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The Dialectics of Staff Unionism and University Management; Critical Discourse for Effective Educational Service Delivery

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Abstract
This paper was poised by the lingering lamentations about the acute fall in standard of education and rapid knowledge declination among Nigerians today. The problem has become so intense that Nigerian ivory towers are now accused of producing ill-prepared and unemployable graduates who seriously lack the skills and competencies needed to positively assist the nation in its quest for growth and development. Unfortunately apart from poor university management, suspicious and insincere, if not selfish relationship between leadership of staff unions and leadership of university management is another factor impeding adequate and effective educational service delivery in Nigeria today. With pluralist perspective, the paper presents an industrial relations view of service delivery with particular emphasis on Nigerian ivory towers. The opposing ideological stands of these major stakeholders in the university community are examined while advocating that such dialectic can be managed to make a balance that will facilitate effective and continuous educational service delivery. The paper concludes that creating harmonious equilibrium of interest groups rather than the domination of one over the other, will aid universities in delivering the much expected service to the society.

Key Words: Education, Leadership, Management, Pluralism, Service Delivery, Unionism

Introduction
Labour relations within the framework of university community is a peculiar one. The university community has, within it, a conglomeration of intellectuals and well informed individuals who converge in the varsities to pursue goals that they cannot singlehandedly achieve. However, the process of achieving desired end, especially in employment relationship, is not without tampering with the interest of one or other individuals or counterparts in the same business. Where there are two or more individuals in a relationship, one person tends to either be stronger or weaker than the other. It is in this sense that the university management is perceived as being the stronger actor in terms of its position in the citadel, its economic strength, and political connection. Consequently, the management have often been reported to display some exploitative tendencies and exercise undue managerial control over the staff unions and other stakeholders of the university. Ekong (2001), in his study of management styles in Nigerian universities, documented that authoritarian management style was highly in play in many Nigerian universities. Workers’ reaction to such draconian policies or exploitative strategies of the employers, according to Fajana (2006), is partly through unionism and other forms of protest. Hence unionism emerged in the varsities to protect and promote the interest of members by demanding enhanced conditions of service through collective efforts. This is done by engaging in power relationship or competition with the management which often results in incessant industrial bluffs and acrimonies in the university system; a scenario that gradually shifts stakeholders’ attention from the primary purpose for which universities are established. The contention of this paper is that the dialectics of staff unions and
university management should be well handled and channelled towards crafting a balance that is capable of ensuring adequate and effective educational service delivery in the society.

The Universities and Service Delivery in Perspective

Universities across the globe are known as centres for knowledge impartation, skill acquisition and manpower development. The Nigerian educational system is guided by the National Policy on Education (2004) which places emphasis on tertiary institutions to strive hard in ensuring acquisition, development and inculcation of the proper value orientation in all citizens, develop intellectual capacitates in individual for self-sustenance, acquisition of both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individual to develop into useful members of the community, make them understand and appreciate their environments, contribute to the upkeep of the society. Akinsanya (2010) sums it up that universities all over the world are meant to be providers of knowledge, transmitters of societal values and culture, and very importantly are institutions mandated to engage in teaching and research with the intention of discovering and crystallizing scholarship. Universities are thus expected to be conscious about development, whether in respect of the society or the individual and whether in physical or psychological dimensions. (Akintayo, 2008) To serve in this capacity the university is traditionally expected to perform these valuable duties through, teaching, research and community services. Research, which is known to be an important factor in positive changes and development, is a systematic investigation into phenomena with a view to increase knowledge and promote socio-economic and political development.

Research has an extended connotation when referred to as ‘research and development’ (R&D). In this sense, research means application of the newly acquired knowledge for developmental purposes of new and improved products, services and industrial processes of capital development and improved living conditions. This is why the World Bank (2002) emphasised that knowledge is the most important factor in economic development, stressing that a society’s ability to produce, select, adapt, commercialised and utilise knowledge is critical to sustained economic growth and improving living standards. The Universities and other research-based institutions are responsible in this regard. The universities are also saddled with the responsibility of teaching by imparting knowledge in our students on how they can develop sound mind, moral and behavioural comportment, skill and competencies in vocations so they can be fit and positively contribute to the upkeep of themselves and society. This is done through several means such as public conferences, seminars, or floating some professional or vocational programmes, etc... Fostering town and gown relationship; in such a way that greater involvement of universities in their social context and increased accountability to society is ascertained. Knowledge transfer as well as rendering Corporate Social Responsibilities (CSR) to their immediate communities is the third function of the university.

Although universities are rather different than conventional business organizations, the institutional theorist have argued that any organization is a social system with a need for legitimacy and social acceptance. (Manuel, Antonio & Yolanda, 2012; Galán, 2006) it is in a bid to secure this social acceptance that this approach may be applied to universities. It therefore means that there are certain societal demands from universities which include partnering with the society in helping to meet its needs.

The State of Universities Educational Service Delivery in Nigeria

It is important to state that certain inherent academic and administrative constraints exist in university community which adversely frustrate the institutions’ efforts towards effective service delivery to the larger society. The problem of Nigerian education system is not lack of the institutions to perform the role of imparting education to Nigerians, but the poor service delivery in managing the citadels of
learning. (Onma, 2012) These problems range from administrative constraint, academic constraints, and unhealthy relationship between staff unions and management. A recent universities evaluation regarding service delivery by SERVICOM in December, 2012 revealed plethora of weaknesses in service delivery in some Nigeria universities. Onma (2012) carefully highlighted the weaknesses discovered in the evaluation to include:

1. There are no customer care policies in most Nigerian universities to guide the students on fair treatment in the Universities system. A problem that affects how staff generally, treat students and other stakeholders.
2. Frontline staff are not trained on specialized complaints-handling nor empowered to deal with complaints at the point of contact. This causes delay in complaint resolution.
3. There is inadequate power supply in most of the universities which is bad for effective service delivery
4. The result of monitoring performance against all standards are not recorded, analyzed nor published. A problem that makes it difficult to measure improvement or otherwise of service in the university system
5. Transportation system is poor as most universities have insufficient buses to transport students to and fro campus while a large number of students live off-campuses.
6. Most toilets in the universities are not cleaned and the outdated facilities have not been replaced in most of the toilets.
7. Most universities do not carry out Customer Satisfaction Surveys to test and determine the satisfaction level of all customer groups and for continuous improved service delivery.

Onma (2012) mentioned other weaknesses as the absence of a system in place in some universities to monitor waiting times and this results to unnecessary delays of customers at service points; inability of the universities to encourage comments and views from the customers and the use of outdated visible facility for obtaining comments like the suggestion boxes; summary of complaints received from the students and other customers over a certain period of time is not published to demonstrate to students and visitors that their complaints are acted upon for service improvement purpose.

Further, most staff of Nigerian universities do not wear name tag and their desks are not clearly marked to indicate their names and designation for easy identification or to guide all customers and visitors to the universities on the structure of the organization. The names, telephone numbers and office numbers of principal persons or persons in charge of customer service and complaints are not displayed, thereby making it difficult for customers to lodge their complaints when service fails.

Unfortunately, staff unions and universities management, who are supposed to form effective partnership in curbing these enormous problems are, most of the time, at loggerhead spending much time devising several strategies to outsmart each other in negotiation rather than jointly devising means for improving the university’s performance in service deliveries. This is to say that apart from poor university management (discussed above) suspicious and insincere, if not selfish relationship between leadership of academic staff union and leadership of university management is another factor impeding adequate and effective educational service deliveries in Nigeria today. This idea is corroborated in the submission of Ayorinde (2010) that academic sessions that were predictable have become wantonly elongated, and service delivery poor, due to unbridled student unrest and staff union versus school management industrial acrimonies, bluffs and crises. Well it is pertinent to state that it is not the universities stakeholders that are entirely responsible for the current state of educational system and its attendant
service deliveries in Nigeria today. Government who, in its democratic principles, is supposed to provide free education to all citizens at all levels share larger blames because of its insensitivity to the goals of university education in Nigeria.

**Consequences of Poor Educational Service Delivery: Universities of Nothingness**

It is university for nothing whose impact is not meaningfully felt by the larger society, or whose products are incapable of contributing positively to the progressive development of the nation. As a result of the failure of both management and staff unions of universities to recognise their differences and devise appropriate mechanism for controlling it, there have been lingering lamentations about the acute fall in standard of education and rapid declination of knowledge among Nigerians today. This is often pointed towards the decay experienced in the Nigerian tertiary education system triggered by a number of factors including systematic neglect and inability of the system to adapt to, and cope with global changes and the changes in the economy (Opanuko, 2012). The problem has become so intense that Nigerian ivory towers are now accused of producing ill-prepared and unemployable graduates who seriously lack the skills and competencies needed to positively assist the nation in its quest for growth and development. Their ineptitude and incompetence which render them jobless has resultantly led them to a high level of criminal behaviour and violence. The desperation to avoid implications of joblessness (such as poverty, low self esteem, lack of future prospect and security etc) makes the large portion of Nigerian youths to resort to ill-mannered struggles for socio-economic survival which often dismantle the defence of the nation and cripple the pace of her economic growth and development (Oludeyi, 2013). They have thus gradually become a cog in the wheel of progress in the country.

Nigerian graduates who are rational and pragmatic no longer rely on university education, because its acquisition no longer helps them secure lucrative job for survival. They get further disappointed to arrive at National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) camp only to discover that it is from ‘then and there that their struggle continues’ as they are, from the camp, informed of the lack of job opportunity for them as graduates in the country. They have resorted to investing in self-help books to acquire knowledge that are not taught in universities. A number of skill acquisition programmes have emerged in both formal and non-formal settings to equip Nigeria graduates to be self employed entrepreneurs. This is not actually a bad thing but its upsurge clearly indicates that Nigerian universities and other tertiary institutions of learning no longer fill this vacuum; they have failed in meeting with the expectation of the society. Blames and accusing fingers are usually pointed at the government for leadership ineptitude, corruption and selfishness which have brought woes to the nation. This is to a degree a truism but certain questions come to rational minds; where were these leaders educated? What is wrong with the function of the citadels in educating the populace about politics and voting the right leaders base on merit rather than political or financial status of the contestants? This is not to put the whole blame on the universities stakeholders; it is rather to sensitise and awaken staffs and universities administrators to see the gigantic nature of challenges before them. In essence, the philosophy of education in Nigeria holds that university teaching should seek to inculcate a spirit of communalities in the students. It is however being observed that this spirit, which is lacking in most universities, is required both within and among the different levels of staff in the university. Hence, in other to enable Nigerian universities to meet their expected obligations and perform their valuable duties in social and economic growth of the nation, both staff union and management must devise a strategic and goal oriented means for managing the opposing ideological stands of the two. They must adopt a concern-for-all approach to handling administrative, academic and disputes in university communities.
Relationship between Staff Unions and University Management: Dialectics of Superiority

The relationship between staff unions and management may be described from two perspectives; as dialectical and as symbiotic. The first perspective is that management and staff unions differ in terms of orientation and perceptions of wages and salaries packages, promotions criteria, infrastructural management and facility maintenance, managerial ideologies and approaches, academic and administrative roles expectations etc, which often lead to rifts and rancour in the university system. According to Akinsanya and Akinsanya (2012) other areas of contention between university management and the staff unions have been issues of funding, conditions of service and welfare. Agitation has, resultantly, continued to mount between university management and unions on the sensitivity or importance of projects executed on the several of the university campuses, some of which do not have bearing with the needs of the members of the community.

The second perspective (symbiosis) recognises the fact that despite these arrays of differences, the duo cannot successfully pursue their various ends in the university and achieve their desire end except with collaboration. The management and the governing council cannot, by themselves, perform all the needed tasks to keep the system functioning while the crop members of staff unions cannot also, by themselves, oversee the administration of the university on both its internal and external stands. There is therefore a kind of interdependence between management and staff unions in most aspect of operations. Hence, one party’s ineptitude will affect the other party as well as the entire university system and its operations towards service delivery. It is in recognition of this collegial and mutual relationship that a meeting point for dialogue and consensus must always be sought in other to avert or reduce the explosiveness of tension and its consequence in the university community.

It must however be clearly stated that Nigeria universities stakeholders, especially the staff unions and management, have not scored impressively in attempting to adequately manage their differences to enabling them concentrate on areas of the university’s shortcomings on service delivery. The management and staff unions’ relationship is well captured in Akinsanya and Akinsanya (2012):

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\text{The management styles in several Nigerian universities have been attributed to the closure of many of theses institutions. This has been laid to the posture of several Vice Chancellors who have suppressed the “collegiate” system and operated the individual machinery in running the higher institutions. The university workers who are employees in every right... seek ways in ensuring a suitable environment for the execution of their assignments... They (through their various unions) have continually requested that the university system operate under an autonomous setting where the members can be free to appoint her leaders particularly the chief executives. This is understandable from experiences of some appointed Vice Chancellors who have severally displayed draconian administrative styles since they had no allegiance to the system. Thus, many staff has been socked, dismissed and jailed. Such incidents have been highlighted with the proscription of the staff unions’ times and over again including the seizure of salaries and allowances.}
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It is not only the staff unions that are vulnerable in the dialects, university management also face series of rigour especially during tense industrial crises in the university. The major consequence is a frustration on university operational process and its service to society and humanity.

Theoretical Insight: Unitarism and Pluralism

Two major schools of thought in industrial relations that are best used as analytical tools in discussing the dialectics of staff unions and university management is pluralism and the contrasting
unitarism. Pluralism is a school of thought in industrial relations which traces back to Sidney and Beatrice Webb in England and John R. Commons, mostly regarded as the father of U.S. industrial relations in the early twentieth century. (Budd, Gomez, & Meltz, 2004) Pluralism emerged as a response to the flaws of unitarism. Unitarism perceives institutions as ‘an integrated and harmonious whole, existing for a common purpose’ assuming that each worker in any organisation identifies himself with the aims and objectives of the organisation as well as its modes of operation. Hence there is no conflict of interests between those supplying financial capital and their representatives and those contributing their labour and job skills. (Akinbode & Ebeloku, 2010) Unitary theorist advocated that unionism is an unnecessary evil and collective bargaining is also irrelevant since all parties to employment relationship are like family or team in the same proverbial boat where no member will attempt at rocking the boat.

Pluralist perception about employment relationship recognises the diverse interests of the actors in industrial relations. The pluralist industrial relations analyse work and the employment relationship from a theoretical perspective rooted in an inherent conflict of interest between employers and employees interacting in imperfect labour markets. (Budd et al, 2004) The employment relationship, according to them, is viewed as a bargaining problem between stakeholders with competing interests; employment outcomes depend on the varied elements of the environment that determine each stakeholder’s bargaining power. Pluralism thus recognises the contradictory interests of parties and the inherent antagonises springing from the dialectical relationship between the two which are often resolved at the bargaining table. This bargaining practice however raises certain fundamental questions concerning the distribution of resources and the rules governing interactions between employers and employees. This has led to the promulgations of certain laws that help in determining major contending issues between these two opposing parties. In pluralist approach to industrial relations, individual employees, managers, owners, and union leaders are viewed as human agents rather than purely economic and or rational agents. Behavioral elements of individual decision-making are therefore important. Cognitive limitations, emotions, social or cultural norms and values, habits, intrinsic as well as extrinsic motivators, and concern for others, fairness, and justice are also taken cognisance of. (Budd et al, 2004)

Pluralist industrial relations is concerned about what standards of treatment are deserved by human beings in an organisation and how the available standard shape behaviour and attitude towards work. Pluralists take note of the imperfect labour markets and the presence of powerful corporations or desperate competition among workers which can result in substandard employment conditions. Thus they suggest creating a balance between the competing interests in the employment relationship. The suggestion of pluralist approach to managing and blending conflicting interest in employment relations is captured in Budd et al, (2004)

...industrial relations theories, research, and policy prescriptions must be conscious of the relationships among the goals of workers, employers, and the larger society and seek ways of achieving a workable and equitable balance among these interests.” Imbalances the income, from a pluralist perspective, can reduce economic growth by depressing consumer purchasing power and preventing investments in human and physical capital. Excessive corporate power that creates substandard wages and working conditions can burden society with welfare-reducing social costs. Behavioural elements of decision-making imply that individual perceptions of balance or fairness can affect employee turnover, productivity, and other industrial relations outcomes. A central analytical tenet of the pluralist school, therefore, is that employment relations outcomes emerge and persist, not because they are necessarily the most efficient...but because they strike a
balance between the competing interests of different individuals, stakeholders, and institutions. (Budd et al, 2004; Pg. 2-3)

Note the emphasis on the consciousness of the conflicting goals of the parties to employment relations. In university employment relationship, which is usually a matter between and among informed individuals and groups, there must be ‘equilibrium of capital and labour’ rather than the domination of one over the other. This balance or equilibrium inevitably has impact on the morale of university workers, turnover, efficiency and most especially quality of work. If these are all prerequisites for quality of work in organisations in general, then they logically are prerequisite for effective university educational service delivery in particular.

The Concept of Service Delivery: Pluralist Industrial Relations Perspective

The most significant concern in the discourses of pluralist industrial relations perspectives is the ‘interest’ of the actors to employment relationship. The protection or truncation of these opposing interests goes a long way in determining the quality of job of employee as well as the manner in which services are rendered. In industrial relations, organisations are viewed as a society on its own, and workers are citizens who are entitled to certain fundamental human rights; standards of human dignity and self-determination. Unfortunately, labour markets do not often meet up with optimizing employee welfare based on perfect competition. The failure to adequately boost employee confidence through adequate protection of workers rights often breeds such anomalous work-related attitudes as apathy, sabotage, voluntary turnover, etc. This is why Budd (2012) contends that workers’ rights are viewed as central to job quality, and non-market institutions are embraced as necessary for achieving high levels of job quality. In the context of university community, university workers’ job quality, if ascertained, will aid effective educational service deliveries. This is to say that the more improved the job quality of university workers is, the more effective educational service would be achieved and rendered.

One important prerequisite for effective educational service delivery of the university can be extrapolated from Budd’s ‘objectives of employment relationship’. Writing on job quality, he identified three objectives of pluralistic employment relationship to include i) efficiency, ii) equity and iii) voice. And job quality is rooted in these objectives

- Efficiency means efficient profit-maximisation usage of labour and other scare resources.
- Equity means equitable distribution of economic rewards, fairness in the administration of employment policies, and the provision of employee’s security.
- Voice means opportunity for meaningful workers participation in workplace decision-making process. (Pg. 3)

The position of the pluralists is that institutions and practices should be channelled to maintain a balance between, efficiency, equity and voice. In the words of Budd (2012), a pluralist industrial relations perspective on job quality is one that analyses job quality through a lens that focuses on the efficiency, equity, and voice aspects of jobs as importantly affected by institutions. Moreover, this reasoning indicates that high-quality jobs fulfil efficiency, equity, and voice, while low-quality jobs are those that lack one or more of these elements. In the case of universities pluralism, to continuously discharge the valuable duties of effective service delivery expected of the citadels to the society, university workers’ job quality should first be sought through a balance between the objectives of employment relationships cited above. Some radical industrial relations pluralists however opine that less emphasis should be placed on
efficiency claiming that efficiency will be achieved if equity and voice are giving adequate attention and care. This position is not however visible in the academia because efficiency begets excellence which is the hallmark of effective university educational service delivery

Conclusion
This paper examines the dialectics of staff unionism and university management as it may impede effective educational service delivery if not properly handled. Within the context of this paper the pluralist theory of industrial relations premised in the discourse of differences among the university stakeholders. The stakeholders’ ideological views and differences determine their reactions towards one another and thus influence the operations of the ivory towers. Consequently, it is clear that the universities have the mandate to train and initiate research which result in manpower development for national development no longer vividly reflect in the service delivery patterns of many Nigerian universities. The pluralist nature of employment relationship in university community which consists of competing yet legitimate employer and employee interests require good and quality jobs (in form of service delivery) if the consequences are to be nip in the bud. Quality jobs are those in which these divergent and often antagonistic interests of the stakeholders are harmonised and balanced.

Recommendations
This paper established the fact that efforts need to be intensified by universities administration and union leaders to harmoniously resolve issues of conflict and disagreement to allow for speedy and progressive national development. They must adopt a concern-for-all approach to handling administrative, academic and disputes in university communities. In other words, creating harmonious equilibrium of interest groups rather than the domination of one over the other, will aid universities in delivering the much expected service to the society.

It is further suggested that greater effort should be made in the direction of providing staff with adequate facilities, improve the conditions of the immediate environment particularly, toilets, lecture rooms, offices and allow for interpersonal communication as a method of reducing the acrimony between administration on one part and other university staff. However responsibilities for provision of facilities is more on the part of the government while facilitating the provision as well as maintaining balance relationship with other stakeholders in the university is the responsibility of the university administrators. For effective and adequate educational service deliveries by universities in Nigeria, everyone especially the government should fasten belts and to rise up to the challenges and change the course of university administrative and academic events in Nigeria by putting education in a right perspective and footing.

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