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Leadership and Administrative Skills for Optimal Universal Basic Education Delivery in Nigeria

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Abstract

In Nigeria, the Universal Basic Education (UBE) is the foundation of the education system. The implication of this is that the overall success or otherwise of the educational system delivery will depend, to a large extent, on the functionality of the basic education scheme. The rationale for this paper is based on the fact that the Education for All (EFA) target by 2015 and a cardinal objective of the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) is for member countries to provide functional basic education to their citizenry. This paper therefore examines the leadership and administrative aspects which are quite crucial to the successful implementation of the scheme. The author discusses the main issues of leadership and administration, and makes a case for the possession and utilization of these skills by the head teachers for quality management of the UBE programme in the country.

Key words: Leadership, Administration, Administrative skills and Universal Basic Education

Introduction

Leadership and administration are crucial to the development of any sound productive system like the education industry. In Nigeria, Universal Basic Education (UBE) is the foundation of the education system. Government's desire to meet the target of Education for All and the Millennium Development Goal (EFA/MDG) in 2015 arising from series of national and international conferences that Nigeria participated in gave birth to the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme. The basic education programme aims at eradicating illiteracy, ignorance, poverty as well as stimulates and accelerates national development, political consciousness and national integration (UBE, 2000).

Accordingly, the UBE Act (2004:16), the establishment of the UBE programme in 1999 by the Obasanjo administration is an expression of the government to entrench viable participatory democracy and enhance national socio-economic development as a consequence of a free and compulsory regime of basic education. In addition, UBE was intended as evidence of Nigeria's commitment to the World Declaration on Education for All at Jomtein (1990) and Dakar (2000), as well as to the New Delhi Declaration of (1991) and the follow-up conference in Beijing in 2001, requiring stringent efforts by the E-9 countries (nine countries of the world with the largest concentration of illiterate adults) to drastically reduce illiteracy within the shortest possible time.

Consequently, for effective management of the basic education system, certain essential leadership and administrative skills are required of the head teachers who are the leaders and administrators of the system at that level. This is because without such leadership, the basic education scheme may not realise its goal.

Education leadership and administration are both processes that require one or more persons to influence the behaviour and work effort of others in a particular situation towards goal achievement. They are both crucial since the development and otherwise of systems and organisations depend on them. The Leadership process is often the function of the leader, the follower and the situation. Administration is equally a process that involves a lot of activities all geared towards goal achievement (Peretomode, 2003). The task of this paper is to discuss the twin concepts of leadership and administration, as an effective means of UBE delivery in Nigeria.

The Concept of Leadership

Peretomode (2003) and other scholars have argued that leaders are not born but made. Reddin (1970) and Fiedler (1967) demonstrated this earlier in the three-dimensional and contingency theories respectively. However, with the multiple understanding of the concept, Peretomode's (2003) views of leadership is considered as effective for use by head teachers to deliver the UBE scheme in Nigeria.

According to him, some of the basic aspects of leadership are (1) the ability to persuade others to work towards defined objectives enthusiastically; (2) interpersonal influence directed through the communication process towards the attainment of goals; (3) initiation of a new structure or procedure for accomplishing or changing organization's goals; (4) influencing the actions, behaviours, beliefs and goals of one person by another with the willing cooperation of the one being influenced. From these some elements of leadership can be identified. For one thing, leadership is not an isolated activity but one that involves others – followers or subordinates whose cooperation is crucial to the success of the leader. Leadership involves the use of influence as distinct from forcible domination or coercion. The process of leadership involves an unequal distribution of power among leaders and group members. The giving of directive for example, flows from the leader to the subordinates and not vice versa. Leadership is a process, which means that it is a continuous, ongoing activity directed towards the accomplishment of goals as its ultimate outcome (Ijeoma, 2004).

In the opinion of Okeke (2006), leadership may also refer to the act or practice of guiding, supporting, facilitating, initiating, giving feedback, suggesting, protecting, commanding, linking, interpreting actions and modeling. Ogonor (2004) sees leadership as the process of mixing reasonably with the group, integrating group members, organising, dominating, communicating, controlling, recognising efforts of group members and prodding members to be productive. Also, whoever would qualify to be called a good leader should be capable of active listening, visioning, clarifying, questioning, confronting, reflecting, feelings and coordinating. He should also show adequate human relations, technical and intellectual skills and knowledge, emotional stability, administrative ability and ability to motivate others to accomplish group goals. Anyone who can score up to eighty-five percent in the characteristics/qualities as listed is certainly a good, efficient and a leader who can succeed (Akinade, 1996).

Elements of Leadership

According to Akinade (1996), the leadership process is often represented by the equation: $L = f(l, f, s)$. The leadership process is a function of the leader, followers and the situation. The leader is the head of a team. He could be the commissioner for education, head teacher of a UBE school, principal, class teacher, school prefect or even senior student assigned leadership responsibility. According to Okeke (2006), the leader is usually a very powerful minority. The leader injects into a particular situation his/her legitimate power, abilities, competencies, motivation, expectations and personality attributes. Every situation has its peculiar features which may include special tasks, resources, history, physical setting, social structure and availability of resources. The situation may be the ministry of education, primary education board, a school or, even the home. Followers may be regarded here as

staff, colleagues or subordinates. These are individuals who are led by the leader. They contribute their expectations, competencies, motivations as well as personality characteristics. The three leadership elements of leader; followers and situation must show positive correlation otherwise efficiency of the process will be in jeopardy (Nwufo, 2004).

Concerted efforts should therefore be made to ensure congruency of the three elements. This will require the head teachers in the UBE schools to co-ordinate properly the teachers and the work situation, which is the school.

Leadership Styles

Some of the common leadership styles according to Ijeoma (2004, pp. 69-71) are:

1. **Autocratic Leadership Style** - This style of leadership is characterized by force and command. The leader always imposes his/her wishes, desires and ideas on the followers without consideration for the opinion of the subordinates.
2. **Democratic Leadership Style** - Here, the ideas and opinions of the followers are highly considered before decisions are taken. It is the opposite of the autocratic type of leadership. The process of decision making here is mostly by consensus or by voting where necessary.
3. **Charismatic Leadership Style** – This style of leadership is associated with the peculiar characteristics of the leader. Traits like body built, power of oratory, intelligence and others that secure respect, loyalty or allegiance of others wherever the individual finds him/herself makes the person a charismatic leader.
4. **Laize Faire Leadership Style** – This is a French term which is interpreted to mean, “*Do as you wish*”. Here, the leader exercises very little control or influence over the followers. Members of the group or organization are left alone to decide on how to accomplish tasks.

Some Qualities of a Good Leader

Akinade (1996) identified some of the qualities of a good leader as follows; technical skill, human skill, conceptual skill, emotional stability, ability to motivate others, honest, commitment to duty, clear vision and goal. Similarly, Ocho (1997:60) observed that a good administrator/leader should be able to take decisive decisions, plan, communicate effectively, organize and coordinate activities and evaluate work from time to time.

Certainly, the possession and utilization of these qualities by the head teachers will enhance their productivity as school managers. Salau (2003), Oluwuo and Abraham (2006) observed that the successful Implementation of the UBE programme in Nigeria will be enhanced if the head teachers possess and apply some of the leadership skills as enumerated above.

Administration

The other related concept that has been advocated for improved performance is the acquisition of administrative skills by school heads. In the opinion of Okeke (2006), wherever people are organized in such a way as to attain certain specific goal(s) the elements of administration will come to play. This could be the school, the church, business organizations and even the family. Administration therefore is geared towards goal attainment and goal accomplishment.

Some few definitions will suffice here. Ijeoma (2004) view administration as a process of directing the utilization of material and human resources for the purpose of accomplishing predetermined goals of an organization. The activities involved in the pursuit of goals to meet a variety of human needs are carried out in organizations. These organizations are distinguished by their specific goals. One can therefore speak of general and specific functions of administration. The general functions are applicable across all organizations. The specific functions derive from the goals and objectives of a particular type of organization. The two reflect the domains of theory and practice respectively. Sergiovanni (1980) points out that administration is generally defined as the process of working with and through others to efficiently accomplish organizational goals. It is the art and science of getting things efficiently done.

Some Features of Administration

Okoroma (2009) and Nwafor (2000) identified some of the common features of administration as follows:

- 1. Exist in an Organization** – In order for administration to take place, there must be an organization. Ijeoma (2004) recorded that administrative activities are carried out in organizations. Typical organizations include hospitals, schools, churches, the family, banks, etc.
- 2. People-Oriented** – Administration, whether in small or large organizations is usually operated by people and geared towards meeting the needs of people in specific areas. People are therefore the live-wire of administration. All administrative functions are executed by people for the benefit of mankind.
- 3. Directed towards Achieving Specific Goal(s)** – Setting goals and working towards the achievement of such goals is paramount for all administrative

processes. This often gives direction and purpose to the administration. Different administrative functions have different goals. For instance, the specific goals of a learning institution will differ from that of a bank, hospital, a construction company, and so on.

- 4. It is Continuous** – Administration is a continuous process. The administrative process never terminates, even with the change of leadership or resignation of some staff members, with the exception of the death of the organization. Organizational policies usually change with time, but the process of administration continues *ad infinitum*.

Consequently, administrative activity can take place in a variety of settings provided certain conditions are met or certain elements can be identified in it. Such elements include organized cooperation of human beings to perform tasks with the objects of achieving mutually desired goal/goals. Thus, administration can take place in such entities as the church, student union, university, staff club, hospital, vehicle assembly plants, etc. The only difference is that whereas the administration of small organizations may be relatively simple and easy, the administration of large-scale organizations is complex and relatively difficult (Nwafor, 2000).

This is true for the basic schools which have become quite complex and relatively difficult to manage because of increased enrolment in the schools. Accordingly, the foregoing definitions and understanding of administration indicate that the head teachers in the UBE scheme perform administrative tasks. Thus, Agabi (2004), Bassey (2006) and Koko (2005) expressed the view that administration is a necessary function of education managers. They equally believe that the head teachers should brace up to the present complex and demanding administrative duties associated with leadership if the objectives of the UBE programme will be achieved.

Functions/Processes of Administration

The process of administration reflects the seven-point acronym POSDCORB as developed by Gulick and Urwick (1937). The processes were presented to reflect the functions of administration as well. The acronym POSDCORBE stands for Planning, Organization, Staffing, Directing, Co-ordination, Reporting, Budgeting and Evaluation.

Planning – This involves the establishment of the formal structure of authority through which work sub-divisions are arranged, defined and co-ordinated for the specific objective of the organization. Essentially, planning relates available and potential resources to the goal of the organization. In education this will imply a careful analysis of the resources provided for it and the desired objectives of the system. It usually differentiates a goal – oriented effort from an ordinary assemblage of individuals.

Organizing – This is the determination of the way by which the goal conceived in planning can be accomplished. This entails division of work into administration units and the allocation of duties, authority, and responsibility to all concerned, and the definition of the relationship among the executive and the workers in all units of the establishment.

Staffing – This scope of work falls directly on the personnel department. It usually involves the whole process of personnel management in an organization, which range from recruitment, orientation, development, discipline, conditions of work, down to retirement. The careful selection and effective management of personnel are positive related to the efficiency and success of an organization. Staffing in an organization must take note of the functions which the organization is established to perform.

Directing – This entails the provision of leadership services to the organization. Specifically, it involves the task of making decision and assigning tasks, responsibilities and delegation of authority for the performance of organizational responsibilities.

Coordinating – Since organizations are made up of different parts, but must function both separately and co-operatively for the realization of the organizational goal, the tasks of effective co-ordination becomes very crucial. Co-ordination so that unity of purpose for goal attainment can be realized.

Reporting – This function is accomplished through the communication process. It is a two-way directional function, especially of the Chief Executive in an organization. On one hand, the Chief Executive keeps those to whom he is responsible informed of what is going on. On the other hand, he keeps himself and his subordinates informed of the activities of the organization. This is achieved by going through records, research and through inspection and supervision. The former is achieved through the recognition and use of effective communication, which is a tool for effective management.

Budgeting – Since finance and administration are inseparable, every administrator who hopes to be efficient and effective must utilize pragmatic budgeting techniques in his fiscal planning strategy. This is so, because budgeting is the hallmark of administration. It is the live wire for the success of organizations. Its scope ranges from fiscal planning, accounting and control.

The forgoing is regarded as the basic tasks of responsibilities of an administrator in an organization, both in the private sector and in the public sector, as in the UBE schools. However, recent researches in this area of study have included evaluation.

Evaluation – This is an additional function of management, because the administrator needs to appraise the organization and its people to see whether they are

meeting the goals for which it was set up. This will provide room for innovation, improvement, restructuring or redesigning as the case may be. Ultimately therefore, if the work of the educational administrator as spelt out is properly executed, it will lead to the production of sound and functional graduates from the school system. More so, if the products of the educational system are sound and competent, it means that our educational has developed. Therefore, effective execution of educational administration will lead to educational development. Consequently, the overall success of the educational industry will ultimately lead to national development. Jaiyeoba (2003) and other scholars highlighted administrative functions as planning, organizing, coordinating, and directing.

Okeke (2006) reasoned that productivity for staff and students will be improved if head teachers in the school system will develop themselves along the functions of administration as discussed. Similarly, Ijeoma (2004) noted that one reason for the poor performance of school administrators is as a result of poor knowledge and utilization of functional administrative rules.

Administrative Competence (Skills)

Skill or competence is perceived to mean the ability to do something well. Administrative skill therefore is viewed as the special competence and ability by school administrators as well as all others to perform their duties effectively and efficiently towards goal achievement in organizations. The reasons why administrators such as the head teachers need to possess sufficient skills in administration is to enable them achieve organizational goals as planned.

Katz (1955) and cited by Peretomode (2003) identified three basic skills upon which, in his opinion, effective performance and consequently, successful administration rest. These skills are actually quite interdependent though they are often treated separately for pure analytical purposes. The basic skills are identified as technical, human and conceptual.

Technical Skills refers to the proficiency or ability to use the tool, methods, processes, procedures and techniques of a specialized field (in this case, education) to perform specific tasks. A surgeon, an engineer, a musician, a psychologist, a guidance counsellor and others have technical skills in their respective fields. The school administrator needs enough technical skill to be able to accomplish the mechanics of the job he/she is responsible for. This skill is important for the head teachers in the UBE scheme. It will enhance the effective supervision and instruction aspect in school management. Other skills in this category are the finance and business management, school- community relation, teacher-pupil personnel and physical facilities development skills respectively. Oluwuo and Abraham (2006) saw these as core to the development of effective school system. Head teachers are therefore encouraged to

develop themselves in the suggested areas to enhance their productivity and well being of the education system.

Human Skill refers to interpersonal skills. It is the school administrator's ability to work effectively with, and through other people on a one-to-one basis and in a group setting. It requires an understanding of one's self and group dynamics, and the ability to motivate other people either as individuals or groups.

Conceptual Skill, according to Lipham and Hoer (1974) and cited by Peretomode (2003) is directly associated with knowledge because in order to conceptualize, an individual must possess or have access to a wealth of cognitive and organized information. Basically, conceptual skill refers to the mental ability to coordinate and integrate the entire interests and activities of the organization and, more importantly, it also refers to the ability to apply information and concepts to practice. Generally, this involves the school head's ability to see the organization, e.g. the school, the school community, and the educational programme as a whole and understand how the various parts of the organization depend on one another and how a change in any of them can affect the whole system. Abbot (1974) sees conceptual skills as the ability to discern meaning in and establish relationships between events and bits of information which at first glance would appear to be discrete and unrelated; it also involves diagnoses and analysis – the ability to quickly get at the true cause of a certain situation through a maze data, observation and facts. Conceptual skills are most difficult to acquire because they require sufficient time and certain amount of intellectual ability.

Katz (1955) as quoted by Peretomode (2003) suggested that although the three skills identified are essential to successful administration, their relative importance depends on the level of administrative responsibility. Higher level administrator (e.g. Commissioner for Education, or Director-General in Ministries of Education) require conceptual skills more than technical skills, and lower level administrators (e.g. Principals) who are, for the most part, concerned with the day-to-day work of a school needs more technical than conceptual skills. Human skills, however, are important at all levels of administration, but it is probably most important at the lowest level where the greatest number of administrator-subordinate interactions is likely to take place.

The skills as discussed are crucial for the successful implementation of the UBE scheme in Nigeria. In this regard, it would be necessary for the Ministry of Education to organize regular training and retraining programmes for the head teachers to enable them acquire and improve on these skills for efficient and effective UBE administration. The managers of the schools are equally advised to attend conferences and seminars to update their knowledge in school and organizational management.

Methods of Acquiring Administrative Skills

According to Peretomode (2003), apart from attending conferences, seminars and workshops where the requisite administrative skills could be acquired, there are three major mechanisms that facilitate the acquisition of administrative competence and skills. These methods are the same for acquiring leadership skills as well.

1. **Education** – This involves undertaking undergraduate and graduate studies.
2. **Experience** – This involves exposure to a variety of situations, problems and demands. It involves time and entails maturity on the job.
3. **Mentor-Mentee Relationship** – This is the process of acquiring administrative/other worthwhile skills through observation and association with other more seasoned higher administrators.

Some Problems of Administration in the UBE Schools

In the opinion of Oluwuo and Abraham (2006) some of the recurring problems in the administration of schools, which are general to almost all the levels of education in the country, are: Inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, poor teaching/learning facilities, and low morale of staff, politics, poor planning and implementation problems.

Consequently, the leadership and administrative skills are the necessary tools that will enable the head teachers in the UBE scheme to adequately tackle and solve the prevailing problems in the educational system. Some of the problems are quite fundamental and require government's intervention. However, an experienced head teacher that has the requisite knowledge as discussed in the text in administration will be able to improvise and achieve considerable results.

Conclusion

Of all the functions that head teachers perform in the basic schools, the leadership and administrative aspects appear central. In their supervisory, instructional, infrastructural, counselling, and other roles, the leadership and administrative aspects are key elements in enhancing performance. It is for this reason that this paper examined the salient issues in leadership and administrative skills for optimal performance by the head teachers. To achieve that, some of the main elements of the twin concepts were discussed as they relate to education. Since leadership and administration are crucial to successful educational development, and since the UBE is the foundation of the nation's educational system, the paper concludes that it is imperative for head teachers to possess and utilize the necessary leadership and administrative skills to enhance quality delivery of the UBE programme in Nigeria.

On the basis of this, it would be necessary for head teachers to be exposed to regular training on educational leadership and administration. Workshops and seminars will go a long way to achieve this. Possession of the necessary qualification in educational management and planning by those to be appointed as head teachers will equally be helpful in making them effective and efficient. Those already appointed but do not have the requisite experience and qualifications could be encouraged to enroll for a post graduate diploma in educational management to promote productivity. Furthermore, regular in-service trainings for the head teachers and their supportive staff by the relevant government agencies will also enhance optimal UBE delivery for the overall educational development of the country.

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