



Review Paper

The University Administrator as a Partner in Meeting the Complexities of the Current Trends in University Administration: Ghanaian Universities in Context

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Abstract

The perception of the University Administrator's job as incidental to the main business of universities has been receding gradually in Ghana since 1948. The administrator is now beginning to be accepted as an important stakeholder in dealing with the challenges that confront tertiary education. The dearth of funds for management and the massification phenomenon have clearly pointed to the usefulness of the skills that administrators now come with. In dealing with challenges such as advocacy on funding matters and workable systems, the institutional, memory of the administrator often come handy. This paper deals with the role of administrators in pursuing the objectives of universities as partners, examine the complexities in universities and current trends in university education in Ghana. Besides observations, the study relied on literature review (Desk study). The paper recommends full coupling of salaries and allowances of the administrators. The umbrella association for all professional groups GAUA should continue to fight for training opportunities to prepare the administrator for the emerging complexities.

Keywords: University administrator, Complexities, Stakeholders, Funding.

Introduction

This paper is focused on the University administrator as a partner in meeting the complexities of the current trends in university administration in Ghana.

This piece of write up begins with a stipulative definition of whom a university administrator is. In the context of this paper, the university administrator does not include such persons as Vice-Chancellors, Pro-vice-Chancellors, Provosts and Deans. The University Administrator is used here to refer that category of non-teaching professionals who render all kinds of professional support service towards promoting the core business of teaching and research in universities.

Persons with professional qualifications but primarily engaged as teachers and researchers in the university are also not intended to be covered by the classification of University Administrator. Although some chief executive officers in the universities may argue that they are also administrators, majority of them see themselves as teachers first and administration as ancillary business.

Methodology

Besides observations, the study relied on literature review (Desk study).

Literature Review and Findings

The partnership: Admittedly, university education started globally as an unequal partnership between the teaching and non-teaching sections of scholarly communities. As church-sponsored universities gave way to circular tertiary education, school administration also became separated from church, schoolmaster from priests and taxes from tithes. The scarcity of vital funds for development eventually also brought the need for qualified fund managers instead of mere bookkeepers. The many types of professionals in university administration was occasioned by the emerging complete demands to allow the teachers to concentrate on teaching. The relevance of the University administrator cannot therefore be wished away by anybody. Coupling, decoupling and recouping over the years have sought to downplay the important role that administrators play in university administration but have not succeeded. Universities as presently constituted, consist of four (4) categories of members. These are: i. The senior members, ii. The senior staff, iii. The junior staff, iv. Junior members.

The senior members consist of teaching and non-teaching members who are involved in the policy formulation and implementation processes in the life of any university. If one section is unattended to, its inefficiencies tend to affect the corporate image of the whole institution. A very inefficient non-teaching staff section may cause several difficulties during

admissions, registration, examinations, graduation, hall administration, appointments, promotions and all forms of formal severance.

Tertiary Reforms: In 1987, the University Rationalization Committee was formed to look extensively at the whole educational system in Ghana. In 1991, the resulting white paper advocate the establishment of UDS and UCEW, a change over to the semester system and the gradual replacement of 'A' levels with SSS results. The URC culminated also in the passing of PNDCL 317 and Act 454 for Educational Advisory Committee (EAC). The committee put a lot of paper work and control systems in the hands of university administrators. No doubt the expansion of access to tertiary education required in the development and enforcement of new mechanisms to ensure that quality is not sacrificed in the name of numbers^{1,2}.

Maintaining the quality assurance threshold is a task that calls for inputs from accountants, registrars, architects, lawyers, engineers, surveyors, programme analysts librarians and other professionals whose pre-occupations promote the imparting of knowledge. The importance of meetings and the memos which explain or advocate certain policy options or alternatives on the way forward cannot be denied as pointed out in ancient Romans in Barrow that the administrator being more permanent on the job, keeps the scores and frequently reminds actors of what worked perfectly in the past, what is likely to work as well as what is likely to fail³.

The Outputs of Universities: Just as the quality of raw materials decides the quality of the finished products in industry, the quality of certain inputs decide how useful the products of universities will be the main parameters in assessing the relevance or usefulness of products from the universities in my view are: i. Lecturers, ii. Lecture Room, iii. Laboratories, iv. Libraries, v. Liquidity, vi. Linkages between systems.

Of these indicators, only the first has to do with the quality of teaching staff. The other indicators constitute important services provided by the administrator to produce a conducive learning atmosphere for the teachers and learners in any university. The role of a good library in training as emphasized when Katz cites Mark Twain as observes that "the man who does not read good books has no advantage over the man who cannot read". A good library supplies the stock of textbooks which provide the knowledge needed for a particular curriculum to meet a skill gap⁴.

In every organization, the usefulness of a partner depends largely on what skills a partner brings to the table. As chief advisors to chief executives, administrators are generally expected to know the rules and regulations as well as the accepted producers that are also in conformity with natural rights. Administrators provide the conducive physical and fiscal environments for expanding the frontiers of knowledge by seeking the truth, knowing the truth, spreading the truth and

thereby diminishing ignorance. Academics believed, any many still believe today that, administration is meant for failures.

Administrators were not only perceived as "overpaid clerical appendages" but also a body of people not to be seen or heard there are still several academics in this 21st century who believe that the primary duty of administrators is to record the arguments and decisions of the academics at meetings and implement such decisions later. Granted that this is the primary occupation of administrators, it is still important that the arguments and decisions be recorded with a certain clarity and precision for posterity⁵.

Truly, when universities started in Ghana, the administrators recruited were non graduates or 1st degree holders. They were not required to have second degrees. It was the exception more than the rule for an administrator to have a terminal degree. It is still very much so in many universities in Ghana. Chukwuemeka is reputed to have said. I have yet to meet a man who when he could be appointed to the academic staff opted for a job that involved the routing perusal of files and dishing out of irrelevant and time-consuming circulars and memoranda. It can be very frustrating if in spite of an administrator's commitment, one is seen as not belong⁶.

Because of the existence of such prejudices, administrators need to earn their respect by using common people to achieve uncommon performance levels and thereby earn some credibility from their academic colleagues. Respectability in any partnership in a community of scholars calls for various forms continuous learning to meet performance expectations. In the words of Ahuja, the administrator needs "a behavioural change of individuals by cultivating their mental abilities and inherent qualities through the acquisition, understand the use of new knowledge insights and skills". Staggered training programmes both on the job and outside one's own university will progressively remedy any performance deficiencies. Isolated cases of sub-standard performance by some administrator should not continue to be a basis for all administrators to be lumped together as "overpaid clerical appendages"⁷.

Indeed, one can point to damning evidence by some academic, such as one professor. Chambers posits that such institutions are like old-factories with strand products⁸. "Yet this will not mean that all professors are out-dated. The same writer observes that most "research materials acted upon and that does not mean that academics serve no useful purpose in the economic, social and political lives of most economies. Neither does the damning revelation by chambers pointes that most professors "take on more and more and complete less and less, complete it less and less well....." Prove that professors are not useful in the global search for sustainable development through quality assurance⁸.

The collegial nature of universities means that any link in any of the constituent bodies will affect the overall institutional rating and should be a cause of worry to the other parts and sub-parts

contributing to the efficient running of the larger system. No matter how one looks at a university, the non-teaching partners are now a vital component who need to be trained and motivated at all times. Effah points out that, the administrator should not laughing all the time otherwise he will be taken for a clown. Neither should he put on a straight face to frighten face people away from him. He simply needs to have a good sense of humour⁹.

There is no one perfect mould for an administrator or chief executive. They come in all moulds. Drucker observes, that some administrators talk their mind while others are timid. Some of them are tribalistic while others are the generous type. Good leaders come in all makes¹⁰.

The Funding Maze

As the paper pointed out earlier, but it needs repetition here. Medieval universities were founded by states, philanthropists and churches. As circular universities began to emerge, church and state affairs were separated. With the drying up of funding for universities, universities also moved from merely using middle level accounting staff as mere bookkeepers to chartered accountants for fund managers. Considerable professionalism is now required in making funding proposals, preparing budget estimates and accounting for both government and donor funds.

When Ghana had only three universities, funds could be released to universities in tranches of five (5) years in advance. This allowed for planning for recruitment, stocking of libraries and laboratories and infrastructure development in the universities.

The current debate about full cost recovery and cost-sharing mechanisms is far from over. While the universities seek to justify these innovations as cost –sharing with stakeholders, students resent the practice and cynically refer to it as cost –shifting by the universities to students and parents. The universities too maintain that the deliberate under funding is a neglect of the state’s social responsibility to provide adequate funds for tertiary education and that there is no other perceived way to maintain a certain minimum quality assurance in the universities for national and international respectability without charging more through the fee-paying option. The case is getting interesting having been taken to the Supreme Court for interpretation.

The burden of accounting properly for all funds falls not on academics, but on professional accountants and their lieutenants. From quinquennial votes, funding deteriorated rapidly to triennial and further to biennial votes. As the economy experienced a further downturn, funding also deteriorated further from biennial votes to annual and eventually to monthly remittances at the tertiary level. Even this monthly remittance is not reliable and sometimes can be in arrears up to three months for particularly items two and three.

Running a university with limited funding amongst scholars must be a daunting task for any professional. But, through a combination of internal generated funds (IGF) supplementations, Loans from banks, overdrafts and juggling among various investment portfolios, the accountants and other administrators have kept the universities afloat while dialogue and advocacy continue to draw attention to the threat to the future of higher education. Since money is the life blood of any organization those who manage our limited funds are performing a very important role. This is not a job anybody can do and do well in the 21st century.

Copeland points out that the competent administrator has qualities which are not possessed by many eminent scholars, and the qualities of the competent administrator are no less easy of attainment than that of scholarship. Abundant money may not necessarily guarantee good outputs but the lack of cash is bound to create lots of challenges to any university seeking to be a centre of excellence in a globally competitive technological world¹¹.

The work of administrators is taken lightly but when book and research funds, salaries and budgets deadlines are not paid or met , the resulting disenchantment points powerfully to the importance of the administrator in the pursuit of the so called primary objectives for which universities are generally perceived to be established for.

Lastly, when the students want to bare their fangs over schools fees, it is the administrators who provide the support services who are targeted. When modest increases in fees do not result in glaring improvement in facilities, the students and lecturers conclude that there is no efficiency in the use of the fees. How else can some explain the use of flashy cars by administrators and air conditioners in their offices?

To disgruntled partners, there is no advantage to the married man going to bed early in darkness to save the cost of candles if such conduct results in a budget for twins in the long run. Austerity measures and sacrifices must be seen to be yielding good dividends. Keeping the score and providing satisfactory answers for all manner of deprivations to all constituencies in the universities is the onerous task of the administrator.

Complexities in Universities

The Penchant for Arguments: Universities have earned a name for themselves by engagement in needless arguments. Very simple matters can degenerate in to heated arguments in boardrooms in universities. Chambers says about his colleague professors that most times: They are neither looking for progress nor the success of an organization. They always look out for to embarrass others and the achievements⁸. Chambers further observes that “while academics seek problems and criticize, practitioners seek opportunities and act. Academics look for what has gone wrong: practitioners look for what might

go right.” The broad representation of talents among all the partners in the university partly explains the influences of the constituent disciplines in arguments⁸. Bogue notes, scientists will want an experiment and philosophers a logical argument. Lawyers will want an adversarial hearing and theologians a reference to the scripture. Sociologists will want an opinion poll and artists a panel of judges. Engineers will want a systems study and economists a cost/ benefit analysis. Agreement comes more easily during arguments when members come from the same training and professional calling in organizations¹².

Promotion system: The promotion system among academics is heavily skewed towards publishing. One has to publish or perish. Although publishing is not required for placement at the highest levels of non-teaching professional groupings, communicating effectively is a necessary requirement for survival up there. The import of heavy reliance on accomplished scholarship among academics is that effective teaching is not sufficiently encouraged and rewarded. Yet this is the number one activity that can ensure that the graduates from universities meet the performance expectations of industry, government and the business community. The fact that good teaching is not rewarding, there are many in universities who publish for promotion and care very little about service to humanity. Leboeuf points out in title of this book that what gets rewarded get done and calls this the greatest management principle. Keeping career records, accomplishments, writing minutes and issuing promotion and regret letters to failed candidates is not a particularly pleasant business¹³.

Change versus Conservatism: Universities preach change to respond to the needs of country, industry and business community but are conservative to the marrow. University staffs are consultants to governments, donor agencies and distressed businesses and organisations but their own backyards are not better managed than others. Bogue cites Warren Bennis as saying that “universities are most the worst managed institutions in the country, one reason, incredibly enough is that universities....have never deeply studied their own administration.” No doubt an incompetent administrator safely anchored in the centre of things in academia, will bring any university into disrepute much sooner than most people can expert¹².

There is this often heard joke that if you want to reform a university, you may as well change a cheese or cemetery. The battle lines continue to be drawn in all university campuses between radicals and conservatives. The ever pervading influence of academic freedom and license does not permit control of the executive without a violent resentment of the universities. The different professional leanings, compounded by political colourations, ethnic prejudices and personal ambitions make teamwork a tall order in universities. Many lecturers take pride in introducing chaos even in their teaching approaches and expect the students to introduce order into their chaotic presentations.

Conservatism is a familiar ball game in universities. Prompt responses to changing demands are difficult to achieve. Taggart could not have been nearer to the truth when he observed, the history of universities is a very gradual and grudging acceptance of new disciples; as each discipline was at last able to squeeze into the university, the newly accepted disciplines to rear its ugly head. The situation may be changing for better today but the tendency is very much alive in debates over curricula approvals at academic board meetings¹⁴.

Current Trends

Universities in Ghana have experienced and continue to experience certain transformations as a result of deliberate search for some economies of scale, changing financial fortunes and sometimes deliberate intervention by Government to achieve a fit between global market demands, government policy objectives and introspective educational reforms. The following trends come to mind.

Massification: There has been a massive sudden increase in tertiary enrolment referred to as the “massification phenomenon” Mohammed bhai came about through deliberation expansion of access in all the pre-tertiary institutions, the implementation of educational reforms reducing the duration of the pre-tertiary level and donor pressure to expand tertiary education access for a rapid transformation of the ailing economy. The result of this massification in increased pressure on classroom space, laboratory space, increase in student loans and cash to keep vital services functioning to meet the desired objectives of markets, universities and policy makers in government. Massification has therefore led to feeling of perceived decline in the quality of university products and warranted the institutionalization of quality assurance standards to uphold and sustain quality. Universities have been compelled to examine their own strategies and use their scarce resources to achieve a fit between market expectations and skills and knowledge dissemination in the global arena¹⁵.

Proliferation of Universities: From a single public university in 1948, public universities have now grown to six. There are also ten regional polytechnics now turning into universities but no sign of a private polytechnic. The Ghanaian tertiary education landscape is virtually saturated now with private university colleges seeking to expand further access to tertiary education. This proliferation has almost immediately engaged the attention of the tertiary regulatory agencies such NCTE, NAB and NAPTEX to strengthen supervision to maintain respectability nationally and internationally for the degrees, diplomas and certificates being purportedly issued to deserving tertiary students^{1,2,16}.

Increasing professionalization of non-Teaching Staff: From the recruitment of non-graduate staff, on-the job training and retraining, many university staff are now being recruited from the onset with good professional qualifications to deal with the

ever expanding range of hobs administrators are expected to perform. The increasing professionalization of virtually all the support services of universities will in future lead to the accord of greater respect to the roles of the administrator as other partners will come to appreciate that the administrator is in a perfectly different sphere of influence in expanding the frontiers of knowledge.

Generating IGF: Increasing under-funding has led to ingenious ways of trying to generate funds to augment what come directly from the consolidate Fund and Constitutional Sources such as GETT Fund, Scholarships Secretariat and donor agencies. The main difficulty with optimizing income generation (IGF) is the pervading feeling that universities are generally mean in rewarding its staff involved in self evaluation consultancies. Knowledge possession belongs to the realm of intellectual property rights and both academics and non-teaching staff are generally reluctant in investing their expertise, time and resources in-house compared to the expected earnings for similar assignments outside.

University Autonomy: Universities in Ghana continue to dread the Nkrumah era where recruitments, promotions and nominations to serve on boards and committees in the universities were dictated by government. The appointments of chancellors and vice-chancellors are now in the hands of university councils although the chairmen of university councils continue to be appointed by the government of the day. At least vibrant councils can co-operate or oppose any appointed council chairman on matters which affect their constituencies and thereby influence or resist being influenced on matters they are conscientiously opposed to.

Ageing Faculties: The fact that poor salaries and other conditions of service, it has not been lately possible to attract renown professors from abroad and other accomplished scholars from industry/commerce to take up tenure in Ghanaian universities. The massification phenomenon, the desire to survive after one's useful working life and the refusal of the younger generation to take up careers in academia have led to many retirees taking post retirement contracts to support the systems they have built over their wrong lives. The collapse of several printing houses and referees taking post-retirement contracts to support the systems they have built over their working lives. The collapse of several printing houses and referred journals has made upward progression in academia not only a nightmare but a dream nearly impossible to achieve under the present harsh conditions in universities. The result is that the younger academics hardly use their book and research allowances for the purpose for which it was intended and damn the consequences.

Graduate Unemployment: Due to the massification phenomenon, the formal sector has become choked. Even where there are vacancies, World Bank and IMF conditionalities for loans and grants dictate the pace and manner of recruitments

to fill vacancies in establishments. The difficulties of graduates to secure jobs have led to many going for graduate qualifications in the belief that higher qualifications will make them more competitive. In the meantime, bad economic management has led to only buying and selling in the informal sector, the polytechnic, the vocational and technical schools and universities are not producing graduates who can use their entrepreneurial knowledge to create enterprises and employ themselves and others. Ghanaians do not appear to be ready to pay more yet for training graduates who will only add to the hordes of other unemployed youths in the streets.

Inclusive Education: Female enrolment at all levels has undeniably increased. Concerns about the feminization of poverty have led to advocacy that the admission and employment of more females through education will not only invariably lower their fecundity rate but increase their productivity rates through enhanced formal and informal sector earnings. The policy of support for brilliant but needy students and giving tertiary access to average performers from deprived senior high schools are all mechanisms to bridge the gap between the rural poor and the urban elite. Issues of gender, equity, affordability, access, curricula relevance and marketability are high on the agenda of most universities.

Innovative Teaching and Learning Methodologies: Although chalk and blackboards are still used, they are becoming a thing of the past in registration for undergraduate and graduate courses are now possible through online. Easy questions in assessing students are giving way to multi-choice-questions (MCOs). Video conferencing, power point presentations and internet searches are now technologies to bring information to every capable person living wherever there is internet access. Technology does not now require the teacher to be "teaching in front of the room, deciding what was to be learned, in what manner and under what circumstances" as well as "telling, explaining and questioning students while the students listened answered, read and wrote" Cuban method of Problem Basic Learning (PBL) approach as changed all this while video conferencing and other teaching methodologies do into require the teacher to be in the front¹⁷.

Delinking of Admission and Residential Accommodation: The massification phenomenon without corresponding expansion in residential facilities has brought about sever pressures in managing allocation of residential slots. Increased numbers in the rooms have also brought about greater pressures of services such as electricity, water, toiletries and reading places.

Kelvinators provided at vantage points which flowed with milk in the past cannot now even supply cold water to students. Decent meals in the Dining Halls are not only over for good; the PAYE system has gone with it too. Private partnership in providing residential facilities on campuses and adjoining

neighbourhoods are now the leeway to cope with increasing demands and dwindling resources.

Conclusion

The administrator is often chastised for many transgressions which are not truly part of his routine duties. Many stakeholders are willing to assign good motives to all the good things that happen in universities to vice-chancellors as the chief executives of universities and all the failings of the system to the incompetence of administrators. Truly construed, the administrator does many things but under the direction of chief executives. The administrator advises and executes whatever policies have been designed and approved through the collegial system.

The successes and failures in universities ought to be properly borne collectively by all the partners with stakes in the effective and efficient running of the systems. The administrator who wants to exert himself without the stamp of the authority of the relevant committees is bound to meet with resentment from academia. The administrator may wield a lot of power but that is not to say that he is solely blamable for the many deprivations that can be seen in the universities. It is a collective responsibility.

Administrators certainly can improve upon their image through improved services. The administrator needs to be modest in times of crises and train and retrain to gain respectability among the partners in the tertiary system. The struggle for credibility is bound to linger much longer until the unfolding crises of relevance and confidence in funding solutions. The emerging complexities in university administration is bound to draw the attention of partners powerfully to the relevance of the job of the university administrator. There is absolutely the need for a rethinking and understanding to make the administrator feel that he belongs and the partners to relish his contribution to the ideals in academia we care if others show that they care about them. If they do their best and they are still blamed, they can console themselves that, is the price they can least have to pay for joining the profession.

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