



# Monitoring Recruitment and Selection Practice: A Therapeutic Strategy for Quality Service Delivery in Nigerian Public Universities

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## **Author's contribution**

*The sole author designed, analyzed and interpreted and prepared the manuscript.*

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## **ABSTRACT**

The major objective of this paper was to assess the extent to which monitored recruitment and selection practice could enhance quality service delivery by lecturers in Nigerian public universities. Exploratory research design was adopted so as to facilitate gathering of data that formed the basis of judgments and conclusions. Nigerian public universities were established and managed by government (federal or state), to provide educational services as well as embark on research for purpose of general development. Acquisition and management of relevant resources was *sine qua non* for effective functioning of the institutions. The decreasing quality of performance in public universities is believed by certain individuals and unions to be the consequence of infrastructural decay, which the envisaged improvement in government funding and condition of service could possibly be the panacea. This paper uncovers the maxim that infrastructural renaissance and staff welfare, devoid of concomitant staff quality checks especially at the verge of recruitment and selection exercise would rather result in fiasco. It was recommended among others that uniform

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recruitment and selection policy and procedures be formulated; also, the implementation must be monitored by external agencies of government.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

University is a citadel of learning, with traditional functions of promoting research, developing skills and knowledge, and authorized to confer degrees in various fields. The complex functions and mandates of universities determine the vast nature of factor inputs required for attainment of the established goals.

Over a decade now, relevant labour union and individuals have made frantic efforts urging government to properly fund public universities in Nigeria, if the country is to achieve the much needed human and societal development goal through education. The targeted funding pattern, if met, would help in providing the necessary facilities and improve the general infrastructure, thereby creating conducive environment for teaching and learning. Invariably, these proponents view improved university funding as the sole and pivotal means of achieving qualitative university education or better still, the panacea for the perennial churning out of half-baked graduates.

The question now is “can improved university funding devoid of monitored staff recruitment and selection practice provide a solution to the chagrin performance of public universities in the country?” Therefore, effort in answering this question constitutes the crux of this paper.

## 2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1 Overview of Public University and Funding

University, be it publicly or privately owned is the most complex educational institution, in terms of functions, facilities and scope of operation, designed and established to offer candidates the highest degree of training in various fields than can be expected of any other level of tertiary institution [1]. The activities and operations of universities in Nigeria (federal and private) are under the supervision of National Universities Commission (NUC). The introduction of entrepreneurship studies in Nigerian universities' curriculum is one of the recent developments in the university system [2].

Unlike private universities, public universities are established and managed by the government at state or federal level. Less than two decades ago, every university in Nigeria was publicly owned. The reign of President O. Obasanjo (1999-2007) marked the cradle of private universities proliferation in the country operating side by side their public counterparts.

The funding burden of public universities rests on government – state or federal. Over the years, the deteriorating standard and quality of public university education was blamed on low budgetary allocations. This condition resulted in frequent devastating face-offs between the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) and the government. The paltry nature of budgetary allocations to education has negative consequence on the general operations of public universities as well as on the quality of service to the public [3].

The last the nationwide strike by teachers in Nigerian public universities lasted for about six months. Union members were admonished not to succumb to the intrigue of government but to stand firm to ensure the success of the struggle for implementation of the 2009 agreement reached between the union and the federal government [4]. The major component of that agreement was improvement in public university funding, as catalyst for increased performance in this sector, in order to unleash developmental impact on the society. The extent of national development is a function of the effectiveness of education sector (which university is part of). Proper funding of education sector constitutes part of the essential determining factors of university effectiveness [5].

The union struggle so far seems to be parochial to the impossibility of accomplishing university performance targets through funding alone. In other words, what might be the situation in terms of the envisaged university performance when the required funding level is met, devoid of grave concern about the mode of staff recruitment and selection.

#### 2.1.1 Recruitment

Assembling a quality workforce begins with a sound recruiting effort [6]. Acquiring quality

workforce through effective recruitment system saves a lot of future costs for an organization. Recruitment is the set of activities used to obtain a sufficient number of the right people at the right time; its purpose is to select those who best meet the needs of the organization [7]. Recruitment could be seen as the process of searching for and obtaining applicants for jobs, from among whom the right people can be selected [8]. In other words, recruitment means the process of finding and attracting capable applicants for employment.

A good recruitment programme is one that is properly planned and well operated [9]. Recruitment and selection policy sets out how to ensure, as far as possible, that the best people are recruited on merit and that the recruitment process is free from bias and discrimination [10].

Recruitment has a direct impact on performance, this being the case, if done well, brings in the best people to the organization [11]. In larger organizations, specialist recruitment officers may be appointed with the human resource team or recruitment services may be delivered from a recruitment service center, whose main role is to ensure that the right people with the right skills are employed at the right time by the organization [12]. One would think that, with a continuous flow of new people into the workforce, recruiting would be easy [7].

### **2.1.2 Sources of recruitment**

i) Internal recruitment: It involves seeking applicants for positions from those who are currently employed. Internal sources include present employee referrals, former employees and former applicants [8]. Internal recruitment involves recruiting within the firm [13]. Internal recruitment has several advantages [14]: It is less costly than external search, and it generates higher employee commitment, development and satisfaction because it offers opportunities for career advancement to employees rather than outsiders.

ii) External recruitment: This involves efforts aimed at drawing applicants from outside the firm. External recruitment makes it possible to draw upon a wider range of talents, and provides the opportunity to bring new experience and ideas into the business [13]. External recruitment is more expensive. Also, it may pave a way for a mediocre that performed well in paper, with good credentials but without sufficient job performance

proWess, to be brought in. The methods and sources employed depend on the firm's recruitment policies and procedures [15].

### **2.1.3 Relevance of job descriptions and job specifications in effective recruitment**

Relevance of jobs descriptions and job specifications in effective recruitment organisation's basic operations and activities must be borne in mind prior to recruitment and selection. This to a great extent determines the quality of staff to be hired into the organization. The first step is to perform a job analysis, the process by which a firm determines the duties and nature of the jobs to be filled and the skills and experience required of the people who are to fill them [6]. Generally, job analysis is an effort to study and understand specific jobs in the organization so that managers can have a full sense of the nature of those jobs and the kind of skills and abilities necessary to perform them [16]. The first step in conducting a job analysis is to develop a job description, a written statement of the duties, responsibilities, reporting relationships, working conditions and methods and techniques as well as materials and equipment used in a job [6].

### **2.1.4 Selection**

Selection is often the step that succeeds the stage of attracting applicants sourced within or outside the organization. It is another important set of activities that must be performed based on the firm's relevant policies and procedures, to enable the firm obtain the envisaged number and quality of personnel.

In the selection process, employers attempt to obtain the skills, abilities and other attributes a person needs to perform a particular job [14]. Selection involves matching the requirements of a job with the attributes of candidates. This is facilitated by drafting a 'person specification' defining the background of the ideal candidate [17].

The following are some of the key stages in the selection process [15]:

1. Sifting through application forms or CVs
2. Drawing up a shortlist of candidates
3. Inviting these candidates for interview
4. Conducting interviews (supported by tests where appropriate)

5. Making a decision about choice of candidates

Everyone involved in the recruitment and selection of staff has a responsibility to ensure that candidates are treated fairly and decisions are made objectively and in line with the organization's commitment to equal opportunities [18].

#### **2.1.5 University of Calabar appointment (recruitment and selection) guidelines for academic staff**

Subject to the provisions of Section 3.3 (a) relating to the making of temporary appointment by the Vice Chancellor, vacancies on the established staff list shall be advertised in at least two (2) widely read newspapers in Nigeria, notice boards and website of the University of Calabar, except where, for good reason the committee may authorize that any particular vacancy be filled without advertisement; provided that the candidate shall not be exempted from the usual assessments [19]. The guideline further specified that the University Assessment and Interviewing Panel for fresh appointments shall consist of:

- a. The Vice Chancellor - Chairman
- b. Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic)
- c. The Provost, Dean of Faculty/Director of Institute
- d. The Heads of Department concerned, except that if the Head of Department is himself a candidate or interviewed, he shall not serve on the panel.
- e. At least two external assessors with knowledge of the subject or field in respect of which candidates are being assessed or interviewed.
- f. University Librarian
- g. The Registrar
- h. Director of Academic Planning
- i. Two representatives of the University Governing Council
- j. A staff of Establishments Division, appointed by the Registrar shall serve as the Secretary.

Though public universities in Nigeria exist as autonomous entities, but certain aspects of their operational procedures especially, employment, federal character application during employment, staff development and promotion are almost similar in nature.

### **3. UNMONITORED RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION PRACTICE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES**

As is the case in other sectors, human capital is considered most important of all the resources, by virtue of its potency in manipulating other resources [20]. It does appear, in Nigeria, for decades, emphasis has been on achieving increased funding, probably due to its perceived ability to procure other resources required for task performance. So far, infinitesimal attention has been paid to the process of attracting and selecting quality staff that can offer best services in Nigerian public universities.

About two decades ago, staff employment in public universities was often based on procedure where areas of need were sent by heads of departments to the vice chancellor or registrars; advertisement of job vacancies widely made; the applications sorted and sent to the relevant departmental head, the shortlisted applications forwarded to the registrar who, in consultation with the vice chancellor, will present before Appointments and Promotion Committee for consideration before final consideration and approval by the university council [19]. Whoever that scales through these stages will be issued temporary (probationary) appointment by the Registrar. The successful candidate commences work and after a period of about one year, the person will be made to attend regularization interview, if successful, would have his or her appointment regularized before being confirmed within the second or third year of that appointment.

The sequential steps in the staff recruitment and selection procedures to some extent, helped to sift out applicants considered unfit for university jobs. At that period, people in the labour market did not see university jobs as being attractive due to very poor condition of service prevalent in the sub sector. People who willingly choose to work in this sector were very few. Also, the phobia of imminent embarrassment and humiliation during the interview session and lectures with students further killed the interest of many incompetent job seekers. Interestingly, many of those who passed through the employment procedure of public universities were individuals who could beat their chest to proclaim high level of competence in the discharge duties. Also, the quality of services delivered by the university

workers was very commendable, leading to the sub sectors' remarkable contribution to the general development via effective training and research.

In about a decade ago, public universities through relentless struggle of the relevant union began to witness some level of improvement regarding work condition/staff remuneration. The consequence of this was a sharp departure from the due process of hiring workers into public university system. It paved ways for unfair and discriminatory staff employment practices. The purported economic attractiveness to public university jobs led to indiscriminate employment due to pressures from politicians, traditional rulers, high powered bureaucrats, relatives and friends of university administrators. In a bid to accommodate unimaginable volume of job requests, many university administrators, over the years resorted to jettisoning the standard procedures for staff hiring. This scenario led to employment of enormous volume of mediocre to perform academic jobs, hence contributing vehemently to the present day rot in the Nigerian public universities, which "increase funding" implementation cannot be the sole panacea.

As a result of universities top management deviation from standard staff recruitment and selection procedures, campuses recently became dumping ground for frustrated politicians, external retirees, spouses and relatives of politicians, candidates presented by university management personnel etc. In other words, recent employment in the public universities mostly tailors toward the line of sentiment and utter discrimination rather than merit.

The glaring overstaffing condition in the universities environment in terms of quantity and not quality has been the outcome of the deviation from the standard employment procedures. Also, the present day unfair and discriminatory employment practice has substantially negated the federal character policy of government as well as the equal employment opportunity act.

The presence of many incompetent personnel in public university system gives rise to declining quality of both individual and institutional performance, increased corrupt practices and wanton sexual harassment.

#### **4. METHODOLOGY**

This paper adopted exploratory design which facilitated collection of relevant secondary data

by way of literature review. Relevant primary data were gathered through observation technique. The data gathered enhance making of judgments and conclusions.

#### **5. CONCLUSIONS**

Public universities established through special state edits or federal acts, were aimed at undertaking the moulding of individuals for purpose of formal/special skill acquisition, as well as embarking on research, to foster human and general societal development.

The attainment of this aim is a function of the acquisition and management of the essential resources in these tiers of educational institutions.

At the moment, every public university in Nigeria suffers grave setback interms of human and material deficiency, which negatively impacts on the quality performance at both individual and corporate levels.

Frantic efforts of relevant unions in the universities have so far been unleashed to urge the federal and state governments to urgently improve on funding and condition of service, as the sole panacea for the rot.

The obvious departure from the standard staff recruitment and selection procedure has led to infiltration of incompetent employees, giving rise to poor individual and universities performance and climaxed wanton and heinous behaviours on the campuses.

Incompetent employees often lack the zeal to tap the motivation and satisfaction inherent in the assigned duties. They are also not committed to goals [21]. Strict adherence to due process by management of Nigerian universities in carrying out staff recruitment and selection becomes the maxim that constitutes the nitty-gritty of this work.

Improvement in university funding and staff condition of service without the concomitant staff quality checks especially at the verge of employment procedures will definitely end in fiasco.

#### **6. RECOMMENDATIONS**

Since the targeted increase in workers' quality service delivery and overall university performance would not be attained through

improved university funding and condition of service devoid of establishment and strict adherence to realistic, applicable recruitment and selection policy and procedures, the following recommendations were made:

Uniform human resource management policy and procedures should be formulated to guide actions and decisions of public universities management, especially, with regards to employee recruitment and selection.

To forestall discriminatory practice and non adherence to equal employment opportunity act, government should establish and put in force effective mechanism to monitor employee recruitment and selection practice in public universities.

Government through Federal Ministry of Education and Nigerian Universities Commission (NUC) should set minimum standards by way of outlining the qualifications, experience and capabilities expected to match specific jobs in the university environment. Subjecting applicants to practical test is also necessary in this case.

To guide against overstaffing, redundancy and inefficiency, staff employment should be pre determined through effective human resource planning and based on the needs and requests of the work units or sections.

Advertisement of job vacancies approved by the relevant government agencies should be widely made. Also, copies of the applications and credentials sent to the universities should be forwarded by applicants to the relevant supervisory/ monitoring agencies of government (state or federal, as the case may be. This may be made faster through the agencies' email or website.

The participation of external assessors from Ministry of Education and NUC during the interview should not be compromised. This would ensure that the established standards are met by the candidates, also, that the due process in terms of the employment policy and procedures are followed.

Employments when the university council has not yet been constituted should be abolished by government, since that could be the game plan by public university management to employ workers on the basis of undue sentiments and favoritism rather than on merit.

University databank should be maintained by government for easy accessibility of information about staff qualifications, appraisal reports, mode and period of employment, promotion, etc.

To clean up campuses, government should constitute independent committee and deploy same to various universities for verifications and other necessary actions such as transfer, inter-ministerial redeployment or training. This action could also help in decongesting departments, and minimizing redundancy and wastage.

Government should enforce the university staff ratio of 1:3, meaning that employment should be based on policy of one non academic staff to three academic staff. This will reverse the current trend of employing more non academic staff, whereas many are redundant and unproductive.

Staff employment (recruitment and selection) procedures should be made one of the key areas to be assessed by Nigerian Universities Commission (NUC) during accreditation visits to universities. The report of non compliance with the due process should be viewed seriously, also, appropriate sanctions meted out on personnel or institutions that erred.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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