POLICY MANAGEMENT AND EFFECTIVE PERFORMANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY AS THE NEXUS

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Abstract

Universities in Nigeria are vested with the responsibility of producing manpower for the labour market. To carry out the affairs of the universities to meet this target requires making policies to govern her affairs and activities. Managing such policies properly therefore is vital to the effective and efficient performance of the universities. This can only be done through effective communication. Communication is the network that connects and holds individuals in the institution together; to work together in harmony to achieve the goals of the policies made. It therefore implies that policies must be communicated effectively and efficiently within the system; the individuals in the system must know how to manage such policies by communicating them effectively as at when due for the institution to meet its aims and objectives. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is a nexus that connects individual for efficient information management; making information to be received just-in-time for proper policy implementation and performance. The discourse of this paper therefore is on the key position of ICT in effective policy management for efficient performance in the universities. It posits the application of ICT in information management in the university system as the nexus between policy making and its implementation to achieve the goals of the university system. Based on this position, some recommendations were made such as provision of ICT facilities within universities; training and retraining of university staff to be abreast with trends in ICT, embracing ICT innovations and change by staff of the university amongst others.
Keywords: Policy Management, Higher Education, Effective Performance, Information and Communication Technology

Introduction

Education is adjudged an indispensable tool for the growth and development of a nation; it is the greatest human investment for the total growth and development of a nation (Amaele, 2014). Tertiary education especially is fundamental in the development of manpower for the growth and advancement of a strong and viable economy, especially in the present dispensation of competitive knowledge economy driven by Information Communication Technology (ICT).

University or higher education is the highest level of the formal education responsible for the manpower development. It is the education given to individuals after the secondary level (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2014). The university education is vested with the responsibility of providing the requisite training needed for most skilled labour and profession in the society. The operations of the universities are governed by policies. The effective management of the policies has far reaching effects on the performance of the universities in accomplishing the mandates for their establishment. Effective policy management in the universities is key in carrying out its functions. The application of ICT in the policy management is one way this could be achieved.

The 21st century era is the era that is knowledge and information based and technology-driven, powered by ICT. The knowledge and application of ICT in the management of the policies of the universities is therefore fundamental if it must meet its mandate. It is axiomatic that the higher education sectors which is vested with the responsibility of providing the manpower for this era use this technologies to carry out its activities, so as to meet the demands of the present day global competitive knowledge economy. This is therefore the thrust of this paper, for it is said that what we put in, is what we shall get; effective and efficient input logically will yield effective and efficient output.

The Mandate of Higher Education in Nigeria

Education is said to be a process of unearthing of the in-horn potentials and powers in an individual and the acquiring of knowledge, skills and competencies needed for self-realization and functional living (Achunonye, 2019). Through instruction individuals in the society gains the requisite knowledge and information, acquire skills and competencies, develop aptitude and insights and the cultural values and ideas are passed on for the advancement and sustenance of the society (Usoro, 2016). Thus, education is said to be the determinant factor of the level of the development of a nation hence the National Policy on Education (FGN, 2014) see it as instrument "par excellence" for the development of the nation. Education in Nigeria occurs in different stages; early childhood education, primary education, secondary education and higher education which is the highest and terminal level of formal education.

Higher education according to the National Policy on Education of 2014 defined higher education as the post-secondary education; that education given to an individual after the secondary levels (FGN, 2014). Institutions that offer this education are College of Education: They are responsible for training teacher who will mar the education system at all levels. This level is very crucial as the quality of the teachers determines the quality of the education system all this being equal.

Poly/Monotechnic Education: The carter for the provision of technical and vocational knowledge and skills in various areas of discipline. They are vested with the responsible of providing technical manpower for the nation.

University Education: It is the highest level of higher education and is responsible for providing knowledgeable and skills manpower that will drive the knowledge based economy for the nation; to solve the problem and challenges faced by man (Usoro, 2011). In this work therefore universities and higher education will be used interchangeably as they fall within this category. Higher education in Nigeria is concerned with such functions as teaching, research and community service through which it equips individuals with knowledge, skills and competencies, and so develop manpower for the advancement of the society; through enhancing service delivery, facilitating scientific and technological advancement and ensuring cultural development of nation (Uduk, 2016).

The goal of higher education in Nigeria as stated by the Federal Government of Nigeria (2014) are to:
- Contribute to national development by raising high level manpower through training;

- Provide accessible and affordable quality learning opportunities in formal and informal education in response to the needs and interests of all Nigerians:
- Provide high quality career counselling and lifelong learning programmes that equip learers with the knowledge and skills for self-reliance and the world of work;
- Reduce skill shortages through the production of skilled manpower relevant to the needs of the labour market;
- Promote and encourage scholarship, entrepreneurship and community service;
- Forge and cement national unity; and
- Promote national and international understanding and interaction

These goals are pursued through teaching, research and community service; and if rightly done will lead to enhancing national unity, develop skilled knowledge labour, advancement in science, mathematics and technology in this era of knowledge based economy. Higher education has the ability to place the nation in a position to be able to compete favourably in the era of knowledge based economy.

The Concept of Policy Management

The concept policy management is made up of 2 words; policy and management. Let us define these words. Policy is a statement of intent, principle or strategy to guide decisions and procedures to achieve a goal or outcome. It is a rule or rules governing decisions and actions for accomplishing a task (Wikipedia, 2019), Management on the other hand is the effective coordination and harmonization of resources, to ensure desired output and goal. It is a set of principles used for effective and efficient planning, organizing, directing, coordinating, controlling and harnessing human, information and other non-human resources to achieve organizational goals (https://www.manauementstudvhq.com, 2019). For this discourse we shall tow this definition. Policy management therefore could be said to be the effective management of policies to achieve goals of an organization, in this case higher education.

Policy management in higher education could be seen as the effective and efficient procedures of organizing, directing and controlling the policies of higher education in such a coordinated manner as to harness the resources especially policy information so as to effectively achieve the goals of higher education. It involves proper coordination of policies within and outside and between the higher education stakeholder in a manner that will guarantee effective performance of the universities to achieve their goal of social efficiency, social mobility and democratic equality.

Policy management is about making policies work to achieve purpose in an organization. To www.policvmedical.com (n.d), it is the process of creating, communicating, maintaining and implementing policies within an organization to achieve results. The intent is to make policies just-in-time accessible to workers within the organization. Such timely information and communication will guide the workers to make accurate, right and safe decisions. Again, it will guide the organization to avoid litigations by being proactive in actions, up-to-date in accreditation standards and record keeping. Like the late President of America John F. Kennedy said; the role of management in society is critical to human progress (https://www.managementstudyhq.com, n.d), especially in the higher education sector where individuals who will manage the society are raised. Good policy management is the backbone of a successful organization (Subashiny, Rita & Vivek 2012). This crux of this discourse therefore is

on the key position of ICT in effective information management. ICT is the bridge between effective policy management and efficient result or performance. The paper posits the fact that ICT is the nexus that will connect and manage the policies effectively so as to harness the resources in the higher education sector properly to y ield the desired results in achieving the goals of higher education.

Effective policy management will help higher institutions amongst others to checkmate the following;

-       Wastage of resources, time and money, duty overlap, loss of data,
-       Excessive documents, damages of storage, papers
-       Poor visibility and reporting
-       Files and documents in disarray and poor communication of information
-       Overwhelming complexity of task and increase in workload
-       Lack of accountability, usage of much space (Bonnie, 2011).

For effective performance, institutions must clearly train and communicate policies to staff in the system to ensure they understand what is expected of them. This is where ICT comes in as a just-in-time tool to mediate in the situation. When policies are well managed, it will help;

-       Communication boundaries and expectations
-       Establish a tradition of adherence and complained within the system
-       Protect the organization from litigation
-       Help to achieve organizational goals efficiently
-       Can mitigate health in areas
-       Helps to explain the running of the organization and accountability Structures

A comprehensive policy management which is the thrust of ICT is key to effective management of higher education meeting global demands (www.policvmedical.com. n.d).

Policy managers must use ICT to strategically engage staff and stakeholders for the effective implementation of such policies to achieve higher education goals. The sustainability of higher education in Nigeria depends significantly on the quality of information and policy management. With the use of ICT tools, policy managers can enhance the effectiveness of policy implementation, better decision making and better output. This is because ICT makes for better reliability of information in terms of accuracy and speed (Espinosa& Santos, 2017).

Statement of the Problem

Higher education goals as stated in the National Policy on Education is fundamental to the advancement and sustenance of the country, based on its key position in the scheme of national development. To fulfill its mandate higher education is established or managed through policies. However these policies have been inconsistent and incoherent, reasons being the undue influence of politics on education, rapid turnover of education policy formulations with diverse focus and interest and corruption amongst others (Adiele, 2016).

Policies are the framework on which institutions and organizations are built and sustained. It guides decisions, actions procedures and strategies for accomplishing goals (Wikipedia, 2019). Therefore if the policies governing the higher education affairs are not properly coordinated and communicated, understood by stakeholder and implemented appropriately, it becomes difficult to sustain the institution. This reason may not be far-reached

in explaining the challenges witnessed today in the higher education sector, ranging from poor administration of the higher schools, to poor financial management, corruption, poor academic performance and what have you.

Ogbogu (2013) stated that for higher education in Nigeria to be sustained and be self-reliant to survive in the competitive global economy, its policies must be effectively institutionalized, harmonized and operationalized. To support this, the vice President of Nigeria Prof. Osinbajo rightly said, funding alone cannot guarantee quality education (education.gov.ng, 2019).

Furthermore, Korthari (n.d) stated "if policies do not conform to an orderly style and structure, use more than one set of vocabulary, are located in different places, and do not offer a mechanism to gain clarity and support such as policy helpline, organization are not positioned to drive desired behaviour in corporate culture or enforce accountability". Simply having a set of policies is not enough to make the universities achieve her goals, but having a policy management system that is powered by ICT for just-in-time meeting of the needs of higher education is critical $_t$ in this regard. This therefore necessities the need for the effective application of ICT in policy management in the universities to ensure proper understanding coordination and implementation of policies to effectively harness the resources in the universities for better performance.

Why Information Communication Technology (ICT) for Policy Management ICT is a terminology used for technologies, which give people access to information, communication with others at great accuracy and at very fast speed (Rachael, 2004). ICTs include devices such as computers, telephones, e-mails, databases, data-mining systems, search engines, video-conferencing equipment amongst others (https://link.springer.com>chapter, 2012).

ICT today is the language of every profession, business, region and what have you. It is used for different purposes globally to facilitate job effectiveness, its impact is felt greatly in every facet of life and endeavour across nation boundaries. It is seen as. the building block of the modern society (Dennis & Danjuma, 2018).

The use of ICT for policy management will among other functions do the following;
1.   Enhance accountability within and outside the institution
2.   Enhance service delivery
3.   Reduce administrators workload
4.   Increase productivity of the system
5.   Enhance efficient exchange of information amongst staff
6.   Is the cheapest means of communication
7.   Provide policy makers and manages the data and expertise for efficient work delivery (Ra, 2017)

Generally, the application of ICTs in the system will make for integration of content and data formulating, planning and integrating networks and providing solutions.

It is therefore the stand of this paper that ICT be incorporated in policy management in the higher education system for better performance.

Conclusion

The use of ICTs for policy management in the universities in fundamental to effective running of the universities if it must achieve its goals. This is due to the fact that policy and

information is a key resource for the smooth running of a system to achieve success, ICT devices such as search engines, databases, data-mining, system, computer amongst others are handy in this regard. Their effective use will reduce waste of resources, loss of important information, work overload and at the same time lead to increasing in service delivery, productivity, just-in-time information, expertise for job effective and many more. The fact remains that there can be no effective coordination, for better service delivery in the higher education sector if ICT is not effectively used for policy management.

Based on this premise the following recommendations are made;
1.   There should be consistency in higher education policies and such policies should be spelt out clearly for proper understanding of the policy managers and implementers.
2.   Education stakeholder to provide state of the art Information Communication Technology facilities for policy formulators, policy manager and policy implementers.
3.   Provide the necessary facilities to power the ICT devices such as power supply, networks, conducive environment for the working of the devices.
4.   Provide regular capacity building for all stakeholders in policy management and implementers on policy management.
5.   Training and retraining of higher education managers on the best practices for the application of ICT in policy management.
6.   Develop data banks and clouds for higher education policies for easy accessibility and retrieval.

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