

Ethnicity and Management of Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria: The Experience of College of Education. Oju, Benue State, Nigeria

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Abstract

A common phenomenon in the management of tertiary institutions (Universities, Polytechnics, Colleges of Education, etc) in Nigeria in recent times is a situation whereby the top hierarchies of these institutions are manned by personnel from within the locality. This development is a far cry from the practice in the past and, worldwide as the idea of universality underlying the operations of these institutions suggests that the best hand is engaged from any part of the world. This paper analyses the implication of this development on Nigeria's educational system. Using the College of Education, Oju, Benue State, Nigeria, as case study, the paper pointed out the negative effects of this development to include unbridled mediocrity, mistrust, lowering of standards, among others. The paper noted that a tertiary institution is established to produce critical original thinkers, men and women of universal character. It therefore emphasizes on skilled manpower particularly at management level, being sought from around the World and, not confined to a particular locality.

Keywords: Ethnicity. Education, management, tertiary institutions,

1. Introduction.

In every society, education is fundamental to bringing about the desired change. It is what is required to develop the individual in the society into a sound and effective citizen. It is for this reason that governments all over the world placed a lot of emphasis on the development of education.

In Nigeria, education has enjoined active participation by individuals, communities, non-governmental organizations, as well as government intervention in order to meet the growing needs of the people for knowledge. From handful numbers of wholly government owned higher institutions at independence in the 1960s, today we have a plethora of higher institutions-Universities, Polytechnics, Colleges of Education, etc-owned by individuals, private organizations and governments, both federal and States.

A common phenomenon in the management of these institutions in recent times is the increasingly domestication, or regionalization of their key or principal officers. Unlike in the past where management personnel of these institutions are sought worldwide in line with the principles of universality underlying their operations, Vice-Chancellors, Rectors, or Provosts and, Registrars, Librarians and Bursars are appointed on the basis of regions or localities that the institutions are sited.

This development has wide ranging effects on the operations of these institutions. While, on the one hand, it could be said to be borne out of the need to encourage local participation in the management of institutions located within an environment, it is, on the other hand, a negation of the concept of merit which entails that skilled manpower, particularly at management level, is sought from around the World and, not confined to a particular locality.

This paper highlights the values that underpin this development in the management of higher institutions in the country. In doing this, certain key concepts are clarified, and a general examination of management environment of higher institution in the country is done taking into consideration the peculiar experience of the College of Education, Oju, Benue State, Nigeria.

2. Conceptual clarifications

For the purpose of this study the following concepts are clarified:

2.1 Tertiary Institutions

In Nigeria, the formal educational system is classified into three different levels- Primary, Secondary and Tertiary education. Primary education is the lower level of education that serves as a preparatory ground. It includes kindergarten and the first six grades of elementary school.

The second level, secondary school refers to the intermediate school between primary and or elementary school and the higher one. It usually offers general, technical, vocational, or higher school preparatory courses. In the country today, this level of education is segmented into two-Junior and Senior grades of three years each.

Tertiary education, on the other hand, is the advance level of education and it includes knowledge or education imparted in polytechnics, Colleges of Education, Universities as well as all forms of professional institutions for the Military, Doctors, Lawyers, etc. For the purpose of simple clarifications, the concept Tertiary Education is used to mean the same thing as Higher Education. It embodies all organized learning and training activities at both conventional and non-conventional, or formal and non-formal institutions of learning. As Utile, T (2009:17)

noted:

Any situation in which mature persons are organized for building up on their knowledge and skills, to apply knowledge to the analysis and search for solutions to life problems can rightly be classified as higher education. This is particularly so when such programmes are intended to equip the beneficiaries to play leadership roles in various aspects of socio-economic life.

In Nigeria, the duration of learning at tertiary education level varies according to the programme, and the kind of institution involved. While in Colleges of Education and Polytechnics, the duration may be three, two or even more years; in the Universities it may be four, five or more years depending on the programme.

Irrespective of the programme, or kind of institution, the goals of tertiary education as spelt out in the National Policy on Education (2010:36) includes:

- a. Contribution to national development through high-level relevant manpower training;
- b. Develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of individual and society;
- c. Develop the intellectual capacity of individuals to understand and appreciate their local and external environment;
- d. Acquire both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to be self-reliant and useful members of the society;
- e. Promote and encourage scholarship and community service;
- f. Forge and cement national unity, and
- g. Promote national and international understanding and interaction.

Achieving the foregoing goals, especially in a formal institution like the College of Education, Oju requires a conducive atmosphere devoid of ethnic or tribal sentiments. It requires putting in place a World class management structure that is highly result-oriented in nature. But the question is whether the enabling environment is created in Nigeria's higher institution of learning to enhance a sound management team that is dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and excellence through teaching and research? What do we imply by tertiary institution's management and, how do the management make or mar the operations of these institutions?

2.2 Tertiary Institutions Management: By tertiary institutions' management, we simply imply the art of carrying into effect any policy, plan or undertaking needed for the smooth operation of the institution in question. Being formal institutions, a class of officers is charged with the responsibility of carrying out day-to-day administrative duties. These class of officers, known as management team, in the case of a College of Education includes the Provost, Registrar, Bursar, Librarian, among others.

Beside this, there is the Governing Council Board which is the highest decision or policy making body, and the Academic Board that has supreme authority over academic matters.

Together, these key structures and/or management carry out the day to day administrative work flow of the institution. They play major roles in policy initiation and implementation and, generally operate within mandates and policies lay down by the enabling statues of the institution. It is for this reason that in constituting a management team of an educational institution, efforts are usually made to hire the best brain from anywhere in the World. How has this being the case with respect to the College of Education, Oju?

3. Ethnicity and Management in College of Education, Oju: Facts and Figures.

Most societies in the world today are made up of several social groups of various sizes and interests. Some of these groups may have economic undertones while others are racial or ethnic in nature. The later which is our concern in this paper, implies a race or tribe that has a common cultural attributes or tradition. In other words, by ethnicity we implies a group of people having similar socio-cultural beliefs and practices. Nigeria is a plural society with diverse socio-cultural, ethnic groups. It is believe that Nigeria has over two hundred and fifty (250) ethnic groups with the Hausa/Fulanis, Yoruba and Ibo forming the majority.

In Benue State, Nigeria, there are three major ethnic groups namely; Igede, Idoma and Tiv. These different tribes are distinct in spoken languages and other cultural traits. They are equally organized independently around common interests and needs. They are found in every major institution or organization of the state, including the College of Education, Oju.

The College of Education, Oju was first established in 1981 by the civilian administration of Mr. Aper Aku. The college which was then referred to as Advanced Teachers College (ATC) was later scrapped by the Military administration of Brig. Gen. Atom Kpera in 1984. In 1992, the civilian government of Rev. Fr. Moses Adasu re-established it under the new name. The college has, as its core values, the pursuit of knowledge and excellence as well as the liberation of the mind through research, teaching, intellectual debates and learning. It is specifically charged with the responsibility of training and graduating students who are expected to teach and primary at secondary schools level.

Since 1992, the college has turned out graduates in large numbers and, witnessed a lot of development, albeit, amidst intermittent crises. Some of these crisis were isolated students cult activities; misunderstanding among staff and students of the college and, between them and members of the host community. These crises got to a

head in March, 2009 when a misunderstanding between a Tiv female student and an Igede girl from the college host community, Ogengeng Ukpa over fetching of water from the College borehole led to a major crisis that resulted in the death of a student and eventual closure of the school.

An Administrative Commission of Enquiry was set up with the aim of determining the cause(s) of the crisis and finding a lasting solutions to it. After several weeks of sitting, the commission noted that the recurring crisis in the college is traceable to two main problems:

- Lack of basic infrastructures; and
- Unhealthy ethnic rivalry among staff and students of the college

In particular, the commission noted that the operations of the college is polarized along ethnic lines in such a way that allegiances by both staff and students are to individual ethnic group leadership instead of the school authority. Existing tribal unions became the rallying point for both staff and students of the different ethnic groups, instead of the school management.

The commission findings further revealed that the Igedes who are the host ethnic group, though a minority in terms of both staff and student enrollment dominated the college management. The College Provost, Deputy Provost, Registrar, Bursar, Dean, Student Affairs and several other key officers were of Igede ethnic extraction. This situation, the commission noted, was made possible because of the government deliberate policy to domesticate the school management.

In terms of student population, the ratio is such that out of every ten (10) students, seven (7) are of Tiv and Idoma ethnic extractions, while the remaining three (3) are shared among Igede and other tribes like the Ibos, Yalas etc. Note that Benue State is made up of twenty three LGAS. Out of these total number of LGAS the Tiv tribe have 14 LGAS, the Idomas, 7LGAs while the Igedes have only 2 LGAS. Thus, we have a situation where even if staff recruitment or student admission is done on the basis of equality of LGA, the Igedes that hosted the College are bound to be a minority. It is this stark reality that the different tribes in the college capitalized on. The Tivs and the Idomas could not understand why, even though they are the majority group in the college, they could not play a leading role in the management of the college affairs. They find the situation reprehensive and use every opportune excuse to undermine the operations of the college. Unfortunately, the Igede managers of the college could not comprehend and manage this social structure dynamics within the college entity properly. The student crisis of March, 2009 which led to wanton destruction of lives and properties, closure of the college for a whole session and the eventual sacking of its management is the result of this underlying airs full of suspicious, mistrusts and resentments among the various ethnic groups in the system.

On the recommendation of the Commission of Enquiry, the Government appointed a Sole Administrator to oversee the day-to-day affairs of the College. It equally set up a Reconciliatory Committee to reconcile the warring ethnic groups within the college and, between the college and the host communities. Though the combine efforts of the Sole Administrator and the Reconciliatory committee succeeded in restoring normalcy to the college, it is not without a huge cost.

4. Conclusion.

This paper is an exposition of the havoc that an educational institution run on the basis of ethnic chauvinism could suffer. As a citadel of learning and research, an educational institution in this era of globalization is expected to develop a culture of learning that creates self confidence, robust competition and high productivity. Achieving this requires throwing the doors of the institution wide open to get the best hands from all over the World. Where this is not done, as is the experience of the College of Education, Oju, Benue State, Nigeria indolence and poor standards, instead of meritocracy and selfless service becomes the order of the day. The larger society, of course, suffers for it.

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