

**THE USE OF COMMITTEES IN THE EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT OF THE
POLYTECHNIC SYSTEM (A CASE STUDY OF AKANU IBIAM FEDERAL
POLYTECHNIC, UNWANA, EBONYI STATE)**

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Abstract

The Federal Polytechnic Act is an Act to establish polytechnics in various part of the country to provide full-time courses in Technology, applied sciences, management and other fields of study and to make provisions for general administration of such polytechnics. In the polytechnic system, the Rector is the Chief Executive officer charged with both administrative and academic functions while the Academic Board is the formal authority under the polytechnic regulations to make academic policy. However for the sake of meaningful decision and achievement of special and technical tasks, committees are usually created. This paper examines the Use of Committees in the Effective Management of Polytechnic system in Nigeria using Akanu Ibiam Federal Polytechnic, Unwana as a case study with a view to determining its effect in the system. It will also make appropriate recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of the system.

Key words: federal, polytechnic, act, committee, management, system

1. INTRODUCTION

The National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) is a principal organ of the Federal Ministry of Education specifically created to handle all aspects of Technical and Vocational Education falling outside University Education. Following NBTE establishment by Act No.9 of 11th January, 1977, the Federal Polytechnic statute enacted Decree No.33 of 1979 as amended by decree No. 5 of 1993, to give legal basis for the establishment of Federal Polytechnics in Nigeria. The Polytechnics and Colleges of Technology are essentially for production of middle level technical manpower needed for industrial and technological development of the country. Two types of certificates are awarded at this level, namely; the National diploma (ND) and the higher National diploma (HND).

One of the distinguishing features of polytechnic education is the strong emphasis on practice – based learning. Work attachment is included as part of the practical curriculum. This enables the students to gain on - the - job experience. The education provided is directly relevant to the country and the students' future career. (<http://walemicaiah.blog.com/2013>).

The functions of the polytechnic in Nigeria as specified in the Act (1987 No. 28) of the first schedule are as follows:

1. To provide full – time or part – time courses of instruction and training:
 - a. In technology, applied science, commerce and management; and
 - b. In such other fields of applied learning relevant to the needs of the development of Nigeria in the area of industrial and agricultural production and distribution and for research in the development and adaptation of techniques as the Council may from time to time determine.
2. To arrange conferences, seminars and study groups relative to the fields of learning specified in paragraph(a) of this subsection (1);
3. To perform such other functions as in the opinion of the Council may serve to promote the objective of the polytechnic. (Federal Polytechnic Act 1987, No.28)

However, to perform these functions effectively and take meaningful decision to achieve special and technical tasks, certain committees are created. Therefore, this paper will examine the Use of

Committees in the Effective Management of the Polytechnic system using Akanu Ibiam Federal polytechnic as a case study.

2. BRIEF HISTORY OF AKANU IBIAM FEDERAL POLYTECHNIC, UNWANA

Akanu Ibiam Federal Polytechnic, Unwana (formally The Polytechnic, Unwana-Afikpo) was established by Decree No. 33 of 1979. The polytechnic took off in November 1981 with Late Engr. Dr. O. B. Epelle as the pioneer Rector at the temporary office in Afikpo. Work then commenced on the rehabilitation of the polytechnic's temporary site at Okposi in Ohaozara Local Government Area of the then Imo State. At the same time, perimeter survey of the permanent site of the institution at Unwana, in Afikpo North Local Government Area commenced. On April 30, 1982, the foundation stone of the Polytechnic was laid by the then vice president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Chief Dr. Alex Ekwueme.

On May 27, 1982, the institution admitted its first batch of 178 students for courses in Business Administration and Management, Secretarial Studies, Electrical/Electronic Engineering Technology, Mechanical Engineering Technology. The institution has since included Accountancy, Civil Engineering Technology and Science Laboratory Technology Departments. Other Departments which included Computer Science, Pre-ND Science, Food Technology, Ceramics and Glass Technology, Hospitality Management and Tourism, Surveying and Geo-informatics, Architectural Technology, Mathematics/Statistics, Agricultural Technology, Public Administration, Marketing and Pre-ND Business studies had since been accredited. Most of these departments run programmes in both National and Higher National Diploma courses.

On September 25, 1982, the polytechnic was officially declared open at a matriculation ceremony which marked the formal admission of the first Batch of students. The student's population has grown from 178 in 1981/82 to more than 7000 in 2014/2015 session.

On the 9th of June, 1987, the polytechnic moved to its permanent site from where it operates now. Unwana, the permanent site of the institution is a town located in Afikpo North Local Government Area in Ebonyi State, Nigeria by the bank of Cross River State. Unwana people have a rich culture as well as a conducive environment for academic pursuit. (Ezeora U. E., Okoroudoh I. S., Ndubuisi I. C. 2015).

3. ADMINISTRATION STRUCTURE OF AKANU IBIAM FEDERAL POLYTECHNIC, UNWANA

Akanu Ibiam Federal Polytechnic Unwana is a complex institution that requires highly organized and effective administrative structure in order for it to deliver on its objectives. Its organization is in three folds system-the Governing Council, the Management and the Academic Board. The Governing Council is the highest administrative body in the Polytechnic saddled with the task of general arrangement, Supervision and control of the affairs, Policy, assets and liabilities and funding of the Polytechnic. The Chairman of the Governing Council is usually appointed by the President. The second administrative system is the Management. This body sees to the day to day activities of the Polytechnic. The Rector is the chairman of Management Committee. Other members of Management are the Deputy Rector (Academic), Deputy Rector (Administration), Registrar, Bursar, and the Polytechnic Librarian

The third administrative system is the Academic Board. It is the highest academic authority in the Polytechnic and has direct Policy control over all academic matters. It makes and implements academic programme, Moderate examinations, direct teaching and research. The Academic Board approves Sessional results. The Chairman of the Academic Board is the Rector. Other members of the Board are:

1. The Deputy Rectors
2. The Registrar
3. The Deans of Schools
4. Dean Student Affairs
5. Director Academic Planning
6. Heads of Departments
7. The Polytechnic Librarian
8. 2 nominated members from the Congregation

The Rector is also the Chief Executive officer Charged with both administrative and academic function while the Academic Board is the formal authority under the Polytechnic academic regulations to make academic policy. However, for meaningful decisions to be taken, and to effectively organize the human resources in the System for effective and efficient Management, Committees are set up.

4. CONCEPT OF COMMITTEE SYSTEM IN AKANU IBIAM FEDERAL POLYTECHNIC, UNWANA

The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines Committee as a group of people appointed, by a larger group, to deal with a particular matter. Nwachukwu (1988) on the other hand defines Committee as a device for achieving Co-ordination of activities and sharing information among various departments and divisions of an organization.

Akanu Ibiam Federal Polytechnic committees are Ad-hoc, standing or Constitutional/Statutory micro entities. They are created to meet some specific and critical needs of the Polytechnic in its daily search for Knowledge and truth. Panels, Boards and Special task force equally constitute kinds of Committees in the Polytechnic. These committees are either responsible to the council, Academic Board or Management. Examples of such Committees include but are not limited to the following:

1. Finance & General purposes Committee
2. Town and Gown Committee
3. Student Affairs Committee
4. Physical Planning & Developing Committee
5. Senior Staff appointments & Promotions Committee
6. Junior Staff appointments & Promotions Committee
7. Staff Development Committee
8. Ceremonial Committee
9. Auction sales Committee
10. Admissions Committee

Others are:

1. Library Committees
2. Sport Committees
3. Bus Management Committees
4. Examination Misconduct Panel
5. Tenders Board Committees

6. Rectors minor Contract Committees
7. Housing Committees
8. National health Insurance Committees
9. Anti-Corruption and Transparency unit
10. Gender policy Committee, amongst others.

5. COMMITTEE REPORTS

These committees present its report monthly, quarterly or annually as the case may be. A committee report according to Okafor (2012) is a document that contains facts, information and recommendations of a subject matter in order to facilitate decision making process. The structure of a standard committee report has nine (9) components. The components and a description of what each component entails are as follows:

1. **TITLE:** The title provides a suitable name of the report. The title usually is derived from the name given by the constituting authority or the theme of the subject to be investigated.
2. **INTRODUCTION:** The introduction provides a short background on the constitution of the committee. Essentially, it indicates the details of the letter constituting the committee (including the reference number, date and the constituting authority).
3. **MEMBERSHIP:** This provides the details of the membership of the committee and the status of each member of the committee as specified in the letter constituting the committee.
4. **TERMS OF REFERENCE:** Terms of reference implies the scope of operation of the committee as specified by the constituting authority. It is the area of concern within which the committee is required to conduct its investigation, derive its finding and make recommendations. The committee is not permitted to operate outside the specified terms of reference.
5. **PROCEDURE:** This describes the methods adopted by the committee in the conduct of its investigation, in obtaining vital fact and information and in deriving its findings. This would involve the frequency, venue and dates of meeting held by the committee, field trips undertaken by the committee in the conduct of investigations, Memoranda, documents and oral evidence received from witnesses, interviews with accused person e.t.c.
6. **FINDING:** This indicates crucial and relevant fact identified by the committee in the course of its investigation. These facts unravel the mysteries behind the subject of the investigation and provide answers to the concerns that led to the setting up of the committee by the constituting authority.
7. **RECOMMENDATIONS:** These are suggestions made by the committee based on the provisions of the relevant laws or regulations. It could also be based on the informed opinion of the committee. They suggest solutions to a problem or disciplinary measure to be administered against a person based on the findings of the committee.
8. **APPRECIATION:** This is a closing formality that expresses gratitude to the constituting authority for giving members of the committee the opportunity to serve in the committee.
9. **SIGNATURE OF MEMBERS:** The signature page of the report is set out for the signature of all members of the committee. It is usually the last page of the committee report. A standard report is incomplete and invalid if the report is not signed by the chairman and members of the committee.

6. THE USE OF COMMITTEES IN THE EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT OF THE POLYTECHNIC SYSTEM USING AKANU IBIAM FEDERAL POLYTECHNIC UNWANA AS CASE STUDY

Fundamentally, committees assist the Polytechnic management team in arriving at useful and meaningful decisions that can promote the growth and development of polytechnic education. Therefore the committee system in Akanu Ibiyam Federal Polytechnic, Unwana act as catalyst that fast track the physical and intellectual growth of the system in a competitive term with other ivory tower in the world. Foxworthy (1971) in Ikenwe (1998) asserts that committee system in institutional governance promotes democratization of administrative process. This implies that administration is decentralized in a committee system thereby encouraging individual and collective participation. It equally fosters a sense of belonging and motivates individual total commitment to the aspirations and goals of the polytechnic.

The security challenge in the polytechnic campus has made the committee on security very vital and relevant to the safety of lives and property in the polytechnic. The incidences of violence against students and staff by Unwana Youth and secret cult activities have been reduced through the collaborative efforts of both the polytechnic internal security apparatus, government security agencies and the efforts of the committee members on security in providing an enduring peace and tranquility that promotes intellectualism.

Akanu Ibiyam Federal Polytechnic, Unwana is a complex educational system that requires a concerted effort of all the major state holders to constantly exchange ideas and opinion on vital issues that will promote the tone and image of the polytechnic through effective and efficient administration. Obayan (2002) consequently posits that committee system is a vital ingredient to achieving effective polytechnic administration. The various committees in Akanu Ibiyam Federal Polytechnic, Unwana are therefore advisory bodies, the think tank that offer relevant and useful advice and suggestions to the Governing Council and Management of the Polytechnic.

Managing higher educational system in Nigeria has been quite difficult in the area of finance. Since the inception of polytechnic education in Nigeria funding has been the main bane to quality education. The 26% minimum allocation to education from the nation's budget as recommended by the World Bank has been a mirage in Nigeria. This is partly because of the overdependence on the revenue from Nigeria crude earning and the weak naira value in international market. The negative implication is the inability of Nigeria polytechnics to attract expatriates into the system, poor infrastructural development and low quality outputs. However, the committee on finance and general purpose and other congregational committee in Akanu Ibiyam Federal Polytechnic Unwana, have been very useful in this direction. They identify other alternative and veritable sources of revenue/income to the polytechnic. Today, there are profitable ventures in the polytechnic such as consultancy services, large scale farming, transportation, X-Ray services and commercial manufacturing products are among other avenues of sourcing for funds through some of these committees. Other benefits of committee system in administrative governance of Akanu Ibiyam Federal polytechnic, Unwana include:

DEMOCRATIZATION OF THE POLYTECHNIC: There is devolution of powers from the Governing Council especially the Rector. Delegation of authority to member of the committee has increased commitment and collective responsibilities to the promotion of the ideals of the system. This has invariably occasioned the stable academic calendar.

The principle of checks and balances militating against the abuse of authority is now guaranteed in the polytechnic leading to an increased quality production of students. Cross fertilization of ideas resulting in better decisions that will reposition the polytechnic towards meeting the technological challenges in the country is being achieved through committee system.

7. PROBLEMS OF THE COMMITTEE SYSTEM IN THE POLYTECHNIC

A major challenge to committees in Akanu Ibiyam Federal Polytechnic Unwana, is the issue of delay in decision making process. Some committee members are not committed to the vision and mission of

the polytechnic. Therefore, they hardly attend meetings while some perpetually go late to such meetings where vital decisions that will move the polytechnic forward are taken. The voices of dimension among committee members at meetings also affect efficiency of polytechnic administrative decisions. Alabi, Mustapha and Abdukareem (2012) added that the responsibility for a committee's decision is too fluid with no single person bearing it. Added to this is the problem of non-implementation of the decisions or recommendations of committee member. This explains why the appointment of committee members is usually at whims and caprices of the Polytechnic Management. Conversely, poor implementation of Committee's recommendation does not motivate active participation of all in the Polytechnic administration.

Appointment of personal friends to committees robs off the genuineness and sincerity of committee system to the Polytechnic growth and development. Standards, quality of work and high expectations are compromised whenever people who do not possess both technical and special skills and genuine love for the aspiration of the Polytechnic are appointed to serve in critical committees like finance and General Purposes, Student Affairs, Campus Security, Sports and Tender Board etc.

The Committees in the Polytechnic system is usually threatened by cost in terms of the huge human and material resources used. Time availability for committee members to attend crucial meetings is an added problem. In the Polytechnic, committee members decry poor provision of logistics by the Polytechnic authorities in order for them to effectively carryout their responsibilities.

Non-disciplined members of committee usually reveal highly confidential information to outsiders especially the affected persons before they are deliberated upon. This act often renders the activities of such committees inefficient and counter-productive.

8. CONCLUSION

The complex nature of Akanu Ibiam Federal Polytechnic, Unwana, Ebonyi State coupled with the increasing high expectation on the Management to meet the needs of both the members of staff and students has made the use of committee system inevitable. The Polytechnic academic life is constantly driven by dazzling technological advances, geometric increase in students' enrolment, a mismatch in funding and the challenge of importing functional and self-sustaining skills on Polytechnic graduates in the face of global economic uncertainties. Therefore, various councils, Academic Board and congregation are put in place in the Polytechnic with the aim of collaborating and synergizing with Polytechnic Management for effective and efficient administration that will promote goals realization of the system though these committees have their challenges.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

For the Polytechnic to effectively use committee for efficient and effective running of the system, the following recommendations are made:

1. There should be total democratization of the appointment process of committee members. High sense of belonging and unalloyed commitment to the ideals and values of the system will be greatly achieved.
2. Only members of the Polytechnic community who have proven integrity, valued experiences: possess professional and technical skills should be appointed to various committees in order to achieve maximally the objective of such committees.
3. The Polytechnic Management should be courageous at implementing some of the recommendations of the committees not minding its adverse implication to individuals and finances of the Polytechnic. This will boost the confidence of the committee members and will always work assiduously to reposition the system for the good of mankind.
4. Some committees with overlapping functions should be fused together to achieve efficiency and effectiveness.

5. The Polytechnic Management team should always organize workshops, seminars and retreats, the vision and mission of the Polytechnic should be reechoed to members to serve as their guiding principles while discharging their responsibilities. The various committees should work collaboratively while their activities should be periodically reviewed by the Polytechnic Management.

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