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Ethics of Recruitment and Selection of Academic Staff in Nigeria Universities

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Abstract

Ethics – the moral code, doctrines and principles guiding how recruitment and selection (R-S) of academic staff is carried out, is a common discourse in the academia. Therefore, this study theoretically x-rayed ethics, R-S of lecturers in universities in Nigeria. How most vacant positions in the institutions were filled were uncovered to be commonly based on ethnicity and political affiliation or ‘godfatherism’ of the applicant as opposed to ethics and merit. This means that politics and ethnicity are some of the attendant factors affecting ethics and due process in using relevant criteria such as academic qualification, teaching experience, current research, recognize publication, contribution to university/the nation, academic recognition/distinction, references and interview performance for selection. It was suggested that university administrators need strengthen the recruitment process of the personnel unit for autonomy or self-dependence. Autonomy is expected that R-S to make the unit uphold ethical dictates, avoid bride induced recruitment, discourage loyalty to political affiliation in the discharge of statutory roles of recruiting competent staff for the university.

Keywords: Ethics, Recruitment, Selection, R-S, University, Recruitment Criteria

Introduction

Universities are institutions established to contribute to national growth through the development of human capital. They are academic institutes established to inculcate right values for the survival of the individual and society (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013). Specifically, university education is recognized to be useful in bringing about political, moral, human and socio-economic changes

in the lives of people in a given nation. In the light of the foregoing, the Federal government in the National Policy on Education succinctly stated that the objectives of establishing any university are geared towards:

- (a) Contributing to national development through high level relevant manpower training;
- (b) Developing and inculcating proper values for the survival of the individual and society;
- (c) Developing the intellectual capability of individuals to understand and appreciate their local and external environment;
- (d) Acquiring both physical and intellectual skills for relevance among members of the society;
- (e) Promoting and encouraging scholarship and community service;
- (f) Forging and cementing national unity; and
- (g) Promoting national and international understanding and interaction (FRN, 2013).

In achieving the aforementioned goals, the role of the non-academic and academic staff among other categories of human resources in the university cannot be overemphasized. The relevance of the non-academic staff in the attainment of university goals and objectives cannot be undermined due to the fact that they are involved in the day-to-day duties that border on administration while the academic or teaching staff handle the teaching and research activities in various Faculties and Departments (Ajibola, 2011). Hence, the non-academic staff in administrative, executive, secretarial, and technical units among others can be said to provide anchor that make teaching and research purposes attainable. In order to ensure that the right manpower are employed and selected for the university, the personnel division are charged with the responsibility of performing two important duties “recruitment” and “selection” (R-S) while respecting some ethics.

The question of who to recruit and select must be answer by managers at the helm of affairs for the attainment of predetermined goals (Gamage, 2014). To better understand the subject matter of discuss, some concepts – recruitment, selection and ethics are defined in this work as follows.

Concept of Recruitment (R)

Recruitment to Subramaniam, Shamsudin and Ibrahim (2011) connotes all managerial practices and decisions that border on the number, personality of individuals that are willing to apply for, or to accept a given vacancy. Similarly, Costello (2006) defined recruitment as the set of proceedings that define the number of qualified manpower needed within an institution for selection and job placement. In other words, the recruitment process makes judicious selection possible can be made to fill vacancies. Recruitment refers to the series of steps undertaken to ensure that skill persons of interest or apposite for various academic job position are called upon (Opatha, 2010). From the foregoing, one could rightly say recruitment is the procedure of getting competent individuals for various job vacancies in the university.

Concept of Selection (S)

The common saying from the Holy Bible “many are called but few are chosen” has a lot to explain in recruitment and selection, side by side. “Many are called” explains the recruitment part while the later of choosing the suitable few from the many, connotes selection (Opatha, 2010). Selection can be seen as the various mechanisms, approaches or procedures of making choices on who is best, fit and also advancing reasons why candidate A would be better choice than Candidate B or C (Ofori and Aryeetey, 2011). It can be likened to a separation, fishing or harvesting approach whereby what is needed is separated from what is collected (the applicants that indicated interest for the vacancy).

Dessler (2007) on the other hand, described selection as the process of matching people and jobs, whereby the decision-making process in hiring typically involves multiple interviews and interviewer ratings, and it may make use of performance tests and assessment centers. Therefore, employee recruitment and selection involve those organizational activities that influence the number or types of applicants who apply for a position and assess whether a job offer is accepted (Adiele, 2017). This implies that selections requires that use of some particular instruments to select the best.

Getting the “right hands” with high knowledge, skills, abilities and other relevant characteristics that fit a job position are some of the justifications for selections to be made (Onah, 2003). For

organization to request for application, objectives must be established and used for the selection process. The position to be filled must be defined in terms of job description and specification (Cascio, 1986). It should be stressed that any mistake or foul play at this stage leads to selection of mediocres into the organization whose pre-occupation will be mostly to collect monthly salaries, without any serious commitment to the goals and objectives of the organization.

Concept of Ethics

Ethics can be defined in relation to morals, principles, value code that defined a set of proceedings and undertakings within an institution (Cascio, 1986; Biobele, 2007). Ethics for recruitment undertakings may therefore have something to do with the series of underlain principles or moral framework that sets pace for judging fit and unfit practices (Gberevbie, 2009; Onwe, Abah & Nwokwu, 2015). This explains that ethics has something to do with standards, codes, doctrines, tenants, cannons and creeds that affects how valuable decisions are made on matters of recruitment cum selection.

Ethics in R-S of Academic Staff in Nigerian Universities

In other to follow ethics and predetermined guidelines, most universities are expected to strictly follow some recruitment/selection criteria. These recruitment criteria for the university are centered on the following:

- academic/professional qualification,
- teaching, current research,
- recognized publication,
- contributions to university or nation,
- academic recognition/distinction,
- references,
- interview performance.

Qualification is one of the criteria used to recruit academic staff into the university system. It describes the qualification from an institution of learning such as a primary school, secondary school, and tertiary institution with attendant certificate of learning. The general expectation is that higher qualification promotes teachers' quality and increases their understanding of pedagogy and methods of stimulating learners (Ibrahim, 2011). Hence, the qualification for academic staff is often a minimum of Master degree (M.Sc., MA, M.Ed) in the relevant area of specialization. In most cases, evidence that an applicant has begun a doctorate degree (Ph.D.) in a given area of specialty is often an added advantage.

Teaching experience covers two major aspects namely: teaching length and load. Teaching length connotes the years of experience in the teaching field. It can be seen as the period of service that a prospective candidate has had as a classroom teacher in a school as measured in cardinal terms of days, weeks, months and mostly years. On the other hand, teaching load refers to the subject or course coverage or scope of teaching experience that a candidate for recruitment has. It is believed that the longer a teacher stays in the service of teaching, the better their experience and higher their knowledge will become in all it takes for an academic staff to effectively engage teaching and research (Jones, George, and Hill, 2000).

Current research and recognized publication are two (2) criteria that have been greatly considered in the recruitment of academic staff for the university. Quality of current researches publication can be described in relation to the worth of academic paper(s) submitted for peer review and/or paper(s) presented at conferences, and published in refereed journals at the local, national and international levels. These (current research and recognized publication) are often needed to showcase the intellectual input of a prospective academic staff of the university to the academia or their wealth of contribution to the body of knowledge within a discipline or area of specialty (Costello, 2006). Aside current research and recognized publication, prospective candidates for recruitment are also selected based on their contributions to the university/nation and their academic recognition.

Contributions to the university/nation can be seen as the qualitative worth of input to the development of the university or promotion of national goals in the country while academic recognition can be seen as the award of distinction or excellence that may have been conferred on a prospective candidates based on an outstanding contribution to an academic body such as an

institution, organization or association. On the other hand, academic recognition can come in various forms such as recognition for participating in a workshop, conference, seminar and/or symposium. It could also be recognition to the peer reviewed system of a referred journal as a reviewer, or an academic body such as an institution, organization or association (Ibrahim, 2011). The last two criteria often considered necessary in the recruitment of academic staff of the university are references and interview performance.

References refer to the contact details of an individual or authority that is put forwards by a prospective candidate for a university job position to his/her employee to verify to conduct of the candidate. Due to the university culture of recruitment only individuals of good reputation and conduct, it is generally expected that applicants for prospective job positions must possess a testimonial of good conduct from their previous place of employment or from the last school or college attended as the case may be. This is to verify possible claims the candidate could have made about themselves during the application stage for the job. To achieve this, interviews are often scheduled.

Interviews refers to the face-to-face contact between a prospective candidate for a job position and an interview officer that is geared ay accessing the candidate and verifying all claims in an oral conversation. Akpan and Ita (2015) noted that references are important but should be sought routinely, in combination with an interview and other recruitment criteria. Requesting references encourages candidates to be honest about the claims made at the application stage; but as the candidates selects who to nominate as a referee, it is reasonable to expect that a favorable representation of him/her will be presented. Therefore, additional tests such as interviews are required to establish a 'fuller picture' of the candidate (Dessler, 2007). In addition, the performance of the candidate based on the assessment at the interview is often a way to get some information about their abilities, skills and personality traits such as their openness to new experiences, optimism, agreeableness, service orientation, stress tolerance, emotional stability, initiative or proactivity among others. To ensure that only qualified personnel that are recruited, the following ethical requirements/guidelines for the recruitment criteria are stated in Table 1.

Table 1: Ethical Guidelines on the Recruitment Criteria for Applicants on Academic Staff Position in Nigerian Universities

(Source: Personnel Division Handbook of Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Edo State, Nigeria)

s/n	Recruitment criteria
	Academic/professional qualification
1.	Applicants must have a Bachelor degree in the relevant area of specialization
2.	Applicants must be a member of a recognized professional body/association of their specialization
3.	Applicant must have a Ph.D or have evidence of enrolling for a Ph.D undergoing a PhD programme
	Teaching
4.	Applicants must have taught before in a secondary school for at least five years
5.	Applicants must have taught for at least 1year
6.	Applicants must have taught on his/her subject areas of specialization for at least 1year
	Quality of experience
7.	Applicants must have a work experience of not less than three years
8.	Applicants must have some cognate experience in the teaching field
9.	Applicants must have some experience in the area of academic research
	Current research
10.	Applicants must have current papers dated within the last two years
11.	Applicants must have evidence of ongoing research for publication with reputable journals
12.	Applicants must have evidence of attendance at conferences
	Recognized publication
13.	Applicants must have evidence of scholarly publications in local journals
14.	Applicants must have evidence of published conference papers
15.	Applicants must have evidence of scholarly publications in one or more international journal
	Contributions to university or nation
16.	Applicants must have evidence of contribution to the nation e.g. contribution to the community development service (CDS) at the Youth Service
17.	Applicants Must have evidence of contributing to their local community
18.	Applicants must have evidence of contributing to organizational goals at their previous place of employment
	Academic recognition/distinction
19.	Applicants must have received an award of excellence in the teaching related
20.	Applicants must have some award of contribution as reviewer to any reputable journal in his/her area of specialization
21.	Applicants must have received an award of excellence as contributor to any reputable journal
	References
22.	Applicants must have a referee from place of previous employment
23.	Applicants must have a referee from school of graduation employment
24.	Applicants must have a referee from the institution of appointment

	Interview performance
25.	Applicants must score above an average at the time of interview
26.	Applicants must demonstrate some confidence in attending to interview questions
27.	Applicants must demonstrate mastery on their knowledge of their job duties

The foregoing in Table 1 shows that there are three ethics guidelines for each of the recruitment criteria and these guidelines all have a predetermined maximum score point during selection of applicants or candidates for the vacancy. Table 2 shows the total expected score point that can be given to applicants on each of the recruitment criteria during selection.

Table 2: Ethical Guidelines on the Selection criteria for Applicants on Academic Staff Position in Nigerian Universities

(Source: Personnel Division Handbook of Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Edo State, Nigeria)

s/n	Criteria	Selection Score point
1.	Academic/professional qualification	10 points
2.	Teaching:	
	Length	10 points
	Load	5 points
3.	Quality of experience	5 points
4.	Current research	5 points
5.	Recognized publication	30 points
6.	Contributions to university or nation	5 points
7.	Academic recognition/distinction	5 points
8.	References	5 points
9.	Interview performance	20 points
	Total	100 points

Barriers to Ethics in Recruitment-Selection (R-S)

The idea of “who knows the prominent and powerful” among academic staff sometimes erode the value and importance of ethics. In describing this, Osakwe (2007) noted that ethics is sometimes put aside when R-S is left to the hands of the politically influential. Similarly, Onwe, Abah, and Nwoku (2015) noted that applicants who are related to anyone in the political class sometimes

take advantage of their standing relationship with “the big and prominent” to gain position in the university even when they do not meet up with all the recruitment criteria. On some situations, express orders are given by the Visitor (the sitting State Governor) to Vice Chancellors of the state university to appoint a preferred candidate without recourse to ethics or R-S guidelines criteria.

One area where politics downplays on existing moral recruitment code is the political affiliations of most Vice Chancellors (VCs) with state governors that is acclaimed to give most prospective applicants a chance to be sit of the VC. With little or no consideration for experience, skill, contribution to service, many VCs have gain access to becoming head simply because they know a friend who also knows someone that knows another person in power (Tiemo & Arubayi, 2012). Consequently, nepotism, erosion of character principle, injustice and unfair treatment emerges in appointment.

Onwe, Abah, and Nwoku (2015) submitted that low productivity, inefficiency, overstaffing, indiscipline and mediocrity constitutes the major consequence of these barbaric act. Ethnicity, may also interface the R -S process in a university (Okereka, 2015). For instance, an attempt to favour an individual of the same ethnic group with the recruitment officer may affect ethics in recruitment. Beyond the basic recruitment criteria of academic/professional qualification, teaching, current research, recognized publication, contributions to university or nation, academic recognition/distinction, references and interview performance; Sanusi (2006) submitted that ethnicity is sometimes given the topmost priority during selection after the recruitment for various academic positions. The consequence of this is that ethnicity puts aside ethics and merit; giving room for mediocrity and incompetence to have a free ride.

Conclusion

Ethics in R-S of suitably qualified academics for job vacancies in the university is so key. The recruitment criteria considered relevant by academic staff are academic qualification, teaching experience, current research, recognize publication, contribution to university/the nation, academic recognition/distinction, references and interview performance. In recent times, the R-S of candidates are based on their ethnicity and political affiliation or ‘godfatherism’ as opposed to ethics and merit. Hence, the following suggestions are made:

- 1) University administrator should strengthen the recruitment process of the personnel unit for autonomy or self-dependence. Autonomy is expected that R-S to make the unit uphold ethical dictates, avoid bribe induced recruitment, discourage loyalty to political affiliation in the discharge of statutory roles of recruiting competent staff for the university.
- 2) Personnel officers of the university should establish an ethics review board that would scrutinize recruitment criteria score on teaching experience, academic recognition/distinction as the current criteria score was considered inadequate.
- 3) University administrator should recognize the role of the personnel division by making them independent and also trying not to interfere in the recruitment process. By making them independent, it is expected that recruitment and selection would be devoid of ethnic consideration, bribe induced recruitment, loyalty to political affiliation in the discharge of statutory roles of recruiting competent staff for the university.
- 4) Interview performance should be given high sense or priority over and above references by the university management team. Hence, due emphasizes should be placed on interview in order to get some information about the abilities, skills and personality traits of candidates

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