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The Opportunities and Challenges Faced by University Councils in Zambia in The Process of Managing Academic Staff in Higher Education Institutions

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Abstract

The study focused on management of academic staff by the university councils as managers. The academic staff for this study comprised of the vice chancellor, deputy vice chancellor, the deans of schools and directors of institutes, all members of staff engaged in teaching and research and the librarian. The main objectives of the study were; to establish the opportunities realized by the university councils of the public universities while managing the academic staff, to determine the challenges faced by the university councils of the public universities while managing the academic staff and to examine the main roles of the university council of the public universities while managing the academic staff. The main purpose was to find out the opportunities and the challenges faced by the university councils as they manage public universities.

The findings of the study were that, the opportunities of managing the academic staff by the university councils were that of producing researchers, educators, producing self-employed citizens, economists, developing academia citizenship, promotion of discoveries and consultancy. The study also found out the challenges faced by the university councils while managing the academic staff such financial constraints, the use of modern technology, leadership development, human resource retention, succession planning, staffing recruitment, organization effectiveness and problem of infrastructure.

The population comprised of lecturers at Kwame Nkrumah University with a sample of 15 lecturers. The instrument used was the interview schedule.

Keywords: University councils, academic staff, higher education institutions, opportunities and challenges

Introduction

Objectives of the study

The study was guided by the following objectives

1. To establish the opportunities realized by the university councils of the public universities while managing the academic staff.
2. To determine the challenges faced by the university councils of the public universities while managing the academic staff.
3. To examine the main roles of the university council of the public universities while managing the academic staff.

Research Questions

1. What were the opportunities realized by the university councils of the public universities while managing the academic staff?
2. Which challenges the university councils of the public universities were faced with while managing the academic staff?
3. What were the main roles the university council of the public universities played while managing the academic staff?

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Statement of the problem

In Zambia higher education institutions and public university council started as far as 1966 with the University of Zambia then other public universities followed after. University councils of public universities from 1966 to date have realized a lot of opportunities and faced a lot of challenges while managing the academic staff. The experiences of university councils of public universities during this period of management from 1966 to date have not been reviewed and documented the reason this study have been instituted. This study therefore meant to answer the question “what are the opportunities realized and challenges faced by university councils of public universities while managing the academic staff in a Zambian context?”

Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study was to investigate the experiences concerning the opportunities realized and challenges faced by university councils of public universities while managing the academic staff in a Zambian context from lecturers view point in order to provide invaluable resource from their real life experiences.

Significant of the study

The study would help university councils of public universities to be encouraged as they manage the academic staff and find solutions to various challenges they are being faced with. The study will further help academic staff of higher public institutions appreciate the management of the university councils of public universities and offer possible solutions to many challenges being faced with through consultancy.

Research instrument and analysis of data

The study used the interview schedule. Information from the responses of the sample of 15 lecturers of Kwame Nkrumah University was analyzed manually.

Limitation

The study reviewed the experiences of lecturers' point of view. Thus the study was limited to lecturers view, hence the interpretation is based on lecturers' comments during the study and not from councilor's point of view.

Literature Review

Education

Education is a process of imparting knowledge into learners (Ndhlovu, 2012). Higher Education institutions have this noble duty of imparting knowledge into the students. This is done through teaching and learning, research and publication, giving service to the institutions and community service

In Zambia higher education institutions started as far as 1966 with the University of Zambia followed by Copper-Belt University in 1986 and Mulungushi University in 2008 then later three universities followed suit, these were Kwame Nkrumah University, Mukuba University and Chalimbana University though still at transformation stage currently.

Management of human resource in higher education institutions

Management of human resource in higher education institutions is cardinal. This study focused on management

of university by the public university councils while paying particular attention to opportunities realized and challenges encountered by the council in the process of managing Academic Staff of public universities.

Higher Education Institutions consist of universities and colleges. Universities and colleges can either be private or public. University institutions are autonomous but take into account the legal framework established by the national authority such as from the government or the ministry responsible in this case the Ministry of higher education.

The functions of higher education institutions is to provide higher education or being responsible for offering tertiary education and create conditions for learners to acquire qualifications and pursue excellence and promote the full realization of the potential of learners, to create conditions for life-long learning, prepare learners and academics, strengthen the effect of academic learning and scientific research so as to enhance social and economic development, conduct research necessary and responsive to national needs, provide facilities appropriate for learning and research that is in line with the needs of the public, to prepare specialist, expert, research and managerial cadres, to carry out intellectual and creative work to meet national needs, provide optimal opportunities for learning and the creation of knowledge and contribute to the advancement of all forms of knowledge and scholarship in keeping with international standards (Malila, 2013)

Composition of councils for public universities

The composition of university councils for the public university is as follows;

These are part-time members- appointed by the minister. These are the Vice Chancellor- ex-official, Deputy Vice Chancellor- ex-official, one staff local authority- from local authority, two members of academic staff- from senate, one outside the republic- associated with higher education, one student from the student union, one academic staff from academic staff, three members from trade, commerce and professions, one member of the national assembly-nominated by the speaker, one representative from the ministry responsible and registrar of the institute (Malila, 2013)

Members elect their chair-person and vice chairperson. The registrar is the secretary of the university council of public university.

Functions of councils for public university

- A Council is responsible for the governance, control and administration higher education institution, and
- Provide for the welfare of the staff and students of the higher education institution;
- Determine the salaries and other conditions of service of the staff of the higher education institution.
- Appoint and suspend, dismiss or otherwise discipline persons in the employment of the higher education institution in accordance with the provisions of Higher Education Act and its statutes.
- Regulate and determine all matters concerning the higher education institution in accordance with the rules adopted.
- Administer funds placed at the disposal of the higher education institution for specific purposes.
- Approve reports or recommendations from the Senate which the Senate is authorized.

- Implement the decisions of the Senate.
- Determine the terms and conditions on which examiners appointed by the Senate and the remuneration to be paid to the examiners.
- Determine, after consultation with the Senate, the academic dress and insignia of the Chancellor, officers and graduates of the higher education institution;

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- Call for, receive and consider reports from the Vice-Chancellor on the operation of the higher education institution.
- Determine all fees for the higher education institution.
- Establish administrative or service sections or units of the higher education institution as it considers necessary.
- Do any other things which are necessary.

(Malila, 2013)

Categories of university staff

There are three categories of staff of a higher education institution designated “administrative staff” and “other staff” “academic staff” The administrative staff consist of persons employed by a higher education institution, other than the academic staff, who hold administrative, professional or technical posts designated by the Council as senior posts. These are the Head of Department, Technician, laboratory assistant and librarian

The other staff consists of persons employed by a higher education institution who are not members of the academic staff or of the administrative staff.

The university academic staff

The academic staff consists of —

- ✓ the Vice-Chancellor;
- ✓ the Deputy Vice-Chancellor;
- ✓ the Deans of Schools;
- ✓ the Directors
- ✓ all the members of staff engaged in teaching and research;
- ✓ Librarian; and such other persons as the Council may designate.

(Malila, 2013)

Responsibilities of Academic Staff at the University

The responsibilities of academic staff at the public university is to implement what the legal frame-work for higher education and the councils demand. Thus, Williams and Traynor, (2017 stated that, the responsibilities of the academic staff is to deliver lectures, seminars and tutorials design, prepare and develop courses and teaching materials, develop and implement new methods of teaching to reflect changes in research, assess students' coursework, set and mark examinations, supervise students' research activities, including final year undergraduate projects, Masters or PhD dissertations, supervise own research group, which typically includes research assistants (postdocs), PhD and Master students, support students through a pastoral or advisory role, undertake personal, research projects and actively contribute to institution's research profile, write up research and prepare it for publication, prepare bids to attract funding to your department for a range of research projects, carry out administrative tasks related to the department, such as student admissions, induction

programs and involvement in committees and boards, contribute to professional conferences and seminars in one's field of expertise, establish collaborative links with other institutions, as well as with industrial, commercial and public organizations, participate in staff training activities.

Skills needed to be of value to the academic staff

The academic staff will be expected to have the following skills; expertise in the subject area, enthusiasm for specialist research area and the ability to pass this passion on to students and peers, to publish research and a willingness to participate at professional conferences and seminars, a capacity for original thought and the ability to produce original research for publication, having excellent oral and written communication skills in order to write reports and applications for funding, and to deliver lecturers, workshops and presentations, to have networking skills in order to build relationships with other researchers and research groups, both locally and overseas, as well as within one's own department, to have the ability to organize one's own workload and research group, the ability to manage time within competing demands, the capability to work both independently and as part of a team to achieve both one's own research goals and the aims of department, to possess excellent analytical skills and a flexible approach to work and having good general IT and administrative skills (Williams and Traynor, 2017).

Presentation of findings and discussions

Opportunities of the university council of public higher education

In the process of managing academic staff it was found that, the university councils were

1. **Producing researchers-** through encouraging academic staff in carrying out research activities, writing articles, books and publishing them, participate in projects and programs as reported by one researcher.
2. **Encouraging discoveries and consultancy-** by making discoveries, inventions and improvement in course of person's duty as narrated by another respondent. This is because consultancy is about the contributions the staff is likely to make to the universities in form of projects through their personal efforts. For instance they are able to contribute money, buildings, skills and equipment.
3. **Producing Educators-** who were constantly developing themselves through participating in different events such as conferences, seminars, workshops as stated by one respondent. Then another respondent explained that, the university councils created the system of in-service professional training for higher education teaching staff which focused on accumulation of professional credits and self-training. Furthermore another respondent expressed that, the university councils created and applied mechanisms to support academic staff mobility by creating positions such as student development fellow, lecturer three, lecturer two, lecturer one, senior lecturer, associate professor and professor as supported by (Petrov, 2013).

For instance the following were the examples given such as those who were appointed to staff development fellow were those who earn Bachelor's Degree with a level of attainment equivalent to merit or B+ grade average or higher. Those appointed to lecturer three were those with an earned Bachelor's Degree with a level of attainment merit or equivalent, an earned Master's Degree with research component in the field of specialization, who demonstrate potential to conduct research and write papers for publication also with three favorable referees' reports or addresses if they were already serving at the university. Those appointed to lecturer two were those with an earned Bachelor's Degree with a level of attainment merit or equivalent, an earned Master's Degree with research component in the field of specialization, an earned PhD in the field of specialization, who demonstrate potential to conduct research and write papers for publication also with three favorable referees' reports or addresses if they were already serving at the university. Those appointed to lecturer one were those with an earned Bachelor's Degree with a level of attainment merit or equivalent, an earned Master's Degree with research component in the field of specialization, an earned PhD in the field of specialization, with six years of full time teaching experience at university level, who had cumulative record of 7 publication with two publications in refereed journals and senior author of a minimum of one, who demonstrate service to the academia and wider community who demonstrate service to the academia and wider community also with three favorable referees' reports or addresses if they were already serving at the university.

Those appointed to senior lecturer were those with an earned Bachelor's Degree with a level of attainment of merit or equivalent, an earned Master's Degree with research component in the field of specialization, an earned PhD in the field of specialization, with at least nine years of full time teaching or lecturing experience at university level, who had cumulative record of 10 publication with four publications in refereed journals, books, book chapter and creative work and being a senior or single author of a minimum of two publications, with evidence of outstanding performance in lecturing and training, who participate in department or school administration, who demonstrate evidence of public service, mentorship of junior staff and supervision of student research, who demonstrate service to the academia and wider community also with three favorable referees' reports or addresses if they were already serving at the university.

Those appointed to associate professor were those with an earned Bachelor's Degree with a level of attainment merit or equivalent, an earned Master's Degree with research component in the field of specialization, an earned PhD in the field of specialization, with at least ten years of full time lecturing experience at university level, who had cumulative record of 15 publication and 8 must be refereed publications and being a senior or single author of a minimum of four. Then five referred publications since attained senior lecturer level, external evaluation of best three publications chosen by the applicants. The lecturer who shows evidence of outstanding performance in lecturing and training, a lecturer who showed evidence of outstanding performance in research such as demonstrating ability to initiate and develop collaborative research projects with junior staff, attract funding for research and

projects, carry out and complete research projects and supervise undergraduate and postgraduate student's projects. Those who showed evidence of an experience of providing academic and administrative leadership in the university. Those who demonstrated evidence of public service, mentorship of junior staff also with three favorable referees' reports or addresses if they were already serving at the university.

Those appointed to being a professor were those with an earned Bachelor's Degree with a level of attainment merit or equivalent, an earned Master's Degree with research component in the field of specialization, an earned PhD in the field of specialization, with at least ten years of full time lecturing experience at university level, who had cumulative record of 25 publication and 7 must have been published since attaining the rank of associate professor. Then at least 12 of the cumulative publications must be refereed scholarly works and be a senior or single author of a minimum of six. Then at least 15 years of experience of effective lecturing at the university level. The associate professor should show evidence of outstanding contributions to the advancement of knowledge and of attracting research grants and providing research mentorship. The evidence of experience in providing academic and administrative leadership in the university. The evidence of significant contribution to life and work of the university and public service and demonstration of ripeness of judgment, the evidence of applying knowledge and experience to development of society. The demonstrated evidence of public service, mentorship of junior staff and supervision of student research also with three favorable referees' reports or addresses if they were already serving at the university.

4. **Producing self-employed citizens-** though promotion of both theoretical and practical skills during the training. For instance this was achieved through twinning of institutions, teaching practice, involvement students in research activities and presentations as expressed by one respondent.
5. **Producing Economists-** as reflected in a response where one respondent reported that, university councils effort made universities produce economists who were able to meet the needs of the fluctuating economy as well as local and global advancements
6. **Promoting or developing Academia Citizenship-** this was done by motivating academic staff to develop professionally and participate in some institutional, international and national projects without expecting any payments their service was later considered for their promotion mobility (Petrov, 2013) as also reported by one respondent. The findings of the study showed that, the opportunities of managing the academic staff by the university councils were that of producing researchers, educators, producing self-employed citizens, economists, developing academia citizenship, promotion of discoveries and consultancy. Depending on these empirical findings the researcher supports the efforts done by university councils in the process of managing the academic staff and if this continues it would change the face of Zambia by bringing real development to the country because higher education is a

cornerstone for development in any country.

Challenges experienced by the university council of public higher education

The findings were as follows;

1. **Financial constraints-** the council faced challenges of not having enough funds for the salaries, allowances and loans of its staff, reasonable travelling and subsistence allowances for members of the Council or members of any committee of the Council when engaged in the business of the public higher education institution, at such rates as the Minister may determine as well as any other expenses incurred by the Council in the performance of its functions.

The researcher feels that, financial constraints might have been caused because the councils depended heavily on student fee, funds from the government and donor funds not from fundraising activities.

2. **The use of modern technology** – it was reported that, changes in technology resulted in anxiety and even resistance among academic staff. Technical changes were seen specifically as threats by staffs who envision that their roles within the university will not be appreciated. This was another form of challenge to the council.

The researcher argues that, the university councils could have overcome this challenge for instance by developing strategies to combat this resistance to change and this is key to the academic manager's role. This starts by assuring employees of their worth and meaningful place within the institute and by helping them to see the technology as an aid not a hindrance to their work.

3. **Leadership development-** leadership development is cardinal for those in leadership and those who aspire to be leaders. One respondent reported that, the university councils faced the challenge of leadership development.

In order to holistically address the challenge of leadership development faced by the council as discovered in this study the researcher suggested that, it needed a critical strategic initiative or a long term plan of leadership development. This is because across the globe leadership development has been identified as a critical strategic initiative in ensuring that the right academic staff are trained and retained and the culture of the organization supports performance from within to gain market position, and that academic staff are equipped to take on leadership roles of the future so that the organization is viable in the long term.

4. **Human resource retention-** The response from one respondent was that, the council experience the challenge of providing training, engagement programs and giving support to the academic staff who wish to keep up with technical changes which not only benefits the university but also helps the staff who take this route to feel like they are a vital part of the university.

The researcher proposed that, the managers could have faced this challenge by identifying the core areas where training is needed and offer either on-site programs or by facilitating training opportunities for the staff off-site

Secondly, the council could have rehearsed with the

ministry in strengthening the created system of in-service professional training for higher education through embarking on strengthening academic staff of focusing on accumulation of professional credits and self-training;

Thirdly, the councils might have also promoted and support strongly the application of already existing created mechanisms of supporting teaching staff mobility and academic politics.

Lastly, the council could have as well strengthened and improved policies to recognize and reward the staff.

5. **Succession planning-** one respondent narrated that, choosing a leader for succession proves difficult to the council due to lack of long-term objective of preparing candidates to succeed in times of death, retirement of leaders and other eventualities.

To overcome this challenge the researcher suggested that, the councils needed to develop internal candidates for leadership roles so that there could have been always a high standard of capability within the organization against which to measure the qualities of outside candidates. Furthermore the councils might have promoted a choice for successions which requires a candidate with genuine appreciation of people and puts the community's success ahead of once own recognition.

6. **Staffing recruitment-** the response from one respondent was that, there was workforce Shortages or a shortage of skilled workers in many universities because the managers often found it difficult to find the skilled academic staff. Most of the staff were found not be consistent with their specialties areas, they were found having done different courses from different field. The researcher deduced that, to address this problem the university councils needed to strengthen two things: the training of their current employees to keep up with technical changes and to motivate and encourage employees who they brought on board to be the best they could be. Managers could have also facilitated and strengthen further education programs, training days, conferences and seminars to keep employees' skills fresh as stated by (McGuire and Jorgensen, 2011)

7. **Organization effectiveness-** effective organization calls for effective planning, objective oriented, capacity building, feedback or communication, quality input and output. One of the responses was that, there was heavy workload among the academic staff which prevents some of them from enhancing the quality of their teaching and developing their research activities. Another response was that, there was low level of salaries offered for such workload leading to the need of combining teaching at two or more universities, resulting in an even more negative impact on working conditions and, consequently, on the quality of teaching.

Basing on this empirical finding the researcher argued that to address this challenge the council needed to strengthen further the already established flexible system of salaries based on the nature and the level of teaching assignments (bachelor, master, doctorate) and

individual profiles. As supported by Werner and DeSimone, (2012) that, the council also needs to implement strategic organizational change for increased quality and productivity through increased salaries of which the researcher was in agreement.

Secondly, the university councils needed the aspect of planning for management of the staff in order to come up with objectives, capacity building, input and output or feedback resulting in having built and upheld values of the organization.

8 Infrastructure problems- it was found that the university councils were faced with the critical shortage of staff houses, lecture theaters, classrooms, hostels and computer rooms. The researcher recognized that, there was need to source for funds from the government, donors and use other fundraising adventures in order to address the problem.

This study found out the challenges faced by the university councils while managing the academic staff such financial constraints, the use of modern technology, leadership development, human resource retention, succession planning, staffing recruitment, organization effectiveness and problem of infrastructure. These challenges needed a lot of attention from the university councils in order to address them adequately.

Conclusion

Opportunities realized by the councils of public universities should be encouraged such as the production of researchers, promotion of discoveries, consultancy, and academia citizenship, production of educators, self-employed citizens and economists. The challenges being faced with by the council need to be addressed such as financial constraints, use of modern technology, leadership development, human resource retention, succession planning, staffing recruitment and organization effectiveness for the betterment of the institution.

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