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CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The success of any higher education institution like every organization depends primarily on The success of any higher education institution like every organization depends primarily on the people it employs, their competence, commitment and motivation to perform the mission, goals and task of the organization. The 21st century remains the period of development of a knowledge-based economy in which higher education institutions such as universities, polytechnics and colleges of education are expected to play key roles as drivers of development. Again, the challenges of globalization, the development of technology and the knowledge-based economy, have continued to underscore the need to develop higher education institutions to be able to produce the needed human capital to drive educational goals and consequently, national development. Without an adequate, skilled and well-motivated workforce operating within a sound human resource management, development and execution of educational programmes are far from being achieved. Human resource and execution of educational programmes are far from being achieved. Human resource management in higher education institutions is very important as undermining it would result in social, political and economic jeopardy. This paper therefore focuses on the need for higher education institutions in Nigeria to adopt a strategic human resource management which would address challenges of recruitment, training and development, performance and appraisal system, remuneration and reward system, working condition as well as retention plan and organizational culture. In undertaking the study, ability-motivation-opportunity (AMO) model or theory was adopted as the theoretical underpinning of the study. It suggests that organizational interests are best served by a system that attends to the employee ability, motivation and opportunity (AMO). AMO theory helps to choose from human resource practices that foster organizational performance. The paper however recommends strict adherence to proper procedures for recruitment of staff in line with best practices. Also adherence to proper procedures for recruitment of staff in line with best practices. Also, training and development of staff among other incentives should be well-packaged in the higher education institutions' human resource management in order to guarantee a highly motivated workforce. Above all, there is need for Nigerian higher education institutions to as a matter of necessity adopt the strategic human resource management approach if they must attain skillful management of staff competencies.

Keywords: Human resource management, Higher education, Human capital, national development

Introduction

The success of any educational institution is determined mainly by the quality of its human resource

and the extent to which it takes human resource management as the heart of its educational administration. Higher education no doubt, is an instrument for improving the socio-economic life of a nation. The quality of any civilization in the world today depends basically on the character of human beings and not the physical equipment or the political machinery. The main task of educational institutions especially higher education institutions is the development and improvement of this character. Higher education institutions have therefore become more interested in implementing human resource management as a strategic partner in their operations.

In the era of globalization, international competition, innovation and technology advancements, there is emphasis to embrace human resource management for competitive advantage. To Bontis (1996), human capital may be the only sustainable competitive advantage that an organization has in the ever changing, globalized world. In the knowledge-based economies of the 21st century, there is need for our higher education institutions to develop astrategic human resource management concept since quality employees are considered as a primary component for attaining a competitive advantage.

The universal objective of human resource management is to generate a workforce that is of value to stakeholders, build a competitive position of the organization through efficiency, accelerate the value of human capital and while taking into consideration the needs of employees, build employee's confidence in the workplace. Human resource, usually recognized as the most important out of the resources required for production of goods and services, is the key to rapid socio-economic development and efficient service delivery (Onah, 2008). Human resource management therefore is seen by Frank (1974) as a series of activities in which the job, the individual and the organization all interact as each develops and changes.

In Nigeria, there is no doubt that concerted efforts have been made and still being made to improve the quality of higher education system to be more proactive and productive in delivering on the goals for which it was instituted. These efforts require a fundamental transformation in the methods of managing not only the personnel attitude, relationships and changes in the work environment, but also the way the human resources managed and developed strategically to accomplish the organizational and societal goals. The need for an enhanced and improved human resource administration in higher education is important and it requires a strategic approach to human resource management for proper harnessing of academic and non-academic staff for effective service delivery. This paper therefore is an attempt to bring to the fore, the contemporary issues in human resource management in higher education institutions in Nigeria with a view to throwing up other means of making human resource management to be more proactive in goals achievement.

Theoretical Underpinning of the Study

Ability-motivation-opportunity (AMO) theory has been adopted as the theoretical underpinning of this work. The AMO theory suggests that there are three independent work system components that shape employee characteristics and contribute to the success of the organization. According to the theory, organizational interests are best served by a system that attends to the employee ability, motivation and opportunity (AMO). According to MacInnis and Jaworski (1989), the origin of AMO model lies in the continuous scientific discourse between industrial psychologists, who believe that performance is a function of hiring and training; and social psychologists, who assume that motivation is necessary to ensure performance. It must be stated that the roots of AMO can actually be found in Vroom's (1964) works, where he claims that performance is a function of both ability and motivation. This theory was enriched by Blumberg and Pringle's (1982) opportunity elements reflecting working conditions, tools, materials, leader behaviours, procedure and time. These authors argue that individual performance is a result of capacity (C i.e. abilities), willingness (W i.e. motivation), and opportunity (O). All three elements are necessary for performance (P) to

occur. A low level of any of these elements would strongly negatively affect levels of individual performance. The AMO framework was first initially proposed 11 years after Blumberg and Pringle's (1982) work by Bailey (1993) and later developed by Applebaum, Bailey, Berg, Kallberg and Bailey (2000).

More recently, Kaufman (2015) has argued that in order to achieve better performance, perceived as individual productivity, creativity and discretionary efforts, organizations or companies should focus on boosting the ability and motivation of employees while creating opportunities by giving them the necessary autonomy, tools and power to make decisions. To Jiang, Lepak, Han, Hong, Kim and Winkler (2012), these three processes help to translate human resource management practices or systems, broadly speaking, into organizational performance. In developing and managing human resource, organizations or systems are advised to adopt the right theory as according to Gerhart (2005), proper choice of human resource management practices is essential for the conscious shaping of employee abilities (i.e. selection, hiring and training), motivation (i.e. performance-related pay) and opportunities to act (i.e. emphasizing teamwork or suggestion systems). To this end, the adoption of AMO as the theoretical underpinning of this work is not in any way misplaced as it best explains the dynamics of human resource management which is the crux of the study.

Defining Human Resource Management (HRM)

The starting point in defining HRM is to first understand what human resource as a concept is all about. Barney (1995) defines human resource to include all experiences, skills, judgment, abilities, knowledge, contacts, risk-taking and wisdom of individuals and associates in an organization. Human resource (personnel), is regarded as the most valuable asset of any organization. To Ndiomu (1992) cited in Ainabor (2019), the personnel (human resource) of an organization comprise men and women, young and old who engage in the production of goods and services and who are the greatest assets of the organization. Human resource experts and practitioners alike have pointed out the importance and critical role of the human elements in organization. Thus, the human resource of higher education institutions in Nigeria, need to be properly managed for them to make maximum contributions to the achievement of higher education objectives.

Having defined what human resource is, what then is human resource management (HRM)? Griffin (1992) cited in Omebe (2014) defines human resource management as the set of organizational activities directed at attracting, developing and maintaining an effective workforce. Tyson (1997) in Teir and Zhang (2016), state that human resource management plays the role of translating the organizational strategic aims into human resource policies and creating human resource strategies that could gain better competitive advantage. However, Tocher and Rutherford (2009) cited in Allui and Sahni (2016) see HRM as the set of activities and functions directed to developing and maintaining the labour structure in firms. Such activities in HRM are recruitment, selection, appraisal, training, compensation and employee relations (Guest, 2011 in Allui and Sahni 2016). Arising from above discourse, there is need for higher education institutions saddled with the responsibility of developing, nurturing and ensuring the skillful management of staff competencies for competitive advantage to be more strategic by adopting and developing strategic human resource policies and practices. Recent studies have shown that high performing business organizations practice strategic human resource management (SHRM).

Strategic human resource management (SHRM) therefore, according to Walker (1992) in Allui and Sahni (2016), is the "means of aligning the management of human resource with the strategic content of the business and human resource strategy so that the latter supports the accomplishment of the former and, indeed, helps to define it". In the early 1980's, the strategic concept in academic staffing began to gain popularity, due to the fact that resources in educational funding in America were becoming scarce. This according to Mortimer (1985), was due to the fact that

faculty and supporting staff salaries, wages and fringe benefits averaged 70% to 80% of an institution's operating budget. This made the concept of strategic staffing to gain momentum to play a vital role in the labour-intensive industry of higher education (Mortimer & Tierney, 1979). Keller (1983) observes that American higher education in the 1980's entered a new era that required new procedures and new attitudes; better planning, strategic decision-making and more directed change in human resource management. After Keller's ground breaking publication of his book titled "Academic Strategy", many colleges and universities became interested in instituting a strategic approach to human resource management in their organizations.

Strategic human resource management (SHRM) according to David, Chin and Victor cited in Allui and Sahni (2016) involves designing and implementing a set of proactive human resource policies/practices that ensures that an organization's human capital contributes to the achievement of its corporate objectives. Strategic human resource management remains one of the contemporary issues in human resource management in that it emphasizes the increasing proactive dimension of human resource function, its pivotal position in the success of organizations and its possibility of transforming the human resource function from being reactive, prescriptive and administrative to being proactive, descriptive and executive. Strategic human resource management entails the conscious and proper integration of human resource management into the primary business strategy of a firm or an organization by aligning human resource activities with all stages or layers of the organization or institution. Smylie and Wenzel (2006) in their study investigated the factors that are responsible for the effectiveness of teaching/learning processes at Chicago universities and found that strategic human resource management (SHRM) practices such as staffing, vocational development and training, communication, reward and evaluation are some of the significant factors in this regard. They equally found that the application of SHRM practices and evaluation would raise higher education effectiveness. Bahrami (2013) in his study of the relations between strategic human resource management and intellectual capital in Iranian universities found that there is a significant multiple correlations between SHRM practices such as (staffing, training, performance appraisal, compensation and participation) and intellectual capital (human, structural and relational capital). Bergquist (1992) was strongly of the view that when human resource offices are properly positioned, effectively structured, sufficiently funded, adequately staffed, organizationally supported and well managed, the tripartite mission of any college or university which comprises teaching, research and community service is more likely to be effectively and efficiently attained.

In other words, strategic human resource management (SHRM) is a coherent configuration of activities including setting long-term goals, principles, plans and programmes concerning employees, aimed at creating and using human capital as a guaranteefor achieving and maintaining a competitive advantage in the future (Pocztowski, 2008 in Szlagowska-Rudzka, 2018). To this end, Popescu and Baltaretu (2012) have argued that the effective use of human potentials in educational institutions includes not only appropriate use of the teaching, auxiliary and administrative staff who are supposed to have the suitable competencies, skills, experience and personality, but also their role in the development of other resources in the institution. Thus, the study is an attempt to address the challenges of human resource management in the areas of recruitment, training and development, performance/appraisal system, remuneration and reward system, working condition as well as retention plan and organizational culture in higher education institutions in Nigeria, using a strategic human resource management approach.

Recruitment and Selection system

Human resource management function begins with the process of recruitment and selection by which higher educational institutions get the best academic and non-academic personnel to interpret and implement the educational curriculum programmes. Recruitment and selection of

staff in higher education institutions deal with hiring of people with appropriate and necessary skills, abilities, knowledge and experience to fill the vacant teaching and non-teaching positions in universities, polytechnics and colleges of education. The processes of recruitment and selection in labour-intensive organizations such as tertiary institutions have been critical to achieving longterm sustainability. A typical selection processin an organization involves assessing applicants in a variety of ways ranging from the 'objective and measurable' such as years of experience and educational achievement, to the 'subjective and personal' such as quality of output expected and leadership potential. In order to effectively achieve this, universities, polytechnics and colleges of education are expected to rely on a number of selection tools or devices. These include application forms, evaluation of written information such as application letters, resumes and curriculum vitae, stimulated demonstrations by applicants, tests and interviews of various sorts, physical examinations, reference and background checks, and sometimes onsite visits to current employer. The challenge of human resource management in higher education institutions in Nigeria has become an issue in recent times as recruitment and selection of staff particularly academic and senior non-academic staffh as fallen short of the above process or any known and acceptable standards and procedures. Recruitment of academic and non-academic staff in our tertiary institutions as at today is more predicated on favouritism and nepotism than on established standards. Staff recruited into sensitive positions as academic positions in our higher institutions are even allowed into classrooms without first making them pass through proper standards and procedures of assessment or evaluation. To Omebe (2014), "there are problems on the quality and quantity of staff recruited for the education of our citizens. Politicians and 'godfatherism' have taken the upper hand" The resultant effect is the low output of our tertiary institutions' staff and the low quality of our graduates that are churned out from our higher institutions into the labour markets. Applying inadequate methods of recruitment and selection could lead to a high cost to higher education. Therefore, recruitment and selection planning strategy should address each of the groups of higher education institutions' employees whether academic, administrative or engineering and technical staff. The recruitment of academic teachers should be purposeful and based on very high standards and competitions for posts.

Dalton and Kesner (1983) and Olian and Rynes (1984) have pointed out in their study that the recognition of structure, size and strategy on staffing decision is extremely important. Gerstain and Reisman (1983) have equally in their study emphasized that the importance of the selection system is not in the specifics of the selection methodology but in the increased attention paid to the link between strategy, organization design and selection of the employees. However, Mortimer (1985) has observed that institutions differ and do not face the same resource environment therefore, no single strategy is appropriate to all institutions.

Training and Development

Staff development is the process of appraising staff performances and identifying their key skills and competence that need development or training in order to improve their skills for better performance. It is important for higher education institutions to establish strategies for human resource development and training particularly for their academic and senior non-academic staff. The human resource development and training allow educational institutions to achieve the competitive advantage needed to maintain their existence and relevance in the comity of higher education providers. Higher education institutions require a comprehensive and institutionalized strategic human resource development. Hall (1984) in Allui and Sahni (2016) defines strategic human resource development as identifying and managing employee learning in conjunction with the development of corporate and business strategies for the future. In the same vain, Harvey (1983) in Allui and Sahni (2016) reiterates that in order for training and development to help accomplish organizational objectives, a human resource training and development plan must be established and carefully aligned with the corporate goals. Strategies for staff development by

higher education institutions should include the encouragement of staff to undertake postgraduate studies, attend conferences, seminars, symposia, training trips through national and international grants, etc. Such strategies contribute to the development of human potential in several aspects such as development of skills, competences and efforts of individuals needed to achieve the goals of the institutions; developing a strong, sufficient and strategic organizational culture and structure; increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of all the staff, increasing the capacity for creativity, innovation and problem solving, etc. Students/learners remain the ultimate beneficiaries of a well-articulated strategic training of staff by educational institutions as skills acquired through such training would be inculcated in them.

That the 21st century world is undergoing rapid transformation underscores the urgent need for higher education institutions in Nigeria to fully embrace and integrate the use of information and communication technology (ICT). Despite the failure of successive Nigerian governments to meet the yearnings and aspirations of its citizens, the lesson cannot be lost to the people that the development and introduction of new information and communication technologies (ICTs) is pervasively positively promoting the efficiency and effectiveness of all organizations that strategically exploit these technologies. However, Nwufo (2009) cited in Omebe (2014) rightly observes that ICT penetration and usage remain very low and so there is need to train many teachers at all levels in ICT to equip them for re-engineering the society through skills. Training and development, no doubt, can be facilitated in our higher education institutions through information and communication technology (ICT). With the development of ICT, lectures, seminars and symposia are made easy through well-focused communication strategies and instruments. To Omebe (2014), current calls for ICT usage in education is worthy but its implementation in Nigeria as a nation is in the toddling stage. This sorry situation of the non-deployment of ICTs in most educational institutions in Nigeria was further exposed as learning by our children was and still being disrupted during the Covid-19 pandemic. According to Aduragba-Hussain (2020), considering the state of Nigeria's educational sector, pertinent questions need to be asked: Do schools in Nigeria have technology to cater for the 46 million students affected? Do teachers have the required skills and resources to deliver live lessons or record a massive open online course (MOOC) tagged lessons? Do households have facilities to engage their children in online or remote learning? To Aduragba-Hussain (2020), it is only children on the higher end of socio-economic spectrum that may experience less disruption to their learning because their private schools are well-equipped with ICT infrastructure and as such, can afford remote learning at home. Thus, the majority of students that would be left struggling are those from vulnerable and disadvantaged backgrounds, who do not have access to computers and other devices outside school. In most cases, these children live in communities with poor or non-existent internet connectivity and unreliable power supply. This digital divide, no doubt, will worsen the learning disparities among these children.

With regard to training and development of staff in higher education institutions in Nigeria, it is ironical that universities, polytechnics and colleges of education, which are in the business of education, have scarcely focused on the training and development of their own employees to maintain the faculty and administrative vitality. In addition to the above is the absence of any systematic attempt to link training and development to the strategic plans of our educational institutions in Nigeria.

Performance/Appraisal System

According to Devanna (1984), performance appraisal is "the cornerstone of an effective human resource system". Therefore, performance appraisals appear to be particularly important in labour intensive educational organizations. Unfortunately, most higher education institutions in Nigeria have failed to devise and design an appropriate performance and appraisal strategy

for their staff. Performance and appraisal system can be seen as a control system through which individual performance can be measured against strategic objectives to achieve effective job performance. To Narasimha (2000), performance appraisal includes designing performance assessment schemes to indicate the degree to which the proficiency of the employee is important and the extent to which corrective training is required. Thus, establishing a performance review process to enable employees to feel free to give their feedback and say anything with regard to work process is an issue that has been given an increasing attention recently in human resource management. In a study carried out by Turk (2008) on performance appraisal as a way of motivating and compensating academic staff in Estonia, it was found that performance appraisal and compensation system is related to a highly motivated core of staff. To Turk (2008), a good and well-functioning performance appraisal system would help the educators to make their mark in the organizational setting of their faculty.

Remuneration and Reward System

One of the contemporary issues in human resource management in Nigeria's higher education institutions is remuneration and reward system. It involves the design and administration of remunerations and rewards for jobs performed. Ministry of education and management of higher education institutions in Nigeria must take the issue of remuneration and reward system very seriously. To Omebe (2014), staff performance would increase substantially if they are adequately compensated according to the quality and quantity of work done. There is need to match remunerations and rewards with accomplishment of organization's strategic goals. The motivation level of our tertiary institutions' employees can be influenced by managements of higher education institutions in many ways. Managements of Nigeria's tertiary institution can use performance-based compensation to provide remunerations and rewards to employees for achieving the targets of the institutions. There is need to link remunerations and rewards with performance in our higher education institutions in Nigeria. This practice, no doubt, is an effective compensation system. Omebe (2014) concludes that a good remuneration tends to reduce inequalities between staff earnings, raise their individual morale, motivate them to work for pay increase and promotions, reduces inter-group friction and employee grievances.

Retention plan and Organizational Culture

The development and well-being of higher educational institutions depends on the ability to recruit and retain experienced and talented staff be it academic or non-academic. Hansel (1991) in his study has found that institutions that do not retain experienced staff face difficulties in establishing quality programmes. The need for higher education institutions to improve retention of desirable, experienced and talented staff remains an issue that is at the front burner over the years and in recent times. Evidence abounds that retention of such quality staff improves the quality of institutions. The mass exodus of quality staff from Nigeria's educational institutions due to poor remunerations and conditions of service no doubt, affects our tertiary education in an adverse manner. Therefore, those responsible for the management of human resource in our institutions should strategically factor retention plans into human resource practices. Retention of staff in our various higher education institutions can be achieved, if management lays emphasis on aspects of incentives beneficial to staff such as increasing salary, improving working conditions, reducing examination stress, reducing class size, improving teaching conditions, increasing channels of promotion, increasing opportunities for professional development, improving occupational opportunities, encouraging democratic decision-making, improving opportunities to attend conferences, improving teaching and non-teaching loads, etc. To this end, Ciftcioglu (2011) has argued that organizational commitment acts like a psychological structure that maintains employees' interactions with their organizations and helps employees to take decisions about remaining in the organization.

On the other hand, organizational culture, be it employees' way of communication or performance of the organization, is one issue that is influencing every aspect of the organization. Organizational culture as a concept is key in understanding its influences on strategic human resource practices in organizations. Organizational culture represents the collective values, beliefs, and principles of organizational members and is a product of such factors as history, product, market, technology and strategy, type of employees, management style and national culture (Needle, 2004). Organizational culture according to Allui and Sahni (2016) includes the organization's vision, values, norms, systems, symbols, language, assumptions, beliefs and habits. To Hofstede, Neuijen, Ohayv and Sanders (1990), organizational culture is agreed among researchers to be holistic, soft, and difficult to change, has a historical basis and is socially constructed. It is the responsibility of human resource managers to build the organizational culture. There is need for strategic actions on the part of human resource managers in higher education institutions to take certain steps or actions that could promote employee trust and thereby build a culture of trust and innovation. To this end, human resource management practices in Nigeria's educational institutions should be strategically designed and developed so as to facilitate organizational trust among employees.

Conclusion

This paper has examined some contemporary issues in human resource management and stressed the need for higher education institutions in Nigeria to adopt a strategic human resource management which would address challenges of recruitment, training and development, performance and appraisal system, remuneration and reward system, working conditions as well as retention plan and organizational culture. In undertaking the study, ability-motivationopportunity (AMO) model or theory was adopted as the theoretical underpinning of the study andit suggests that organizational interests are best served by a system that attends to the employee ability, motivation and opportunity (AMO). It was discovered that tertiary institutions in Nigeria are yet to adopt and fully embrace the strategic human resource approach in their human resource practices. The mode of recruitment and selection of employees for instance, is usually not based on job analysis to determine areas of need. Rather, the recruitment and selection of academic and senior non-academic staff has fallen short of the above process or any known and acceptable standards and procedures. Even money and time expended on training and development of staff have never been considered to be useful and worthwhile hence managers of higher education institutions in Nigeria scarcely pay serious attention to such practice. On the whole, dealing with contemporary issues of human resource management in our higher education institutions requires a decisive approach such as strategic human resource management.

Recommendations

There is need for human resource managers in our higher education institutions to routinely design and adopt an acceptable standards and procedures for recruitment and selection of academic and non-academic staff. This involves designing and implementing a set of proactive human resource policies/practices that ensures that an organization's human capital contributes to the achievement of its corporate objectives.

Higher education institutions in Nigeria should establish strategies for human resource development and training particularly for their academic and senior non-academic staff. The human resource training and development plan must be established and carefully aligned with the corporate goals of the institutions. Using strategic human resource initiatives, our tertiary institutions can design and administer high quality training courses, seminars and workshops for their staff.

There is need for a unified, fair and well-functioning performance and appraisal system in

Nigeria's higher education institutions as a control system through which individual performance can be measured against organization's strategic objectives to achieve effective job performance. A fair and well-designed appraisal system can in a way motivate staff to performance.

There is need to match remunerations and rewards with accomplishment of organization's strategic goals. A good remuneration package tends to reduce inequalities between earningsof staff of comparable performance.

There is need for strategic actions on the part of human resource managers in higher education institutions to take certain steps or actions that could promote employee trust and innovation through the building of organizational culture.

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