

INDUSTRIAL HARMONY FOR ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE: AN IMPERATIVE FOR A PRODUCTIVE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM IN NIGERIA

Akuh, E. A. (Ph.D)

Faculty of Education, Kogi State University, PMB 1008 Anyigba, Kogi State-Nigeria

ABSTRACT: *Industrial harmony enhances labour productivity as one of the critical means of improving performance in the education sector, achieving economic growth, enhancing living standards and quality of life. It creates a peaceful working environment that is attractive to tolerance, dialogue and other alternative means of resolving industrial or labour disputes. It is in this vein that the paper discusses the imperative of industrial harmony for academic excellence and a productive educational system in Nigeria. To ensure harmonious industrial relations, the leader of every institution will need to encourage, open and frank discussion of the institution's problems with the subordinates; seek the opinion of those doing the institutional job i.e. the staff; explain their discussion to those who have to carry them out; recognize the contributions of all involved in the institutional job; set collaborative goals to encourage team work instead of autocracy and listen to rather than talk at their subordinates. In conclusion, effective and understood grievance procedure that is simple, straightforward, flexible, proactive, responsive, devoid of protocol and time conscious is central to harmonious industrial relations. Above all, promoting visionary and disciplined leadership within our educational system is a key to a conducive environment for learning devoid of corrupt practices and indiscipline.*

KEYWORDS: Industrial Harmony, Academic Excellence, Productive and Educational System

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria educational institutions have experienced disharmony in recent times, instability and other forms of industrial conflict. This situation has resulted in low productivity in the schools. Most of these problems have been because of poor communication (Enyi, 2001), incessant industrial disputes, brain- drain, under-funding or poor financing of quality education, cultism, corrupt practices and abuse of trust (Ladan, 2012; Mukoro, 2013).

According to Nworgu (2005), most Nigerian universities have experienced a series of crises caused by poor communication between students and university administrators. Industrial relations, one of the major areas of concern to the government, employers of labour, investors and trade unions of any industrial community is the maintenance of industrial harmony for the proper growth and development of the economy and the nation. This is so because; industrial conflicts disrupt both the process of productivity and the free flow of goods and services.

Suggestively, the imperatives of industrial harmony for academic excellence are the most potent panacea in a developing economy like Nigeria, for a productive educational system and sustainable human development.

Industrial Harmony

Industrial harmony refers to a friendly and cooperative agreement on working relationships between employers and employees for their mutual benefit (Otobo, 2005; Osad and Osas, 2013). According to Puttapalli and Vuram (2012), industrial harmony is concerned with the relationship between management and employees with respect to the terms and conditions of employment and the work place. In effect, it is a situation where employees and management cooperate willingly in pursuit of the organization's aims and objectives. Industrial harmony requires that:

1. All management personnel understand their responsibilities and what is required of them, and have the training and authority necessary to discharge such duties and responsibilities efficiently;
2. Duties and responsibilities for each group of employees are stated with clarity and simplicity in the organizational/institutional structure;
3. Individual employees or work-groups know their objectives and are regularly kept informed of progress made towards achieving them;
4. There is an effective link in the interchange of information and views between senior management and members of the work group;
5. Supervisors are briefed about innovation and changes before they occur so they can explain management's policies and intentions to the work-group;
6. Employers cooperate with trade unions in establishing effective procedures for the negotiation of terms and conditions of employment and for the settlement of disputes;
7. Employers encourage the establishment of effective procedures among member organizations/institutions for the settlement of grievances and disputes at the level of the establishment or undertaking;
8. Employers take all reasonable steps to ensure the organization/institution observes agreements and agreed upon procedures;
9. The organization/institution maintains a communication system, which secures the interchange of information and views between different levels in the organization/institution and ensures that employees are systematically and regularly kept informed, factually and objectively, of changes and progress in the system.

Industrial harmony thus covers the area of responsibilities, employment policy, collective bargaining, communication and consultation (Odia and Omofonmwan, 2007). Industrial harmony enhances labour productivity and in turn improves performance in our education sector, achieving economic growth, and enhancing living standards and quality of life. It creates a peaceful working environment conducive to tolerance, dialogue and other alternative (to strike) means of resolving industrial or labour disputes in Nigeria (such as negotiation, mediation, arbitration, conciliation and litigation or court adjudication). This creates a high level of employee satisfaction.

Industrial harmony according to Ladan (2012) is imperative for a productive educational system for two (2) basic reasons: -

- a. It enhances labour productivity as one of the critical means of improving performance in the education sector, achieving economic growth, enhancing living standards and quality of life. Unfortunately, academic performance in schools has been constrained by frequent labour unrests in Nigerian educational institutions.
- b. It creates a peaceful working environment that is attractive to tolerance, dialogue and other alternative means of resolving industrial/labour disputes.

Academic Excellence

Students can be useful when they perform well in their studies. Keathley (2005) defined excellence as the state or quality of excelling. It is superiority or the state of being good to a high degree. Improving academic excellence of a student means achieving the objective function which the educational policy stipulates. Thus, the improvement of academic excellence of a student has always been the concern of all stakeholders. The stakeholders include: the government, educational and school administrators, school proprietors, teachers, parents, professional counsellors, and students themselves (Fajana, 1995; FME, 2005 and Ekwesili, 2006).

Although all stakeholders play active roles towards the improvement of academic excellence of students, the contributions of school personnel (school administrators, professional counsellors, teachers and others) are critical for optimal improvement of academic excellence of students. Academic excellence refers to extremely high standards of education and exceptionally sounds graduates that we produce from tertiary institutions to the labour market.

It is imperative, because, the higher the quality of graduates (in terms of knowledge and skills) the higher the productive service, with efficiency and effectiveness in every sector of the economy, which leads to greater prosperity all round for sustainable human development. It must be devoid of the problem of the meal-ticket syndrome in our educational system, wherein the society places undue emphasis on certification and the pressure to obtain it by any means (including corrupt, enrichment, forgery, falsity, harassment, sexual abuse and bribery) at the expense of hard work, value/ethical standards, commitment, consistency in focus and above all morality and honesty (Ackers, 2002; Akinsolu, 2005).

However, the crux of the matter lies in the question: - How do we maintain industrial harmony or achieve academic excellence for a productive educational system in Nigeria?

Effective Communication: Communication is vital to any social system as it creates an environment of trust, harmony and proficiency. It promotes effective management practices and motivates staff to greater productivity. Communication is an inevitable and important tool of management. Organizations/institutions that withhold information or give it grudgingly may breed conflict, mistrust, suspicion, confusion, or crisis. From this perspective, management must communicate with staff regularly to achieve industrial peace and harmony and increase worker performance (Udejah, 2001; Obi, 2004).

Effective communication helps to promote harmonious relations between the school manager and staff and is critical to productivity in a school organization. An administrator best achieve these objectives by adopting the inverted triangular system of communication, which brings management closer to the workers thus smoothing the relationship between the two, and easing the decision-making process. Unachukwu (1997) argues for upward, downward, and lateral communication channels between the administrators and subordinates. The administrator

should make him or herself accessible to staff and students, delegate some functions to them, and actively pursue feedback.

Unachukwu (1997) maintains that effective communication facilitates meaningful interaction and exchange of information or ideas among group members. Communication should be open and administrative functions coordinated harmoniously. The free flow of information, according to Onasanya (1999), is an important factor in creating understanding in an institution. In his view, administrators have a responsibility to ensure not only that they understood but that they in turn understand other members of the institution. School administrators can be well understood if they maintain a commitment to openness. Management should ensure that staff members are kept well informed about issues such as salary structure, conflict and dispute resolution procedures, safety, staff development and training, and so on. To prevent duplication of instructions, management should also ensure that all unit heads are fully aware of their areas of responsibility (Akpofure and N'dipu, 2000).

School administrators must avoid denying access to information. Vaid (2003) maintains that many cases that lead to employee grievances are associated with poor communication in the labour management relationship. This creates acrimony and distrust. Workers should not be denied information and management should not show lukewarm attitude towards information dissemination. Managers and/or administrators must be well versed in communication theory and practice if they are to enable employee access and understanding thereby promoting harmonious relationships between management and staff and among the staff themselves.

Proper Funding of Educational Sector: The federal government budgetary allocation to educational sector does not agree with UNESCO standard and best global practices. The low level of fiscal allocation to the sector according to Ladan (2012) is so far below the UNESCO's threshold of 26% of the total budget and will certainly affects the implementation of government policy on education in the country and in particular the Universal Basic Education and our Tertiary Education System.

This poor annual budgetary allocation to education in every year explains very clearly, why the nation's universities will continue to suffer the frustration and indignity of very low rating in the world ranking of universities. As long as the nation's politicians have refused to take university education seriously by not adhering to the minimum budgetary allocation of 26 per cent demanded by UNESCO, our universities will continue to remain "glorified secondary schools" at the expense of the nation's development and our youths, who are at the receiving end (Ladan, 2012).

Application of Harmonious Industrial Relations in our Educational Institutions: Harmonious industrial relations here refers to an industrial environment where workers along with their union and management understand and accept each other as partners in progress; that a cooperative attitude is mutually beneficial in terms of output, performance and rewards. It does not assume that conflicts do not exist but that effective and proactive collective agreements and grievance procedure exist that can prevent the conflicts from transforming into a crisis. Thus, internalizing harmonious industrial relations will eliminate poor management as it relates to human resources management (Bateman and Snell, 1999).

In Nigerian institutions, many problems of incessant industrial disputes result from executives, administrators and employees who exhibit specific attitudes and behaviour patterns; these

inhibit harmony and create crises. These attitudes and behaviour patterns according to Blumende (2001) and Iwambe (2002) are summarized as follows:

- (a) Making decisions with little knowledge of the implication on the systems or the people who have to implement them.
- (b) Failure to communicate decisions effectively to those charged with implementation.
- (c) Working as individual rather than as a team. Most Nigerian administrators believe too much in their ability and ego. They tend to know all about all. They believe in dishing out orders, directives and policies to the workers. Soon, they are isolated and hated by the workers.
- (d) Sometimes, management does not act as they talk. Some managers are known to believe in the “do what I say not what I do”. Majority of the leaders (management team) have tended to be selfish, self-centered and incapable in most cases of performing effectively.

Clearly speaking, management needs to find new ways of working and thinking. The old principle of command, control, compliance, “of they and we” must be challenged and abandoned. Modern educational institutions are too complex to profitably separate the thinkers and doers. Our society and social revolution also is attacking the principles of compliance, without which control and command cannot work. Therefore, new ones based on teamwork, consensus and creativity to allow intelligent and ambition workers must replace old traditional principles.

Managing Employees Productivity: The place of employees in any educational institution (private or government) cannot be over emphasized. From management science point of view, society’s need of food and services do not come in ready-made form. People are employed and charged with the responsibility for them to transform education. It is for this purpose qualified staff or personnel are recruited to carry out designated tasks in an institution or organization (Akuh, 2014).

From sociological perspective organizations by extension are groups of individuals that agreed to work together for a common goal(s) through a clear fine of activity. Organizational goals vary from one organization to another. It is true that employees charged with the implementation of organization goals and aspirations must be result oriented. This is to forestall organizational ailments like corporate collapse, goal displacements, inefficiency, ineffectiveness, under production and to ensure organizational effectiveness. Similarly, failure to effectively implement brilliant programmes due to individual problems may lead to educational collapse (Budd and Bhave, 2008).

Problems of people in the work place and society in general are the deadly killer diseases. They manifest in such areas as in-discipline, greed, apathy, corruption and envy. Problems of people have caused serious damages to the fabric of socio-economic and political sectors; problems of people have stayed long with us in organization because of the missing ingredient of the “personality”.

Stroking For Desirable Results: For instance, babies need physical touch for survival; as they grow older, people partially replace the need for physical touch with recognition by others. Here, both the needs of babies and adults can be seen as a ‘hunger’ for touch and recognition.

This 'hunger' can only be satisfied by strokes. What is a Stroke? Stroke means any form of recognition. It can be physical touching, rocking, tapping on the back, and putting hands on the shoulder of the baby or any act showing that he/she is there. It means recognition of his presence by a look, nodding to him, saying a word. Some strokes include such basic recognition as greetings, listening attentively to someone worth due respect and giving direct compliment secretly or openly (Kaufman, 2004).

Generally, people in various educational institutions need strokes. They in fact will not grow normally if administrators or others do not touch them. There is a popular saying among transactional analysts that "if the infant is not stroked, his/her spinal cord shrivels up." This simply suggests that if infants are not touched, it is likely they may die or if they survive, may be malformed. Certainly, people who work in our various educational institutions need strokes to improve for higher productivity (Ghosal and Westney, 2005).

The strokes given the employees will determine the desired results. There are two types of strokes, namely positive and negative. A positive stroke is a kind of positive recognition and may be in the form of verbal phrase, additional responsibility, and promotion, monetary incentive or anything useful in recognizing someone positively. A negative stroke is a negative recognition, which is the same as rebuking someone, a cut in pay or demotion or both. It might seem here too simple and may seem the same as reward and punishment method, but it is not (Farnham and Pimlott, 1995).

If you stroke the proper ego, the desirable behaviour will emerge in the individual, even from the frustrated messenger, clerk, supervisor, manager, officer, chief executive, lecturer, student etc. Positive strokes make one feel good, alive, alert and significant. Strokes improve the sense of well being of people, especially if the stroking is authentic and from the right ego-state. Stroke validates people; it makes them feel confident of themselves and others. As a result, they become more effective on the job (Abraham and Morrison, 2006; Akuh, 2014).

Visionary, Transparent and Accountable Leadership: Industrial harmony is achieved in the workplace only when leaders determine what they want their organization/institution's culture to look like and then strategize to make it a reality. To ensure harmonious industrial relations, the leader of every institution will need to:

- (i) Encourage, open and frank discussion of the institution's problems with the subordinates;
- (ii) Seek the opinion of those doing the institutional job i.e. the staff;
- (iii) Explain their discussion to those who have to carry them out;
- (iv) Recognize the contributions of all involved in the institutional job;
- (v) Set collaborative goals to encourage team work instead of autocracy; and
- (vi) Listen to rather than talk at their subordinates.

The leaders of institution must take ownership of the new principles to the extent that they examine and amend all traditional procedures and practices. They must also turn their attention to the area like management style and worth of employees. In other words, a participating and listening type must replace the traditional management system of command and control (Ferguson, 1991; Ndujihe, 2002).

CONCLUSION

This paper examined the extent, to which industrial harmony can be achieved for academic excellence and a productive educational system through effective communication within our educational institutions, proper funding for high quality of education, transparent and accountable leaders among others.

Harmonious industrial relations are the most potent panacea for academic excellence and a productive educational system. This is because it will only take the combine team of committed management with the technical know-how and resolved cooperating and understanding employees who believe they have a stake in the scheme of things to solve institutional problems like ineffectiveness, inefficiency, fraud and under production, conflicts, etc. This option of concerted efforts by management and staff for a common goal of moving the educational system forward we believe is far better and potent than rationalization, retrenchment, shutdown of schools (Lidan, 2012; Akuh, 2014).

Therefore, the way forward for Nigeria include the following: -

1. Effective and understood grievance procedure that is simple, straightforward, flexible, proactive, responsive, devoid of protocol and time conscious is central to harmonious industrial relations.
2. It is evident from the above discussion that academic excellence cannot be achieved without improving funding and quality of education in Nigeria.

Therefore, annual budgetary allocation to education should be increased to at least the UNESCO minimum benchmark of 26%. There should be better utilization of funds, tracking and monitoring of the use of resources for education by multi-stakeholders' forum.

3. An effective communication system is central to maintaining healthy work relationships among personnel. In order to ensure that communication does not pose any unnecessary challenges, a good organizational structure should be put in place. All staff and management should be instructed in the existing links of communication: who to report to, who to give instructions to, where to get what from and who is to be given what. Memos, emails, notice boards, telephone calls, circulars, and meetings all aid communication in the school organization.

When the appropriate organ does not provide the required information, substitute communication develops in the form of rumours, gossip and falsehoods. These, in turn, have the potential to generate conflict within the educational institution.

Above all, promoting visionary and disciplined leadership within our educational system is a key to a conducive environment for learning devoid of corrupt practices and indiscipline.

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