

Making academic rules and regulations count: Towards ensuring quality tertiary education in Nigeria

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Abstract

Common opinions qualify the quality of education in Nigeria as poor. There is a heartbreaking observation that many products of Nigerian Universities and other tertiary institutions perform below average. Different factors such as poor staffing, inadequate infrastructure, and poor funding have been identified among others as the causes. This paper does not rule out these, however, it argues that academic rules and regulations formulated to guide the operations of tertiary institutions in Nigeria are implicitly and explicitly representative of quality assurance in tertiary education. The extent to which they are implemented has implications for the quality of tertiary education in the country. The academic rules and regulations of the Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka has been selected and reviewed to account for this.

Introduction

Tertiary education is crucial to the development of any Nation. Researches that contribute to science and technological development, agricultural development, social, political, and economic developments is driven at this level of education. What this means, is that tertiary education demands critical attention.

In developing nations of Africa and other continents, it is common knowledge that tertiary education has not received and is not receiving adequate attention. This does not mean that

efforts are not made to improve tertiary education on the Continent. Part of the efforts could be seen in the adaptation of a framework of tertiary education in Europe and North America. Unfortunately, while the adaptation has improved on the content of tertiary education, it has not improved on the delivery and appropriation by students. Evident in the foregoing is that what is required may not count in the development but the delivery of content and its appropriation to form a strong base for improvement and translation into the cultural inclinations of the Continent. This paper is driven by the need to articulate principles and instruments for the delivery of tertiary education in such a way that it could be appropriated maximally by recipients (students) to manifest corresponding qualities. It considers the factor of academic rules and regulations as basic to this.

Academic rules and regulations are formulated to guide the operations of tertiary Institutions for the purpose of positive achievements in their activities. The pertinent question is whether the set of academic rules and regulations formulated by tertiary institutions in Africa is implemented to the letter. This paper provides insight into this by using Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria as a reference case. By the review of the school's academic rules and regulations (henceforth ARR), the paper predicts results and interrogates the extent to which the results are manifested.

On rules and regulations

Universities have long functioned as members of a loosely knit international academic community, bound together by common historical origins in Western Europe; universally accepted goals of teaching, research, and community service, transnational academic disciplines, similar organizational structures, and

vocabulary; global discussions of discovery and theory; mechanisms for regular interaction and scholarly exchange; and a unifying quest for knowledge and understand (Saint & Lao, 2009). Therefore, a need arises for rules and regulations to govern every organizational setup in order to achieve its expected goals.

Regulations are rules made by a government or other authority in order to control the way something is done or the way people behave. Here, rules and regulations are interchangeable. This accounts for the two always used together. However, some distinction is made between the two: rules are the guidelines or instructions of doing something correctly. They include the principles that govern the conduct or behaviour of a person in an organization or country. On the other hand, regulations refer to the directives or statute enforced by law in a particular country. In this distinction, the co-occurrence of the two is further supported. Rules describe regulations in the same way as regulations describe rules.

Rules and regulations are widespread and can have a profound impact on economic activity. They are adopted for reasons that can include promoting direct economic benefits, encouraging social improvement, improving health, ensuring safety, reducing environmental risk, and reducing systemic risk. The rules are formulated and enforced by institutions such as local or national governments, state-endorsed bodies, or privately endorsed bodies, including professional medical and legal organizations, among others. Generally, rules and regulations are developed with a focus on their alleged benefits (Ghosal, 2010.).

A study by MANTEP Institute, (1995) describes school rules as principles or orders which monitor and guide behavior in a particular academic institution. School regulations are official orders that a particular school adopts to ensure proper students'

behaviour. Mosha (2006) confirms this by reference to Tanzania. According to him, school rules and regulations in Tanzania have specific functions including to prepare pupils as good citizens who become better people in adult life; to make students realize that offenders are punished which will encourage obedience to the laws of the country and to conform to accepted norms and rules of conduct, also to encourage co-operation and harmony in the society. Some of the school regulations are part and parcel of school rules. School rules are principles or orders which guide behaviour in schools. Some of the rules include being punctual, maintaining neatness and cleanness, living in peace and order, being obedient to teachers, parents, and the community, taking care of school materials, equipment and buildings. In principle, school rules and regulations function together to ensure that schools are maintained and there is a smooth running of education (Mosha, 2006).

MANTEP Institute (1995) comments that teachers believe that when students are properly disciplined and controlled, there is order, peace, and harmony in the school. This has an implication for the macro society. Render, Padilla & Krank, (1989) shows this: ‘the goals of school rules are to create good citizen who (1) do good to others and do not harm others, (2) function well in the society and live by its laws and norms, and (3) take responsibility and do their very best’.

From a postmodern viewpoint, school rules and regulations can be termed as ‘hidden curriculum’ that intends to compel students to accept institutional definitions of themselves, as ‘normal’ human beings (Skelton, 1997: 186). The hidden curriculum could be said to include routines such as timekeeping, attending classes, wearing uniforms, dressing decently (in the case of a tertiary institution) greetings, the practice of academic

rules. By developing and implementing school rules and regulations, by students in school, “normalcy” is rewarded and “deviance” is punished.

Kwayu (2014: 8) in her opinion of school regulations states:

“School regulations are official rules or orders intended to control the running of a public school. The notable school regulations related to students' control and discipline include i) school daily timetable; ii) procedures of carrying out activities in school individually or in a group; and iii) use of punishment on students breaking school rules or not following school regulations”.

Rules and regulations may connote different meanings, some people may see them as an infringement on their freedom, some may see them as liberating while some others take them as instruments of maintaining order, and, this is the case for schools. Apparently, they represent important control mechanisms to which students conform. As widely acknowledged, human beings normally respond to four elements of social bond in a conventional society: attachment to others, commitment to conformity, involvement in conventional activities, and belief in the value or legitimacy of the convention. These four elements qualify rules and regulations, and also, determine how students behave in schools, outside the schools, and in post-school life. In other words, one of the objectives of having school rules and regulations is to train children to become good citizens and better adults who contribute constructively and productively to their society.

Academic standards are the benchmarks of quality and excellence in education such as the rigour of curricula and the difficulty of examinations. The standards are supported by academic rules and regulations, which though are conditionally flexible and static, govern the academic behaviour of participants in institutions (Shayer, M. and Adey, 1994). Therefore, school discipline depends on academic rules and regulations.

Adams (2000) explains that the concepts of school discipline and school violence are used interchangeably even though they denote different things. School violence should refer to incidents of crime that usually are punishable by adult criminal law. In contrast, school discipline is supposed to refer to the advancement of student training towards a goal, i.e., behaving according to rules, and should include all misconduct, from being late to class to bringing a gun to school. Violent behavior in schools is by default undisciplined, but undisciplined behavior is not necessarily violent. The two concepts are controlled and mediated by school rules and regulations. School rules and regulations are therefore an indispensable requirement for a stable school system.

Natsiopoulou (2011) thinks of a student's disciplinary incident as a point or successive points where the student, one or more adults in charge, the organization (its imperatives, rules, regulations, and culture, which also refers to the particular cultural patterns that the student body may have developed over time and managed to sustain), timing, particular conditions, and space, meet and interact. He argues that student discipline is a key issue for today's schools and that student disobedience is consistently noted as being a core challenge faced by teachers and schools in our times.

More frequently, in modern society, a lack of discipline is frequently blamed on:

- changes in family structure and culture (i.e., single-parent families, working mothers, lack of an extended family, or parental disciplinary practices that are harsh and inconsistent);
- violence propagated through the media; and
- peer pressure and other aspects of teenage culture.

What is worrisome is not the factors but the rate of student's unruly acts. It is common knowledge that student indiscipline has increased in intensity and frequency in recent times. Truly, there have always been disobedient students but as it is the case now, student misbehavior has reached new levels (Bear, 1998).

Over the years, there seems to be a need to do more besides the implementation of rules. Arguments have been raised that most times students are not drawn closer in a friendly relationship to know the source of their rebellious attitude. Skinner and Hales (1992) in respect of this argue that Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) has only been half-implemented. They explain that teachers and administrators may praise or punish students (i.e., deal with the consequences that follow the behaviour), but they do not try to understand student behavior from a behavioral perspective as well, which requires taking into account environmental factors (i.e. "antecedent" events). Regarding discipline, these causative events may include factors such as who the student is sitting next to, but also involves the school, the teacher himself and his teaching approach, the system of rules that the children are subjected to in school, the practices of the school in its effort to enforce the rules, the constant surveillance, the day-to-day routines, and so forth (Skinner and Hales, 1992).

Nevertheless, some scholars do have a different opinion on the causes of student's defilement of school rules. Gottfredson, D. C., Gottfredson, G.D., & Hybl, (1993: 182) after their studies on eight schools for three years conclude as follows:

“Some individuals are more likely than others to misbehave;...some teachers are more likely than others to produce higher levels of misconduct in their classrooms by their management and organization practices, and some schools more often than others fail to control student behaviour.”

Akiba (2010) corroborates the foregoing, he acknowledges that some students misbehave due to poor classroom management or unfair rules and schools' insistency on punishing students for misbehaving instead of questioning the methods employed by teachers or changing their rules.

Discipline in the school is a very important aspect of academic excellence, while lack of it usually gives rise to a lot of problems such as lack of vision and mission, poor time management, irregular attendance, and punishment. It also plays a vital role in the acquisition of a sense of responsibility in learners as well as educators (Mussa, 2015). Achieving discipline is a sine qua non in governing any academic institution. Working out effective rules and regulations for this achievement is, therefore, a major task.

Discipline creates a good image of schools and prepares learners for the future. Disruptive behaviour amongst learners is eliminated if there is a good level of discipline at school. The enforcement of discipline at school is a key for the learner in his journey to adulthood. In this stance, discipline is the ability to

carry out reasonable instructions or orders to reach appropriate standards of behaviour. Ngonyani, Muhairwa, and Mmari, (1973: 15) qualifies it to be that “abstract quality in a human being which is associated with and manifested by a person’s ability to do things well at the right time, in the right circumstance, with or without minimum supervision”.

The present study is anchored on the premise that academic rules and regulations are focal in the pursuit of quality assurance in the standard of education in Nigeria. This is supported by the impetus rules and regulations given to the achievement of not only student discipline but also academic staff discipline. In other words, the position of the paper is that quality assurance in university education in Nigeria is affected by the academic rules and regulations designed by Nigerian universities especially given the extent to which the rules and regulations are enforced or implemented.

Some Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka academic rules and regulations

The academic rules and regulations of any university target the achievement of the mission statement of that university. For Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka (henceforth, NAU), her mission is:

“In the process of learning, students would be oriented to use their education in the solution of practical problems confronting them and the Nigerian society. It is hoped that the graduates of the university will be able to use their knowledge to lift the society of its problems in science, technology, the utilization of human, and

material resources, and in the development of culture and the environment” (*General and Academic Regulations*, 2011: 1).

To achieve this mission, some of the following rules and regulations have been designed and approved for the academic running of the university:

(1) Minimum academic standards

- a) Every academic program is designed to provide the students with a broad-based education and computer literacy-between 10% and 20% of the total credits shall be drawn from two Faculties outside the student’s Faculty (p.5).
- b) Every academic program is designed to provide adequate room for extra-curricular activities such as sports etc. (p.5)
- c) The time limit for the completion of any program shall not be longer than 150% of the prescribed duration for the program (p.5).

(2) Academic advising

- d) Every new student shall, upon completion of registration, be assigned to an academic adviser who shall be a lecturer in his Department and who shall provide the student with assistance on academic matters as well as with personal counseling (p.5).
- e) A student shall normally have the same academic adviser for the duration of his program (for the sake of continuity) except in compelling circumstances where a change may be necessary (p.5).

- f) Student academic advising shall be complemented with student counseling services provided on a university-wide basis (p.5).

(3) Registration of students

- g) A full-time student of the University shall not attend to a full-time job at the same time (p10).
- h) To maintain his student status, every student shall complete the registration exercise at the beginning of the first semester of each session (p.10).
- i) Registration exercise for each academic session shall take place in the first week of the first semester of that session (p.10).

(4) Instruction to all students

- j) Every student must register at the beginning of each session to retain his studentship of the University. Only registered candidates shall be regarded as bonafide students of the University (p.12).

(5) Summary of academic standing

CGPA	EFFECT	CGPA	EFFECT
1.00 – 5.00	GOOD STANDING		
0.60 – 0.99	REPEAT THE YEAR OR CHANGE DEPARTME NT	>1.00	GOOD STANDING
		<1.00	WITHDRAW FROM UNIVERSITY
0.00 – 0.59	WITHDRAW FROM UNIVERSITY		

probation stage

(6) Withdrawal from the University for Disciplinary Reasons

- k) The senate shall order a student to withdraw from the university on disciplinary grounds such as forgery, fraud, examination misconduct, membership of secret cults, etc.
- l) A student required to withdraw from the University for Disciplinary Reasons shall neither be issued with a transcript nor be considered for admission into any of the University's programs, for any job or contract with the University.
- m) The particulars of such a student shall be circulated to all other Nigeria Universities.

(7) Examination

- n) Any student who misses a chance to sit on examination on the published date and time but has a valid reason like illness, for missing it, shall submit a medical certificate to

the Registrar, through his Head of Department, within 5 days from the date of the examination, or of discharge from the hospital whichever is later.

- o) Only if the medical certificate is authenticated by the University Director of Medical Services, shall the student be allowed to sit the examination without penalty in the next examination in that course. No special or private examination shall be arranged for such a student. (p.25)

(8) Qualification to sit an examination

Candidates for each examination are only those students:

- p) Who were duly registered for the course as required by the University registration regulations;
- q) Who have attained a minimum of 75% attendance at lectures/lab/clinics; and
- r) Whose registration numbers appear on the official examination list for the course.

(9) To regulate excesses on the part of the academic staff, the academic rules and regulations stipulate offenses that are punishable by dismissal:

- s) Unauthorized handling of exam scripts.
- t) Assisting a student in answering examination questions.
- u) Alteration of approved examination result(s).
- v) Victimization of a student(s) through examination marks.
- w) Award of marks for unmarked exam/quiz scripts (p. 35).

The selection of the ARR items here is determined by the implications they have for quality education. In the section below, they are discussed to highlight the implications.

Discussion of some of the NAU's ARR

The content of the university programmes is no doubt rich with university general study courses, faculty courses, and departmental courses. The extra-curricular programmes of the university are laudable. This is expected especially with the benchmarks provided by the National University Commission (NUC). In other words, the locus for the achievement of the minimum academic standards is set. However, the achievement of the standards by students is influenced by ARR (2-10). For instance, is it truly the case that students are assigned academic advisers who advise them on academic and personal matters throughout the duration of their programmes? Again, is there any annual statistical report on student counseling services provided by the university? The answer to these questions requires a quantitative study. However, whatever the answer may be, academic advising is an important factor in university education and should be taken seriously. Workshops and seminars on advising should be organized for university lecturers to equip them for this very important activity as inadequate inappropriate advising could mar a student's promising future.

The full-time and part-time programmes are designed to enforce the first item under ARR (3). Hence, it is not expected that a full-time student should be engaged in demanding non-academic activities. As much as this is in place, the extent of its implementation is not certain. This is because it is possible to find students in full-time programmes who claim they self-sponsor their education. In other words, they do other things in addition to their academic programmes. Such other things are distractions to their commitment and diligence to academic activities and would thereby affect the quality of education they achieve. The other items under ARR (3) are expected to be enforced but there had

been cases where students do not pay their school fees until the first week of the first semester examinations. And, in cases where no serious checks had been done, some of them delay payment until the second semester. Moreover, there had been verifiable reports of students who defaulted in different categories of fees until graduation. This defaulting is not commendable and speaks of indiscipline which should not qualify the defaulter for graduation since university graduates are usually found worthy in character and learning. Of course, the ARR (4) emphasizes (3).

The specification of academic standing is crucial. It suggests that students must be adequately advised academically. In fact, the problems students have with registration and academic standing are traceable to inadequate advising. Poor academic standing in the first and second years should be addressed appropriately with the recommendation of withdrawal in cases of students' poor academic performance; otherwise involved students would waste their time and parents or guardian's resources waiting to withdraw at the expiration of the duration of their programmes.

There is ample evidence that the specifications under ARR (6) are enforced because now and then news about expulsion and suspension (definite and indefinite) is made public. However, it is not certain that the last specification is enforced. It would be great to have the statistics of expelled students whose names are duly circulated to other universities. Moreover, it would be laudable if efforts are made to determine cases of students who graduated from other universities after their expulsion. With this verification and the certificates obtained revoked, ARR of universities would serve to improve the quality of university education by ensuring that good character is also emphasized.

Many a time one finds reasons to ask whether adequate orientations are given to university students after admission. This is because it is common to find students who carry over courses they missed in examinations as a result of ill health. This is another situation that exists as a result of inadequate advising of students. The stipulations of the ARR (7) make clear the grounds on which any missed exams could be written by students without the cost of carryover or re-sit. In other words, both the lecturers who advise the students and the students who are advised should have enough information about the ARR.

ARR (8) is crucial and against all odds should be implemented but the extent of its implementation is much at low ebb. A good number of students have reasonable and unreasonable reasons why they miss lectures and practicals. Many a time, some lecturers contribute to this problem with coming very late for their lectures or outright absence to lectures. However, there is a benchmark of 75% attendance for the number of times the academic contacts should be held. This rule ensures that students are adequately exposed to courses before examinations. It is, therefore, a vital measure for quality learning. The other specifications under ARR (8) handle impersonation, a problem bedeviling university education.

As we have seen, ARR (2-8) evidences that students succeed in achieving quality by the contributions and guidance of lecturers. In other words, any ARR that does not have provisions for lecturers is inadequate and inappropriate. This is what ARR (9) takes care of. Of course, from time to time there is news about lecturers who have been dismissed for committing any of the offences listed. However, the question is, 'how committed is the university management in enforcing the rule?' The degree of commitment determines insistence and consistency, which rule

out nepotism and favoritism. That is, there are usually no sacred cows.

Conclusion

The development of infrastructures to drive university education is very undeniably a crucial requirement for quality education. However, the place of ARR and its implementation in the accomplishment of quality university education cannot be taken by infrastructure. This is because infrastructures do not enhance discipline but the ARR does. It takes discipline for students to register as students at the beginning of any session. In fact, it is common knowledge that it is the registration on admission that is taken seriously. Subsequently, many students become careless about it. Similarly, it takes discipline for a student to achieve 75% attendance in all the courses offered in a semester. And, it takes discipline for a student to be committed to study (not allowing any distractions)so as to achieve good academic standing. Lastly, it takes discipline for a student to avoid any offences that could attract punishment by expulsion or suspension (be it definite or indefinite).

More so, the ARR ensures discipline on the part of academic staff. The extent of compromise the quality of Nigerian university education faces with offences such as assisting students in answering examination questions, alteration of results, awarding unmerited scores could hardly be imagined. This is one reason why the university management must rule out sacred cows in the enforcement of this aspect of the ARR.

That ARR is an important instrument in ensuring the achievement of quality university education cannot be overemphasized. In other words, efforts should be made by every Nigerian university towards the implementation of their ARR.

The National University Commission (NUC) should in addition to conducting academic programme accreditation exercises conduct also an assessment of the ARR implementation in every university. This would put in place a holistic approach to the pursuit of quality university education in Nigeria. In addition to providing for implementation, attention should also be given to the review of existing ARR. Some universities are operating with a decade(s) old ARR. Such ARR does not account for contemporary realities and should be reviewed to deal with such realities.

Overall, quality university (more generally, tertiary) education is a sine qua non for scientific, technological, social, economic, etc development of the country. Providing for infrastructural development in the universities should be pursued but even more implementation of the ARR of the universities should be pursued to qualify the awarding of university degrees to individuals who indeed have been found worthy in character and learning. It is the sum of character and learning that qualifies quality.

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