

TOWN AND GOWN INTERFACE: ASSESSMENT OF NIGERIAN FEDERAL UNIVERSITIES AND EMPLOYMENT OF INDIGENES OF HOST COMMUNITIES

OMEIRE, Charles Obioma

College of General and Communication Studies,
Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike, Nigeria
E-mail: comeire@yahoo.com.

Abstract

In addition to the traditional role of teaching, learning, research, community service and extension, universities in many countries such as Nigeria are increasingly becoming major employers of labour. The objective of this paper was to ascertain the views of host communities on the employment of natives in Nigerian federal universities located on their land. The concept of town and gown was situated in its historical context. Host communities of the University of Jos (UNIJOS) and the Federal University of Technology, Owerri (FUTO) served as case study. A sample size of 277 respondents was selected from six host communities of the two institutions. The survey research design was adopted while descriptive and inferential statistics were used in the analysis of the data. The result revealed that while the host communities of UNIJOS affirmed that the university was adequately employing their indigenes, those of FUTO indicated that the institution was not sufficiently employing natives of host communities. The paper recommended that the National Universities Commission (NUC) should monitor and ensure that federal universities comply with the employment guideline which requires federal establishments to give preference to host communities in the employment of junior staff especially.

Keywords: Town, Gown, Employment, Host, Community, Nigeria.

Introduction

Historically, the phrase 'Town and Gown' is used to portray two distinct communities coexisting in the same geographic location. The word 'town' represents the host community or the non academic population who may be the original owners of the land in which the university/institution is located. On its part, the word 'gown' represents the university community. The use of the academic gown in various university ceremonies is well known. It is necessary to point out that this tradition is traced to the European curricular of the Middle Ages when students admitted to the universities often held minor clerical status and so wore clothes similar to those of the clergy. Also, the gown proved suitable for studying under very cold condition and over time evolved into long academic gown worn with hood and cap. In addition, the gown served as a status symbol, distinguishing students and their teachers from 'ordinary'

townsfolk. It also ensured that the wearers of the gown were excused from engaging in physical manual work which the townsfolk usually carry out (Ruegg, 2003).

As at the end of March 2016, Nigeria had a total of 142 universities made up of 40 federal, 41 state, and 61 private universities. Apart from serving as factories for the production of high level manpower for the technological, economic, political and social advancement of the country, universities in Nigeria have become huge industries and massive employers of labour. With the industrial and manufacturing sectors not playing leading roles in driving the Nigerian economy, the pressure on universities and other public institutions as agencies for employment become very intense. The snag, however, is that federal universities have limited absorptive capacities. Host communities, as part of the larger Nigerian society, are also affected by the scourge of unemployment. It thus becomes necessary that indigenes of these communities will interface with federal universities for solution to the challenge of unemployment. The focus of this study is to ascertain the perception of indigenes of host communities on the employment of their members by federal universities located on their land.

Theoretical Framework

The exchange theory is germane to this discourse and thus provides the theoretical orientation for the work. The exchange theory is associated with Homans (1961), Blau (1964) and Emmerson (1981). It postulates that people enter into relationships in which they can maximize the benefits to them and minimize their costs (Nye, 1978). Emmerson (1981: 33) identifies three core assumptions of the exchange theory thus:

- People for whom events are beneficial tend to act ‘rationally’, and so such occur.
- Because people eventually become satiated with behavioural events, such events come to be of diminishing utility.
- The benefits that people obtain through social processes are dependent on the benefits that they are able to provide in exchange, giving exchange theory, its focus on the flow of benefits through interaction.

Exchange theorists maintain that people are attracted to each other for variety of reasons that propel them to establish social relationships. Once the initial ties are established, the rewards that they provide to each other serve to lubricate and solidify the bonds. The opposite situation is also possible. With insufficient rewards an association will weaken or break. Rewards that are exchanged can be intrinsic (for example love, respect) or extrinsic (for instance money, handshake) (Ritzer, 2008).

The exchange theory may be used to explain the volatile or ambiguous relationship existing between Nigerian federal universities and their host communities. It thus appears that host communities embrace federal universities when they are established on their land based on the expectation of benefits derivable from such institutions. Such anticipated benefits may include compensation to land owners, employment opportunities, infrastructural development of the communities, admission of indigenes into such institutions etc. On their part, federal universities at inception

cherish the benefits derived from the host communities (their landlords), particularly the provision of the land on which such institutions are located and provision of residential accommodation to some university staff and students in their various communities (Onwunari, 2010).

Methodology

This study was carried out in host communities of the University of Jos (UNIJOS) and the Federal University of Technology, Owerri (FUTO). UNIJOS is a conventional university which is situated in North Central Nigeria while FUTO is a specialized university that is located in the South Eastern Nigeria. Survey method was utilized for the conduct of the study. The large nature of the population studied informed the choice of the survey design.

The two federal universities were purposively selected because they fit into the general geographic demarcation of Nigeria (North and South) and the broad classification of federal universities in Nigeria (conventional and specialized). Three host communities were selected from each of the two institutions. They were purposively chosen based on their proximity to each university and the fact that their land has been put to use (not earmarked for use) by the institution. Based on these considerations, from FUTO, the following communities were selected, Ihiagwa, Eziobodo and Obinze. The communities chosen from UNIJOS were, Naraguta, Chwelnyp and Nukwis.

The respondents were selected through simple random sampling technique. The sources of data for this study were both primary and secondary sources. The primary data were collected through the use of questionnaire. A total of three hundred copies of questionnaire were distributed (fifty for each of the participating host communities). Two hundred and seventy seven were completed and returned - one hundred and forty six of the respondents were from FUTO host communities while one hundred and thirty one were from UNIJOS. The secondary data were obtained from books and journals. Descriptive statistical tools were used in the analysis of the data collected.

In terms of demographic profile, the respondents were males and females, 18 years and above, and largely educated with majority possessing secondary school certificates. They were also of various occupational backgrounds.

Results and Discussion

The results of the study are presented below.

Table 1: Respondents’ Opinion on the Employment of Junior Staff

Response	Fed. of Tech. Owerri (FUTO)		University of Jos (UNIJOS)	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Strongly Agree	23	15.7	22	16.8
Agree	44	30.1	45	34.4
Disagree	66	45.2	46	35.1
Strongly Disagree	13	9.0	18	13.7
Total	146	100	131	100

Source: Field survey, 2015

As shown in table 1 above, about 15.7 % of respondents from FUTO host communities strongly agreed that the universities employed indigenes as junior staff while about 30.1% merely agreed. On the aggregate about 45.8% maintained that indigenes of host communities were employed as junior staff by FUTO, while about 54.2% expressed contrary opinion.

Regarding the University of Jos, on the aggregate, about 51.2% indicated that the university employed indigenes as junior staff while about 48.8% expressed contrary view.

Table 2 Respondents' Opinion on the Employment of Senior Staff

Response	Fed. Univ. Tech., Owerri (FUTO)		University of Jos (UNIJOS)	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Strongly Agree	21	14.4	30	23.0
Agree	39	26.7	38	29.0
Disagree	40	27.4	28	21.3
Strongly Disagree	46	31.5	35	26.7
Total	146	100	131	100

Source: Field Survey, 2015

The above table shows the agreement or disagreement of indigenes of host communities on the employment of natives as senior staff by the Federal University established on their land. About 14.4% of the indigenes of FUTO host communities strongly agreed that indigenes were employed as senior staff while about 26.7% just agreed. On the aggregate about 48.1% affirmed that indigenes of host communities were employed as senior staff by FUTO while about 58.9% expressed contrary opinion.

With respect to UNIJOS, on the aggregate, about 52.0% of the respondents maintained that the University employed enough senior staff who are indigenes of the host community while about 48.0% expressed contrary view.

From tables 1 and 2, a consistent pattern can be discerned. It could be observed that majority of the respondents from FUTO host communities expressed the view that the University did not employ enough indigenes as junior and senior staff. Conversely, majority of the respondents from UNIJOS host communities affirmed that the university employed sufficient indigenes as junior and senior staff. This disparity in response pattern could be explained from two perspectives.

First, FUTO is located in the South East Nigeria which is populated predominantly by the Igbo. The Igbo are well educated, enterprising (Afigbo, 1982) and cherish white collar jobs (Omeire, 2015). It may thus not be very easy for a University located in Igbo land to adequately cater for the huge employment (junior and senior) needs of the people. On its part, UNIJOS is located in North Central, Nigeria which is inhabited largely by the Hausas. The Hausas are largely farmers and traders. Most of the educationally disadvantaged states in Nigeria are from Northern Nigeria. Universities that are located in Northern Nigeria may not face as much pressure as those in the South with respect to demand for employment.

The second explanation is related to the first. The Vice Chancellor and the chief executive of a federal university located in southern Nigeria who is not an indigene of the host community is likely to face pressure from his own local communities for employment. If such a Vice Chancellor succumbs to primordial pressure, he may recruit more people from his kinsmen than from the University's host communities. This is more so when the Vice Chancellor is from the same geo-political zone where the University is located.

The result from FUTO host communities which indicate the people's view that the university was not employing their indigenes might explain the tension and crises that come up intermittently between FUTO and its host communities. The negative perception of the university serves as the remote reason that ignites and aggravates issues that generate conflict between the communities and the university. This is also in line with the exchange theory which holds that beneficial outcomes reinforce relationships while lack of benefits mars such interface.

It may be pertinent to also point out that in Nigeria, though federal universities are located in states, there exist guidelines for employment to reflect federal character. As Philips (1988) points out, in the federal public service grade levels 01-06, vacancies are to be filled largely by persons from the geographical areas in which the federal agencies are located. The guideline provides that from grade level 07 and above, consideration should be given to Federal Character in recruitment into federal public service, federal universities inclusive.

The outcome of this study thus suggests that federal universities located in Northern Nigeria are conforming to the nation's employment policy guideline which directs that consideration be given to host communities in recruitment, especially into the junior cadre. Conversely, it appears that their counterparts in the South are not complying fully with the above guideline.

Conclusion

The study explored the historicity of the concept of town and gown and empirically investigated the perception of indigenes of host communities on the employment of natives by federal universities located on their land. The Federal University of Technology, Owerri and the University of Jos were used as case study. The result of the study showed that majority of respondents from FUTO host communities indicated that the university was not employing enough indigenes, both in the junior and senior cadre. On the other hand, most respondents from UNIJOS host communities affirmed that the institution was recruiting enough indigenes as staff, both at the junior and senior levels.

Recommendations

Based on this finding, it is recommended that the National Universities Commission (NUC) should periodically undertake comprehensive staff audit in federal universities with a view to ensuring that they do not short-change host communities with respect to employment, particularly of junior staff.

To further ensure that the interests of host communities are catered for with respect to employment and other benefits, it is recommended that government should ensure that one of the external members of the governing council of federal universities is appointed from the institution's host communities.

References

- Afigbo, A (1982). *Towards a Cultural Revival among the Igbo-speaking Peoples* In Ogbalu, F and
- Emenanjo, E (Eds) (1982) *Igbo Language and Culture* Ibadan: Ibadan University Press.
- Blau, P (1964). *Exchange and Power in Social Life* New York: Wiley Publishers.
- Emmerson, R (1981). *Social Exchange Theory* In Rosenberg, M and Turner, R (Ed) *Social Psychology: Sociological Perspectives* New York: Basic Books.
- Homans, G (1961) *Social Behaviour: Its Elementary Forms* New York: Harcourt Brace and World.
- Nye, F (1978). *Choice Exchange and the Family* In Burr, W, Hill, R, Nye, F and Reisisi, I (Eds) *Contemporary Theories about the Family*, Vol. 2 New York: The Free Press.
- Omeire, C (2015). *Socio-Cultural Factors and Child Adoption in Rural Communities in Imo State, Nigeria*.Ph.D Dissertation, Unpublished. Owerri: Imo State University.
- Onwunari, G (2010). *Management and Administration of Educational Institutions: The Place of Host Communities* Paper presented at National Educational Conference, Abuja, Nigeria.
- Philips, A (1988). *Essentials of the 1988 Civil Service Reforms in Nigeria* Ibadan: University Press.
- Ritzer, G (2008). *Sociological Theory* New York: McGraw Hill.
- Ruegg, W (2003). *Mythologies and Historiography of the Beginnings* In H De Ridder-Symoens (Ed) *A History of the University in Europe* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.