choice of course of study. Enemu however, maintained that such practices mar the objective implementation of the 1978 education policy. In a like manner, Akpaku (2013) observed that Stakeholders of university education in North Central States have expressed deep dissatisfaction on the conduct of admissions in universities in the area. They alleged that admission procedure in universities in the area is unconventional, unethical and unfavourable to meritorious candidates or candidate from poor socio-economic background as well impair national unity and integration due the parochial influence of ethnicity portrayed in the implementation of quota system and catchment area policies. Quota system and catchment area policies have inequitable effect on students' admission, admission processes are bastardized, enhance production of low quality graduates, encourages unethical practices during admission processes and encourages overpopulation of campuses. In addition, Olonde cited in Egwa (2015) gave a clear picture of what thrives in Nigerian Universities during admissions and employment as he stated that one of Nigerian's reliable scholars also captured the picture of Nigerian university in this way:

...Universities suffered from arbitrary governance.... Rather than being a place which justice and truth are to be nurtured, the universities triumphed on mediocrity and untruths. Promotion was earned through sycophancy and the admission procedure became systematically bastardized as wives, children and cronies of vice chancellors had their own admission quota without reference to the established procedure. University governance became unpredictable and university finances in

shamble (p.29 – 36).

Good as this policy seems, it has been grossly bastardized by the influence of ethnicity derived from tribe and religion. Nigeria is a country of great diversity because of the pluralistic ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups that live within its borders. Nigeria has over 250 ethnic groups and over 500 tribes; in terms of religion, Nigeria is roughly half split between Christians in the west and Muslims in the north while the dominant regional groups are the Hausas in the North, Yorubas in the West, and the Igbos in the East. The importances people attribute to different aspects of their identities also vary according to context and time. People may be divided into groups in many ways—geographical locations, in behaviour, language, physical characteristic and among others. Yet only those divisions that have or may acquire strong social significance that is, such meaning for their members and for others in the society that they influence behaviour and well-being in a significant way are likely to form the basis of ethnicity.

Furthermore, Dzurgba (2008) argued that the Aptitude Test conducted in universities in addition to UTME conducted by JAMB for the purpose of students' admission into the universities is political ploy to legitimize the ethnicity in some universities. Having analysed the patterns of admission, Agboola and Ofoegbu (2010) observed that quota system and catchment area policy do not facilitate entry for some regions because a gap in access across disciplines was noted in their study and adduced the high access rate in some disciplines, the low number of applicants was because candidates were drafted to these areas to make up for their quotas as most candidates are not keen to study those courses.

Conclusion

There is a need to integrate the non-indigenes in the state employment, equal opportunity should be to non-indigenes in all tertiary institutions of the federation this will bring about a sense of belonging and respect to humanity. Government should try to instill love, peace and unity in her representatives at various establishments so that there will be no more perpetuation of wickedness against the non-indigenes. According to Ifedili (2006), this will bring about the desired unity and that non-indigene should be promoted as at when due and should receive the same benefits that other employees get from the government.

Dysfunctional politics and conflict which are synonymous with ethnicity can be regulated and minimised. Among these are meritorious and credible personalities should be considered for appointment into the membership of any governing council of all tertiary institutions, criminalization of the use of ethnic considerations in the selection and appointment of VCs

and acting VCs, mandatory use of the principle of 'firstcome firstserve' as the basis for the appointment of VCs following the result of interview, decentralisation of the office of the VC, the offices of other principal officers, provision and deployment of sanctions by government or proprietor of universities for wrong political behaviours on the part of members of council, continuous orientation for members of governing council, appointment of men and women of proven integrity and experience as members of the council and closing the gaps in existing laws on the appointment of VCs and acting VCs.

Equal opportunity should be given to all staff to enhance effectiveness, create a sense of belonging and security, and promotion of national unity. In as much as it is good that the educationally disadvantaged area is being encouraged, it should not be at the detriment of others like a situation where a candidate does not gain access just because of his birth place. In as much as the quota system and catchment area policies are promulgated to bridge the educational gap, the federal, State government and stakeholders in education should devote attention to primary and secondary schools so that students from these educationally less developed states can compete with their counterparts from the educationally developed states. Nigeria cannot continue to thrive on mediocrity where we have abundant sources to produce superlative human resources in every endeavour in the country.

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