

Good work ethics and service delivery in public universities in the south-south region of Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The Nigerian University administration is a collection of specialized academic faculties established by law, financed by private and public funds, and staffed by professionals in various disciplines for the purpose of achieving their overall goal (teaching, research, and community service) of service delivery. Since good work ethics represents a critical determinant of effectiveness and productivity vis-à-vis service delivery in all formal organizations, this paper utilizes the “person-situation” theoretical model to assess the level of service delivery in selected public universities in the South-south geo-political region of Nigeria. The present investigation adopted the survey research design. Six hundred and sixty (660) academic and non-academic staff and three hundred (300) students were purposively and randomly sampled respectively. The instrument used for data collection was titled: “good work ethics and service delivery questionnaire”. Data was analyzed using population t-test, multiple regression and Pearson product moment correlation. The study revealed that almost all the public universities under consideration have witnessed poor service delivery in terms of delay in the release of students’ results, delay in the preparation of transcript, failure to adhere to time-tables (crash programme) – leading to frustration by students. The overall consequences of this have been the poor rating of these universities. It was recommended among other things that effort should be made to address the poor work ethics (in terms of initiative, dedication, high standard of responsibility, loyalty, accountability, and self-discipline) among staff and students in the selected universities with a view to strengthening its performance index and therefore service delivery.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Work, whether paid or unpaid connotes the carrying out of tasks requiring the expenditure of mental and physical effort, which has as its objectives the production of goods and services that cater to human needs (Gidens, 2009). However, how a given employee perceive the above conception depends on his/her orientation to work. That is, the aspirations and goals which workers hope to fulfill in their place of work. These aspirations and goals are assured to have evolved from needs created by situational factors within the work and non work spheres of life (Aluko, 2008). Experience have shown that attitude to work which moderate such situational variables is critical in determining the effectiveness or otherwise of an organization. Okoh (2003) see attitude as the feeling, habits and beliefs that affect the individuals' behaviour to work. Some beliefs, habits, feelings and motives are supportive of positive work ethics while others do not.

The work attitude affects the way a worker relates to, conceives and views his job. It shows how committed, dedicated, hard working and performing a worker is in relation to the objective of the organization. Implying from the above therefore, workers imbued with positive work ethics would be seen to be highly committed, dedicated and hardworking leading to the achievement of the vision and mission of their respective organization. The reverse could also be the case.

In more general terms, work ethics involve being personally accountable and responsible for the work that one does or how one feel about the job he/she does. If one may ask, with particular reference to the Nigeria public universities, are the workers accountable and responsible for the work that they do? How do they generally feel about their work? Have they been able to live up their expectations in terms of satisfying the vision and mission of their institution vis-à-vis service delivery? Questions such as these should provoke our imagination and begging for answers.

The university administration (especially public universities) have made headlines in recent times of its inability to render specific services to its immediate beneficiaries. Like Alubo (2014) puts it, "Nigeria's Tertiary Educational Institutions (TEIs) have hugged the headlines at most continuously for the past two years, albeit for the wrong reasons". According to him, rather than any earthshaking piece of research or cutting edge discovery,

the reportage is replete with clashes between rival cults groups, campus prostitution.... There are also issues of admission racketeering, sometimes complete with business offices, and sorting as the trading in grades between lecturers and students is known (Alubo, 2014). These activities (Alubo, 2014) concluded put TEIs in bad light not just because of the malfeasance which they represent but more because their presence raises basic questions about the *raison d'être* of the TEIs.

What could definitely explain this bizarre situation in our public university system? Could it be that the workers in these institutions do not perceive work in a positive light or do not seem to derive self worth from their work? This paper therefore seeks to espouse the implication of this supposedly poor work ethics among university workers on their ability to achieve the tripartite mandate of teaching, research and community service. Most specifically, it is also intended to find out whether such perceived poor work ethics have any impact on the workers ability to render prescribed service to their major stakeholder (students) in term of prompt release of results/transcripts. Also the study seeks to evaluate the extent to which the Nigerian Public Universities adhere to official time table in terms of teaching and administration of examination. Finally, to find out if there exists a relationship between workers poor work ethics and the overall rating of Nigerian Public Universities.

1.1 Study area

The data reported here were obtained from a field survey on staff and students perception of work ethics and service delivery in Nigerian Public Universities. The survey was carried out in selected public universities in the south – south Geo-political Zone of Nigeria (SSGPZN). The SSGPZN comprised of six states including Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo and Rivers (Agba, Ikoh, Ushie and Bassey, 2010). SSGPZN has a total population of 21,014,655 (National Population Census, NPC, 2006) and occupies 85,303 square kilometers.

SSGPZN forms significant part of the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria and is one of the commercial nerves of the country, providing over 90 percent of the Nations Foreign earning (Ushie, Agba & Plang, 2015). The Zone is home to a number of public university (State and Federal) with a huge workforce, a number of those who are working in these public universities earn income that Agba and Ushie (2013) describes as starvation wages. This largely explains the supposedly poor work attitude among workers in these institutions with concomitant effect on service delivery.

Those owned by the Federal Government of Nigeria Include:

- (i.) University of Calabar, Calabar, Cross River State.
- (ii.) University of Uyo, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State.
- (iii.) University of Port Harcourt, Port Harcourt, Rivers State.
- (iv.) Federal University of Petroleum Resources, Effurun, Delta State.
- (v.) Federal University, Otuoke, Bayelsa State.

The ones' run solely by State Government in the region, however with subvention from the Federal Government;

- (i.) Cross River University of Technology, Calabar, Cross River State.
- (ii.) Akwa Ibom State University.
- (iii.) Delta State University, Abraka.
- (iv.) River State University of Science and Technology
- (v.) Niger Delta University, Bayelsa State. Thus, the sample for the study is drawn from the huge population of staff and students in six of these universities to access their perception of work ethics and service delivery in these public universities.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

A review of relevant literature on good work ethics and service delivery in the Nigeria University System will serve as a usual background and theoretical perspective to this study. Reeves (2015) maintained that defining the specifics of good work ethics is essentially a subjective practice, but employers usually agree as to the characteristics of “good” work ethics looked for in their employees. He defined personal ethics as moral objectives or values that you believe in and practice as part of your life’s philosophy (Reeves, 2015). When it comes to work, your ethics also encompass your overall attitude about work. Reeves sees good work ethics as a person who shows up on time with the willingness to do what it takes to get the job done without complain (Reeves, 2015). He presented some characteristics of “good” work ethics to include: honesty, personal integrity, responsibility, optimism, self-motivation and being a team player, commenting on personal integrity, Reeves (2015) say that “a person with personal integrity is trustworthy”. He or she carries through with what he/she promises. For instance, if he or she cannot meet a deadline because of other demands that arise, he/she communicates this immediately to his or her supervisor. Personal integrity

also means that you don't blame someone else or make excuses for what you didn't do or mistakes you have made.

Also Schreiner (2015) contended that “people who possess a strong work ethic embody certain principles that guide their work behavior, leading them to produce high-quality work consistently and without the prodding that some individuals require to stay on track”. Five of such principles advanced by him include: reliability, dedication, productivity, cooperation and character (Schreiner, 2015). According to Schreiner, (2015) reliability goes hand in hand with a good work ethic. For instance, if individuals with a good work ethic say they are going to attend a work function or arrive at a certain time, they do, as they value punctuality. Individuals with a strong work ethic often want to appear dependable, showing their employers that they are workers to whom they can turn. Because of this, he said, “they put effort into portraying and proving this dependability by being reliable and performing consistently (Schreiner, 2015).

In the view of Jenkins (2015) “a strong work ethic is vital to a company achieving its goals”. According to him, certain factors come together to create a strong work ethic. These include: integrity, sense of responsibility, emphasis on quality, discipline and sense of teamwork. For instance Jenkins (2015) explained that an employee with a high sense of teamwork helps a team meet its goals and deliver quality work. These employees respect their peers and help where they can, making collaborations go smoother for the attainment of set goals.

Strengthening service delivery in the University Educational System is a key strategy to achieve its vision and mission as far as her obligation to the major stakeholders (students) is concerned. Currently, the literature pertaining to service delivery/quality in the higher education sector is significantly undeveloped (Beaumont, 2012). Traditionally, many researchers have focused their efforts on commercial services (Sultan and Wong, 2010). However, it is crystal clear that Nigerian public universities do not operate on “commercial services”, it has become increasingly apparent that institutions operating in higher education sector, previously not regarded as “profit making organizations”, are attempting to gain a competitive advantage over their competition (Oldfield and Bren, 2000). As a result, universities (especially public universities) must consider themselves as a “profit-making organization” that is operating in a competitive market place.

In the light of the current economic climate, funding cuts and potential future decreases in students' numbers, Universities must realize that they are business entities, competing for resources and students both in the local and international market (Paswan and Ganesh, 2009). This means that University should be continually looking for appropriate ways of gaining a competitive advantage. Accordingly, the higher education sector must strive to deliver a high quality of service and satisfy its students, who some may term 'participating customers', to achieve sustainability in a competitive service environment. Like Beaumont (2012) puts it, "universities can only be successful as long as their students are being offered something that they wish to buy, at a quality they feel is acceptable". The students here are seen as raw material. Therefore, the core activities are structured to process, sustain or change them to state that they become useful to the society. Are students really getting these services in our university system today? What could be responsible for students' inability to assess the required services?

There is no gain saying that Nigerian University System have in recent time faced series of challenges ranging from poor infrastructures (Okebukola, 2002), mass exodus of many brilliant lecturers (Akinnaso, 2012), inadequate funding and socio-political generated tensions (Olujuwon, 2004). Akinnaso (2012) maintained that it is not poor funding alone that has contributed to the present state of underachievement, but rather, the anti-intellectual stance of corrupt and valueless federal and state governments since the days of the military administration has also eroded ethical values and academic standards in the universities. Olujuwon (2004) does not see universities performing the role they were set for, According to him:

The tertiary institutions that are established to promote intellectual excellence, good virtues etc. have deviated...the majority of these institutions have misplaced their goals and allowed social, political factors of their environment to create crisis in their academic community (Olujuwon, 2004 p. 6).

A combination of these problems Akinnaso (2012) contended, "have led to the weakening of university administration; poor teaching and learning outcomes; diminishing research and consultancy traditions; and questionable service to the community".

Another dimension of the problem affecting service delivery in the university system is the poor or near absence of record keeping. This scenario in turn affects preparation and

release of results and transcripts. Alubo (2014) for instance decries the spite of poor record keeping in Tertiary Educational Institutions (TEIs) when he said; “in most TEIs records are poorly kept such that the issuance of academic transcript is a tug of war”. He lamented many instances in which students wait months and years for transcripts which may never be issued. The challenges according to him relate to the analogue system of records keeping, poor work attitude and muddled up filing system, (Alubo, 2014).

In the face of these challenges, one would like to find out whether the students or graduates of our universities are actually benefiting from a robust education and training programmes to prepare them for work and life. In fact, have the universities been able to achieve their tripartite mandate of teaching, research and community service? These and many more is what this research paper seeks to unravel.

2.1 Theoretical perspective

The theoretical framework adopted for this study is basically the person - situational perspective to explain workplace behaviour. Significant research endeavours on workplace ethics have focused on the long standing “person-situation” debate (Allport, 1937; Mischel, 1968 and Baker, Hunt and Andrews, 2006). Those who are inclined to the individual (person) difference perspective believe that one’s values, motives and traits determine ethical behavior. In the same vein, those who are inclined to the situational perspective maintain that the characteristics of the situation or organizational environment account for variances in ethical behavior. For instance study conducted by Stanley Milgram on obedience that used fake electric shocks to study how people react to being asked to cause harm to others (Milgram Experiment), found correlations of situations and behaviors to be around .40. Moreover survey studies that compare the effects of situational variables on behavior show that the correlation between situation and behavior are also around the .30-.40 range (Epstein and O’Brien, 1985).

What can be logically inferred from the above is that a combination of individual attitude which has to do with his feelings, habit and beliefs couple with the cultural background of the worker affects his ethical behavior. That is, the way and manner the worker in the Nigerian University System behaves is a function of a given situation. Also, the value system of the individual worker in relation to the organizational environment and job requirements can positively or negatively affect the individual’s behavior to work. For instance, if a worker in the Nigerian Public University System holds a negative orientation

about the university environment in which he/she work, it will most likely affects his/her job performance and therefore service delivery. In other words, work attitude affects the way and manner a worker relates to, conceives and view his/her job.

3 METHODOLOGY

Survey design was adopted for this study; it was opted for because it is cheap as compared to other research design. It allows for objectivity and the sampling of opinions for workers. It allows for rational and objective establishment of relationships among variables. Agba et al (2010) observe that survey design samples allows for proper elucidation of respondents feelings, attitude and opinions over a given phenomenon. The study gathered information from purposively selected respondents from public universities in the Zone. Participants were selected from among the staff and students in six of the public universities with homogenous characteristics. Purposive method was used to select 660 staff and 300 students respectively.

Data was elicited from respondents using structured questionnaire, different questionnaire was used for staff (teaching and non-teaching) and students, the questionnaire was divided into two sections. Section A elicited the demographic data of respondents while Section B was used to collect data on workers perception of work ethics and service delivery in Nigeria Public Universities. Cronbach alpha reliability procedure was used in establishing the reliability of each of the sub-scale in the two instruments. Cronbach alpha reliability is one of the methods of measuring internal consistency. It depicts the degree to which the items in the instrument are internally consistent in measuring the variables of interest. The derived values ranged from .59 to .825. The Data elicited from respondents were coded for various response options as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Coding of Variables

Response Option	Positive	Negative
Strongly agree (SA)	4	1
Agree (A)	3	2
Disagree (D)	2	2
Strongly disagree (SD)	1	4

Source: Kerlinger and Lee (2000)

As noted in Table 1, Positive response to a positive question is ranked highest (4), that is, for strongly agree (SD). While negative response to negative answer received the highest score of four (4) for strongly disagree. Other score follows the same sequence

3.1 Research hypothesis

The following hypotheses were derived from the afore mentioned objectives of the study.

1. Work ethics among workers in public university is not significantly high
2. There is no significant relationship between workers work ethics and the delivery of service in terms of prompt release of students results/transcripts in Public Universities.
3. Adhering to time table does not significantly relates to work ethics of workers in public universities.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Hypothesis one

Work ethics among workers in public university is not significantly high. There is only one variable in this hypothesis, therefor population t-test was employed to test this hypothesis at $p < .05$, the result is presented in table 2.

Table 2: Population t-test of Work ethics among workers

Variable	N	Df	Mean	SD	t-value	Sig.
Sample mean	660	659	26.97	2.92		
					180.918	.000
Population mean			25.00			

Population mean is calculated thus $(4+3+2+1) \times 10 / 4 = 25.00$

Source: Data from fieldwork

The result presented in Table 2 is to assess Work ethics among workers. The sample mean of 26.97 is greater than the population mean of 25.00 at $p < .05$; $df = 659$. By this result the null hypothesis is rejected while the alternate hypothesis is upheld. It can be inferred that workers in public universities work ethics is statistically significantly high. This result collaborate Jenkins (2015) who asserted that a strong work ethic is vital to a company achieving its goals. According to him, certain factors come together to create a strong work ethic. These include: integrity, sense of responsibility, emphasis on quality, discipline and sense of teamwork, and all these and many more is exhibited by staff (teaching and non-teaching) in the universities sampled.

Hypothesis two

There is no significant relationship between staff work ethics (integrity, initiative, responsibility and self-motivation) and service delivery in terms of prompt release of students' results/transcripts in Public Universities. Two variables were identified here, work ethics which is the independent variable and service delivery as the dependent variable. The result is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Multiple Regression of characteristics of good work ethics and service delivery

<i>Model</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>R²</i>	<i>Adj. R²</i>	<i>Std Error of the Estimate</i>	
1	-.555	.308	.261	9.258	
	Unstandardized coefficient		Standardized coefficient		
Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.
(constant)	55.449	20.514		2.703	.009
Integrity	1.487	.780	.227	2.100	.039
Responsibility	.192	.486	.044	.394	.694
Initiative	.972	.900	.240	1.344	.186
Self-motivation	1.733	.670	.273	2.587	.012
Service delivery	.247	.107	.239	2.298	.025

Source: Data from fieldwork

The result in table 3 shows that the combination of all the predictor variables (integrity, initiative, responsibility and self-motivation) are jointly related to the predicted variable (Service delivery), the correlation is positive and moderate ($R = .555$). More importantly, they accounted for 26.1% of the variance in Service delivery.

The regression co-efficient shows that three independent variables out of four independents variables i.e. integrity ($\beta = .227$, $t = 2.100$, $p < .05$), Self-motivation ($\beta = .273$, $t = 2.587$, $p < .05$) and Initiative ($\beta = .239$, $t = 2.295$, $p < .05$) were most influential independent variables in the prediction of Service delivery, because they were statistically significant. Corollary to this table is that Responsibility ($\beta = .044$, $t = .394$, $p > .05$) is not influential in the prediction of Service delivery.

The finding is in agreement with Reeves, (2015) who posited that when it comes to work, your ethics also encompass your overall attitude about work. Reeves sees good work

ethics as a person who shows up on time with the willingness to do what it takes to get the job done without complain. He presented some characteristics of “good” work ethics to include: honesty, personal integrity, responsibility, optimism, self-motivation and being a team player. Also with regards to prompt release of result the study also confirms Alubo (2014) who reported the spite of poor record keeping in Tertiary Educational Institutions (TEIs) when he said; “in more TEIs records are poorly kept such that the issuance of academic transcript is a tug of war”. He lamented many instances in which students wait months and years for transcripts which may never be issued. The challenges according to him relate to the analogue system of records keeping, poor work attitude and muddled up filling system. This to a large extent is responsible for the poor service delivery witnessed in most of the public universities.

Hypothesis three

Adhering to time table does not significantly affect service delivery among workers in public universities. Two variables were identified here. Staff adhering to time table which is the independent variable and service delivery as the dependent variable. The result is presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Pearson product moment correlation of staff adhering to time table and service delivery

Variables	N	Mean	SD	r-value	Sig.
Staff adhering to time table	960	14.73	2.52		
				-0.693	.000
Service delivery	960	24.50	3.80		

*significant at $P < .05$; critical r-value = 0.138; df = 958.

Source: Data from fieldwork

Pearson product moment correlation analysis was employed to investigate the relationship between staff adhering to time table and service delivery. As presented in Table 3 the calculated r-value of -0.693 is greater than the critical r-value of 0.138 with 958 degree of freedom, this result therefore implies that, the null hypothesis is rejected. It therefore mean that staff adhering to time table statistically significantly affects service delivery among workers in public universities. The negative correlation value shows that while one variable is increasing (not adhering to time table) the other variable is decreasing (service delivery). The finding lends credence to Schreiner, (2015) assertion that reliability goes hand in hand with a good work ethic. For instance, if individuals with a good work ethic say they are going to attend a work function or arrive at a certain time, they do, as they value punctuality. Individuals with a strong work ethic often want to appear dependable, showing their

employers that they are workers to whom they can turn. Because of this, he said, “they put effort into portraying... and proving...this dependability by being reliable and performing consistently. A cursory look at the work environment in our public universities depicts a very poor work ethics among staff in these institutions. For instance, both teaching and non-teaching staff (including management) are often used to observing what is called “African Time” in carrying out their daily work assignment with concomitant negative implication on their overall performance and therefore service delivery.

5 CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that good work ethics can be achieved only with dedicated and committed leadership. The public universities in Nigeria are faced with series of challenges ranging from poor infrastructures, mass exodus of many brilliant lecturers, inadequate funding and socio-political generated tensions, anti-intellectual stance of corrupt and valueless federal and state governments among others has eroded ethical values and academic standards in the universities. It is therefore suggested that federal institutions must put in place mechanism that encourages good work ethics. Leadership in Nigeria public university should be people-centered. This is because human are central in the university system and the focus is on service rather than product and therefore the students should be seen as raw materials. In addition staff should be encourage to imbue the culture of creative thinking (initiative) and learn to speak with one voice. Further more in other to promote best practices management should encourage and motivate staff to fully realize their potentials and contribute positively to service delivery in our public universities. Finally, there should be flexible service delivery so as to help universities deliver and sustain transformational change and improvement, including real efficiency savings as well as other measurable strategic and educational value through the streamlined flexible provision of administrative and students services.

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