

Strategic Plan and Implementation of Academic Programme in Unity Schools in South-South, Nigeria

Dr James Okon

Department of Educational Administration and Planning
University of Calabar, Calabar

Dr Victor Obule Ebuara

Department of Educational Administration and Planning
University of Calabar, Calabar
Email: ebuarav.@yahoo.com

Email: Corresponding author: coker_maurice@yahoo.com

Abstract

This work has taken a vivid look at strategic plan and implementation of academic programme in unity schools in south-south of Nigeria. This paper sought to find out the relationship between strategic plan and academic programme implementation in terms of curriculum utilization, students enrolment and school finance management. To address this problem, three research questions and three research hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. The research design adopted for the study was ex-post facto. The sample of the study was one hundred and sixty (160) drawn from a population of 2,200 academic staff using a simple random sampling technique. Data was collected using structured questionnaire which was validated by experts in the department of educational administration and planning. The reliability of the instrument was established through a trial test, having a reliability index of 0.80. The finding of the study indicated that the higher the strategic plan the more effective and successful is the implementation of academic programme based on the result it was recommended tertiary education planners should diligently adopt modern management technique in allocation of found for school programme implementation.

Keywords: Strategic plan, academic programme, academic programme, schools' enrolments, curriculum utilization.

1.0 Introduction

In historical perspective, planning of education in Nigeria has its antecedent in developed countries. Planning education used to be attempts to project current trends in enrolment pattern and growth to the future by calculating only the number of teachers and classroom spaces that are needed to accommodate the pattern of growth and budgetary estimate required. This attempt was considered suitable for the country when enrolment was very poor and interest in education was low.

Education planning today, according to Ogundele (2004) is faced with numerous challenges that required more sophisticated and better planning approaches to succeed. Some of these challenges bordered on curriculum structure, decision implementation, leadership and environmental constraint, implementation of academic programmes are carried out without in-depth analysis of problems and challenges they are expected to address. Education plans and decision implementation channel are taken in haphazard manner without proper initiatives. In other words, there is so much of whims and caprices approach to education programme planning and implementation in schools, particularly unity schools due perhaps to response of government to

political pressure and sometimes because of the desire to score cheap political points and as a means of fueling corruption in the system.

The nature of unity schools in the south-south of Nigeria paints a picture of lack of proper strategic planning. This development has led to the flood of academic programmes without adequate implementation strategy of academic studies. In this study, implementation of programmes imply processes that involved in translating educational plans into actions to bring about change in the learner as they acquire the planned experiences, skills and knowledge that are aimed at enabling them function effectively in the society by the school management (Uche, 2012). On this note, the researcher has observed that in the south-south states of Nigeria, unity schools have failed in the strategic planning effort and implementation of their academic programmes. The major thing in implementation of the academic programme is the curriculum. In south-south unity schools under the federal ministry of education in Nigeria, seems like most curricula are not well planned and sometimes irrelevant. The major challenge is observed on graduating students who cannot think skillfully, who are no longer creative nor resourcefully inclined to improved academic performance.

In addition, adequate consideration and planning on the factors like curriculum relevance, students enrolment, manpower development school plant maintenance, school finance management and staff/personnel matters both at the planning and implantation stages and which are indices of academic programme execution and successful implantation are given very poor attention in the schools. While, these schools plan their growth rate in future, it is not too clear whether at the stage of planning, due consideration is given to the cost implications of the envisaged academic programme expansion. The observation here is that, unity schools in the country have grown over the years in this south-south geo-political zone, but there is no feasible indication that strategic planning and programmes implementation have been properly articulated and executed. This is so because, more often, the facilities and resources on ground do not match quality delivery and implementation of academic programmes. More so, these unity schools are also said to be consuming a disproportionate percentage of the ministry's funds. According to the ministry cited in edited work of Lawal, Jinioh, Ijouya, and Olorundare (2008) unity schools students constitute 1.88% of the total pupils in secondary schools, over 88% of the federal ministry's of education budget and over 85% of the staff resources are being spent fruitlessly on the management of unity schools. These expenditures, therefore, appear to affect the management of departmental academic programmes of the schools.

The correctness and success of any strategic plan is partly tested through proper implementation of programmes of specific activities in schools to meet the academic objectives. Thus, programme implementation which is an important tool of monitoring and assessing the appropriateness and success of a strategic plan need to be given adequate attention. Without a careful planned approach to implementation, strategic goals cannot be attained in the academic programme of the institution; therefore, developing and operationalizing such a logical approach represents a formidable challenge to the school management and other stakeholders. It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to investigate and assess the current strategic programme implementation in unity schools in south-south states of Nigeria.

2.0 Statement of the problem

In the past few years, unity schools under the control of the Federal Ministry of education have been expected to be standard of academic excellence in quality, performance and acquisition

of skills, but, have failed to produce the quality output of graduates needed for nation building due perhaps to lack of foresight in strategic planning and programme implementation.

At inception of unity schools, admission to these colleges was planned and designed to be truly national with admission quota guidelines enforced to ensure that there is equity. Merit was not sacrificed as the best from each state were considered for admission. Up to the early 1980s, the schools were considered as centres of excellence in academic performance. They were the ultimate then in planning and performance. Competition was high and parents were rest assured of their words passing examination in flying colours, all things being equal. Thus the schools have produced excellent students who have and are still contributing to national development.

The cheering development and academic programme performance however began to decline from the 90s as the unity schools became disoriented and disenchanted. The besetting problems with these institutions in the south-south states seems to be the fact that the school managers, government and other stakeholders have grown skeptical about strategic planning, hence academic planning and development are taken in a haphazard manner without proper implementation processes. They have become tied to the original history and past glory of the schools that have a hard-time to stabilize. The institutional leaders now go through a time consuming and often an expensive and disruptive process in developing a reliable strategic plan, only to see it abandoned and ignored as anything truly useful. The usually strict admission policy plan is no longer respected and there are now widespread allegations of corruption. Some principals of unity schools are now sanctioned over breach of admission policy and examination malpractice. The general decay in the public schools also afflicted these schools. The rot is such that today the unity schools are mostly shadows of their past in terms of instructional materials and academic performance, hence the product of these schools are now, understandably deficient and also their producers, that is the teachers who lack resources for effective teaching and self-improvement. Many parents contemplate on withdrawing their children since academic programme implementation is no longer reliable and the quality parents were looking for are no longer there. Schools are overpopulated, the inadequate facilities are overstretched. A careful observation seems obvious that the major problem that has hindered educational objectives is not lack of good ideas, but, lack of focus, practical and actionable implementation of school programme. All these setbacks certainly need to be arrested. It is on this premise that the study is embarked upon.

3.0 Purpose of the study

The aim of this study is to examine the relationship between strategic plan and the implementation of academic programme in unity schools in south-south of Nigeria.

Specifically the study intend to:

- 1) Find out the relationship between strategic plan and academic programme implementation in term of curriculum utilization.
- 2) Investigate how strategic plan relate to academic programme implementation in terms of students enrolment pattern.
- 3) Investigate the extent to which strategic plan relate to academic programme implementation with regards to school finance management.

4.0 Research questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study.

- 1) What is the relationship between strategic plan and academic programme in terms of curriculum utilization?
- 2) To what extent does strategic plan relate to academic programmes implementation in terms of students enrolment?
- 3) To what extent does strategic plan relate to programme implementation in terms of finance management?

5.0 Research Hypotheses

To direct the study the following hypotheses were formulated.

- 1) There is no significant relationship between strategic plan and academic performance implementation in terms of curriculum utilization.
- 2) There is no significant relationship between strategic plan and academic programme in terms students enrolment.
- 3) There is no significant relationship between strategic plan and academic programmes in terms of management of school finance.

6.0 Research methodology

The research design adopted for this study is Ex-post facto. This design is used in this study in view of the fact that the research is undertaken when the event has a leading taken place. The researcher therefore, had no direct control over the independent variables which were studied retrospectively with the aim of determining their level of relationship with dependent variables. This research was carried out in the south-south states of Nigeria involving all the unity schools within the six (6) states in the zone. These unity schools are: Federal Government College Cross River State, Federal Government College, Akwa Ibom State, Federal Government College River State, Federal Government College, Bayelsa State, Federal Government College, Delta State and Federal Government College Edo State, respectively.

The population of the study consisted of 2,200 academic staff and all the academic programmes from the various unity schools located in the six states of the south-south zones. Stratified random sampling was employed as sampling technique. Schools and academic programme were grouped base on their locations and departments. After stratification, a simple random sampling technique was adopted to select the respondents. Within the six states chosen, one hundred and sixty teaching staff (teachers) 160 was used as the sample size of the study. 60 academic programmes were used for assessment.

The instrument used for data collection was a Questionnaire titled: strategic plans/academic programme implementation questionnaire (SP/APIQ). The research instrument was constructed and developed by the researcher and given to experts in educational administration and planning to face validate and ascertain the degree of accuracy with which the instrument measures what it was designed to measure. The reliability of the instruments was established through a trial test. The measures of the instruments used in this study were scored on a four point Likert scale format. The data was analyzed using Pearson product moment correlation statistical tool.

7.0 Results

The results of this study are presented in the tables below. The analyzes and discussions are made to address the research hypothesis formulated to guide the study.

7.1 Hypothesis one

There is no significant relationship between strategic plan and academic programme implementation in terms of curriculum utilization.

Table one

Pearson product moment correlation analysis of the relationship between strategic plan and academic programme implementation in terms of curriculum utilization

N=160

| Variables | $\sum x$ $\sum y$ | $\sum x^2$ $\sum y^2$ | $\sum xy$ | r-cal |
|---|----------------------|--------------------------|-----------|-------|
| Strategic plan | 2149 | 29311 | 27811 | 0.94 |
| Implementation of academic programme in terms of curriculum utilization | 2028 | 26208 | | |

The result of the analysis in table one above shows that the calculated r-value of 0.94 is greater than the critical r-value of 0.159 at 0.05 level of significance with 158 degrees of freedom. This means that there is a positive relationship between strategic plan and implementation of academic programmes in terms of curriculum utilization. This implies that the more unity schools meet the objectives of their programmes the more successful is the implementation of the academic programmes in terms of curriculum utilization. Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected. The r-value, which is positive in the result imply that the higher the strategic plan, the more effective and successful in the implementation of the academic programme in terms of curriculum utilization. On the other hand, the poorer the strategic plan, the les the implementation of academic programmes in terms of curriculum utilization.

7.2 Hypothesis two

There is no significant relationship between strategic plans and implementation of academic programmes in terms of students' level of enrolment.

Table two

Pearson product moment correlation analysis of the relationship between strategic plan and implementation of academic programmes in terms of level of students' enrolment.

N = 160

| Variables | $\sum x$ $\sum y$ | $\sum x^2$ $\sum y^2$ | $\sum xy$ | r-cal |
|--|----------------------|--------------------------|-----------|-------|
| Strategic plan | 2038 | 29001 | | |
| Implementation of academic programmes in terms of level of students enrolment. | 2028 | 26208 | 26211 | 1.00 |

$P < 0.05$, $df = 158$, crit $r =$ value 0.159.

The result from Table Two above revealed that at 0.05 level of significance and at 158 degree of freedom, the calculated r-value of 1.00 by far greater than the critical r-value of 0.159, thus, the null hypotheses was rejected.

This implies that there is a significant positive relationship between strategic plans and implementation of academic programme in terms of students' level of enrolment. In other words, the more unity schools meet the objectives of their programmes, the more effective is the implementation of academic programmes in terms of students' level of enrolment. The r-value of 1.00 in the result means that the higher the strategic plan, the more effective and successful is the implementation of the academic programmes in terms of level students' enrolment and vice-versa.

7.3 Hypothesis three

There is no significant relationship between strategic plans and implementation of academic programmes in terms management of school finance.

Table three

N=160

| Variables | $\sum x$ $\sum y$ | $\sum x^2$ $\sum y^2$ | $\sum xy$ | r-cal |
|---|----------------------|--------------------------|-----------|-------|
| Strategic plans | 2198 | 38972 | | |
| Implementation of programme in terms of management of school finance. | 2028 | 26208 | 27543 | 0.258 |

$P < 0.05$, $df = 158$, critical r-value = 0.159

The result from table three above revealed that at 0.05 level of significance and at 158 degrees of freedom the calculated r-value of 0.258 was found to be greater than the critical r-value of 0.159. The means that, there is a significant relationship between strategic plan and implementation of academic programme in terms of management of school finances.

That is the more unity schools in the south-sought meet the objectives of their programmes, the more effective is the implementation of academic programmes in terms management of school

finance. Based on this result the null hypothesis was rejected. The positive r in the result means that the higher the strategic plan; the more effective the implementation of the academic programmes with regards to school finance management.

8.0 Discussion of findings

The result of the analysis in hypothesis one revealed that there is a positive significant relationship between strategic plans and implementation of academic programmes with regards to curriculum utilization. The indication here is that if the objective of the academic programme that are planned for are met, the implementation of such programme will as a matter of fact be effective; therefore, the desired academic outcome will be attained.

The outcome of this study is inconsonance with the work of William and Longe (2005) who opined that it is the responsibility of the educational planners to provide students with the is background skills necessary to be successful in their chosen career. In support of this result, Obanya (2007) stressed that curriculum that is relevant (planned well) effectively utilized is the one that reflects what the learner eventually takes home from an educational experience, which he called "learned curriculum". He concluded by noting that curriculum planners and implementation has become ineffective and lacks any useful feedback mechanism that is helpful to the students and society.

Ajayi (2007), and Oluwature (2007) in their works confirmed failures in curriculum plan and implementation, when it is irrelevant not pursued and utilized well to meet the needs of the learner and society.

The curriculum of the educational system in unity schools in south-south of Nigeria has been the subject of attacks, in addition to the theories based on them. The curriculum contents have not been well planned and not oriented towards the psychology of learners; the teaching methodology in vogue is to only learn by rote; as such, students are largely examination conscious robots, who tend to memorize without understanding, repeat without neglecting and adopt without adapting, hence poor performance.

In hypothesis two, the result showed that there is a significant relationship between strategic plans and student level of enrolment which indicates that when the school meet the objective of planned academic programme, the more effective the implementation of such programme in terms of the level of students enrolment. This implies that the higher the strategic plan the more successful and effective the implementation of the academic programme.

This observation is in line with the research work of Alexander (2003) who posits that strategic enrolment planning is more than long term recruitment or retention plan, it is a data informed process that aligns schools academic and delivery resources with its changing environment to accomplish the school vision, mission and objectives. The researcher is in agreement with the above contention by stressing that enrolment strategic planning which Nigerian schools carries out should begin with student-client contact, since it is a deliberate process that requires time for planning full implementation and development of facilities that will sustain the effort. The educational institutions are therefore required to take a periodic census on students' level of enrolment.

The result however disagree with the work of Adedipe (2007) who contended that large classes in schools hinder curriculum implementation because the quality of teaching will be poor, due to unplanned teacher student ratio. Due to this lack of foresight among educational planners, accurate planning has not been given its rightful place in matching the level of enrolment of students with available infrastructure which has resulted in poor implementation of academic programmes.

In fact, this study revealed that the more the planners of school academic programme know about the characteristics attitude and values of would-be-students, the better they would design effective enrolment programme for successful implementation.

The analysis of hypothesis three revealed that a significant positive relationship exist between strategic planning and academic programme implementation in unity schools. From the result, the study revealed that when unity schools faced to meet the objectives of the academic strategic plan, the implementation of the academic programme is bound to fail.

This assertion, corroborates with the work of Toby (2010) where he said that financial management and accountability of school administrators denote the extent to which these school heads assumes responsibility or answerable for what expenditure goes on in the school system. This contention is in consonance with the research findings of Achimugh (2012) who observed that many secondary schools administrators run into serious problem because they often attempt to introduce innovations and programmes without first considering the cost and sources of funds. Series of research carried out by UNICEF (1999) to ascertain the competence and effectiveness of school principals in financial management matters revealed that about 70% are below average, while only 30% is perhaps indictable which clearly indicate that poor planning on financial issues could automatically result in poor management and implementation of any planned academic programme.

Ross (2008) is in support of this view by pointing out that, once goals and objectives are set, an action or strategic plan is needed for execution with the required financial allocation that should be directed into the project. Projects implementation sometimes failed due to inadequate budgeting and proper accountability in their executions. Hence educational funding required adequate planning.

9.0 Conclusion

From the analysis of the study the researcher concluded that there is significant positive relationship between the strategic plans and implementation of academic programmes in the unity secondary schools in south-south states of Nigeria in terms of curriculum utilization, students' level of enrolment and school financial management. The government and other stakeholders should do something towards improving the academic situation in all schools designated unity schools in the country. In other words there is need for re-examination of our management efforts and practices in school planning and administration.

10.0 Recommendations

Based on the conclusion, the following recommendations are made:

- 1) It is pertinent for government to embark on intensive and extensive collection of data on schools to ascertain the enrolment level of students to match with the available but inadequate resources towards a successful academic programme.
- 2) It has become necessary and urgent our education managers to adopt modern management techniques such as; programme planning, budget system evaluation, management by objectives technique, programme evaluation review technique. Delphi technique; critical both method in the allocation of human, material and financial resources for implementation education programme.

REFERENCES

- Achimugu, L. (2012). *The Agonies of Nigerian Teachers (2nd ed)* Ibadan: Heinemann.
- Adedipe, N. D. (2007). Quality Assurance Strategy and Last Allocation. *Paper Presented at the Workshop On Education Financing, University of Lagos, April 23-24.*
- Ajayi, P. O. (200). Evaluation of the Implementation of Physical Curriculum in South West Secondary Schools in Nigeria: *Unpublished M.Ed Thesis, University of Ado-Ekiti.*
- Alexander, F. K. (2003). The Changing face of Accountability, Monitoring and Assuming Institutional Performance *Journal of Higher Education, 71,411-431.*
- Amugo, M. B. (1997). Designing and Delivery of Curriculum for Nigeria: *Journal of Educational Planning 3, 72-74.*
- Lawal, S. Jimoh, N; Ijaya, A. & Olorudare R. N. (2008). *Educational Planning in Nigeria, Issues Problems and Challenges*, Owerri: Owelle Press.
- Longe, O. & William, G. (2005). Corporate Ladder: The way up. *Daily Independent*, Nov. 29; 16.
- Obanya, P. (2007). *Thinking and talking Education*. Ibadan: Evans Brothers.
- Obanya, P. (2010). Strategic Planning Principles Applied to Education *Paper presented at the Mbipom Foundation Lecture; University of Calabar, Unical Hotel Conference Centre, June 11-13.*
- Ogundele, A. (2004). *Planning an Effective Educational Programme for Nigerian Schools*. Ibadan: Tony Ben Publishers.
- Olowature, I. O. (2007). Evaluation of Scientific Planning of Education in Nigeria. Ibadan: Global press
- Ross, P. (2008). What you need to have a Strategic Plan. *The Voice 100-103.*
- Toby, C. A. (2010). Responsibility, Authority and Accountability of the School Principal. *The Nigerian Principal 3(1) 87-94.*

Uche, K. K. (2012). *Strategic Plan and Implementation of Academic Programme in the Universities in South Eastern States, Nigeria*.

United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (1999). *Higher Education in the Twenty-first Century Vision and Action*, Paris: UNESCO Press.