

Horizontal Occupational Mobility among Non-Teaching University Administrators in Southern Nigeria: A Consideration of Systemic Challenges in Effective Management of the Process

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Abstract: Many non-teaching university administrators change their occupations of origin after acquiring relevant additional skills, knowledge and experience in their administrative jobs. This study examined the challenges university Registries in Southern Nigeria face in the processes of horizontal occupational mobility among non-teaching university administrators. The study adopted Work Adjustment and General Systems Theories as theoretical framework. The research type is ex-post facto and cross-sectional survey research design was adopted to study a cross-section of a population of 5,645 university employees. Six sample States were selected through systematic sampling technique while the sample universities and respondents were selected through cluster, stratified and purposive sampling techniques. The sample size of 343 respondents was determined through data saturation method. In-depth Interview and Focus Group Discussion instruments were utilized to gather data while QSR NVivo software was adopted for deductive thematic analysis of the data. The study found that certain subjective factors which have a detrimental link with the performance of university Registries influence the operations of horizontal occupational mobility. The study concluded that factors such as godfatherism, organizational politics, favouritism, political patronage, inadequate provision for effective policy framework, suitable replacements, in-service training and incentives, poor conditions of service, glaring staff incompetency, an evident gap in the degree of recognition accorded the academic and administrative cadres and high prevalence of occupational mobility influence the processes. It is recommended that horizontal occupational mobility among non-teaching university administrators should be guided by effective policy framework and attention given to skill vacuum, staff replacement and re-training and control for subjective elements.

Keywords: Horizontal Occupational Mobility, Non-teaching University Administrators

Introduction

The university system is made up of two dominant professional divisions known as the academic and non-teaching cadres with specific roles and responsibilities (Ladipo, 2015). The two cadres collaborate in order to achieve organizational goals according to Ladipo. The non-teaching staff render designated administrative services while the academic staff basically teach students and conduct researches (Kivisto & Pekkola, 2017). However, universities have provision for lecturers to perform administrative services when they head some units, departments, faculties, or serve at the management level on the basis of tenure (Asagwara, 2017). These administrative services ensure that all activities, work processes and roles in the various units are well coordinated and performed in a satisfactory manner (Ladipo, 2015).

Organizations all over the world are interested in engaging and elevating candidates who are more skilled and knowledgeable (Global Agenda Council on Employment, 2014). Tien (2016) explained that when organizations demand for higher skills, specific educational qualifications and relevant knowledge in a particular occupation as conditions for employment or career advancement, it is on the basis that those who possess such credentials are professionals and such workers are more productive. The link between skill, knowledge and the capacity of a worker to perform his/her job well was highlighted by Harms (2011) and Ogunleye, Owolabi, Sanyaolu, and Lawal (2017) who stated that knowledge is germane to productivity.

Globally reports revealed that the acquisition of additional skills, education and knowledge brings about a change in an occupational and employees who are prone to quit their original occupations willingly are those who are more educated and skilled (Sicherman & Galor, 1990; Howes & Goodman-Delahunty, 2015). Such workers are more interested in getting better career chances and salaries in other jobs (Tien, 2016). The consequences of occupational mobility are numerous including the good and the bad. Findings from global studies showed that when there is prevalence of job switching in an organization, more productive workers quit their occupations while the less productive ones do not move out (Abbasi & Hollman, 2000; Nyaga, 2015).

It is also argued that organizations eventually get rid of the less productive workers who do not meet the requirements of the job they perform when such workers quit their occupations freely and organizations benefit from more suitably qualified and highly skilled replacements (Glebbeck & Bax, 2002; Brown, Garino & Martin, 2007; Zorlu, 2016). Other consequences include high turnover rate and escalating expenditure on production (Izamoje, 2011; Akinyomi, 2016), loss of wages and job-specific competences (Vavrinova & Krckova, 2015; Hawkins & Mustre-del Rio, 2017; Kambourov, Manovskii & Plesca, 2020).

Historically, the frequency of job switching fluctuates over time. Although, occupational mobility may not necessarily present as a change of organization as much as was obtained in the past, but the Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training (2012) stated that presently, occupational mobility still happens frequently, especially when employees engage in intra-organizational occupational mobility.

Universities in Nigeria encourage interested employees to acquire higher skills, educational credentials and have provisions for the recognition of such qualifications. It has been observed that a significant number of non-teaching university administrators undertake further studies (Jaja, 2013; Ladipo, 2015) with desire to become more knowledgeable and skilled to enable them move up the occupational ladder and perform better. These categories of administrators include those in the technical, clerical, secretarial, executive and career administrative sub-cadres of the university formally identified as the Registry staff.

Jaja (2013) however reported that after acquiring relevant additional capabilities and more experience in their respective administrative jobs, such employees change their occupations of origin horizontally through an internal job conversion process and become lecturers. Those who convert to other occupations within organizations are predominantly more experienced, educated and well trained in their various occupations of origin (Yang & Bidwell, 2017).

Statement of the Problem

In America, studies like DiPrete (1987) investigated the operations of lateral and vertical movements in firms; Forsythe (2018) studied intra-organizational careers and job switches while in Nigeria, Ibok and Etuk (2013) examined occupational change among persons who work in banks. In the higher education sector, some studies had been carried out to determine the impact of occupational mobility on the development of schools. In a position paper for the Centre for Global Higher Education in Norway produced by Tijseen, Lamers and Yegros (2017), it was found that university lecturers are likely to switch their occupations and move to other industries while research-inclined industry workers also move to the university as lecturers. In Nigeria, Jaja's (2013) work highlighted the challenges universities in Nigeria face when non-teaching university administrators become lecturers. However, Jaja did not adopt empirical research methods for the theoretical work.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to examine the systemic challenges which influence the processes of horizontal occupational mobility among non-teaching university administrators in Southern Nigeria. The objective of the study is to investigate systemic challenges which undermine the operations of horizontal occupational mobility among non-teaching university administrators.

Research Questions

1. What factors influence horizontal occupational mobility among non-teaching university administrators?
2. In what ways does horizontal occupational mobility among non-teaching university administrators contribute to university goals?
3. What are the challenges universities face in the effective management of horizontal occupational mobility among non-teaching university administrators?

Scope of the Study

This study concentrated on the processes of intra-organizational occupational mobility among non-teaching university administrators and provides in-depth and insightful information on its operations and consequences on the performance of Universities in Southern Nigeria.

The study covered six (6) selected States from the South-West, South-South and South-East geopolitical zones in Nigeria namely Ekiti, Oyo, Akwa Ibom, Rivers, Abia and Imo States. Respondents were selected from the (12) under-listed public universities: Federal University, Oye-Ekiti, Ekiti State University, University of Ibadan, Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, University of Uyo, Akwa Ibom State University, University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State University, Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Abia State University, Federal University of Technology, Owerri and Imo State University.

A total of 5,645 study population comprising senior academic staff and senior non-teaching university administrators were selected from the following categories of staff: Principal Assistant Registrar (PAR), Deputy Registrar (DR), Deputy Bursar (DB), Senior Lecturer (SL) and Professor (PROF.). The study sampled a total of 343 respondents through qualitative methods of data collection and analysis.

Operationalization of Concepts/Terms

Horizontal Occupational Mobility: Horizontal occupational mobility represents a switch to another occupation characterized by similar grade or level, status and authority with the previous occupation, but requires the application of a different skill due to the differentiated nature of work involved. In this study, horizontal occupational mobility connotes an internal job conversion from an administrative to teaching occupation within a university.

University Administrators: These include senior non-teaching university administrators and senior academic staff.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopted Work Adjustment Theory (WAT) and General Systems Theory as theoretical framework. Work adjustment theory alternatively referred to as the person-environment correspondence theory was propounded by Rene Dawis, George England and Lloyd Lofquist, University of Minnesota (Dawis, England & Lofquist 1964). The theory offers an understanding and interpretation of different individual responses to the work they do, the satisfaction they derive from the job and the decisions they take with regards to either exiting or remaining in a job. The theory further elaborated that a lot depends on how much satisfaction a worker experiences in the course of performing the job as this is a determining factor in a worker's willingness to either continue working in a job that promises success and development or quit it.

Other issues which a worker considers in the process of making work-related decisions, according to Dawis et al. (1964) are the conditions of employment such as choice of career,

stability and security of job, job performance and productivity, and growth in career. The theory is founded on three propositions: Abilities – Demand fit, Needs – Supplies fit and a process of adjustment and accommodation. However, the ability of an individual or organization to accommodate unfavourable conditions depends on the degree of flexibility possessed by the individual or organization. When there is a high degree of mismatch between the requirements of a job and the rewards, a change would take place. It is at this point that an individual would switch a job or an organization would drop a worker (University of Minnesota, 2018).

General Systems Theory

Systems theories originated in the fifties, and are founded on some principles which perceive a system as a combination of some elements all contributing to ensure that the system works as a whole (Teebom, 2018). Systems theory is related to every system found in the world and is useful in the assessment of a phenomenon as a complete whole. Practically, systems theory gives attention to the relationships and interdependence which exist among various components/elements for a better comprehension of reality by adopting the holistic approach. The components and makeup of the single parts become interwoven and indistinguishable; however, a higher degree of recognition is attributed to the results of such interactions.

The sub-systems of a whole system are connected through rationality (Luhmann, 1990) and what binds them is shared value and common goals (Golinelli, 2009). Furthermore, Teebom (2018) posited that each sub-system is an entity and the relationship it shares with other sub-systems can provoke a response, reaction or change internally in the system. Systems theory therefore analyzes an organization as a whole and not as a composition of single parts. It is adopted to examine the interactions and relationships among the different parts of an organization for the purpose of comprehending how the sub-systems affect one another and the organization as a whole; how an organization is managed; how it functions and the common goals achieved (Mele, Pels & Polese, 2010). It also recognizes that a dysfunction in one sub-system of an organization invariably affects the functioning of the whole system (Chikere & Nwoka, 2015).

A major contribution to the systems theory was from a biologist, Ludwig Von Bertalanffy who propounded the General Systems Theory (GST) as an adaptation of the open systems theory. Von Bertalanffy (1968) stated that in reality, a system is composed of a network of internal interactions, interrelations, relationships and interdependence among its components and has a connection with its environment which also influences the system as an entity.

An organizational system therefore needs to effectively manage its internal network of activities to be able to adapt to the ever changing needs of the environment and this adaptation process is done in an evolutionary pattern as a survival strategy for the organization (Von Bertalanffy, 1968). The following crucial elements were enumerated by Mele and others (2010) as characteristic of organizations when the general systems theory is applied: Knowledge, value, quality, environment, relationships, adaptation and complexity.

While Work Adjustment Theory explains how workers react to their work-related experiences such as job satisfaction and what influence their decisions to either continue with a particular job or quit it, General Systems Theory on the other hand describes the systematic link that exists in the network of interrelations, interactions and interdependence found among workers in different sub-systems of an organization and the ability of the organization to work as a collective whole in order to adapt to both organizational changes and the changes from the environment. General systems theory also highlights the consequences of a combination of such actions, relationships, interactions and interdependence among the sub-systems and how such consequences influence the success of the whole organizational system.

Methodology

Cross-sectional survey research design was adopted for this study. The study utilized ex-post facto research design described as a form of quasi-experimental design. It was considered appropriate for the study as the data gathered were based on actions/events which had already occurred and the respondents' experiences.

Samples were selected by adopting multi-stage sampling methods comprising the cluster, systematic, stratified and purposive sampling techniques to determine a representative sample for the study population. Respondents were purposively selected based on specific categories of employees. The study population is five thousand, six hundred and forty five (5,645) respondents consisting of staff of twelve (12) public universities located in six (6) States in Southern Nigeria: **South East** (Abia and Imo States); **South South** (Akwa Ibom and Rivers States); and **South West** (Ekiti and Oyo States). The universities are Federal University, Oye-Ekiti, Ekiti State University, University of Ibadan, Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, University of Uyo, Akwa Ibom State University, University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State University, Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Abia State University, Federal University of Technology, Owerri and Imo State University.

The categories of university employees is comprised of senior non-teaching university administrators from the ranks of Principal Assistant Registrar (PAR), Deputy Registrar (DR) and Deputy Bursar (DB) while the senior academic staff comprised of lecturers from the level of Senior Lecturer (SL) to Professor (PROF.). Three hundred and forty three (343) respondents were sampled. The sample size was determined through data saturation method which occurred at the point where no new themes or ideas emerged from the data gathered (Walker, 2012; Nelson, 2016).

Qualitative research methods were adopted to gather the data which include In-depth Interview (IDI) and Focus Group Discussion (FGD), as well as other documented secondary sources. Qualitative analysis of the data was based on deductive thematic approach through NVivo software.

Data Presentation/Reporting

The data gathered were reported on the basis of the individual universities. The focus of the presentations is primarily on the experiences, observations, understanding and interpretations of the respondents with regards to the factors which influence the

processes of horizontal occupational mobility. Below is a summary of the responses from the Focus Group Discussions and IDI conducted across the selected Universities:

Explain why horizontal occupational mobility is practiced among non-teaching university administrators?

- 3 Job conversion is on the increase in the university because of the recognition accorded the teaching staff.
- 4 Lecturers have better chances of getting political appointments and other benefits.
- 5 There are more training opportunities in the academic cadre.

Data from the FGDs indicate that the incidence of horizontal job conversion is on the increase due to the recognition accorded the teaching staff and the availability of other opportunities outside the university system. Another reason is the access to training opportunities for the academic staff.

An IDI interviewee stated as follows:

.....Often times, the reason for the movement is the desire for respect and recognition(Interviewee_4).

How does the university benefit from the operations of horizontal occupational mobility?

1. It provides internal manpower to meet the needs of the university.
2. It is cheaper to use non-teaching university administrators to meet the manpower needs of the university than to recruit candidates externally.
3. The university benefits from the skills, knowledge and experience acquired within the university.

IDI report:

The university benefits from horizontal occupational mobility because it takes care of the internal manpower needs of the various Departments since employment is not regular, especially with the persistent Government embargo on employment. So, the older lecturers groom the new ones in case of retirements, resignations and deaths(Interviewee_1).

What factors interfere with job conversion processes in the University?

- i. Most of the conversions satisfy individual interests.
- ii. Some job conversions are politically influenced without consideration given to the impact on the university.
- iii. The level of incompetency observed among Registry workers implies that most of the competent ones have switched over to the academic cadre.

The responses also reveal that a good number of the job conversions are done by individuals whose major concern is personal satisfaction. The processes also become influenced by political factors and it brings about a drop in the competency level of the Registry as stated below.

IDI report:

In the last conversion, somebody performed very well but she was not converted because of personal bias. I don't want to mention the name of the very senior officer who hid some people's files and the files only reappeared after the exercise. There is also a level of favouritism where some people are favoured to the detriment of others, especially in the allocation of steps because some of us were given higher steps that they do not merit(Interviewee_1)

How does occupational mobility contribute to the development of universities?

I can answer the question in two ways; sometimes, when staff just move, move and move, sometimes it affects the productivity of the system negatively because often times the conversions are done subjectively. So, because somebody is from your place, somebody is from my village, when it is time for promotion or conversion, if I don't convert the person, they will not make me a chief when I get to the village. That can make someone to be influenced and the process compromised. The promotion or conversion or whatever process that arises from that does not enhance the productivity of the system. But when it is done on merit, there's no way anything done on merit will not develop. Productivity will rise(Interviewee_2).

IDI Report:

Comment freely on the issues surrounding the operations of horizontal occupational mobility in your university:

The prevalence of horizontal occupational mobility is high. Presently, eight persons had been shortlisted to leave the administrative work for lecturing, but the Registrar will replace them eventually. So, it does not have any negative effect on the system in a serious way. There is supposed to be an official memo notifying staff about vacancies and call for applications but the memo will not come out until it is too late. It helps the system because when workers are allowed to grow in the university, they become happy and work better in their respective areas.

Comment on how the processes of horizontal occupational mobility could be effectively managed and what universities should do to be able to employ and retain competent workers in their respective occupations.

1. It becomes detrimental to the development of universities when adequate policy framework is not provided to protect both the interests of the workers and the university.
2. Workers should be promoted as and when due and the conditions of service should be attractive to encourage them to remain in their occupations.
3. Universities should provide internal training programmes for administrators in areas relevant to their occupation in addition to other incentives.

Data on horizontal occupational mobility indicate that it will have a negative impact on the development of universities if adequate policy framework is not provided, in addition to

the provision of incentives through promotions, adequate training opportunities and better conditions of service to encourage administrators to continue in their current occupations.

IDI Report:

What do you think should be done to minimize the rate of occupational mobility among non-teaching university administrators?

The first is that the overall salary and conditions of service must improve whether academic or administrative. Yes, if you don't pay salaries that are adequate, anytime there's an opportunity elsewhere, the person will move. So, our general conditions of service are not such that can make people to stay. At times, that is also why you may not blame some of the truants like I said earlier because the academicians, a good number of them have other things to do to add up to their salaries. I guess at times, that is what some of them are looking for. Well, if I am here, I can have other things. It is easier to appoint an academic as a Commissioner than to appoint an administrator because in our country, what people look at are titles(Interviewee_5).

The reports show that the salary structure and terms of service should improve to encourage non-teaching university administrators to keep their jobs as stated above.

What do you consider necessary for the effective management of occupational mobility?

Replacements are not regular because of Government embargo on employment. Our university uses youth corpsers sometimes to do the work. So, I think the university should sponsor trainings/workshops for staff to enhance their job performances(Interviewee_7).

The need for the university to retrain staff was stressed as stated above.

Results and Analysis based on the Research Questions

1. What factors influence horizontal occupational mobility among non-teaching university administrators?

The data gathered revealed that an increasing number of non-teaching university administrators opt for the academic cadre after acquiring higher degrees, skills and experience on their administrative jobs on the basis that lecturers are more recognized and are more likely to get political appointments and other benefits than the non-teaching university administrators. So the switchers desire recognition and respect. In addition, the reports showed that lecturers have more training opportunities than the administrators.

2. In what ways does horizontal occupational mobility among non-teaching university administrators contribute to university goals?

The data gathered revealed that horizontal occupational mobility takes care of the internal manpower needs of the various Departments since employment is not regular, especially

with the persistent Government embargo on employment. In essence, manpower shortage for academic staff are resolved when the university converts qualified non-teaching university administrators. The data also showed that universities benefit from the experiences, skills and knowledge acquired by the switcher as university staff and the university spends less when non-teaching university administrators become lecturer than having to recruit new employees.

3. What are the challenges universities face in the management of horizontal occupational mobility among non-teaching university administrators?

The reports showed that the frequency of horizontal occupational mobility is high and is still on the increase and the consequence is detrimental to the university Registry and the university generally. It was also revealed that majority of the job conversions satisfy individual interests and are not intended to meet university needs. The data showed that the processes of horizontal occupational mobility are also influenced most times by factors such as political patronage, favouritism, godfatherism, victimization, ethnicism, internal affiliations and other forms of biased considerations and at the end of the day, some of the job conversions are not based on merit. This according to the data affects productivity adversely.

Furthermore, it was revealed that lack of effective policy framework to guide the processes of horizontal occupational mobility, inadequate training schemes and incentives, poor conditions of service, incompetency in the registry section of universities, occupational mobility without staff replacement are responsible for the poor management of horizontal occupational mobility among non-teaching university administrators.

Research Findings

It was found that the reasons non-teaching university administrators switch to the academic cadre is their desire to receive the respect and recognition accorded the academic staff. Secondly, they desire better opportunities and chances of getting other benefits including political appointments and engagement in other available economic activities. Furthermore, their desire for better training opportunities and conditions of service is responsible for their decision to become lecturers.

It was found that horizontal occupational mobility takes care of the internal manpower needs of the various Departments, especially when there is shortage of academic staff to fill spaces created by retirements, deaths, dismissals, etc. and during accreditation by National Universities Commission (NUC). Universities also benefit from the experiences, skills and knowledge of the switchers acquired within the university. The findings also showed that it is cheaper to convert the jobs of non-teaching university administrators than to recruit fresh employees.

The high prevalence of the incidence of horizontal occupational mobility among non-teaching university administrators is undermines the effective management of the processes, especially without replacement for the switchers. It was also found that most times, the interest of the university is secondary when a horizontal occupational mobility occurs and the process is often influenced by political interference, favouritism,

godfatherism, victimization, ethnicism, internal affiliations and other biased considerations.

The study also found that the following factors pose challenges in the operations of horizontal occupational mobility: inadequate provision for effective policy framework to guide the processes of horizontal occupational mobility, inadequate provision for suitable replacements, in-service training and incentives, poor conditions of service, glaring staff incompetency and an evident gap in the degree of recognition accorded the academic and administrative cadres.

Discussion of Findings

The study revealed that non-teaching university administrators switch to the academic cadre because of their desire to be respected and given recognition, access better opportunities and other benefits, training opportunities and better conditions of service available to academic staff. This agrees with Sicherman and Galor (1990) and Gajdushek and Linder's (2011) position that workers quit their occupations because of their desire to move to occupations with higher ranking and prestige. Researchers such as Agbah, Nkpoyen and Ushie (2010); Ilori, Dauda, Raji and Kilanko (2012); Chadi and Hetschko (2017) also maintained that workers who seek satisfying jobs with better remuneration/salary and jobs which can take care of their individual interests, personality, abilities and personal growth are more likely to quit their occupations.

The study also revealed that horizontal occupational mobility takes care of the internal manpower needs of the various universities, especially when there is shortage of academic staff. Zorlu (2016) agrees that occupational mobility provides the required population of workers to satisfy the labour needs in organizations. Universities also benefit from the experiences, skills and knowledge of the switchers and have to spend less to source manpower internally because universities do not have to spend on adverts and other recruitment processes. This is in accordance with OECD's (2010) assertion that occupational mobility enables workers to become developed and it increases the level of competences available in organizations

The study also revealed that when the incidence of horizontal occupational mobility among non-teaching university administrators is high, it undermines the ability of universities to achieve its goals because it creates skill vacuums in the Registry section of universities. Moreover, most times the interest of the university is not considered as it serves individual selfish needs. This finding reiterates Agbah, Nkpoyen and Ushie's (2010) and Nyaga (2015) findings that workers seek satisfying jobs with better wages and which can take care of their individual interests, personality, abilities and personal growth to the detriment of the universities.

In reporting the data on how occupational mobility among non-teaching university administrators influences the development of universities in Southern Nigeria, it was noted that certain other factors influence its operations. These factors are considered as imperative in understanding the processes of occupational mobility among non-teaching university administrators and the link with the performance of university Registries in

Southern Nigeria. The process of occupational mobility within the universities in Southern Nigeria is considered as often politicized and influenced by various elements such as godfatherism, organizational politics, favouritism, personal relationships, political patronage, victimization, ethnicism, internal affiliations and other biased considerations which undermine the ability of universities to conduct job conversion exercises based on merit to meet the needs of the university.

Conclusion

The study concludes that the effective management of the processes of horizontal occupational mobility among non-teaching university administrators is undermined by factors such as godfatherism, organizational politics, favouritism, personal relationships, political patronage, victimization, ethnicism, internal affiliations and other biased considerations. In addition, high prevalence of horizontal occupational mobility, inadequate in-service staff training and occupational mobility without replacement, poor conditions of service, a gap in the recognition accorded the academic staff and administrative employees and a significant level of incompetence observed among the non-teaching university administrators account for the challenges recorded in the processes of horizontal occupational mobility.

Recommendations

1. This study from the foregoing regards occupational mobility as inevitable in universities in Southern Nigeria. However, horizontal occupational mobility should be structured in line with effective policies to guide the processes and the university should initially identify and address its impact on the system in areas such as skill vacuum, staff replacement and re-training.
2. The relationships, behaviours and practices within the system should be guided by effective policy framework channelled productively to enhance the processes and exchanges within the university and designed strictly to address and check for issues associated or arising from godfatherism, favouritism, unhealthy politics, victimization and other forms of subjective considerations within the system be channelled productively to enhance the processes and exchanges within the university.

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