
Challenges of Sustainable Functional Human Resources Management in Universities in South-East Nigeria

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Abstract

The need for quality service delivery and improved productivity in Nigerian universities has led to the need for and added emphasis on functional human resources management. Sustainable functional HRM is a tool which can be used to enhance employee performance. The main goal-object of this paper is to explore the bewildering array of challenges that have characterized HRM in universities in South-East universities in Nigeria. While the conclusion touched on some vital areas of the challenges of human resource management, it is also recommended that while the challenges of human resource management in the universities of our focus have been articulated, their resolution will set HRM on its right track to Sustainable Human Resources Management practices and in fact have a spill-over positive effective on HRM in other universities in the country.

Keywords: HRM, Challenges, South-East, Universities

No nation in the contemporary globalized village can commendably move forward in the developmental continuum without the nation's unquantifiable commitment to mandatory human capital development which Mezieobi, Jarimi and Chukwujekwu (2020) preferred to endowing a populace with the requisite functional knowledge and skills which ordinarily can be ploughed into sustainable development of any nation and the nation's people's wellness. No matter the 'first port of call' where effective human resource or capital development may be said to rightly take off, from the universities, undoubtedly, as the highest point in any nation's (Nigeria inclusive) educational structure, is expectantly saddled with the onerous task of producing the right calibre of human capital that should be in the forefront of a nation's sustainable development. This fact is not just anchoring on the truism that the universities are categorized in the bracket of tertiary or higher education, but that they house the requisite manpower needed to vehicle sustainable functional human resources management to fruition.

Notwithstanding that "human capital development effectiveness...anchors incontrovertibly on the quality, vision of the human capital management system or practices", (Mezieobi, Jarimi and Chukwujekwu, 2020 p.6), the situational realities of

human resources' management system in universities in Nigeria judging from their management ineffectiveness which they are grappling with in futility or rather without any appreciable index of success, commensensically unveil the fact that the universities in Nigeria are wallowing in endemic, Human Resources' Management challenges that have continued to mitigate their effectiveness and efficiency.

The burden of this paper, therefore, is to explore the nature of the challenges confronting universities in South-Western Nigeria with specific reference to human resources' management. The justification of this exposition is predicated near-almost entirely on the fact that in educational management in Nigeria, all conceivable things have been said and written about educational management but, with slim if any emphasis on human resources' management that is beamed at the universities.

Conceptual Clarifications

It is exceedingly pretentious, particularly in a social context, such as Nigeria's where English language is not their indigenous or origin language but a second language to dabble into a discourse in English language without ab initio defining one's terms, holding perhaps, though erroneously that the message of the communicator will be easily and readily comprehended. While there are scholars and personalities such as Disraeli in Mezieobi (2016) who "hate definitions" consequent perhaps on their presumed "obscuring (of the very concept being defined)". Okeke, (1984) or rather as Professor Nwagwu (2018) put it, they consist of "unpacking the set of preferences and prejudices" of a communicator, Mezieobi and Mezieobi (2015) ardent exponents of conceptual clarifications endorse conceptual clarification when they opined that it provides "a common frame of understanding (or meaning-sharing) between the communicator and his (communicative) audience". Taking a cue from this premise, four concepts in this exposition need some brief explanation. They are: Challenges, human resource management, sustainable and universities.

Challenges: Meaning

These will refer to those forces that tend to mitigate or thwart the effectiveness of something or actions.

Human Resource Management (HRM): Contextualized

Human Resource Management (HRM) has been perceived by scholars in various ways depending on the orientation of the scholar. Nonetheless, a comprehensive definition of Human Resource Management (HRM) is that hazarded by Dessler in Sofoluwe and Ojo (2014). According to him, HRM is a human piloted "process of acquiring, training, appraising, and compensating employees (the most valued assets in an organization), and attending to their labour relations, health and safety...", all geared towards putting in their optimal best to achieve both the goal-objects of their organization as well as their individual or collective needs.

Sustainable: Conceptualized

In the very words of Mezieobi, Mezieobi and Nwosu (2014) "sustainable refers to holding tenaciously to something (that is already in existence or has come on board), maintaining it and continuously improving on it ordinarily for the better."

University: The Term

This refers to the highest stage in any nation's educational structure.

Educational Management: The Preponderating Implementation Vehicled Areas of Emphases

Human Resources Management (HRM) in relation to the education industry falls squarely with the exclusive zone of Educational Management which is not only an arm of the professional discipline of Education but also described by Reeser in Okunamiri (2010) as “the utilization (in educational process or service delivery) or physical and human resources through co-operative efforts...(to accomplish educational goals) by performing the functions of planning, organizing, staffing, directing and controlling” as well as “coordinating and budgeting” Babalola, (2016) To and these may be added reporting (or communicating) and evaluation.

While it is very apparent from the foregoing definition of educational management that human resources cannot be meaningfully sidelined in any educational process, no matter at whatever level of the formal educational ladder, it is lamentably very regrettable that a critical look or observation in practical realistic terms of Nigeria's educational management climate reveals that little or no attention is given to sustainable and functional human resource management.

Let us make bold to assert that Nigeria's educational management practice as typified by a bewildering array of literature on educational management, in our context, is profusely focused on include:

1. The historical emergence of educational management practice;
2. Whether or not educational management is a science or an Art;
3. Educational Management in global perspective;
4. Management and policy-making in Education;
5. Contemporary Issues in Educational Management;
6. Modern Management;
7. Aspects of School Management;
8. The environment and structure of Educational Management;
9. Quality Education Management;
10. Applying Management Schools of Thought to Educational Administration;
11. The nature of Educational Policies in Educational Management in Nigeria;
12. Educational “Management periscope...” Ohadinma, (2005); and
13. “Educational Management and innovation for the attainment of sustainable development goals (SDGs)” Ikediugwu, (2017).

Participant observations, pieces of researches and available literature, as the foregoing catalogue of educational management write-ups unveil, manifestly attest to the fact that besides these chains of pontifications that are majorly theoretical, Human Resources Management (HRM), as the crux of management effectiveness in Education service delivery, has been little explored. While this undesirable factor is the antecedents of the challenges of Human Resource Management (HRM) in Universities in South-East geo-political zone of Nigeria, it may be very expedient to concertedly look into the goals of Human Resource Management, as it were in any organization at all including universities as formal organization, before hazarding the challenges of Human Resource

Management (HRM) in universities with emphases on South-East geo-political zone of Nigeria.

Goal-Objects of Human Resource Management

Holistically perceived the goals of Human Resource Management which is geared at the utilizing of people to make the success of an organization as stated by Armstrong (2019) are:

1. Providing a barrage of services as integral component of the process of running an organization which support and enhance the achievement of organizational objectives.
2. Enabling a formal organization to obtain and retain its needed skilled, committed and well-motivated workforce.
3. To develop and promote the inherent capacities of people by providing not only learning opportunities, but also continuous development opportunities.
4. Develop or create a conducive work climate in which productive and harmonious human relationships or interactions can be maintained between the organizational management cadre and employees, such that feelings of mutual trust are developed and become pervasive.
5. Develop and maintain work environment in which teamwork and flexibility hold sway in perpetuity.
6. Assist the organization to adapt to the needs of its stakeholders such as management, government or its agencies, employees, owners and the public.
7. Ensure that unquantifiable value is placed on people who are rewarded for what they do and contribute to achieving for the organization.
8. Effectively managing a diverse workforce, cognizant of individual and group differences in relation to employment needs, work style and aspiration.
9. Playing down human discrimination on the basis of sex, religion, ethnic affiliation to ensure that equal opportunities are provided for all.
10. Be in the forefront of adopting and exhibiting an ethical approach to managing employees which is pivoting on concern for people, as human beings, fairness and transparency; as well as maintaining and improving on the physical and mental wellness of the employees.

Challenges of Sustainable Functional Human Resource Management in Universities in South-East Nigeria: Pinpointed

A litany of factors, individually or in unison are relentlessly functioning to scuttle or rather truncate functional human resources management in the universities of our focus in this exposition. The challenges in question include:

1. In the universities of our concern in this paper, the correct attention has not been given to the crux of management which is Human Resource Management (HRM). This stance is borne out of the fact that the meaning and import of Human Resource Management is not clearly understood, let alone applied the way it should be. When there is no premium in actuality that is placed on the people working in the universities in appreciation of the fact that they are the organization's most valued assets who have immense contributions to make in the accomplishment of the goals for which, those universities are set up, it will be expecting too much that

Human Resource Management will appropriate yield its desired organizational dividends.

2. The abysmal failure of these universities in sustaining and enhancing Human Resource management practices to their advantage is occasioned not only by their misunderstanding of all that Human Resource Management connote, but also by their near-total focusing of attention on the student Personnel Administration and its accomplishment School Business Management to the total relegation of staff Personnel Administration that is toyed with on sustainable tempo. Put very succinctly, the commitment of the universities in question to Human Capital (or resource) development is largely seen as the exclusive preserve of the students to the lamentable exclusion of those people, according to Professor Igwe (2015) who “...do the job...(bringing) to bear on the job...(their) total physical, intellectual and emotional capacities”.
3. Another factor that has stultified Human Resource Management in the Universities in south-East Geo-political zone of Nigeria is entrusting Human Resource Management in these institutions to the care of ‘management generalists’ – those who have no professional preparation or training in educational management – and, are, therefore ill-equipped management-wise to give Human Resource Management its desired boost in these universities. These square pegs in round holes bask in the false euphoria of the Universities’ Human Resource Management when they are in truth empty and barren in Human Resource Management practices.
4. Nigeria’s management elite in their frenzy, obsession with Human Capital (or Resource) Theory and in applying the theory to Education in response to humans’ increasing demand for university education in order to improve such persons’ “productivity...(for) more...future incomes” Obasi, (2000), has plunged into the reckless proliferation of universities – public and private – in Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu States in South-East Nigeria. Since requisite personnel must be acquired, employed or secured by recruitment and selection, the dearth of such persons equipped with skills and knowledge very vital to the achievement of the overall goals of any university, has occasioned the employment of ‘anyhow’ personnel to stay in the stead of the hard to come by quality personnel. This factor is in the main accountable for the poor quality of the universities’ products’ output. The recruitment and selection of staff hernia are aggravated by ethnic or sectional politicking as well as the ‘whom do you know in government’ mentality that has thrown merit to the dogs or the debunking of the right basic qualifications for the job.
5. In the universities of our focus in this paper, formal orientation which is planned and undertaken to familiarize the barrage of recruited staff to their job specification or immediate work situation is least contemplated. This is a brazen relegation of an aspect of Human Resource Management (HRM) which Ezeocha (2014) labelled ‘Orientation’.
6. One other area of challenge with regard Human Resource Management that is staring the Universities in South-East geo-political zone in the face, preponderating and needing therapeutic remedy, is chronic absence of continuous professional development or training of their employees that is university sponsored. In this

way, the continuous improvement of the universities' human resources' skills, qualities, capabilities for their increased productivity, positive contribution to their organizations' goal accomplishment are jettisoned. Embarkation of staff on continuous professional development or training by improvement oriented workshops, seminars, conferences is regrettably an individual or private affair.

The other areas of challenge of the universities with regard to Human Resources Management which the universities are grappling with include:

7. Staff performance evaluation or appraisal has become a routinized ritual earnestly sought for by academic staff, non-teaching staff, administrative and supervisory personnel, by all means – hook and crook – for largely promotion and enhanced pay, at times with watered down pre-determined criteria on account of some other criteria that may be hooked up to age, sex or ethnic attachment.
8. There is effeminate communication system in relation to human resources management in these universities. When a bulk of the managers do not have or possess the qualities of a good manager which Charvatova and Vander Veer in Sofoluwe and Ojo (2014) catalogued as tactfulness, constructiveness, freedom to perform, responsibility awareness, good general knowledge and positive self-perception, there is bound to be communicative leprosy that may not augur well for effective human resource management.
9. The other challenges which are negatively exercising the South-East Universities in Nigeria in terms of effective human resource management are staff relationships, staff demotivation through down-playing their many welfare packages or entitlements such as salary, fringe benefits etc, not boosting staff morale, eschewing positive staff-management relations and discipline, university/community public relations, not involving staff in institutional decision-making, and manifest indulgence in conflict stimulating methods as against “conflict reduction methods” Onyekpere,)2018), truncating human resource development and human resource supervision.

Conclusion

From what has been insightfully articulated in this paper, the conclusion is inescapable that the Universities in South East geo-political zone of Nigeria have a litany of challenges they are confronted with in relation to Human Resource Management. What these challenges are like have been hazarded within the space constraints of a paper. When these outlined and largely highlighted challenges are ameliorated, then Human Resource Management in these universities of our concern would have been set on the right road map in their repositioned track and functional human resource management sustainability will be on unquenchable track, except for adaptation to acceptable modernization motored changes. This will indubitably have a positive rippled effect on the other universities, whatever their location, in Nigeria.

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