

Strategies to Improve the Effectiveness of Committees System in Nigerian University for Universities' Sustainability.

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Abstract

This paper discusses the concept of Committees system in the Universities, reasons for Committees system in the Universities, characteristics of Committees system and the composition of the Committees system in the Nigerian Universities. Since Committees system is indispensable to the University system, the need to have it in the University system becomes a necessity. The paper also identifies some challenges militating against Committees' effectiveness in the Universities environment and discusses the strategies to improve the effectiveness of Committees System in the Universities. The following recommendations are proffered among others; the Universities should ensure that adequate funds are provided for the committees to enable them to carry out their functions.

Keywords: Committee System, Senate, University Sustainability.

1. Introduction

Nigeria is a resource-rich country located in Sub-Saharan Africa. The country had an estimated population of 182.2 million in 2015 according to the World Bank so she is the most populous nation in Africa. Nigeria has the largest economy in Africa with a Gross Domestic Product of \$486.79billion documented by the World Bank in 2016. Obviously, this West African country has a huge potential for growth and development. Aligning with the educational aspirations of all Nigerians, educational development has always been identified as the key to social, economic development of the country (Osunyikanmi, 2016). The Nigerian economy is divided into many sectors. The educational sector in Nigeria takes the form of formal and informal education. The formal education system includes primary/elementary, secondary and tertiary/higher education, as the higher/tertiary education is the highest of all the levels. It includes all levels of education above the secondary or high school cadres. The higher education includes the Universities education that have been described by researchers as the apex of education because it covers all the human endeavours. The history of Universities' education is dated back to 1948 when the first higher institution was established, then followed by the second generation Universities from 1964 to 1970 and the third and fourth generation Universities from 1975 to 1980 and from 1980 to 1990 the fourth generation Universities (Ogunode, Abigail and Lydia, 2019). The National Policy on Education (FGN, 2004), defines Higher Education as the Post-Secondary Section of the National education system, which includes the Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Technology including courses as are given by the Colleges of Education,

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Advanced Teachers Training Colleges, Correspondence Colleges and such Institutions as may be allied to them. The objectives and aims 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 into useful members of the community; the acquisition of an overview of the local and external environments (FGN, 2004). These goals are best achieved in the Universities institutions which have been described by many researchers as the apex of educational system.

The University system is structured to function through the statutory Organs which include; the Visitor (Head of State), Deputy Vice Chancellor (Administration), Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic), Governing Council, Senate, Congregation, all Graduates of the university and Undergraduates of the university. The University Senate is the highest academic decision making body of the Universities. It consists of the Vice-Chancellor; the two Deputy Vice-Chancellors; Provost; Colleges of Health Sciences; Deans of Faculties; Heads of Departments; Directors of Institutes; all professors; the University Librarian; and members of Academic Staff elected by the faculties of congregation or those appointed by the Vice-Chancellor as specified in the University Act. The Senate formulates academic policies which include the organizations and control of all academic activities of the University is the responsibility of the University Senate. The Senate is presided over by the Vice Chancellor. The Senate is, however, advised in academic matters by Boards of Colleges and Faculties. It has the paramount responsibility of organizing and controlling teaching in the university, the admission of students, and the discipline of students and of promoting research. It receives and decides on the recommendations and reports from the Board of Faculties and all other academic units.

In order to make the Universities' system efficient and effective the committee system was introduced into its operation and management. According to Okotoni, and Adegami, (2013) the use of Committees was entrenched in the Laws/Acts establishing Nigerian Universities as indicated in the University of Ibadan Act of 1962 which states that: "Anybody or persons established by the Act shall without prejudice of the generality, shall have power to appoint committees consisting of members of that body and subject to the provisions of sub-section(7) of section four of this Act to authorize committee established by it to exercise, on its behalf, such of its functions as it may determine". In the management of higher institutions, Committees play very important roles in the decision making process. This is because as democratic establishments, Universities' decisions on governance must reflect the opinion of a cross section of the staff if such decisions are to be accepted. This explains why many institutions in the country have established many Committees to assist management in arriving at useful and meaningful decisions that can facilitate the proper management and growth of the university system of education. Ede (2000) describes Universities as international communities engaged in the daily business of the search for knowledge and truth. Ogunmodede (1981), states that authority of governance of Nigerian Universities is derived from an external source - The Visitor, who invariably is the President in the case of a Federal University and the Governor in the case of a State University. According to Daudu (1986), the management of such complex organization requires participation through the Committee System because of the bureaucratic, collegial and political models that are applicable to them. In view of the importance of the Committee System in Universities' management, it is therefore necessary to come up with suggestion, to improve the effectiveness of Committees System in the Universities.

2. Concept of Committee system

Oyeyinka (2010) defines Committee as persons elected or appointed and to whom any matter or business is referred to, in order to discuss and take decision on it. The Committee is guided by the principle of collective responsibility as they are to work together for a common goal or task given to them. Committee is seen as part and parcel of an organization and is indispensable in the smooth running and aiding of administrative progress of the organization. Adefiwitan (2006) describes Committee as a group of people gathered together to take action on an administrative task, that is, a group of persons to whom some organizational matters are committed. In this regard, the Committee is a group of individuals saddled with the responsibility of performing certain or defined tasks within an organization. Badderston (1974) cited in Igwe (2010) observes that committees are sets of institutional devices which are parts of the mechanism for governance and decision making. The committee network as a management device provides an organizational structure that is additional to line managers and general staff. The headship of an organization is helped or assisted by committees in shedding administrative weight and burden which could lead to inefficiency and under productivity. Nwachukwu (1988) sees Committee as a device for achieving coordination of activities and sharing information among various departments and divisions of organization. Nwachukwu (1988) describes a committee as a device for achieving coordination of activities and sharing information among various departments and divisions of an organization. He further states that committee decisions help to promote better coordination in an organization. From the above, Committee System of the University can be seen as the micro unit of the senate or councils of the University System that aids in the decision making of the Universities of the purpose achievement of the University goals.

3. Reasons for Committee System

Committees are simply indispensable in large organizations especially in higher education systems because it is not possible for the Head of the institution or organization to carry out all the responsibilities required to move the organization forward. Committee System is a way of democratization and carrying everybody along in a decentralized system. The Committee System gives everyone in the system some sense of belonging, as they see themselves as being part of the decision-making process.

3.1 Achievement of Universities Goals

The Committee System is institutionalized in the University system with the aims of achieving the objectives of the Universities. According to Ojo (2012) the Committees System of the Universities also help the Universities in the achievement of its major goals. He further stated that committees are set up within the Universities to help coordinate and oversee how various programmes of the Universities will be achieved.

3.2 Decision Making

Another reason for the existence of the Committees System in the Universities environment is to help in making decision from their findings. Ikenwe (1998), highlighting the work of Foxworthy (1971), wrote that the primary motive of instituting the Committee System in institutional governance has grown out of the major concern for democratizing decision making in those institutions and a recognition of the need for more broadly based decision making as universities become more complex. This explains why many

institutions in the country established many committees to assist its management in arriving at useful and meaningful decisions that can facilitate the proper management and growth of the university system of education.

3.3 Exchange of ideas

The exchange of ideas between professionals, on issues confronting the Universities, is another reason why the Committees System was institutionalized in the Universities' communities. Weihrich et al., (2008) assert that matters given to the Committee are for purposes of information, advice, and interchange of ideas or decisions. Thus, the Committee keeps the people in an organization informed about the organization's activities, advice the organization and coordinate the affairs and activities in an organization. A Committee is believed to be efficient and committed in the performance of its duties and particularly in matters concerning details. Forsyth (2006) posits that the committees are "effective decision-makers" which perform better than the individual in the act of decision making. Forsyth further stresses on the effectiveness of the group (committee) in, that groups undeniably have advantages over individual as the collective power of a group is incomparable with individual capability. A group can draw on the collective memory of all its members, that is, groups have wider memory to work upon while an individual making a decision can only draw on his or her own memory. In essence, solutions to problems or questions can often be more easily solved when different group members recall how things were handled in the past and relate it to the present task.

3.4 Transfer of Responsibilities

Another reason why the Committee System was introduced to the Universities' system is to help transfer responsibilities from the Vice-Chancellor to others within the principal officers. Committees System is to help decentralize the power of the Vice-Chancellor and also help institutionalized checks and balances in the Universities system.

Good Committee System can offer a number of important benefits to Universities, including:

- Better Universities strategies and plans
- Improved operational and process effectiveness/efficiency of the Universities
- Improved project management and delivery system of the Universities
- More prudent regulatory compliance, financial and risk management
- Improved member and stakeholder/employee engagement and communication flow
- Increased agility to which an organization can deliver on its purpose and goals

Effective committee structures allow Universities to create values, through innovation, development and exploration, and provide accountability and control systems commensurate with the risks involved.

4. Characteristics of Committee System in Nigeria

In a University system, for example, the Vice-Chancellor is the chief executive officer of the university. As the number one academic officer of the institution, the Vice-Chancellor cannot, just in a fiat, take decisions on very important matters which affect all students and staff. All universities have a body called the Senate

which comprises of all the Professors of the Institution, Provosts, Deans, Institutes Directors, and Heads of Academic Departments. The Senate, headed by the Vice-Chancellor, sees to all academic matters of the University. As comprehensive and representative as the Senate appears to be, many of its decisions are based on the recommendations from the various faculties and committees. The characteristics of Committee includes:

1. Committees are usually made of small body or a small group of persons that have been put together for carrying out some specific assignments with the aim of achieving some University's goals.
2. Members of the Committee are selected on the basis of their specialization or expertise in the area in which the Committee is to be involved. For example, membership of a Curriculum Review Committee would be expected to have specialists in Curriculum Development.
3. A committee is usually composed of a superior officer – usually the chief executive of a University and Senate members.
4. In a University System, the Vice-Chancellor presides over several committees. The Vice-Chancellor, as the Chairman of Senate, in consultation with the DVCs, decides which committees are to be set up to carry out certain functions for Senate.
5. The Business Committee of Senate generally previews all academic matters which come to Senate from various faculties. In many cases, only academic matters which have passed through the Business Committee of Senate can be brought before Senate.
6. The same is true for the Academic Programmes Planning Committee. No academic programme can be presented to Senate for approval by any faculty until the programme has successfully passed through the crucible of the Academic Programmes Planning Committee.
7. Committees are guided by terms of reference provided by the appointing authority. No committee is allowed to go beyond its jurisdiction (NOUN, 2007).

5. Types of Committee Systems in Universities

There seems to be no hard and fast rules about the nature of committee in systems organizations. Generally, committees are either ad-hoc, standing or constitutional/statutory.

Ad-hoc Committees are appointed for a particular short term task and dissolved after completing the task.

Standing Committees meet throughout the life span of the body appointing them – studying and making recommendations concerning the well being of the organization.

Constitutional Committees are generally statutory as contained in the instruments establishing the organization. In other words, committees are an integral part of organizations. In higher education, there are all kinds of committees some of which are called by different names like Boards or Panels. Whether Panels, Boards, or Committees, they all perform very similar functions in higher educational organizations. Universities in Nigeria are run through committees which are either responsible to the Council or the Senate. Some of these Committees are:

1. Finance and General Purpose Committee
2. Development Committee

3. Appointment and Promotion Committee (A&PC)
4. Admissions Committee
5. Academic Planning Committee
6. Committee of Deans
7. Research Grants Committees
8. Research and Publication Committee
9. Ceremonies Committees etc.;

Each of the Universities has between twenty and sixty committees. Each of such committees is supposed to specialize with regard to the terms of reference and focus of activities (NOUN, 2009).

5.1 Admissions Committee

At the University of Benin, it is called the University Admissions Board (UAB). This committee is one of the several committees of the Senate. It is made up of representatives of all the faculties, colleges, schools and institutes. It is headed by a senior academic, generally of the rank of professor, who is appointed by the Vice-Chancellor in consultation with the committee of Deans and the Principal Officers of the University. Using the criteria which have been stipulated by Senate, the Admissions Committee collates all the applications and recommends for the approval of Senate, the admission of students into the various departments of the respective faculties, (NOUN, 2007).

5.2 Examination (Post-UME) Committee has come into existence

When the University has set its cut-off mark for the University Matriculation Examination (UME) conducted by the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB), all candidates who are selected in the University as 1st and/or 2nd choice and meet the cut-off mark, they are also required to also apply for the Post-UME screening exercise of the particular universities which they have chosen. This screening exercise is conducted by a committee specially appointed for that purpose. Unlike many other committees which are standing, the Post-UME committee is not a standing committee. It normally stands to be dissolved as soon as its Chairman submits the Post-UME and Post-Direct Entry (PUDE) screening results to the Vice-Chancellor who in turn hands the result to the chairperson of the University Admissions Board (UAB) for the admission exercise (NOUN2007).

5.3 A Students' Disciplinary Committee (is only empowered to investigate disciplinary matters which have been referred to it by the Dean of the Faculty).

After investigation, all students involved are then invited for questioning and fair hearing, after which recommendations are made to the appropriate authorities for implementation. Quite often, many accused persons misunderstand the characteristics and limitations of committees' particularly disciplinary or fact-finding committees. Disciplinary committees can only make recommendations and not punish offenders. It is the appointing authorities that have the power to punish any offender who may have been found culpable by the committee. Most committees are also characterized by time limitations –they are not permanent structures (NOUN2007).

6. Challenges of the Committees System

- The Vice-Chancellor chairs too many committees to allow for maximum efficiency and the optimization of his abilities;
- Considerable delays and postponement/cancellation of meetings occur to the detriment of quick decision making and speedy implementation of needed administrative decisions;
- Frequent cancellation of meetings by the Vice-Chancellor due to conflict of engagements within the university or the fact that the Vice-Chancellor travels or deliberate manipulation by the Chairman to discuss certain issue, or due to other reasons connected with the Chairman.
- Overlapping membership of some committees and pre-occupation of committee members. As such some meetings may not form quorum, which often results in cancellation and postponement of meetings.
- Inadequate funds to carry out their assignment as scheduled.

7. Strategies to Improve the Effectiveness of Committees System in Nigerian Universities for Sustainability

7.1 Define the Functions of the Committees

One of the strategies to improve the effectiveness of Committees System in the University system for sustainability is to structure the committee with clear function. First, identify the function you want a committee to perform—typically, a specified role in a well-defined set of critical decisions. Then establish the committee and give it an appropriately defined charter. The reduction of a host of ill-defined committees, adopted a handful of ironclad rules. A committee should exist only if it plays an explicit role in decisions that have a material impact on the University's performance and objectives, and only if good recommendations or decisions require diverse perspectives from departments and functions.

7.2 Professionalism should be used to set up Committees and Time-Frame should given.

The setting up of any Universities committees clearly has to match the committee's functional requirements: the right skills, seniority levels and representation from relevant functions or departments. But that is only the start of getting the committees composition right. Size, for instance, is a critical variable. Though some committees may need more members, Bain research suggests that six or seven people is usually the best number for a committee. More than that and the committee's effectiveness is likely to drop sharply. The group has to include at least one respected, experienced individual who can serve as chair and another who has the communication and attention-to-detail skills required for a recording secretary. Equally important: a reasonable workload. Committees can't function when their members are spread too thin. Put strict limits on the number of committees executives can serve on. Spell out expectations about how much time the committees will require. It's often helpful to have term limits on individual committee service. Term limits not only spread the responsibility, they ensure that the same people aren't always required to be on every committee.

7.3 Committee Rules should be used to manage the affairs of the Committee Members.

The use of Committee's rules to manage and coordinate the activities of Committee members will help to committee member to be focused and be disciplined in the meeting. Some committee meetings quickly degenerate into talk fests and socializing. Even those that ostensibly focus on business matters can get on

the wrong track. One antidote to this lack of focus is to build agendas around the key decisions. The most effective organizations typically draft agendas prior to the meeting that specify the purpose of the meeting and the time allocated to each item. Meeting organizers circulate the agendas and supporting documents at least 48 hours beforehand. At the meetings themselves, the chair ensures good discipline, often including the use of symbols and reminders that help keep everyone on track.

7.4 Capacity Development

Another strategy to improve the effectiveness of Committees system for Universities' sustainability is by organizing training and retraining programme for the Committee members. Most committee members have some weaknesses in terms of carrying out committee activities. A training program allows them to strengthen their skills that each member needs to improve. A development program brings all members to a higher level so they all have similar skills and knowledge. This helps reduce any weak links within their assignment that rely heavily on others to complete basic work tasks. According to Ogbomida 1, Obano, Emmanuel (2013), University management team should always organize workshops, seminars and retreats for committee members. At such retreats, the vision and mission of the university should be reechoed to members in order to serve as their guiding principles while discharging their responsibilities. The various committees should work collaboratively while their activities should be periodically reviewed by the university authority.

7.5 Adequate Fund

The provision of adequate fund for the Committee members by the management is another strategy to make the Committee system to be effective in discharging their assigned functions. Ojo (2012) supported this view when He recommended that the Universities should ensure that committees set up in the Universities should be given enough funding and incentives.

Conclusion/Recommendation

In the management of higher institutions, committees play very important roles in the decision making process. As a democratic establishment, university decisions on governance must reflect the opinion of a cross section of the staff if such decisions are to be accepted. Many institutions in the country established many committees to assist in arriving at useful and meaningful decisions that can facilitate the proper management and growth of the university education. This paper discusse the concept of Committee system in the Universities, reasons for Committee system in the Universities, characteristics of Committee system and the composite of the Committee system. Since Committee system is indispensable to the University system, the need becomes a necessity. The paper also identifie some challenges militating against Committee effectiveness in the Universities environment and discusses the strategies to improve the effectiveness of committee system in the University system. For the way forward of our public universities, the following recommendations are made. They include:

- The Vice-Chancellor and the council should always define the assignments given to committees in the Universities.
- The Vice-Chancellor should always appoint Committee Members on merit using their professionalism, experience, and knowledge.

- The Chairman of every committee should use Committee's rules to manage and coordinate the activities of Committee Members. This will help Committee Members to be focused and be disciplined in the meeting.
- The Universities should organize training and retraining programme for the Committee members to boost their performance
- The provision of adequate funds for the Committees by the management is another strategy to make the Committee system to be effective in discharging their assigned functions.

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