

An appraisal of Staff Development Policy in Nigerian Polytechnics

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Abstract

The context of dramatic change in the Nigerian Polytechnic education sub-sector has made issues that relate to the effectiveness of staff development policies and the programs they support critical. Yet the nature and practice of staff development within this sub-sector has continually been a subject of concern with claims that resources are inadequate, activities are marginal, and goals are not met. In the light of such considerations, this paper through a review of extant policy documents as well as academic literature appraises staff development in Nigerian Polytechnics and proffers suggestions for a more robust staff development intervention to meet the demands of the global economy.

Keywords: *Human Resource Development, Learning and Development, Public Service, Staff development, TETFund*

Introduction

Nigeria Polytechnics are a segment of the public service and therefore derive their policy on academic staff development from the Public Service Rule. Currently, Polytechnics in Nigeria make use of the Staff Development Policy which can be found in Chapter 11 of the Federal Polytechnic Staff manual provided by the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE). NBTE is the supervisory body for all Polytechnics in Nigeria. Chap.1 paragraph 1.2 of the Polytechnic Staff manual provides that the staff manual is applicable to all established staff of the Federal Polytechnics. By implication, it means that the staff development policy of the Polytechnic covers all categories of staff whether academic or non-academic.

The staff development policy recognises the training of staff as one important approach for achieving increased efficiency in the Polytechnic and states that the Polytechnic at times recognises the training needs of individual staff through staff appraisals and then prescribes a suitable programme of training. Staff appraisal is carried out through the Confidential Annual Performance Evaluation Reports (APER). Section 7.7 of the Federal Polytechnic Staff Manual states that “for the efficiency of the service of the institution, confidential reports shall be detailed, objective and candid”. The Staff Manual further emphasised the need for the reporting officer to ascertain the desirability of an employee being suitable for any training in order to develop his potential, remedy observed deficiency or specialise in a particular field during the Annual Performance Evaluation Reports (Chapter 7.7 of the Federal Polytechnic Staff Manual). The Policy on Staff Development states that with the recognition of training needs, a Study Fellowship may be granted with a view to enhancing the level of contribution of the staff to the organisation (chapter 11.1a of the Federal Polytechnic Staff Manual). The Policy equally

recognised the fact that individuals may seek self-development and could merely require the assistance of the Polytechnic. In such a situation, the staff may be entitled to study leave in order to aid the realisation of his full potential.

The Staff Development Policy emphasised that all effort geared towards the development of staff must be consciously related to the primary aim of the institution which is to promote technical/technological education and training in support of manpower development of the country. The implication of this policy provision is that staff are allowed to proceed on training when management is convinced that the training programme will contribute more effectively to the success of the Polytechnic institution.

The Staff Development Policy made provision for different categories of leave for staff for the purpose of study, training, research, acquisition of higher degrees or professional qualifications, intellectual development and the general improvement of the individual. Leave is the authorised absence of a staff from duty for a specific period (Public Service Rules 100101) The Staff Development Policy identified the following categories of leave:

Study Leave

In a move perhaps to forestall agitations from members of staff who might not be able to proceed on study leave despite being qualified, the policy states that study leave is a privilege and not a right and could be granted for short term (not exceeding twelve months), long term (exceeding twelve months) and could be granted with pay which entitles the staff to receive payment from the institution in accordance with the approved conditions. Study leave could be granted without pay where the staff have served for a minimum period of one year.

Study Fellowship

This refers to leave prescribed by the institution in order to enhance the human resource development of the institution and it could be in the form of:

- In-Service Study Fellowship which refers to the Study Fellowship granted to a staff that has been confirmed in the service of the institution. Academic Staff are confirmed after two years of unbroken service subject to their performance. Other in-service modes identified by the Federal Teachers' Service Manual of 1977 are as follows:

- i. Evening courses
- ii Day release
- iii. Short full-time courses
- iv. Vacation courses
- v. Workshops and Seminars
- vi. Teachers' Centre-based courses
- vii Radio-TV Courses
- viii. Correspondence / Open / Distant Learning
- ix. Study leave with pay
- x. others

- Probationary Study Fellowship can also be granted a staff who has not been confirmed in the service of the Polytechnic but who has served at least one year in the Polytechnic. In Polytechnics, it is customary that within two years of employment, the appointment of an academic staff is confirmed. All an academic staff needs for confirmation is a good recommendation from the Head of Department and the Dean of the school to get this achieved. What this means is that even if the academic staff is not up to date in terms of

research and teaching, as long as the academic staff has good relationship with the Head of Department and the Dean, then the confirmation of appointment is guaranteed. As at today, it is difficult to see an academic staff whose confirmation of appointment is denied save where there is no good relationship between the academic staff and his superiors. This whole process of confirmation of appointment detracts from what happens in the United States of American and Canada where confirmation of appointment is through a more rigorous process that requires that the academic staff goes through an objective evaluation, in terms of research and teaching

Sabbatical Leave

Academic staff who have good records in their fields and who would have completed a minimum of five years of continuous service in the Polytechnic are eligible for Sabbatical Leave which could be utilised on a training programme designed to meet the needs of either the service or the staff (The Federal Polytechnic Staff Manual; Public Service Rules 100222).

Without prejudice to the provisions of the public service rules and the general policy on staff development as provided by the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE), Polytechnics do have the leverage to modify the staff development policy towards the end of leveraging academic staff development in their respective institutions. Having looked at the provisions for staff development in Polytechnics, it is germane to look at Staff Development Interventions in Polytechnics.

Staff Development Interventions in Polytechnics

In order to ensure commitment to the continuous training of staff at the Federal and state levels, the provision of the 1998 Civil Service Reforms which stipulates that ten per cent (10%) of the total annual personnel emolument be set aside for staff training and development was adopted by both Federal and State Government establishments including higher education institutions. However, it has been noted (Adiele & Ibietan, 2017) that most Federal and State Government establishments have failed to honour this. The multiplier effect of this seeming lack of commitment to the provision of funds for training is the glaring incidence of a critical shortage of senior academics that are aging and retiring and are not being replaced fast enough and this calls for robust interventions that will leverage academic staff development.

Recognising that Nigeria's education system both at the basic and tertiary level had started to experience decline owing to a myriad of challenges, various stakeholders in the education sector notably the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) began to raise concerns on the need to salvage the education sector from imminent collapse. One of the moves to salvage the ailing tertiary education sub-sector was the establishment of the Education Trust Fund in the year 1993 (which later metamorphosed into Tertiary Education Trust Fund) through the Education Tax Decree, No 7. Generally, the whole idea behind the establishment of the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) by the Federal Government of Nigeria was to create a world-class intervention agency vested with the management of the two per cent of all assessable profits of companies registered in Nigeria on its behalf as a special intervention fund for the education sector.

The mission of TETFund is to deliver competent and forward-thinking intervention programmes through providing funding to public higher education institutions, in line with the provision of its enabling act. The activity of the agency initially was to undertake intervention programmes in all the levels of the education system in Nigeria. However, in the year 2011, the National Assembly carried out an amendment to the Act, making it to shift emphasis completely to tertiary institutions (Tertiary Education Trust Fund (Establishment, Etc) Act, 2011). With the new Act in place, TETFund began providing funding for educational facilities and infrastructural

development, promoting creative and innovative approaches to educational learning and services, and stimulating, supporting and enhancing improvement activities in the educational foundation areas, such as teacher education, teaching practice, library development and special education programmes in higher education institutions.

In an effort to address the challenge of academic staff underdevelopment in tertiary institutions in Nigeria and in a quest to ensure the vigorous training of lecturers in tertiary institutions, TETFund introduced the Academic Staff Training & Development (AST&D) programme in the year 2008 for the training of academic staff within and outside Nigeria. According to TETFund, since the introduction of the Academic Staff Training and Development (AST&D) Programme, a significant number of lecturers of the nation's tertiary education institutions had benefitted in various academic training programme.

Apart from Academic Staff Training & Development (AST&D) programme, TETFund equally has in place a conference intervention fund for both academic and non-academic staff of tertiary institutions to stimulate research and development.

In as much as it can be submitted that the establishment of TETFund is a positive right step towards tackling the challenges in Nigeria's education sector, the leadership of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) have criticised the overbearing influence of government on TETFund. ASUU decried a situation where the Federal Government rather than making adequate budgetary provision for the resuscitation of the ailing education sector hijacked funds that were ordinary meant for tertiary institutions. According to ASUU, this action on the part of government is to say the least "fraudulent". ASUU asserts that by going to TETFund to source for funds that in the real sense ought to address the issue of underfunding in the nation's higher education institutions, the Federal Government was intentionally blocking funds for the development of HEI's. (Daily Times, September 12, 2013). Ikelegbe (2020) opined that in as much as it can be said that there have been series of academic staff development interventions under the current democratic dispensation, the effective implementation of HRD development policy for academic staff is still fraught with a plethora of challenges. He emphasised the need to tackle the challenges of staff development in Nigerian polytechnics as the need for academic staff development in Nigeria cannot be overemphasised.

The Need for Academic Staff Development in Higher Education Institutions

Volbrecht and Boughey (2004:58) defined academic staff development "as an open set of practices concerned with improving the quality of teaching and learning in higher education". Based on the above, in the context of Nigerian Polytechnic education, academic staff development refers to a process whereby some sets of practices are put in place that will enhance the knowledge and skills of academic staff in directions that will leverage their role in their respective Polytechnic institutions.

The need for academic staff development in Higher Education Institutions (HEI's) is becoming increasingly important for obvious reasons. Higher education at the dawn of the 21st century is confronted with a plethora of challenges which necessitate that academic staff strive towards improving their skills, knowledge and aptitude. The trend in the HEI environment shows that the demands of society, organisation and students are changing. The societal change, for instance, is such that there is now an increasing change of direction from teaching to learning and from learning in a specific society to a global society. Emphasising the need for continuous learning in HEI's, Hinojosa-Pareja & García-Cano (2023) note that because of the changes in the HEI

environment, academic staff development should offer relevant and up to date learning opportunities.

Within HEI's as organisations, the trend reveals that accountability has become a very important issue. Academic staff are expected to be more accountable to students learning more than ever before, with their responsibility linked to the overall aims and objectives of the institution. Ajike (2023) noted that since accountability, productivity, and efficiency have become the key demands of the day, HEI's should find ways in which academic staff can adequately develop themselves in order to adapt to these changes.

Makoji & Makoji-Stephen (2023) highlighted another changing trend in HEI's. They maintained that the HEI's have become more diverse with students joining HEI's at different ages, motivations, level of experience and educational backgrounds. In the face of these obvious diversities, they assert that HEI's should put in place programmes that will enable academic staff acquire skills that will improve on their ability to manage students with diverse needs and interest.

Tadama et al., (2020) emphasised that individuals and institutions must focus on maintaining and enhancing their biggest asset: the knowledge capital in the new knowledge-based economy. They assert that the demand for education and training is on the increase and set to be the biggest growth industry in the knowledge economy. What this means is that when Higher Education Institutions like Polytechnics are "working" with knowledge, the very people who are involved in the transmission and creation of knowledge (academic staff) must of necessity go through a process of training and development that will enable them acquire the skills, aptitude and knowledge that will help them perform their task effectively and efficiently and also assist them in adapting to new roles.

Many countries have acknowledged the cardinal role of academic staff development in the promotion of learning and scholarship in tertiary institutions. For example, in the United Kingdom, a committee known as the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (NCIHE) was established in 1996 to make recommendations on how the purposes, shapes, structure, size and funding of Higher Education, including support for learners, should develop to meet the needs of the UK over the following 20 years (Dearing 1997a: chapter 1, pg 1)

The vision for Higher Education in the UK outlined unequivocally sees the need for a society that is committed to learning throughout life (Dearing 1997a: chapter 1, pg 1). In fact, the report recognised that the realisation of the vision for a transformed higher education in the UK is a function of the enhancement of the professional skills of people in higher institutions. Higher education in the UK should be able to recruit, retain and motivate staff to the appropriate calibre (Dearing 1997a: chapter 14, pg 1). One of the high points of the recommendations was for institutions of higher education to begin to develop or seek access to programmes for teacher training of their staff if they do not have them (Dearing 1997b: par 8.61). Similarly, in New Zealand, the Quality Assurance Authority of New Zealand (QAANZ) was established in 1999 to advise government on how to implement the new quality regime for tertiary education. The QAANZ Report (1999:24) emphasised the need for higher institutions to maintain a staff compliment with the necessary knowledge, skills and cultural background through staff selection, appraisal and development. The report equally recommended that for higher institutions to meet the challenges of the knowledge society, a supportive and effective learning environment that would foster research and scholarship in line with international standards should be provided.

In Singapore, a Report by the National Institute of Education, Singapore (2009) titled "A Teacher Education Model for the 21st Century" emphasised that faculty (academic staff) require the injection of new learning, skills and knowledge. The report noted that a structured professional development would be a necessary right step in ensuring that faculty are continually refreshed

and updated in their teaching and research skills. The report recommended the adoption of the Harvard Medical School Academy; a training and development programme which addresses three levels of capacity building: basic, refresher, and advanced, as a model for faculty professional development in Singapore. Also, the report explored the need for the provision of the necessary 'white space' in the form of mini sabbaticals (lasting three months or so), which can be a means of giving academic staff opportunities to develop their skills and knowledge in research work or improving teaching skills.

Current debates on HRD and its implications for Human Resource development in Nigerian Polytechnics

Technological revolution, expansion of knowledge, innovation in education and socio-economic changes in our societies, has shaped current debates on HRD in higher education institutions. The literature is replete with emphasis on the role learning and development play in organizational viability and vitality. There is a consensus amongst scholars that learning, and development is the most crucial organizational activity that organizations should be involved in (Antunes & Pinheiro, 2020; Anwar & Abdullah, 2021; Morandini et al., 2023). Thus Adhikari & Shrestha (2023) noted that in an environment of increasing rapid change, ongoing development of the skill and knowledge of academic staff in higher education institution is a strategic imperative for their survival.

Swanson (2022) maintained that HRD is about providing people with the knowledge, understanding, skills, and training that enables them to perform effectively and that the existence in organizations of a learning culture, one that embraces and encourages both learning within and by the organizational entity itself and learning by the individuals in the group, can be a critical factor in ensuring the effectiveness and value of human resource development activity. Thite (2022) also noted that it is by committing resources into the development of the intellectual and cognitive abilities of its human resources that organizations can be seen to be focusing on the future rather than the past. Dachner et al., (2021) expatiating further, opined that the future focus of organizational investment should be on the development of the organization's intellectual capital in the form of its organizational members and not merely the physical capital which had hitherto been the focus of attention in terms of investment.

Browell (2000:57) emphasized the need for higher education institutions to place emphasis on learning and development of employees as a strategic tool because of the potential to increase quality of performance. She asserted that HEI's need to commit to staff development within the context of strategic organizational objectives as a means of achieving continuous growth and development for individuals and organizations.

From the foregoing, it becomes obvious that the shifting attitudes of today's workforce towards learning and development also require a changed response by HEI's generally and Polytechnics in particular, reinforcing the need to provide continual learning and development in order to attract and retain academic staff. In this light, how can Polytechnics in Nigeria facilitate learning and development processes among academic staff?

It has been noted (Zachary & Fain, 2022) that there is no single guaranteed way to facilitate learning and development processes among academic staff. As such, organisations need to develop structure and style that is suitable to its people, skill base, technology, mission and culture and then develop appropriate strategies that will bring about appropriate learning structure and style. These caveats notwithstanding, a number of scholars have attempted to come up with clear guidelines and directions that can be of help to organisations seeking to begin this journey.

These writers (Fiol and Lyles, 1985; Iles and Sutherland, 2001; DeSimone, Werner and Harris; 2002), based on analysis of learning and development processes in some organisations, have come up with common strategies and sequences that were used to facilitate learning and development of their staff. Fiol and Lyles (1985) identified organizational structure, corporate culture, strategy and environment as four contextual factors that affect the probability that learning, and development will occur. Iles and Sutherland (2001) and DeSimone, Werner and Harris (2002) in their separate studies identified structure, information systems, human resource practices, organisational culture and leadership as facilitating the learning and development processes of employees in organisation. They argued that organisations desirous of facilitating learning and development should place premium on these characteristics. Ho and Han (2020) emphasized the importance of developing a learning culture that incorporates the best potential of people, technology, and resources. Rebelo and Gomes (2011:2) identified learning culture, organisational structure, an approach to Total Quality Management (TQM) principles and highly educated employees as those features that could facilitate learning and development. Some of these factors have been isolated and discussed below.

Leadership

Facilitating learning and development in organisations is highly dependent on effective leadership. A lot that happens in the organisation has to do with how the leaders are open to learning and development as well as how compelling their vision of creating a learning culture is communicated. Leaders are expected to provide the necessary support needed to lead others towards the facilitation of a learning and development culture in the organisation. Koziol-Nadolna (2020) see leadership as the ability of an individual to influence others, motivate them and facilitate their contribution to the effectiveness and success of the organization. Nguyen, Yandi, & Mahaputra (2020) believe that Leadership is the accomplishment of a goal through the direction of human assistants. Yukl (2010) considers that, in general, definitions of leadership reflect the assumption that it is a process in which a person exerts his or her influence over others to guide structure and facilitate the activities and relationships within a group or organization.

Leadership is viewed in the literature as a critical factor in the facilitation of the learning and development processes in organisations because leaders challenge the status quo assumptions regarding the environment and are focussed on guiding followers in the creation of shared interpretations which ultimately becomes the basis for effective action (Kim & Park, 2020; Pan & Chen, 2022). Also, Darling-Hammond et al., (2020) observed that leaders in the face of changes in the global climate, face a three-fold responsibility: making learning and development a high priority, creating the psychological and cultural conditions to enhance collective learning, and shaping contextual factors to create transfer of learning from the individual to the organizational level. While recognising that there are a number of leadership types, Srivastava & Chopra (2024) specifically suggest facilitative leadership because a complex environment calls for a form of leadership that stimulates transformation. Strange & Mumford, (2002) advocate the need for visionary leadership which Mutohar & Trisnatari (2020) described as leaders with the ability to open people's minds, create hope and seemingly realise future expectations. Nurtjahjani et al., (2020) emphasised the need for transformational leadership which they described as leaders that stimulate and inspire their followers to achieve extraordinary outcomes and, in the process, develop their followers' own leadership capacity. These leaders help followers to grow and develop by responding to followers' individual needs by empowering them and aligning the objectives and goals of the individual followers, the leader, the group, and the larger organisation.

Despite the important role effective leadership plays in facilitating learning and development in higher education, it has been noted that higher education institutions in Africa (Polytechnics included) are faced with a plethora of challenges of which leadership and management is one.

Teshome Yizengaw (2008:2) in a study carried out on “challenges facing Higher Education in Africa and lessons from experience” noted that:

Leadership and management is generally weak and inefficient, as expressed by an inability to retain and attract faculty, underutilised facilities, duplication of programs, high dropout and uneconomical procurement and inefficient allocation of scarce finance to non-instructional expenditures. Academic leaders tend to have inadequate preparation, orientation and training in skills required for the positions.

Even though Yizengaw (2008) took the view that African governments have started to show commitment and support to the higher education sector, he was quick to note in his report that there is a near lack of strategic leadership in HEI’s in Africa. Continuing, he observed that if HEI’s are to play their role as engine of development that produces qualified human capital, generates knowledge, and ensures participation in the global knowledge economy, then African government must show commitment towards the development of lean but effective, professional high-calibre governance, and leadership and management structures and procedures for effective program implementation.

Also, some scholars (Yizengaw, 2008; Ogunode & Musa, 2020) have noted that weak leadership, management, and governance are rampant and further exacerbate challenges to higher education in Africa. Yizengaw (2008) observed that management inefficiencies drain scarce resources away from the fundamental objectives of increasing access, quality, and relevance and spread human and financial resources thin. Moreover, he noted, the consequences of observed weaknesses in leadership are manifest in underutilized facilities, duplicative program offerings, low student-staff ratios, high dropout and repetition rates, uneconomical procurement procedures, and allocation of a large share of the budget to non-educational expenditures. He maintained that academic leaders are rarely trained in the management of higher education institutions in such critical areas like strategic planning, market research and advocacy, research management, financial planning, human resource management, performance management, and partnership building and networking. In other to address the challenges of weak and ineffective leadership, Yizengaw (2008) assert that interventions to revitalize the institutions must focus on developing faculty and improving management and leadership among other things.

Organisational Structure

It is considered in the literature (Barnard, 2020; Gaspary, Moura, & Wegner, 2022) that the structure of an organisation has an influence on the ability of employees in organizations to learn and develop. Also, Martínez-León and Martínez-García (2011) assert that the way and manner organisational structures are configured impedes or facilitates the capacity of the organization to adapt to change, to learn, to innovate or to improve its ability to generate added value for its customers. They equally noted that the learning and development processes in organisations require information, and that organizational structure plays the critical role of influencing the information flow.

HR Practices

HR Practice has been acknowledged in the literature as having a link with the facilitation of learning and development in organisations. Aboramadan (2022) took the view that human resource systems have the potential of influencing the capacity of organisations to engender new knowledge and stimulate learning and development. Performance appraisal and reward system, it is believed for example, reinforce long-term performance and sharing of new skills and knowledge (Mito, Ajowi, & Aloka, 2021). Also, Nguyen, Yandi, & Mahaputra (2020),

maintained that HRM practices have the potentials of increasing knowledge, motivation, synergy and commitment of employees which can result in sustained competitive advantage for the organisation.

Conclusion

The discussion so far underscores the growing awareness of the need and role of academic staff development in higher education institutions and highlights the importance of HRD for the present challenges and future growth in line with global trends for Nigeria. Therefore, for Nigeria to attain the desired level of competitiveness in the global socio-economic, political and economic arena, there must be put in place policies and practices that will facilitate the learning and development of academic staff which now lie at the heart of current debates in human resource development.

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