

TOWARDS ENSURING EFFECTIVE STAFF MANAGEMENT IN THE POLYTECHNIC EDUCATION SECTOR

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Abstract

Educational quality entails raising students' achievement through enhancing the teaching-learning process and conditions which support it. It is about strategies aimed at improving the polytechnics capacity for providing quality education. There is the argument regarding effective staff management as the most appropriate means of achieving quality in education. To talk about quality is to seek to enhance students' outcomes through specific changes in teaching approaches, the curriculum and through strengthening the polytechnic organizational ability to support the work of Lecturers to ensure quality. Management should therefore focus on improving the performance of organizational members (Lecturers and support staff) in the school system. Also the nature of funding in our educational system connotes that staff are the major beneficiaries of the huge investment being made in education. It is therefore essential that effective staff planning and development be established to ensure that maximum goals in education are achieved. This paper examines the different aspects of staff management and highlights the contribution of each aspect to quality assurance in the polytechnic education sector.

Introduction

This article is about managing staff for quality assurance in the polytechnic education sector. In recent times, everywhere one goes one is faced with questions such, what you are doing to ensure that quality is maintained in our polytechnic education sector? A question such as this does not come as a surprise. This is because education consumes over 80% of their work. It is therefore, important and reasonable that the public should demand to know what is being done with the huge investment that is given to education and the quality of products of our education system, especially now that a lot of school leavers are seen roaming the streets unemployed. The question is whether educators are in fact, doing what they are expected to do, whether the management teams are effective in the performance of their duties. Are the students achieving the national objectives for polytechnic education? Such questions did not start today. The emphasis on students' learning outcome as a measure of performance places the educational system on the defence. This is because educational quality entails raising students' achievement through enhancing the teachers' teaching-learning process and conditions which support it. Talking about quality is to seek to enhance students' learning outcomes through specific changes in the teaching approaches and through strengthening the schools' organizational ability to support the work of staff. There is the argument regarding effective staff management as the most appropriate means of achieving quality in education. To achieve quality in the school system, the co-operation of staff and the endorsement of the school leaders (Administrator) are usually necessary. Although the school is the center of innovation, it cannot achieve it alone. It is embedded in an educational system that has to work co-operatively and symbiotically to be able to achieve the highest degree. For example, advisers, consultants, schools management boards, etc must be defined, harness to the process of improvement.

Okeke (2001: 21) is of the opinion that Schools level of quality is determined by a combination of number of elements: namely, inputs, Lecturers quality, Lecturer behaviour in the classroom, school management and structure". According to Okeke (2008) empirical research findings attest to the fact that management, lecturer quality and lecturer behaviour are the three materials inputs that are important determinants of school quality. It is against this background that, this author tends to call for new approaches to staff management in which improvement is occurring. The aim of this paper is to bring to fore, effective staff management practices that will lead to quality assurance in our polytechnics

Theory Of Management

Deming developed a theory of management in 1999. The theory is based on the premise that all people are educated that they want to do a job and that they deserve respect. They are not born mean, but can be made so. According to Tribus and Doherty (1994:84) the philosophy behind the Deming approach, value self esteem of those who learn and those who teach. How people respond to management actions is very important to the success of management for quality. Deming is emphasizing that management should understand why people behave the way they do in the organization.

A good management system must clearly state its mission (objectives). A theory of management should therefore concern itself with the processes for achieving the objectives, and how to improve those who are involved in the processes for improvement, ensuring that every person in the system understands how the system works, what is to be done and how to do it, and ensures that every person is educated to participate in the improvement process.

Leadership

Leadership in this context is looked at in terms of the quality of interpersonal relationships that exist in the school system and the role leadership plays in the achievement of quality in education. The leader should use a number of strategies to bring out the best from his staff. All those occupying the management position in School need to demonstrate their commitment to standards at all times. Morgatroy and Morgan (1994) are of the opinion that a manager who wants to achieve total quality should ask himself these questions: How can I secure support of all staff for the work we have to do? How can I align the interest of all staff so that we are all working towards a common goal? Harris (2002:19) in his study reported that such strategies as power of praise, involving staff in decision making and giving professional autonomy are very essential for improving quality. The Rectors should develop and maintain a good relationship with their staff and students. Harris also reported that effective leaders generate high level of commitment in their staff through their openness, honesty and the quality of their interpersonal relationship. Sins and Melford (in Harries, 2002:24) conclude that school quality can be achieved, where lecturers are empowered in areas of importance to them. They argue that lecturers cannot create and sustain the conditions for productive development of students if those conditions do not exist for them.

The Mission Statement

In other to get the staff to be committed to the job, there must be clearly stated objectives. The objectives stated must be such that can be used daily by all staff to justify their actions. To achieve quality or high performance in education therefore, the objectives must be clear and well known by every staff for them to apply them daily. Everybody working in the school needs to have a good knowledge of the school's objectives, so that they can fashion their daily actions to the attainment of the stated objectives. Statement of objectives is important, because it inspires people to work towards it. Whitely (1991:28) rightly pointed out that:

A truly integrated and permeating vision energizes people and can resurrect disgruntled, reutilized burnt-out employees. Or provides true challenge and purpose. It makes each person feel that he or she can make a difference to the world; it becomes a relying cry for a just cause-their-cause.

Morgatroyd and Morggan (1994) state that "quality is a function of strategy until you have designed the strategy your school is pursuing, quality is secondary". For a manager (Rector) to elicit co-operation from his staff therefore, the objectives must be clearly stated to them for them to understand. The manager must communicate to them how the stated objectives are intended to be achieved and how they can fashion their actions on the basis of achieving these objectives. Once the staff and students are well informed about these objectives, achieving quality will then become a reality. Secondly, there should be participation by the staff and students in the development of these objectives.

Madumer (2002) states that participation by staff in decision-making will foster greater self satisfaction, increased productivity and minimal conflicts". What obstacles they would have in achieving these goals and how they would be handled must be addressed by the manager. The manager must provide support to his staff and must also match the organizational goal with that of the individual. The manager must think of how to remove these obstacles to the achievement of personal goals and team goals. Uwachukwu and Okeke (2004) state that an individual's expression of job satisfaction is an emotional and effective personal response that results from the extent to which the various aspects of his job are congruent with his values and expectations.

Recruitment

The first step that must precede recruitment is the determination of the kind of personnel required to do the job and also the specification of the number of personnel required to be hired. In the polytechnic, the decision concerning requirement of staff are not only that of the school manager, the Registrar of the school and heads of departments all have much to contribute. The management team needs to consider the experience and necessary skill needed for the job. To ensure this is done, analysis of the knowledge, skill and attitude required for specific tasks should be done to provide a set of criteria helpful for the selection processes. Advertisements are usually based on job description and person's specification. Applications are required from prospective candidates to bring out all factual information needed about the candidates and also to elicit data which may give the selection panel information on the candidates' behaviour pattern. These applications undergo screening exercise and successful applicants are subjected to interview.

Interview is the final stage in the process of selecting an appropriate candidate for a job opening. The purpose for the interview is to further select among the short-listed candidates, the one that best fits the school's needs. It also offers the interviewers an opportunity to find out other characteristics of the candidates that could not be detected from the application. Successful candidates are then hired and once personnel are hired, the personnel have the option either to accept or reject the offer. If the personnel accept, the induction function follows immediately. (Uwachukwu and Okeke, 2004)

Induction

Induction is concerned with the problem of introducing new staff into the organization. In order to reduce the problem of attrition, orientation is required. The management should acquaint the employee with information on salary, fringe benefits, and opportunities for advancement, probationary period, and grievance procedures, staff development opportunities, supervisory procedures, etc. the immediate supervisor of the inductee should introduce the inductee to his fellow

staff. He should be given a tour of the school and given such details about office space and table hours of work, faculties available in the school, etc. After some weeks, the immediate supervisor should find out if the inductee is satisfied with the school and the job, should do a follow-up interview. If there are areas that require further clarification, they should be addressed. A follow-up interview will increase the interest of the employee and also increase his level of satisfaction. Without proper staffing the school cannot achieve quality. It is therefore necessary that members of the school management board should develop clear concepts and techniques necessary for proper staffing to ensure that quality is assured in our Polytechnic education sector (Uwachukwu and Okeke, 2004)

Grievance and Dispute Procedures

Management should provide the staff with the statement and main terms of conditions of service of the education system. The aim is to ensure rapid solution to a problem. The statement must include details of disciplinary procedures, rules and regulations with which the staff is required to operate with, and the method of handling disciplinary matters. This information must be readily accessible to the staff in documentary form. The procedure for handling collective dispute should also be documented. Curson (1981) states that "the procedure should be in writing and should specifically state the category of employee(s) they refer". If this is done by the management, the staff will be duly informed of any complaint against them, and opportunity given to them to defend them before a decision is taken. The knowledge of all these procedures will motivate staff to work towards the achievement of the school goals.

Mentoring

Meade (2001) reports that "mentoring programme for staff promotes interaction between colleagues, provide a safe and confidential environment for the exchange of ideas and increase mutual understanding between general and academic staff. Self-development is rarely successful without the support of other people. An individual's mentor can come from internal or external environment of the school. The main focus is on individual's professional development. Simsoko (in ESP 1993) defines a mentor as "a wise and trusted guide, advising, not telling, mentoring, not protecting, a resource and not a clinical counselor and supporting rather than building false expectation". Mentors perform important roles in negotiating work assignments, counseling, supporting their candidates and helping them to produce realistic plans.

Staff Appraisal

To ensure quality, there should be appraisal to reflect on whether the objectives are being achieved or not. Staff appraisal assists the management and staff to identify weaknesses and strengths and to center their training and development on identified needs. To ensure quality in polytechnic education, an appraisal should be a continuous activity performed by the school's management team. This exercise should be directed to relating the level of performance to the achievement of educational objectives. Lecturers should be appraised on the extent to which their teaching methods, procedures and processes used in teaching are achieving the desired objectives. Also the behaviour of the staff in relation to teaching effectiveness to achieve educational objectives should be appraised. The Rectors should develop positive attitude towards appraisal reports. This is because it forms the basis for the officials from the school's management board to make decision relating to staff promotion, demotion, termination, transfer, or to be sent for in-service training, participation in workshops, seminars, conferences, staff development and instructional programmes. Eferakey (1998) reports that the recommendation of "Lecturer performance appraisal reports, did not constitute the basis of most administrative decisions made by their superiors in the central

administration." This practice will jeopardize the goals of appraisal. This is because the Rectors are not motivated to be fair, dedicated and objective in their administrative duties to ensure quality in education. There is need for managers in education to consider the product of appraisal report as a major framework upon which decisions related to staff are made. This is necessary in order to ensure commitment on the part of Rectors and staff.

Communication

Parsons (1994) reports that "the problem about management is how to encourage their staff into focusing on what may be considered by them as trivial and bureaucratic". This is where the importance of communication and training are very important. The individual staff needs to know the direction and objectives of the school and how they work to achieve the objectives. The manager must always communicate the objectives. The staff needs to communicate among themselves. Teams need to communicate with each other about successes and failures, methods and ideas. This communication should be done practically not only with paper work. The manager needs to move about, share ideas and activities; sometimes the manager must do this to ensure that expectations concerning quality of teaching carried out in the school are met.

Staff Development

Quality is assured in the school when there is a clear and practical focus for the development effort. Hopkins (Ribbens and Burrige, 1994) is of the opinion that "it is important for the staff of the school to see as their right that opportunities are provided for them to develop". The staff requires training in order to be able to make on the control of improvement of the process of teaching and learning. The manager should devote or make time available or set one or more days aside for staff to visit other schools to try and learn how they tackle some of the issues that make them improve on their performance. This type of exposure will help them to add new ideas to their work and improve their performance. Staff development should focus on what the staff need in terms of skills and ideas that would help the school in achieving the stated objectives. These needs will be identified as work is going on in the school. Training will improve the activity of academic staff. A lot of opportunities are provided for in-service training in our institutions of higher learning. These schools should organize intensive programmes or courses in all aspects of teaching techniques, and equip the trainees with the basic teaching skill, which will be required for them to become efficient lecturers for quality improvement.

Recognition for Good Performance

Giving staff a voice is about affording them recognition. It could be by recognizing that their views and ideas are valid and worthy of serious consideration. Research has shown that feedback from senior colleagues particularly those to whom a staff is directly answerable is one of the most potent motivators. Praise from the management or head of department motivates staff to give in their best because according to Evans (1999) "whether they like or not, it increases their chances of feeling the sense of significant achievement that is essential to achieving job fulfillment" and subsequently quality will be assured. Rosenboltz (1991) reports that "positive feedback allows Lecturers gain some on-the-job estimate of their particular competence and worth". Evans (1999) reported from a research finding that "lecturer who was given positive feedback on their work by the head of department reported higher level of job satisfaction, morale and motivation than those who were not".

As Murgtroyd and Morgan (1994) observe "if the tone of a school changes positively, but rewards and recognition systems for individuals and team performance remain the same, then the natural tendency of the staff and students will be to follow the reward and recognition system, not the tone".

The implication of this is that every act of recognition for staff or student decision, every favour given to staff publicly, must have to link to the objectives of the school. Reward and recognition are the most powerful motivators that a manager can manipulate. The most important thing is to ensure that the recognition is linked with the objectives and that those receiving the recognition do so for their contribution towards the achievement of the school's objectives. By recognizing good performance, the strategy for achieving quality will be assured.

Promotion

One very important way of achieving recognition is by promotion. Promotion must be based on competencies demonstrated by the staff, which is linked to the number of publications, and these should be taken seriously. To announce promotion, all the points of decision need to be articulated so that every staff can see and examine why a particular staff was promoted at a particular time. That will give them the message concerning a particular promotion and subsequently motivate other staff to work harder to earn same. The increase in salary that accompanies promotion is an effective motivator to staff. Enaowho (2000) is of the opinion that lecturers demand some economic rationalization by adjusting salary increase over and above prevailing rates of inflation in the economy. "Promotion is of paramount importance if we want to retain good crop of lecturers in the schools. It is important for the management to recognize the potentials of staff built on their strength and as far as possible meet their motivational needs. Getting the right people to do the job and retaining good crop of lecturers on the job can enormously influence the effectiveness of teaching and learning and the quality can be assured.

Strategies for Quality Assurance

For our polytechnic education sector to be fully effective, it needs to demonstrate that it can deliver high standards and subsequently quality. This is very essential in an environment which is ours that demands professional commitment to the huge investment that is being given to education. The degree to which lecturers and support staff in our polytechnic assume collective responsibility for instructional quality determines professionalism. Our polytechnic education sector can only achieve quality if and when our management service in all facets of the organization are carefully monitoring the performance of its members both in the school environment and outside the school environment, and being committed to satisfying both in the staff and students. The management should generate and focus attention on relevant information that will improve teaching and learning processes, motivate staff to attend to such relevant information that will help them to improve quality.

Quality assurance can be achieved by reviewing the existing practice and articulation of policies and procedures as framework for organizational practices. Lecturers must be committed to the job by meeting simple targets promptly. For example, every problem must be promptly treated as they arise. Lecturers must commit themselves to setting targets as a form of organizational motivation. Lecturers must allocate resources where they are most needed. They should also empower the staff and students to achieve their individual and team goals as well as the school goals.

To achieve quality is a team affair. Collaboration is a necessary condition for staff development and quality assurance. All must be encouraged to participate to achieve a broader objective. People must be appraised. There should be continuous training and development for improvement of teaching. Murgatroyd and Morgan (1994:23) state that quality emphasizes the development and maintenance of effective school system and also stresses that organization should be committed to improvement on a continuous basis and this must be accompanied by development opportunities. The school

environment should be free from fear of victimization. There should be accountability for work done. According to Downey, Frase and Peter (1994) "an environment of mutual respect among employees who contribute to the purpose of the organization through the accomplishment of different functions must be established". Again, equitable treatment needs to occur in the area of policy development and fair compensation; standards and processes must be established. The management should establish a sense of fairness and appreciation by developing regard for all staff contributions to the achievement of school objectives.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In this paper, we have tried to discuss quality assurance in the Polytechnics sector by looking at the management of staff who are the major and important indicators of school quality. The staff are seen in this paper as potential measures of organizational health and of the worth of the educational process. While the schools are judged by their overall effectiveness, it is the staff, especially the lecturers, who are the executors of the teaching tasks. The quality of staff professional lives, their job satisfaction, their involvement in decision-making, the management leadership style, the communication framework, recognition for job well done, opportunities for development, their depth of understanding of learning and teaching are all central to quality assurance in the school. The interpersonal relationship, which exists in the school, has an important role to play in achieving quality. Management should therefore, establish in the school a cross functional team, where individuals and team members have adequate access to one another, make available resources and establish shared information base that will allow organizational members to participate and even make decisions at the lowest possible base.

Management should recognize that, although the lecturer's interaction with the students is very important to quality improvement, they must not fail to recognize the important roles support staff play in helping the lecturers to do their job. Management must therefore, mobilize the entire workforce and co-ordinate their efforts with those of the larger community. This practice will create an environment of trust, openness and understanding among staff members and subsequently conflicts will be minimized. In order for the polytechnics education sector to achieve quality, all barriers that impede interdependence must be dislodged. To achieve quality therefore, management must mobilize from the entire school, develop a team of staff that has a sense of efficiency by creating an environment that avoids behaviours which encourage stratification and isolation of staff or group of staff.

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