

INHIBITING ELEMENTS AGAINST ACADEMIC SELF-DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHERS AND PROSPECTS IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Academic self-development of teachers is one way of obtaining the much needed human capital in the school system. However, in the process of undergoing such self-improvement programmes, some inhibiting elements are always experienced. The challenges are: inadequate finance, poor timing, inadequate facilities, strike actions in tertiary educational institutions, lapses in study leave approval, lack of promotion, and poor information management. It is the recommendation of the paper for the government and school administrators to once more redouble their efforts towards ameliorating the present challenges of academic self-development of staff in our schools so that both the society and the participants will stand to benefit in the following ways: enhanced teaching capability, good leadership skills, improved teaching techniques and classroom management, assumption of higher status, improvement in emoluments, and improvement in development.

Keywords: Inhibiting elements, academic self-development, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

The responsibilities of the teacher are very crucial in the satisfactory functioning of the educational process in every society. This is because the teacher remains very central in the actual implementation of the curriculum at all tiers of the education sector. The responsibilities of the teacher include: classroom teaching, guidance and counselling, keeping and maintenance of class attendance, preparatory lesson management, dormitory and boarding supervision, disciplinary activities, mentoring and role model, protection of students' rights, and pastoral care. For the satisfactory performance of their duties, teachers are supposed to possess cognate educational qualifications and experiences.

In order to have the required number of teachers both in quantity and quality, pre-service, in-service, and academic self-development can be fostered. According to Edem (1987) "*Pre-service education is usually provided in teacher-training institutions and in the education departments of the universities with curricula designed to provide for both professional training and subject specialization*"(p. 131). Depending on the government policy in vogue, the beneficiaries while in-training can be given allowance and other incentives or the programme can be fee-paying. In the case of in-service education, the government can nominate certain categories of teachers or provide opportunity for serving teachers to apply for in-service training for a specified period. During such training, some benefits for those in-training include: salary, some allowances, running of promotion or benefiting from notional promotion.

On the other hand, academic self-development of teachers also known as self-improvement education is a concept used to describe the teacher-centeredness of improving himself academically and professionally. It means the process of the teacher providing himself the opportunity of updating his academic skills, knowledge, and abilities for improved and higher academic and professional educational services. Academic self-development of staff is usually propelled by the desire to improve the academic status of a serving personnel, especially when government sponsorship is not forthcoming.

In order to achieve the aim of academic self-development, therefore, most teachers (sometimes, some non-teaching staff inclusive) register in sandwich courses, distance learning programmes, week-end courses, regular programmes in tertiary educational institutions, and academic opportunities offered

by training institutions, attending seminars, workshops, conferences, and registering with professional bodies.

Supporting the need for academic and professional improvement of teachers in the performance of their duties, Bellow (1981) asserts that

The teacher of today must have a good grasp of his subject matter if he is to command the respect of his pupils, especially in the post-primary schools. Questions that pupils in the 1940s would not ask in the class, pupils of the present would intentionally throw at the teacher to test his competence (p.33)

The art of teaching is not gained on a platter of gold; it has to be learned in order to have the requisite knowledge and mastery of subject content, techniques and methods and also updating them from time to time. Where the opportunity of updating such knowledge is not provided by the employer, the employee may decide to do-it-by-himself. However, in an effort at improving their academic and professional status, teachers (and other staff) in our educational institutions always have one challenge or the other. Here lies the crux of the matter for discussion.

Inhibiting Elements against Academic Self-Development of Teachers

The inhibiting elements against teachers' efforts towards academic self-development include the following:

Inadequate Finance

The essence of the availability of finance in the development process of the public and private sectors of the economy as well as the individual developer cannot be under-estimated. For instance, at the individual level as in this case, teachers who engage in one academic programme or the other for self-development will need money for the payment of tuition fees, textbooks, hostel, feeding, transportation, etc. Equally important is money for registration with professional bodies and payment and renewal of professional fees.

However, in recent times, experience have shown that most teachers and non-teaching staff of our educational institutions that engage in academic self-development had passed through the financial rigours of such programmes on self-sponsorship. There is hardly any government policy which encourages such gesture, particularly those who are admitted to run the sandwich, distance learning, week-end, and regular academic programmes. Teachers also register with professional bodies and pay professional fees from year to year without any support by the government. All these expenses impact negatively on the emoluments of the staff who engage in academic self-development programmes.

Poor Timing

Time as a resource is as crucial as any other resource in educational administration. The time within which the staffs of educational institutions perform their duties are mainly the school periods. The school periods are the period when the schools are in session. This means that under normal circumstance, no other contending activity involving the teachers are supposed to be scheduled within the same period.

In any case, experience has shown that most tertiary educational institutions running such academic programmes do so without due regard to when serving teachers will be free to attend. Sometimes, such academic self-development programmes, sandwich courses for instance, are scheduled to commence when the schools from where the teachers are serving are also in session. When such coincidence occurs, the teachers attending such programmes will be faced with the challenges of abandoning the programme during the session for their jobs or vice-versa. The challenge is worse when examinations may be conducted and at the same period, external supervisors may be expected at the schools. Under such scenario, some student-teachers may neither be in school nor at their work place or forfeit one.

Inadequate Facilities

Academic self-development programmes are not only planned to enable candidates access education but also prepared to suit the learning environment and social stability of participants. For instance, while referring to the programmes organized by the National Teachers Institute (NTI) Okorosaye-Orubite (2008) explains that *"These programmes are organized using Distance-learning Education,*

DLE strategies. That is, through a 'work-learn plan' because most of the candidates are already in service with families and other dependants to take care of."(p.54). With the way most academic self-development courses are planned, the candidates are expected to study more on their own both in their hostels (when on campuses) and at their private homes. The learning environments of such students are expected to be facilitated with electricity, radio, television, e-mail, computer, internet, fax, etc.

At present, the problem of power supply in Nigeria is such that not many communities have electricity. Where there is, the supply is epileptic. How then can students be sure of regular and constant power supply to facilitate their studies with the electronics listed above?

Strike Actions in Tertiary Educational Institutions

Over the years, there have been soured relationships between the stakeholders in the management of tertiary educational institutions in Nigeria. The problems exist between the government and the different worker's unions, and between the government and the students union. Some of the problems in the management of tertiary educational institutions in Nigeria that usually cause disharmony ranges from funding, accreditation, complete autonomy, academic freedom, staff welfare, disparity in staff matters, community relations, and students-related challenges.

Very often, these problems have remained unresolved by the contending parties and thus, resulted to one kind of strike action or the other which have either made academic activities on campuses to be suspended or made the schools to be closed down. For examples, the Agreement between the academic staff union of Nigerian Universities and the Federal Government of Nigeria in 2009 over some issues concerning University Administration is yet to be fully implemented. This has resulted to several strike actions in Nigerian Universities. Whenever this happens, academic activities, including those for self-development students are disrupted. Thus, prolonging the period within which the students would complete their academic programmes. The cost of the programme is also increased. In most cases, when academic activities are disrupted, the course work for the semester may not be covered before examinations, thereby making the students to be ill-prepared to face future life and academic challenges.

Lapses in Study Leave Approval

Serving teachers who wish to further their education are expected to apply for study leave. Approved study leave not only gives consent to the applicants to pursue their courses of studies, but also affords the employer opportunity to plan for manpower need, and creates opportunity to plan for the employees-in-training to be reabsorbed at the end of their programmes.

However, this is not always the case. The processing of application for study leave, sometimes takes the entire years which a programme will last. The bureaucratic procedure is such that in some cases, the applications are not approved until the programmes are over and the reply will be that the application is time barred. This ugly trend has often discouraged other workers from applying. The candidates may rather resort to ways of cutting corners to enable them complete their self-development programmes.

The option of undergoing academic self-improvement without notification by the employee and thus, no approval by the employer also has its debilitating effect in the system. This is because, on successful completion of such programmes, it will be difficult for the new certificate of such worker to be recognized by the organization and the beneficiary to be properly placed. It is equally expedient to remark that such scenario is capable of causing disenchantment, acrimony, and low productivity in the work-place

Lack of Promotion

One major aim why workers will want to further their education is to attain higher status through promotion in the workplace. Lack of promotion after successful completion of their courses is a major constraint inhibiting teachers' self-development programmes. After completing their self-development programmes, most teachers apply for upgrading, notional promotion or promotion and the applications are not always treated on time. Sometimes, when eventually, the new certificates are accepted for implementation, the proper placements are not made. At other times, salary arrears which are supposed

to accrue to the teachers following the implementation are not paid. Where such huge financial difference goes into is not known to the affected teachers even though all promotional vacancies are budgeted for. Such budgetary maneuverability in what is supposed to be the financial arrears of staff following their promotions are capable of demotivating and disenchanting the staff. Such behaviour on the part of the employer is also a potential source of discord, disharmony, and industrial crisis in educational institutions.

Poor information Management

One important aspect of information management which is lacking in most educational institutions relates to the welfare of workers, including training opportunities. Apart from other budgetary provisions for training opportunities, 10% of the annual budget of every office ought to be set aside for training and retraining. Not many staff know about such provisions in the budgets. Therefore, they tend not to explore the opportunities available for staff development.

Worse still, the school managers and administrators are not helping matters as they seem not willing to enlighten their staff about most of the items provided for in the budget.

Prospects

Apart from the obvious elements which inhibit academic self-development of teachers, those who are able to scale through their programmes have the following opportunities:

Enhanced teaching capability

Ability to perform effectively and efficiently is one objective of availing oneself with the opportunity of higher education. Teachers who engage in self-development academically are able to teach better because of the acquisition of new content coverage, knowledge and methodology of teaching.

Good leadership skills

Generally, members of a community accord more respect to teachers because of the level of education they possess. Thus, teachers are very often seen as having good leadership skills relevant for educational, political, economic, and social exercise. The assumption, therefore, is that the higher the level of education one has, the better his leadership skills.

Improved teaching techniques and classroom management

Teachers who engage in academic self-development have the advantage of being exposed to new teaching techniques and classroom management. On the conclusion of their programmes, one can conclude that, they will demonstrate the new knowledge both in teaching and classroom management thereby facilitating students' understanding of the learning process.

Assumption of Higher Status

Teachers who engage in academic self-development activities are able to assume higher status and responsibilities in their career. This can be possible through promotion, conversion, upgrading, transfer of service, and sometimes by taking up fresh appointment in another establishment.

Improvement in Emolument

The prospects of academic self-development of teachers include improvement in the emolument of the staff. It also creates disparity between the earnings of the various groups of workers in the education sector. For instance, certain group of teachers may begin to have differences in their emolument after attending self-improvement education.

Improvement in Development

Agabi, Okorosaye-Orubite, Ezekiel-Hart & Egbezor (2005), remark that "*Education produces the relevant manpower for economic development and subsequent sustenance of the economy.*"(p. 43). It is through the process of education that the various human capital needs of the nation can be properly addressed. Those who engage in self-improvement education also contribute meaningfully in producing the much needed human resource for the development of the various sectors of the economy. Teachers produce the needed human resource for the development of the various sectors of

the economy by engaging students in teaching-learning process with a view to positively changing the learners' behaviour and impact on society.

CONCLUSION

In this presentation, attempts have been made to address some of the inhibiting elements against academic self-development of teachers. The work also presents the prospects derivable from self-improvement education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As much as academic self-development is not out-of-place in the process of improving the quality of staff in our schools, the challenges notwithstanding, the nation also stands to benefit from the gesture. Therefore, there is need for the government and school administrators to once more redouble their efforts towards ameliorating the current challenges of academic self-development of staff in our educational institutions.

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