



Management practices of academic heads of departments for teaching improvements in South-South, Nigerian Universities

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Abstract

The study examined the management practices of Academic Heads of Departments for teaching improvement in South-South Nigerian Universities. Two (2) research questions and two (2) hypotheses guided the study, which adopted the descriptive survey as the design. The population of the study comprised the 11 Federal and State universities in South-South, Nigeria that have Faculties of Education and with 1487 lecturers, 432 and 1055 from Federal and State universities respectively. A sample of 491 was drawn using the stratified random sampling technique. The respondents of the study responded to a validated 23 item instrument titled: Heads of Departments Management Practices for Teaching Improvement Scale (HDMPTIS) with a reliability index of 0.95. Mean scores were used in answering the research questions while z-test was used in testing the hypotheses at 0.05 alpha level. The findings of the study revealed among others that Academic Heads of Departments monitoring practices contribute to teaching improvements in South-South Nigerian universities by providing opportunities for university academic personnel to expand their teaching techniques and improve their teaching skills. Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that the mentoring and supervisory practices of Academic Heads of Departments contribute to teaching improvement in South-South Nigerian universities. It was recommended among others that Academic Heads of Departments should continue to use appropriate administrative, academic, psychological, physical, social and environmental consideration in mentoring and supervision of staff for teaching and research.

Keywords: management practices, academic heads of departments and teaching improvements

Introduction

The concept "management" refers to the harnessing of the human and material resources of a group with the hidden and open intention of achieving the objectives of the group. Management is also a collection of activities involving Planning, Organizing, Directing, Staffing, Coordinating, Budgeting and Evaluation (PODSCORDE) as well as motivating and controlling among others. Management is a social activity which takes place in a group and it is attributed to organization(s). Whether in education, health, engineering, the churches, organization (governmental and non-governmental/ public and private sectors of the national and international economics), or in the bureaucracies, management has specific functions.

In the view of Obasi (2004) ^[9], who comes from the educational perspective, management functions or task areas include management of educational environment, personnel management, financial and material resources, instructional management, decision-making management, and communication management among others. These can only be achieved through the use of pre-determined management practices. According to Business Dictionary.com (2013), management practices refer to methods or techniques found to be the most effective and practical means in achieving objectives while making the optimum use of a firm's resources. It may also be seen as strategies, methods, procedures, and options which organizational leaders adopt or employ in managing organization in order to get the best out of their employees for the benefits of both the organization and the employees.

In the aspect of school environment management, school

managers adopt viable and lively diplomatic strategies or practices while relating with people outside of school. In the area of instructional management, practices include efficient timetabling, course allocation, syllabus management and strict implementation of the school curriculum. These are achieved through effective delegation of functions to members of the educational organization. For decision making, Okorie (2009) ^[6] advises that educational leaders should make use of the democratic approach, just as Adekola (2008) ^[1] favours participatory practices. For the staff personnel, management practices approximate general staff welfare, staff training and development, career management practices, talent management and capacity building programmes. For the student population, welfare programmes are needed to cater for their training in sports, aesthetics, moral upbringing, security needs, apart from the school teaching programmes that are aimed at raising their intellectual horizon. The aspect of communication practices and strategies are needed for effective communication and implementation of educational decisions. Lastly, good financial practices are needed for fundraising, budgeting, accountability in the use of educational finances.

The university as a learning organization is committed to discharging some basic functions for the advancement of the society. These functions include teaching, research and community service. In universities, managers of the academics include: the Vice-Chancellors, or Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academics and Administration), Deans of Faculties and Heads of Department. These officials take charge of curriculum management at the university, Faculty and Departmental levels respectively. At the level of the

Departments, Heads of Departments adopt some management strategies which they believe can bring about improvement in the teaching process and therefore increase performance and turn the graduates out as morally sound and employable citizens. These strategies include: mentoring of beginning academics and supervision of teaching activities of lecturers among others.

As is the practice in professions, older members have a duty to bequeath their wealth of information and stock of knowledge of their professional methods, procedures, techniques, styles, and specific managerial techniques, one of which is mentoring. Mentoring is a new motivational and supervisory device used by organization to induce high productivity in their staff, especially the new and less experienced ones (Uche, 2008) ^[8]. Put in slightly different way, Armstrong (2009) ^[2], sees “mentoring as the process of using specially selected and trained individuals to provide guidance, pragmatic advice and continuing support that will help the person or persons allocated to them to learn and develop” (p.1027). By implication, a mentor is a trusted counsellor, career coach, role model or adviser who provides professional assistance, guidance, encouragement, and develop the self-confidence of less experienced staff for enhanced performance. In the opinion of the present writers, mentoring is the process of forming and maintaining an intensive and lasting developmental relationship between a senior person (the mentor) and a junior person (the mentee), also mentoring is perceived as a professional relationship based on mutual trust between an experienced teacher (mentor) and a less experienced teacher (mentee).

An analysis of the presentations from the above scholars show that mentoring is a process involving two categories of individuals, who come together to partner in order to make for the achievement of certain organizational objectives. This suggests that mentoring is a social arrangement and which takes place in a group or organization in order to pass on or keep alive the virtues and practices of the group or organization to new entrants and generations to come. Mentoring is, therefore, an aspect of organizational learning. The Universal Basic Education Commission (2013) sees the teacher mentor as a more experienced, informed, skilled and competent teacher who can serve to provide guidance, supervision, coaching on the job in various aspects of pedagogy and classroom management. The commission furthers that teacher mentoring is especially relevant in our schools today, because of the presence of a large number of unqualified teachers, newly recruited and inexperienced teachers, inadequate opportunities for regular refresher courses and inadequate exposures to modern innovations and trends in pedagogy by our teachers, among them are the use of Information Technology, to facilitate learning, record keeping and generation of reports.

In this study, mentoring is considered as one of the management practices employed by Academic Heads of Departments for the improvement of teaching in universities. In this connection, Uche (2008) ^[8], proofs that this is possible when considering the short- and long-term objectives of teacher mentoring programmes. The scholar lists the short-term objectives of teacher mentoring as helping beginning teachers to expand their techniques, improving their teaching skills, learning classroom management and providing the opportunity for the mentor to pass their expertise on to new teachers. As part of the long-term benefits, mentoring ensures the improvement of

the professional competence and commitment of the mentee to the education system, and the development of experienced ones. Mentoring services are important in educational organizations. This has often been explained in the fact that a functional mentoring programme, can help in advising teachers in drawing up self-development programmes, provide guidance on how to acquire the necessary skills to do the teaching work, advise on dealing with administrative, technical or people, problem that confront individuals, especially in the early stage of their careers, provide information on how things should be done, provide coaching in specific skills, helping in tackling projects and acting as parenting figure. These is as canvassed by Armstrong (2008) ^[2] which gives credence to in mainstream organizations.

Experts and scholars in the larger field of management make use of a variety of management techniques and strategies for organizational improvement and productivity. Management experts like Nnabuo (1996) ^[6], and Madumere-Obike (2004) ^[6] among others, consider supervision as one of the strategies for organizational improvement and productivity, especially in educational organizations. Supervision is an action or process of watching and directing what someone does and how something is done or the action or process of supervising someone doing something. Supervision connotes words such as watch-over, oversee, and direct. These presentations may be useful in the school system because the school head is often seen as a person responsible for the supervision of not only the teachers, but also other aspects of school administration. Komoski (2007) ^[5] perceives supervision to be a leadership instructional act in which the ultimate aim is to improve classroom instructions. Similarly, Oke (2012) ^[11] explains that besides helping to enhance teaching and learning processes, supervision is also the process that ensures that formal curriculum is implemented in the classrooms. More importantly, the supervisory process provides teachers with constructive feedback leading to increased teacher motivation. In this study, supervision refers to the technically oriented professionally driven assistance which older teachers, experienced teachers and school administrators give to teachers to enhance and buttressed modern methods, techniques, strategies, for teaching to achieve effectiveness in the performance of their jobs.

It is hypothesized that heads of academic departments who employ the use of appropriate supervisory strategies in overseeing the teaching activities of teachers or lecturers under their management can tremendously improve on the teaching process. These strategies include classroom visitation, interschool visitation, workshops, microteaching, team teaching, and research models (Nnabuo, Okorie, Nwideduh & Uche, 2006) ^[8]. These models have also been corroborated by Ogunsaju (1980) ^[10] as those which can help in developing the teacher for better performance. It is no wonder, Glickman (1990) ^[4], comments that behind every successful school is an effective supervision programmes.

Statement of Problem

The university as a learning institution is committed to three major functions. These functions include teaching, research and community service, apart from what modern scholars refer to as incidental functions. From the function of teaching, universities produce middle and high-level human

capital who should acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed by them for service to the society. Contrary to this great expectation, the teaching function of the university seems not to be achieving its major objectives as the products of the universities cannot compete favourably with their counterparts from other education systems in the labour market since they are adjudged to be of poor quality. As a reaction to this, academic heads of departments, whose job it is to manage the curriculum of universities are worried as the blame is pushed to their doorsteps. As a way out, scholars, researchers, opinion leaders, educational administrators, and other stakeholders in university education hold the views that the answer to the poor quality of university graduates is the application of proactive management practices in managing academic staff teaching activities to bring about improvements in teaching. This study was therefore contemplated to examine how Academic Heads of Departments (HODs) management practices enhance teaching improvements in universities for quality output. Therefore, the elements of the problem border on how management practices like mentoring and supervision can lead to teaching improvements in universities.

Aim/Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to examine how the management practices of Academic Heads of Departments contribute to teaching improvements in South-South, Nigerian universities. To achieve the above, the study had the following objectives:

1. To examine how the mentoring practices of Academic Heads of Departments contribute to teaching improvements in South-South, Nigerian universities.
2. To ascertain the ways the supervisory practices of Academic Heads of Departments contribute to teaching improvements in South-South, Nigerian universities.

Research Questions

The following research questions were answered in the study:

1. What are the mentoring practices of Academic Heads of Departments’ contribution to teaching improvements in South-South, Nigerian universities?
2. What are the ways the supervisory practices of Academic Heads of Departments contribute to teaching improvements in South-South, Nigerian universities?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested in the study at 0.05 alpha levels:

1. There is no significant difference between the mean

- ratings of education lecturers from Federal and State universities on the mentoring practices of Academic Heads of Departments’ contribution to teaching improvements in South-South Nigerian universities
2. There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of education lecturers from Federal and State universities on the ways the supervisory practices of Academic Heads of Departments contribute to teaching improvements in South-South Nigerian universities

Methodology

The design for the study was the descriptive survey. Answers were sought to research questions and efforts were made to test hypotheses on the variables of the study and their results inferred on the population of the study. The population of the study was the 11 Federal and State Universities in South-South, Nigeria, that have Faculties of Education. There are 4 Federal Universities with Education Faculties and 7 State Universities with Education Faculties. These Universities have a total of 1487 lecturers in their Faculties of Education. These included 432 in Federal Universities and 1055 in State Universities. The sample of the study was 491 lecturers drawn from the 11 universities in the population. One hundred and forty-three (143) were drawn from Federal Universities while 348 were drawn from State universities and represented 33% in each stratum of the population and the entire population. They were selected using the proportionate stratified random sampling technique. The respondents of the study responded to a 23 instrument titled Heads of Departments Management Practices for Teaching improvement Scale (HODSMPTIS) designed by the researchers in the modified 4-point Likert scale model, and which had its reliability index of 0.95 at 0.05 level of significance. The instrument was validated by experts in Educational Management and Measurement and Evaluation.

The instrument had two sections, A and B. Section A was the bio-data section while section B was subdivided into 2 other sections to elicit information on variables of management practices and their implications for teaching improvements in universities. Mean scores and aggregate weighted mean scores were used in answering the research questions while z-test statistics was used in testing the null hypotheses at 0.05 alpha level.

Results

Research Question 1

What are the mentoring practices of Academic Heads of Departments’ contribution to teaching improvements in South-South, Nigerian Universities?

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation on the responses of lecturers from federal and state universities on academic heads of departments mentoring practices contribution to teaching improvement in South-South, Nigerian universities.

S/N	Items Mentoring Practices Variable	\bar{x}_1	SD	\bar{x}_2	SD	$\bar{x}\bar{x}$	Ranks	Remarks
1.	The provision of opportunities for university academic personnel to expand their techniques in teaching improve their teaching capabilities.	2.96	0.733	3.49	0.503	3.22	2 nd	Agreed
2.	Providing opportunities for university academics to improve their teaching skills/teaching process in higher education	2.79	0.693	3.08	0.382	2.96	6 th	Agreed
3.	Exposing academic staff to conditions that assist them to learn classroom management skills to improve teaching in higher education.	2.84	0.693	3.08	0.382	2.96	6 th	Agreed
4.	Academic personnel who benefits from the expertise of their senior colleagues teaches better than those without such better benefits.	2.84	0.762	2.82	0.682	2.96	6 th	Agreed
5.	Providing opportunities for academics to improve their professional competencies so as to spur	2.87	0.733	3.28	0.453	3.08	3 rd	Agreed

	them to teach better than usual.								
6.	Academic personnel who are made to show commitment to education are bound to do their teaching with appreciable improvements.	2.87	0.70	3.21	0.42	3.04	4 th	Agreed	
7.	Improved teaching activities should be expected in education systems where opportunities are provided for experienced academic to develop the skills of beginning academics.	2.78	0.80	3.67	0.66	3.23	1 st	Agreed	
8.	Academics who are assisted to draw up self-development programmes are spurred for better teaching in educational institution.	2.87	0.70	3.04	0.29	2.96	6 th	Agreed	
9.	Academics who are provided with advise on how to deal with general school problems at the early stage of their career in teaching ensure effective teaching	2.85	0.66	2.79	0.66	2.82	10 th	Agreed	
10	Providing academics with information on how teaching is done can guarantee improvements in teaching performances.	2.89	0.70	3.16	0.82	3.03	5 th	Agreed	
11	Academics who are assisted to track projects achieve improvements in their teaching activities.	2.32	0.90	1.76	1.02	2.04	11 th	Disagreed	
	Criterion $\bar{x} = 2.50$	2.81	0.73	2.88	0.57	3.03		Agreed	

Legend Scale

\bar{x}_1 Mean: Lecturers from Federal Universities

1.00-2.49-Disagreed

\bar{x}_2 Mean: Lecturers from State Universities

2.50-4.00-Agreed

SD Standard Deviation

$\bar{x}\bar{x}$ Weighted mean

Data on Table I show that items 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9, and 10 had weighted mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50 and were agreed on academic Heads of Departments management practices' contribution to teaching improvements in South-South Nigerian Universities. Item 11 had a weighted mean of 2.04 and was denied agreement as Academic Heads of Departments management practices' contribution to teaching improvements in South-South, Nigerian Universities.

In summary, with an aggregate weighted mean of 2.95 above the criterion mean of 2.50, education lecturers from Federal and State universities agreed that Academic Heads of Departments' mentoring practices enhance teaching improvements in South-South, Nigerian universities by

providing opportunities for University academics personnel to expand their techniques in teaching, providing opportunities for university academics to improve their teaching skills, exposing academic staff to conditions that assist them to learn classroom management strategies, providing opportunities for academic staff to learn from the expertise of senior colleagues, providing opportunities for academics to improve their professional competencies, making academics personnel to show commitment to educational growth, providing opportunities for experienced academics to develop the younger ones, assisting academics to draw up self-development programmes, advising academics on how to deal with general school problems at an early stage of their careers in teaching, providing academics with information on how teaching is done and assisting academics to track projects.

Research Question 2

What are the ways the supervisory practices of Academic Heads of Departments contribute to teaching improvements in South-South Nigerian Universities?

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation on the responses of lecturers from federal and state universities on the ways the supervisory practices of academic heads of departments contribute to teaching improvement in South-South, Nigerian universities.

S/N	Items Supervisory Practices Variable	\bar{x}_1	SD	\bar{x}_2	SD	$\bar{x}\bar{x}$	Ranks	Remarks
12.	Academics who have opportunities of getting constructive feedbacks from their teaching activities can improve their teaching performances	2.93	0.69	3.58	0.49	3.26	1 st	Agreed
13.	Academic programmes that enhance teachers' professionalism are meant to spur them to improve their teaching.	2.91	0.70	3.24	0.43	3.08	6 th	Agreed
14.	Academics who are provided with opportunities to meet their colleagues share experiences which they apply when teaching.	2.85	0.66	3.41	0.57	3.13	3 rd	Agreed
15.	Visiting academics while delivery lectures is a strategy to improve their teaching performances.	2.82	0.80	2.98	0.48	2.90	9 th	Agreed
16.	Allowing senior academics to be involved in inter-university supervisory activities can help improve the teaching capabilities of academics.	2.82	0.79	3.07	0.39	2.95	8 th	Agreed
17.	Experiences garnered from attendance at workshop can help academics to improve their teaching skills.	2.81	0.64	3.42	0.49	3.12	4 th	Agreed
18.	Creating opportunities for academics to access their classroom teaching activities can spur them for improved teaching performance.	2.82	0.66	3.42	0.49	3.12	4 th	Agreed
19.	Team teaching programmes draw more commitment from individual academics for greater team performance in teaching	2.77	0.65	3.57	0.56	3.17	2 nd	Agreed
20	Academics who are provided with opportunities to conduct researches apply the results of their researches in the course of their teaching	2.77	0.85	3.25	0.48	3.01	7 th	Agreed
	Criterion $\bar{x} = 2.50$	2.83	0.72	3.33	0.49	3.08		Agreed

***The legend and scale for Table 1 apply.**

Data on table 2 show that all the items (12-20) had weighted mean scores above the criterion mean of 2-50 and were agreed on as the ways the supervisory practices of academic Heads of Departments enhance teaching improvements in

South-South, Nigerian universities. In summary, with an aggregate weighted mean of 3.08, education lecturers from Federal and State universities agreed that the supervisory practices of academic heads of departments enhance teaching improvements in South-South, Nigerian

universities through providing constructive feedback on teaching staff teaching activities, provision of programmes that contribute to teacher professionalism, providing opportunities for lecturers to meet their colleagues to share experiences, visiting lecturers while delivery lectures, involving senior academics in inter-university supervisory

activities, opportunities for attendance at workshop, opportunities for academics to assess their classroom activities, involvements in team teaching programmes, and opportunities for conducts of researches whose results are applied to improve teaching performance.

Table 3: Summary of z-test analysis between the mean ratings of education lecturers from federal and state universities on the mentoring practices of academic heads of departments contribution to teaching improvements in universities.

Subject	N	\bar{x}	SD	Cal.z.	z-crit	Df	Result
Lecturers from Federal Universities	141	2.81	0.74	3.71	1.96	482	Significant
Lecturers from State Universities	343	3.07	0.58				Reject

Data on Table 3 shows summaries of subjects, means and standard deviations, and z-test of difference between the mean ratings of education lecturers from Federal and State universities on the mentoring practices of Academic Heads of Departments' contribution to teaching improvements in South-South, Nigerian universities. The z-test value, calculated and used in testing the hypotheses stood at 3.71, while the z- critical value stood at 1.96, using 482 degrees of freedom, at 0.05 level of significance. At 0.05 level of significance and 482 degrees of freedom the

calculated z-value of 3.71 is greater than the z-critical value of 1.96. Hence, there is a significant difference between the respondents. Based on the above observation, the researcher rejected the hypothesis in favour of the alternative that there is a significant difference between the mean ratings of education lecturers from federal and state universities on the mentoring practices of Academic Heads of Departments' contribution to teaching improvements in South-South, Nigerian universities.

Table 4: Summary of z-test analysis between the mean ratings of education lecturers from federal and state universities on the ways the supervisory practices of academic heads of departments contribute to teaching improvement in South-South, Nigerian universities

Subject	N	\bar{x}	SD	Cal.z.	z-crit	Df	Result
Lecturers from Federal Universities	141	2.83	0.73				Significant
Lecturers from State Universities	343	3.33	0.49	7.14	1.96	482	Reject

Data on Table 4 shows summaries of subjects, means and standard deviations, and z-test of difference between the mean ratings of education lecturers from Federal and State universities on the ways the supervisory practices of Academic Heads of Departments contribute to teaching improvements in South-South, Nigerian universities. The calculated z-value used in testing the hypothesis stood at 7.14 while the z-critical value stood at 1.96, using 482 degrees of freedom, at 0.05 level of significance. At 0.05 level of significance and 482 degrees of freedom, the calculated z-value of 7.14 is greater than the z-critical value of 1.96. Hence, there is a significant difference between the respondents. Based on the above observation, the researcher rejected the null hypothesis in favour of the alternative that there is significant difference between the mean ratings of education lecturers from Federal and State universities on the ways the supervisory practices of Academic Heads of Departments contribute to teaching improvements in South-South, Nigeria universities.

Discussion

The first finding of the study drawn from answers to research question one is that Academic Heads of Departments mentoring practices contribute to teaching improvements in South-South, Nigerian universities. Also, the corresponding third finding from hypothesis testing has it that there is a significant difference between the mean ratings of education lecturers from Federal and State universities on the mentoring practices of Academic Heads of Departments' contribution to teaching improvements in South-South, Nigerian universities. These findings agree with Ekeh (2013), Armstrong (2008) [2], Wiles and Bondi (2011) and Uche (2008) [8] who in their expositions found

mentoring as an effective management practice for ensuring effectiveness in organizations and improvement of teaching in educational organizations. These trends may be explained in the fact that quite very recently arising from the shortage of teaching personnel in higher education resulting from the brain drain in the system, university authorities have had to be involved in massive recruitment of younger lecturers to fill vacancies created by such organizational movements. These newly recruited lecturers are therefore made to learn the job under the tutelage of experienced academics and these have been observed to show tremendous improvements in teaching in higher education. This implies that mentoring is a major contributing factor to the improvement of teaching in educational systems in general and higher educational systems in particular. The second finding of the study from answers to research question two is that Academic Heads of Departments supervisory practices contribute to teaching improvements in South-South, Nigerian universities. Also, the corresponding fourth finding from hypothesis testing has it that there is a significant difference between the mean ratings of education lecturers from Federal and State universities on the ways the supervisory practices of Academic Heads of Departments contribute to teaching improvements in South-South, Nigerian universities. These findings agree with Oke (2012) [11], Udofort (1985), and (1992), Nnabuo, Okorie, Nwideduh and Uche (2006) [9], Ogunsaju (1980) [10] and Glichman (1990), who in their research reports and theoretical expositions established that supervision plays vital roles in teaching and learning process. This may be explained in the fact that with the adoption of supervision as a teaching-learning relationship between supervisors and supervisees, academics are better

disposed to discussing teaching improvement issues with their Heads of Departments, who proffer solutions from their wealth of experiences. This implies that teaching improvement is a product of effective supervision of teaching-learning process and that supervision not inspection should be preferred in issues relating to instructional management.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it is concluded that the mentoring and supervisory practices of Academic Heads of Departments contribute to teaching improvement in South-South, Nigerian universities.

Recommendations

In light of the findings and conclusion of the study, the following recommendations are offered:

1. Academic Heads of Departments should continue to use appropriate administrative, academic, psychological, physical, social and environmental considerations in mentoring of staff for teaching and research.
2. Academic Heads of Departments should endeavour to sustain the tempo of supervisory practices of academic activities as this improves teaching and learning in universities.

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