

Implementing Strategic Plans for Greater Productivity in Universities

Adegoroye, Olufunke Adebimpe (Ph.D)

The Registry

Ogun State Institute of Technology

Igbesa, Ogun State, Nigeria

E-mail: funbim1010@gmail.com

Phone: +234802-8774127

Olatokunbo, Christopher Olufemi & Oshionebo, Esther Emike (Ph.D)

Department of Educational Administration

University of Lagos

Akoka, Lagos State, Nigeria

E-mail: olufemiolatokunbo@gmail.com; oshionebo@unilag.edu.ng

Phone: +234703-3977401; +2348139261874

ABSTRACT

Strategic planning has become more relevant in the education industry as it helps to cope with changes in the environments and enhances performance. The availability and adequacy of teaching and learning facilities determine the productivity of an institution. This study examined the implementation of strategic plans of some Nigerian universities in the area of facility maintenance and organisational productivity. The Goal Setting and Task Performance Theory by Locke and Latham (1990) guided this study. A descriptive survey research design was adopted. The population comprised 864 technicians and 43 Heads of Maintenance Sections. Twelve Heads of Maintenance Units and 221 technicians were chosen using the purposive sampling method. The instruments used were 'Maintenance of Teaching and Learning Facilities Questionnaire (MTLFQ) and an Interview Schedule. Two research questions were raised and answered using percentages, mean and standard deviation. The findings of the study showed that Nigerian universities have succeeded in implementing the strategic plans to a large extent. This had improved progression rates of students which was poor hitherto. It was also observed that routine maintenance plans were hindered by inadequate funding and staffing, reduced job enthusiasm and bureaucratic procedures. Thus, the study recommended the need to reduce bureaucratic bottlenecks, boost staff morale and pay a closer attention to faculties that suffered high spill-over rates.

Keywords: Strategic Planning, University Productivity, Progression Rates, Facility maintenance.

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1. INTRODUCTION

University education in Nigeria has continued to prepare high-level manpower to cater for the needs of various sectors of the economy since inception in 1948. The first-generation universities, namely University of Nigeria, Nsukka (1960); Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife (1962); Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria (1962) and University of Lagos (1962) were established based on Ashby Commission's report of 1959 on

the nation's expected development for a period of 20 years (1960 - 1980). As at 2017, the total number of federal universities have risen to 40.

National Universities Commission (NUC) and the Association of Vice Chancellors of Nigerian Universities (AVCNU, 2010) have argued that government policy must shift from mere numerical expansion to consolidation of existing structures and facilities in various universities. The report of Presidential Task Team on Education (2011) identified critical issues that affect learning achievement to include the seating classroom facilities, participatory decision making, teachers' professional support, free flow of information, team spirit, encouragement of teachers' creativity, adequacy in quantity and quality of teaching-learning facilities, continuous professional development of teachers and good classroom interactive practices.

The demand for university placement far outweighs its supply resulting into overstretching of facilities. Despite the yearly increase in enrolment, teaching and learning resources in universities seem not to have experienced commensurate improvement and expansion since their establishment. Thus, more attention needs to be given to the administration and maintenance of school plant and facilities. When a functional school building is provided, effective teaching and learning is guaranteed. Aside from the shortage of physical and material resources, available ones are not properly maintained. This is more pronounced in the public institutions due to poor maintenance culture of public utilities. One of the strategic goals of Nigerian universities is to draw maintenance plans for all teaching facilities and to keep to the plans. The extent to which these plans are adhered to will go a long way to determine the productivity of the universities.

Material resources in universities include laboratory equipment, office consumables, vehicles, teaching aids such as power point and loud speakers. The basic facilities needed in each university include well-stocked libraries, students' accommodation, lecture rooms, health care facilities, workshops and laboratories, administrative facilities, equipment and furniture. The NUC and Association of Vice-Chancellors of Nigerian Universities (AVCNU, 2010) posited teaching, research, management and technical staff require quality working tools like ICT/web access, laboratory, libraries office space facilities and opportunities for their service delivery.

University education produces human capital that is needed for the development of various sectors of the economy. Productivity of the university system is a function of the quality of teaching and learning environment. In the same vein, the quality of university education has great implications for the realisation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). The MDG entails eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, promoting gender equality and empowering women, reducing child mortality, improving maternal health and ensuring a sustainable environment.

Every organisation, including educational institutions, is involved in planning because of its cruciality to the attainment of organisational goals. Due implementation of plans is one of the reasons why an organisation is more successful than another. Universities in Nigeria had always made use of traditional modes of planning such as operational, annual, tactical and rolling plans before the mandatory strategic plan by Federal Government (NUC, 2005). The operational plan specifies the role of each unit and department in executing the mission statement of the organisation with the ultimate aim of achieving the tactical and strategic plans of the organisation. Operational plan is a short-term plan which is less than a year duration. It states quantifiable and measurable objectives of individual units. Annual plans specify detailed activities aimed at achieving a university's objectives for a period of one year.

The tactical plan sets short-term activities and stipulates the human, financial and material resources that a unit or department needs to carry out in order to achieve the objectives of the strategic plan for a period of one to three years. The rolling plans are long-term plans that cover more than five years.

Strategic planning is the process of making decisions on how to use available resources to take advantage of various opportunities in the face of threats and challenges to the organisational goals (Modebelu and Anebi, 2012). The draft manual of the NUC (2003) defines strategic planning as a "coordinated and systematic process aimed at providing an over-all direction for an organisation for the purpose of optimising its potentials". The strategic plans of universities usually cover critical areas such as strategic goals, activities, responsible officers and bodies, estimated cost and time limit. For instance, the critical areas covered in the strategic plans of the universities comprised such issues and areas of need as: library and documentation, academic matters, environmental and physical development, financial resources, internal audit, information technology, student matters, human resources, security and safety.

Generally, the plans include producing relevant highly skilled manpower relevant to the needs of the society, encouraging research and academic excellence among staff and students, improving the quality of teaching, resources and learning processes. According to Locke and Latham (1990), attainment of organisational goals is guaranteed as long as there is adequate staffing, regular dissemination of information, staff commitment, proactive leadership and availability of required material resources.

Modebelu and Anebi (2012) identified the challenges experienced by Nigerian universities to include inadequacy in quality and quantity of academic staff and facilities, inadequate funding, poor teaching and learning environment, inadequate curriculum, obsolete equipment, strikes and poor research culture. Ejiogu and Sule (2012) enumerated critical issues affecting university education in Nigeria even after 65 years of its existence to include, inadequate funding, inadequate access to university education by qualified applicants; brain drain, unstable academic calendar (most especially in the public institutions) and liberalisation of university ownership. These issues are currently driving the managers of public universities in Nigeria to critically examine the way they handle their operational strategies, and the growing needs to provide quality human resources for the labour market. Strategic plan is, therefore, employed to make choices that will result in efficient use of human and material resources.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Strategic plan had been argued to enhance performance of academic and non-academic institutions. It was as a result of the strong belief in this, that Federal Government in 2005 mandated all universities to have a periodic strategic plans. As population continued to grow, the number of admission seekers into the universities began to rise annually. Government has tried to address the challenge of inadequate absorption capacity of the universities through deregulation of university education in Nigeria since 1999, with the establishment of Babcock University, Ilishan-Remo; Madonna University, Okija; and Igbinedion University, Okada. However, the total enrolment in private universities is still insignificant.

For instance, the numbers of federal, state and private universities were 40, 46 and 74 respectively in 2017 (NUC Bulletin, 2017). Out of 862,291 enrolled in all Nigerian universities in 2013, private universities only accounted for 6.0%. In 2017, enrolment figures in all the private universities were only 5.2% of total enrolment (JAMB, 2018). This shows that heavy burden is still on the government to provide resources for increased productivity of the universities.

The report of Federal Ministry of Education (2006) scored tertiary education in Nigeria 20% each in academic achievement, quality of curriculum, faculty quality and supply. This performance has great implication for the realisation of Millennium Development Goals. This is because the quality of university output is significant to this vision. In the light of challenges facing the education industry which include shortage of manpower, underfunding and inadequate access to university education, the use of strategic planning as a management tool has therefore become expedient in addressing challenges of higher education in Nigeria. Some of the challenges of universities are ageing infrastructure, laboratories, library and physical facilities; bloated student population, poor maintenance culture and general apathy among staff. Okebukola (2015) and Babalola (2009) have identified decayed infrastructure as one of the factors affecting university output negatively. However, whether the decay was as result of poor maintenance or due to obsolescence was not stated.

Many scholars (Akinyele and Fasogbon, 2010; Owuama and Onyeike, 2012; Oyedijo 2012; Owolabi and Makinde 2012) have argued that strategic plans enhanced organisational performance. However, the extent to which implementing strategic plans affect progression or transition rates of students have not been empirically established. Thus, this study attempted to fill this gap by examining the extent its impact on the productivity of the university.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine implementation of strategic plans as regards maintenance of teaching and learning facilities and evaluate the productivity of the universities.

Specifically, this study set out to:

1. determine the factors influencing maintenance of teaching and learning facilities in public universities and
2. evaluate how implementation of strategic plans have impacted on university productivity in terms of progression rates of full-time students at the undergraduate level

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

A descriptive research design was employed for the study. The analysis was carried out based on data gathered without any manipulation of the variables of the study (progression rates and facility maintenance). It was suitable for this study, because perception of participants on maintenance of facilities was elicited.

2.2 Sample and Sampling technique

The population of the study consisted of all federal universities in Nigeria. Stratified random sampling technique was used to select one university each from four of the six geo-political zones in the country.

The federal universities in Nigeria were classified into geo-political zones. The oldest university in each of the four selected geo-political zones was chosen. These universities were believed to have established structures as a result of their long years of existence and operations. The sampled universities were University of Ilorin (North Central), University of Nigeria, Nsukka (South East), University of Benin (South South) and University of Lagos (South West). Even though University of Ilorin and University of Jos were both founded in 1970 and located in the North Central, the researcher chose University of Ilorin due to the relative peace prevalent in the area as at the time of this study.

2.3 Research Instruments

The first instrument used was titled '*Maintenance of Teaching and Learning Facilities Questionnaire*' (MTLFDQ) to elicit information on factors that influenced facility maintenance. This instrument was designed for the Technicians. The second instrument used was structured interview schedule.

2.4 Procedure

The researcher and two trained postgraduate students from each of the universities visited administered the questionnaires in 2016. The training was only for an hour on the first day of the visit to the universities. Five days were spent in each of the universities to administer the questionnaires. Two hundred and twenty one (221) copies of MTLFDQ questionnaire were administered and returned by the technicians. Three Heads or representatives of Sections at each of the Maintenance Units were interviewed. Thus, 12 sectional heads and 221 technicians from Maintenance Units, constituted the sample for this study. The study also used enrolment statistics collected from the Academic Planning Offices of the universities to elicit information on rates of academic progression in undergraduates programmes between 2001/2002 and 2014/2015 academic sessions.

Some Faculties /Colleges were not available in some institutions while two faculties were merged as one in some institutions. For example, UNILAG has neither College of Veterinary Medicine nor College of Agriculture, while UNIBEN and UNILORIN merged Faculties of Business Administration and Social Sciences as one. Only the faculties that were available in all the four chosen universities were considered. Thus, Faculties of Agriculture and Veterinary medicine were not included in the study. Even though formulation of strategic plans by universities became mandatory in 2005, some universities had plans prior to this period. The researcher also deemed it necessary to evaluate universities' performance for a period of 15years; 5 (five) years before and 10 years after the mandatory strategic plan in order to observe the trend. This study adopted document analyses of Enrolment Statistics from the Academic Planning Offices of the sampled universities

3. RESULT OF FINDINGS

Data for answering the research questions were answered using mean, standard deviation and percentages.

Research Question 1

What are the perceived factors that impact on the maintenance of teaching and learning facilities?

Table 1: Factors that Influence Maintenance of Teaching and Learning Facilities in the Sampled Universities in Nigeria as Perceived by the Technicians

S/N	Items	N=221	
		Mean	SD
1	My department has a routine maintenance plan for all facilities.	2.91	0.811
2	My boss rarely pays attention to the challenges I face in the discharge of my duties.	2.11	0.623
3	There is a quick response to repairs of gadgets.	2.23	0.870
4	I receive training on new equipment before installation/commissioning.	2.48	0.636
5	Reports on facilities are prepared regularly.	2.61	0.709
6	The routine maintenance plan is strictly adhered to.	2.17	0.970
7	The tools and equipment I work with are too old.	2.62	0.701
8	I do overtime to get the job done even if I am not paid for it.	2.46	0.897
9	I am not happy when I am asked to do a job different from the usual one.	2.50	0.856
10	Spare parts are readily available for quick fixes, repairs and replacements.	2.30	0.764
11	My boss appreciated me when I perform my job as expected.	2.83	0.819
12	My interest in this job has reduced.	2.62	0.943
13	Records of consumables, tools and technical materials are kept regularly.	2.66	0.809
14	My boss reposes much confidence in me in the discharge of my duties.	2.47	1.002
15	There is immediate enquiry when maintenance schedule is not followed.	2.42	0.768
16	Members of staff receive awards and prizes for excellent performance.	2.43	0.832
17	My boss does not consider the suggestions of the subordinates.	2.38	0.904
18	There is adequate provision for needed materials to perform my tasks.	2.54	0.861
19	Promotion in this institution is strictly based on merit.	2.76	0.775
20	We work as a team in my department.	3.10	0.778
21	Reports on damaged facilities are well-coordinated.	2.64	0.748
22	I am always willing to seek help on the job from senior colleagues.	2.94	0.658
23	There is improvement in facilities maintenance now than before.	2.10	0.805
24	The overtime allowance I receive is motivating.	2.19	0.765

Source: Field Work (2016)

Criterion Mean = 2.5

Table 1 shows the perceptions of the technicians on factors that impact maintenance of teaching and learning facilities in the sampled universities. Table 1 also shows the factors that impact on maintenance of teaching and learning facilities as perceived by the technicians. It shows most of the technicians agreed that Maintenance Units had routine maintenance plans with a mean score of 2.92. There were regular reports on equipment and facilities (2.61) and proper records on consumables were kept regularly (2.66). A mean of 2.61 shows that reports on facilities were prepared regularly.

Coordinated reports on damaged facilities had a mean score of 2.64. Promotion based on merit was confirmed by most of the technicians with a mean score of 2.76.

It also shows that few technicians agreed that their bosses did not pay attention to the challenges they encountered on the job with a mean score of 2.11. They disagreed on the other hand, that their bosses reposed much confidence in them. This was shown with a mean score of 2.47. The perceptions of technicians of factors that hindered maintenance of teaching and learning facilities shows the mean scores for quick responses to repairs as 2.23, strict adherence to routine maintenance plan (2.17) and availability of spares (2.30).

Table 1 equally shows a mean score of 2.42 on immediate enquiry when maintenance schedule was not followed. The mean score of participants that agreed to receiving training on new equipment before installation or commissioning was 2.48. The technicians' opinion about receiving awards for excellent performance had a mean score of 2.43. The overtime allowance received was also perceived by most of the technicians as not motivating (mean of 2.19). These values are less than the mean value of 2.50. This implies that these factors hinder implementation of plans in the area of maintenance of facilities. The job enthusiasm of technicians had also reduced as the mean score was 2.62. This was equally coupled with their unwillingness to do overtime jobs as occasions demanded if no remuneration was attached. The high mean score of 2.62 for obsolescence of tools and equipment used by the technicians signifies that maintenance of teaching and learning facilities was hindered by lack of modern tools.

Research Question 2

What is the progression rate of full-time students in the undergraduate programmes in the sampled universities between 2001/2002 and 2014/2015 academic sessions?

Faleti (2018) observed that the 200 Level enrolment figure in 2001/2002 for Faculty of Arts was 1,398 while the refined cohort 400 Level enrolment for 2003/3004 academic session was 1,379 representing 98.6% of the 200 Level enrolment. For Business and Social Sciences, the 200 Level enrolment figure was 6,370 and 400 Level enrolment was 3,988 representing 62.6% of the 400 Level enrolment of refined cohort for 2001/2002 academic session. For Education and Sciences, the 200 Level enrolment was 2,777 and 3,853 while the 400 Level enrolment was 1,323 and 4,308 respectively. This represents 47.6% for Education and 111.8% for the Sciences. For Faculties of Engineering and Environmental Sciences, Law and Pharmacy, the 200 Level enrolment figures for 2001/2002 academic session were 2098, 539 and 488 while the 400 level enrolment refined cohort for 2004/2005 academic session stood at 1,032; 319 and 302 respectively. The percentages of 400 Level enrolment to 200 Level enrolment stood at 49.2% for Engineering and Environmental Science, 59.2% for Law and 61.9% for Pharmacy. College of Medicine recorded 101.2% during this session.

The total 200 Level enrolment figure for Faculty of Arts between 2001/2002 and 2014/2015 academic sessions was 26,126; while the total 400 Level enrolment figure stood at 27,719 representing 106.1%. The percentages of 400 Level enrolment figures to 200 Level enrolment figures for these academic sessions were 107.4%, 101.2%, 113.2%, 87.0%, 149.0%, 99.8% and 111.0% for Arts, Business and Social Sciences, Education, Sciences, Engineering and Environmental Sciences, Law, Pharmacy and Medicine respectively. The average value of percentage of 400 level enrolments to 200 level enrolment between 2001/2002 and 2014/2015 academic session stood at 106.7%. This means that universities in Nigeria recorded high progressions rates in the full-time undergraduate programmes within this period.

Table 2 also show that Business and Social Sciences had high spill-over rates of 145.3%, 177.2% and 150.6% in 2005/2006, 2007/2008 and 2008/2009 academic sessions respectively. Engineering and Environmental Sciences, recorded low progression rates of 49.2%, 71.9%, 68.1%, 63.8% and 76.0% in 2004/2005, 2005/2006, 2006/2007 2011/2012 and 2012/2013 academic sessions respectively. For 2006/2007, 2007/2008 2013/2014 and 2014/2015 academic sessions, Faculty of Law recorded high spill-over rates of 207.2%, 253.4%, 257.9% and 156.6% respectively. Thus, the level of productivity on a general note with regard to progression rates of the undergraduate students in the sampled universities for these sessions was high as most of the faculties did fair well. Hence, the study has shown that strategic plan implementation had improved the productivity of the institutions as evidenced by the progression rates within the period of study.

4. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The study showed through the interview conducted with some of the Heads of Sections in the Maintenance Units that administrative bottlenecks and bureaucratic procedures slowed down the pace at which jobs were executed. This was coupled with the fact that the Maintenance Units suffered shortages of staff which made them to out-source for staff as occasions demanded. Although new tools and equipment were available for technicians to execute tasks, the spare parts for quick fixes and repairs were not readily available. This reduced the rate of response to reported cases of damages in various offices, classrooms and laboratories.

This connotes that Maintenance Units made adequate provision for new tools and equipment but for spare parts, it seemed that the Units' allocations for spare parts were not adequate or the rate at which spare parts were needed was much more than envisaged. The Maintenance Units of universities were also faced with the problems of shortage of funds to replace obsolete equipment. Thus, maintenance of facilities had not improved significantly over the years. These findings partly agree with the findings of Babatope (2010) that financial support to the universities was not adequate which made provision of adequate facilities a great challenge to Nigerian universities.

The response of technicians showed that they were not motivated as there were no rewards for excellent performance. The poor response to damaged facilities was due to lack of spare parts; and lack of modern tools and equipment to work with, even though there were coordinated reports of machineries on a regular basis. Thus, the routine maintenance plans could not be adhered to. There was also the challenge of reduced enthusiasm in the job. This was as a result of overtime allowance which was not motivating. Asides, few technicians admitted they received training on new equipment before installation. There was no doubt that poor maintenance of facilities would hamper service delivery of staff.

One major constraint to successful implementation of plans identified by the participants was funding. This was reflected in the responses that routine maintenance of facilities were not carried out regularly, spares for quick fixes were not readily available, number of staff sponsored for conferences and further studies was insignificant. The participants also opined that their bosses hardly pay attention to challenges they experienced in discharging their responsibilities. This too may not be unconnected with scarcity of funds to carry out some tasks in the respective units and departments.

As regard productivity of the universities in terms of progression rates, the study showed that Faculties of Arts, Business and Social Sciences, Education, Sciences, Engineering and Environmental Sciences, Pharmacy and Medicine fared significantly well in the progression rates 123.1%, 120.5%, 119.2%, 107.1%, 100.1%, 97.8%, 121.0% and 118.2% respectively by 2014/2015 academic session, while Faculty of Law recorded high spillover rates of 156.6%. Shortage of academic staff recorded in Business and Social Sciences in 2005/2006, 2007/2008 and 2008/2009 academic sessions was reflected in the progressions rates of students during this period. The LSR was 48, 46 and 49 instead of the recommended 30 by the NUC. Similar experience was recorded in Engineering and Environmental Sciences as well. The progression rates were low with the values of 49.2%, 71.9%, 68.1%, 63.8% and 76.0% recorded in 2004/2005, 2005/2006, 2006/2007, 2011/2012 and 2012/2013 academic sessions respectively. The Faculty suffered inadequate lecturers during this period and the observed LSR ranged between 36 and 39 instead of the Benchmark Minimum Academic Standard given as 15.

The findings of this study confirms that strategic plan implementation enhances university productivity as earlier reported in previous studies of Faleti (2018), Abdul Kareem, Akinnubi and Oyeniran (2012), Owolabi and Makinde (2012) and Oyedijo (2012). They found that the high level of implementation reduced the wastage rate. This implies that institutional leaders should intensify their efforts in ensuring that implementation is according to the dictates of the strategic plans for greater results. The reasons for high progression rates included good organisational bureaucratic structure in terms of how academic records of students are handled, the devotion of students to studies, class attendance, staff commitment, students' access to bursaries, awards and scholarships.

The problem of high spill-over rate has implications for all education stakeholders, as it increases the social and household cost on education. Oyetakin and Odunayo (2013) carried out a study on the analysis of the cost of wastages in Nigerian public universities and found that the money spent on the wastages could have been used in the provision of additional buildings, furniture, classrooms, books and so on. Thus, from the foregoing, it can be deduced from this study that universities in Nigeria, had complied to plan for providing adequate lecturers and ensuring productivity in terms of high progression rates of full-time undergraduates to a large extent.

5. CONCLUSION

The study identified the factors that enhanced or hindered effective maintenance of facilities in universities. The study showed that the routine maintenance plans in Nigerian universities were hindered by inadequate funding, lack of training on new equipment, lack of recognition for excellent performance, use of obsolete tools, inadequate supply of technical manpower and reduced morale amongst staff. Poor response to reported cases of damages to facilities had also been attributed to bureaucratic routines.

The findings of the study also showed that spill-over and repetition rates for students in some of the faculties in the Nigerian universities were very high about a decade ago. However, there had been a significant improvement now. High progression rates of enrolment in full-time undergraduate programmes had been recorded in Nigerian universities. Thus, the implementation of strategic plans had enhanced productivity of the universities. It was only in Faculty of Engineering and Sciences that inadequate staffing and high spill-over rates were recorded.

The following recommendations were made based on the findings of this study:

- 1) The delays in getting approval for the repair works and execution of jobs should be minimised. This will consequently enhance a sustainable maintenance culture.
- 2) more attention should be given to regular supply of spare parts.
- 3) Efforts should be intensified to employ more staff and boost their morale.
- 4) lecturing job should be made more attractive so as to woo more graduates in Engineering and Sciences to take care of staff deficit in these fields.

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