Improved Tertiary Institution Students Crisis Management with Basic Principles of Administration

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Abstract

Incidence of student’s crisis in tertiary institutions has become more pronounced than ever hence its frequent occurrence in the Nigeria education system. This paper therefore revealed that combination of factors are responsible to this ugly situation in Nigeria hence the need for initiating innovation intervention in its management for improvement. Some of its effects on the students, parents, university administration and the nation at large were discussed. Ways to manage it through the application of basic principles of administration were examined and suggested.

Crisis is a situation in which things have fallen apart or are about falling apart to the extent that the normal working of the society is disturbed (Ndazhaga, 2000). Similarly Titilayo (2003) saw crisis as a time of difficulty, a turning point and decisive stage in a particular system, be it organization, country, industry, education, etc. It is a period of disagreement between two parties during which they express their dissatisfaction and discontentment that should be addressed with a view to preventing traumatic outcomes.

Crisis is an inevitable part of people’s lives hence it happens everywhere such as in homes, places of worship, organizations, offices, industries, socio-political groupings, educational institutions, etc. When it occurs within a given social group due to differences in perception of people in that group, crisis becomes intra group. Such crisis may be either substantive or affective. It is substantive if it occurs from fundamental differences in people’s views, opinion, belief, etc, on a particular issue. Crisis is affective when it is borne out of people’s emotional responses to a situation.

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On the other hand, when crisis occurs between two or more groups of people such as two communities, states, nations, etc, it is inter group crisis. It could occur at different social levels such as in:

1. Economy—when there is a riot within the whole nation, state, etc due to one misunderstanding or the other with their leaders, etc.
2. Political—when crisis occurs between two political groups.
3. Religious—when crisis occurs between two or more religious sects.
4. Ethno-cultural setting—this happens within different ethnic groups.
5. Educational institutions—when crisis occurs in different educational institutions between either school authorities and students or otherwise.

This work therefore focuses on this area. Crisis in the context of students is a chaotic situation in which students are angry and consequently behave violently in their protest against certain institutions’ decision. For Titilayo (2003) it is a form of protestation that results from the inability of students and those in management position to amicably resolve grievances or areas of disagreements. In such cases, students show their grievances on such issues that affect their general wellbeing in the campus. When the situation becomes unbearable to them, they resort to violence and subsequently move to the streets with placards rioting and vandalizing properties.

The genesis of students’ crisis in Nigerian tertiary institutions can be traced back to March, 1944, when the Kings College Lagos students clashed with the police over hostel accommodation. In 1962, there was another students’ crisis at University of Nigeria, Nsukka when the students were protesting over poor quality of food being given to them. In 1965, there was an inter student crisis between the supporters of Prof. Eni Njoku and Prof. Saburi Biobaku over who should be the vice chancellor of University of Lagos. In 1981, there was anti-government demonstration at Obafemi Awolowo University, Ife. In 1988, there was a nation-wide student crisis against increase in the pump price of petroleum, others are “Ali Must Go” crisis as a result of increase in school fees during which University of Ibadan was closed down. Universities of Obafemi Awolowo, Ile-Ife, Jos and federal University of agriculture, Abeakuta protested against the federal government in 1991, to mention but a few. However, research findings revealed that students crisis in tertiary institutions is not limited to Nigeria alone rather to the world over. For instance Ericksons’ (1968) revealed that students’ movements brought down regimes in Asia and Latin America. That of Obianyo (2003) also revealed that student crisis also played major roles on revolutions in central Europe.

It is pertinent to observe that students crisis has become a norm in Nigerian tertiary institutions due to its frequent occurrences. In most cases it impinges on institutions’ law and order thereby impairing the future of education because on each
occurrence it led to the closure of the institution in question. In any case, the fact remains that students crisis does not occur in a vacuum. It is an indicator that certain inadequacies exist in the administration of the institutions involved. This, by implication could be that the administrators of these institutions lack all it takes to check and manage students’ crisis.

Causes of Students Crisis in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions
These include the following:

1. **Leadership of the institution**
   Here, the leaders may be very insensitive to the students problems and thus neglect their needs. This may give room for students, confrontation with school authority which may end in crisis.

2. **Government policy**
   More often than not, some government policies may have direct or indirect adverse effect on the students’ welfare. However some policies may be proper but the students might misinterpret them and resolve to violence. This may involve many tertiary institutions simultaneously.

3. **Communication gap**
   This is seen as lapse in the means of transferring ideas, opinions, views, etc to the students. Nwachukwu (1988) noted that in a cross cultural study in communication involving communication breakdown was the single greatest barrier to corporate excellence. Communication breakdown can occur when the effective channels of communication are not in place.

4. **Religious matter**
   The mode of dressing of many female students on campuses often causes disapproval. Some of their male counterpart’s, especially Muslim fundamentalists (Titilayo, 2003). She gave example that Bayaro University Kano had sometimes in 1993 witnessed total breakdown of law and order when some Muslim fundamentalists invaded a “miss campus” competition organized by the institution students union government.

   Ejiofor (1993) identifies ten major causes of student unrest as increasing poverty of students; social indiscipline, perverted sense of right and wrong in social affairs, absence of employment opportunities, obvious inequalities, inadequacy of previous valued options, goals and ends; perception of power, especially military power as the avenue to status and wealth with no democratic tradition, this power factor becomes a norm among the youth, complete absence on the campuses, etc.
In this regard, Loto (2000) has it as inadequate teaching and learning facilities, poor communication between students and the school authority, lack of involvement of students in decision making, poor leadership style of the school authority, dirty environment, intimidation of students by some lecturers, political situation in the country, divided loyalty among staff and students, unwarranted rustication and expulsion.

6. Peter and Okolie (1998) observed that majority of Nigerian students now are often exuberant, outspoken and radical in outlook, who have set out to challenge institutional authority and any attempt to correct them may create tension and consequently crisis.

7. Fatoki (1989) has his own as poor food and accommodation, inadequate infrastructures and obnoxious college regulations or unpalatable government policies.

Effects of Students Crisis

Students’ crisis in the Nigerian tertiary institutions has effects on the following:

1. Students themselves

Some students may meet their untimely death in the violent act whereas as some seize such opportunity to join some bad gangs which may later destroy them. After any students’ crisis, the school in question may be closed down and the students have to face the consequences such as losing an academic year, serious academic problems because the lecturers will have to rush their lectures in order to cover the course outline, etc. Normally after such crisis, there are fear and uncertainty in the campuses which make students to entertain some anxieties and distractions rather than to concentrate on their studies. Students are forced to pay for items damaged in the school during the crisis.

2. School administration and staff

The fear that pervades the campus affects the administration as well as the staff. Thus study programmes are disrupted, academic sessions are bettered as the calendar year is reduced, consequently the administrators have to plan in retrospect. Lecturers have much to handle within a short space of time which may be stressful. Some student’s activists often seize such opportunity to vandalize and destroy university and staff properties. They may even harm some staff that they hate and have long been looking for any opportunity to confront them.

3. The parents

The parents are not left out either as they have some burden to bear. Thus institutions often surcharged students for destroying its properties. Such payment will be done by the poor parents in addition to the normal fees paid in the university as well as money for buying learning materials, students feeding, etc. In some cases of
students’ crisis, some students are suspended or at worst expelled from the university. In this regard parents have more burden as they are not happy seeing their children loitering in the streets outside their homes. Given this situation some may join bad gangs which may have destructive effects on them.

4. The nation
Universities are established to produce needed manpower for national development. When the universities continue to produce half-baked graduates resulting from incessant crises, then the aims of higher education cannot be realized. This invariably affects the nation’s economical and technological development.

5. The positive effect:
In line with this, some researchers believe that students’ crisis in the tertiary institutions has some positive effects too. For instance, Riniji (2003) revealed that at the end of the crisis, people who are concerned with the crisis, if they are honest should be able to accept where they have gone wrong and would want to work in such a manner that a crisis situation does not repeat itself. In this case, he assures that the leadership of the organization is mindful of the reaction of its members hence positive change can be made in the leadership of the organization. In addition to the above view, crisis, if properly handled can bring about meaningful change to the nation at large. This is perhaps the reason why Ogbazi (1997) asserted that:

Crisis exists when there is mismatch between what is reality and what ought to be ideal. Crisis exists when significant number of people perceives a discrepancy between what is considered right and actual state of affairs. Under this condition, people are apt to question and challenge the legitimacy of the social and political arrangement preventing such inimical condition.

Management of Student Crisis with Principles of Administration
Administration is the application of rules, procedures and policies to accomplish organizational set goals and objectives. It is a position in institution held by an individual given responsibility to offer leadership roles in an organization. To perform these leadership roles effectively, the administrator must follow certain laid down guidelines usually known as principles of administration.

Principles of administration therefore, refer to the descriptive guides for sound and meaningful decisions. They are not necessarily laws but they reveal some ways of seeing and taking administrative actions in any organization. Administrative principles are useful in organizational administration because they:
i. guide all the actions taken by administrators,
ii. describe techniques for handling different administrative situations.
iii. form the bases for administrative actions,
iv. expose the consequences of actions to the administrators.
v. give staff protection against irrational actions by some administrators as well as administrators themselves against the abuses of the staff.

The major principles of Administration that can be applied in the management of students’ campus crisis among others are:

1. The fundamental principles
2. The humanitarian principles
3. The prudential principles
4. The principles of change.

The Fundamental Principles

These are the principles which administrators can apply to solve administrative problems. They include the principle of responsibility, delegation of authority and communication.

Responsibility: In solving a crisis problem, this principle states that leaders must act responsibly. Thus, at all levels every individual must recognize his sphere of authority and act within it in dealing with the students.

Communication: This is the process of passing information, ideas, attitudes and understanding from one person to another (Ogbazi, 1977). Thus in effectively dealing with the students, they must know the what, why, how, who, where and when of things related to them. University leaders should listen to them by the use of dialogue and feedback in any situation to prevent misinformation and rumours. Good communication reduces suspicions which makes students react violently; keeps students abreast of the rationale for making any decision; detects internal problems; offers students the opportunity to contribute their mind in the decision making-process; removes their grievances and encourages them to cooperate with university authority, as well as helping leaders to see students’ needs and interests with a view to providing them.

Delegation of authority –By this, duty is entrusted to individuals on the basis of expertise not on quota system. Leaders must see that duties are given to the people who by training, temperament and experience are capable to understand the rationale behind students crisis and so can manage it effectively.
The Humanitarian Principles

These principles remind university leaders to see students as human beings who need comfort and satisfaction. This implies that any action that would affect them adversely must by all means be avoided for instance banning anything without any alternative, etc. Under this are the following principles.

Democracy: This is based on the recognition and respect of students’ ideas. University authority should be mindful that democracy demands that since students are affected by any decision, they (their representatives) must be part of it to avoid trouble.

Justice: This demands equity, fair play and without favorism or victimization in dealing with students’ affairs. This is obvious because for Giwa (2005), many exceptions weaken justice and weaken the acceptance of authority.

Human relation: This reminds university authority that students have individual needs, feelings, interests and expectations which they (leaders) must respect. By this they must be kind, considerate and open minded in dealing with students.

The Prudential Principle

This states that university authority must think and use judiciously the available resources for the benefit of students. They must in the words of Giwa (2005) anticipate, calculate, regulate, utilize and control functions, services, and resources cautiously and expeditiously. Under this are the following:

Economy: University authority must be economical in the use of limited resources especially fund so that students basic needs such as food, water, accommodation, light, books are provided as and when due. Research findings revealed that absence of such necessary amenities in the campus makes students uncomfortable and consequently creates tension.

Employment of staff: This stipulates that staff employment should be done by careful selection, appointment, placement of job description, training and retaining of staff without bias. By this the right people who will manage students well will be employed in the institutions.

The Principles of Change

This principle states that change is necessary in tertiary institutions and so must be introduced at appropriate time. Under this are:

Adaptability: university leaders must be adaptive to situations for success rather than being rigid and obsolete. In line with this Giwa (2005) suggests that modern administrators must identify and harness change both in the objectives, structures,
functions and techniques. When they apply these in the management of students issues there will be no crisis in the campus.

**Flexibility:** This stresses that university authority must be flexible enough in their plan and action to be able to cater for the needs of students.

**Stability:** This point to the need to conserve and protect any good practice that is proved to be adequate in administration especially ones students enjoy which are also good for the institution.

**Conclusion**

There is no doubt that students’ crisis in Nigerian tertiary institutions often disrupt and threatening the stability of these institutions and the country’s economy at large. Reasons and consequences of this ugly trend have been highlighted. Finally, some ways to manage it by applying basic principles of administration have been proposed with a view to reducing its occurrences.

**References**


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