Review Paper

Bureaucratic-administrative skills in post-secondary education system and national development

Idiaghe J. E

Primary Education Studies Department, College of Education, Agbor, Delta State, Nigeria. E-mail: idiaghejuliana@yahoo.com, Tel.: 08037204948.

Accepted 14 January, 2015

The paper examines the theoretical and practical utility of bureaucratic-administrative skills in tertiary education system. It argues that as a bureaucratic organization, no tertiary education system can claim to contribute to national development if it pays no serious attention to time-tested principles of bureaucracy. National development can only be achieved in an atmosphere of peace and harmony and this can be realized when there is justice and equity which are made possible through effective application of the principles of bureaucracy in both private and public organizations. The paper advocates training and retraining of employees to develop the necessary skills to meet the challenges posed by advancement in knowledge especially in this era of Information Communication Technology (ICT). It further argues that a tertiary education system is better placed in this task of developing bureaucratic-administrative skills for national development in view of its Position in the scheme of things. The paper concludes by saying that to contribute to National Development the tertiary education system must strengthen its bureaucracy by developing its employee’s bureaucratic administrative skills through adequate training retraining.

Key words: Bureaucratic, administrative, skills, tertiary education and national development.

INTRODUCTION

As a process in administration, bureaucracy is indispensable to any organization whether public or private with clearly defined goals and objectives to be achieved. The universal character of “administration” has also made bureaucracy a universal phenomenon since it functions within an administrative set up. The importance of bureaucracy as a purveyor of national development has generated debates among scholars of different persuasions. Liberal scholars like Amucheazi (1981) for instance base their opinion on material or physical development such as roads, airports, seaports and the general infrastructure, while radicals of the Marxian school such as Rodney (1976) and Todaro (1982) contend that bureaucracy could be said to have made considerable impact on national development, if and only if, it is centred on man to improve his social life quantitatively and qualitatively (Nzang, 2000). Whatever their views, the fact remains that development, whether of infrastructure, physical or material are for the benefit of man for effective national development. The skills of bureaucracy are acquired by man and used by man for the development of the nation of which man is also a prominent part.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION OF THE TERM BUREAUCRACY

According to Ihejiiamaizu (1996) the term bureaucracy was invented by monsieur de Gournay in 1845 and was later developed by a German sociologist, Max Weber (1864 -1920). Weber used bureaucracy to describe a rationalistic and efficient organization of government administration and industry Weber contends that rational action has become a natural consequence of complexity in human organizations as is clearly seen, in state administration, business, education, science, military organizations and religious groups.
Though perjoratively associated with red-tape, excess of paper work, rigidity, remoteness, inefficiency; arrogance and corruption as argued by some scholars, others see bureaucracy as a model of carefulness, precision and effective administration (Duru, 1998).

According to Jacob in Nzang (2000), the central points characterized by Max Weber’s ideal type construct of bureaucracy hinges on specialization and division of labour and abstract rules which define the limit of authority. It is based on the principles of hierarchy where every boss is bossed, depersonalization of office where each official conducts the organization business on an impersonal and formalistic manner, employment is based on qualification, there is Job security and promotion to higher levels is based on merit.

The official or bureaucrat who holds office in a bureaucracy does so on the basis of the specialized educational or technical qualifications or professional accomplishments, symbolized in certificates, university degrees or other forms of records of achievements. His office is by appointment, not by election, he is promoted in a series of ascending steps throughout his career. His pay is in form of a fixed salary, not determined by the amount of work he performs, but rather on the position of his office in the total organization. In addition, he is entitled to pension after retirement and in return his duties, obligations, loyalties and primary relationships are towards the organization.

The relationship of the officers of the organization is determined by the arranged principle of hierarchy. Order flows upwards the ladder of the hierarchy. In other words, matters of direction, control and discipline follow a top down approach in step fashion. In this bureaucratic set up, the office is separated from the person occupying it. There is a clear dichotomy between the workers and the ownership of the means of production or administration, that is, there is an atmosphere of impersonality in the bureaucratic arrangement.

The method of operation is based on the established rules and norms. In other words; there is a set of rules which guide the conduct of the office and its operations. The bureaucrat is expected to act within the prescribed rules to ensure that his actions are safe and justified, this account for the heavy reliance on records and files by the bureaucrat in the conduct of his affairs. All communications must be prepared in multiple copies and records of all conversations, orders and transactions must be systematically filed.

In an effort to find a system of authority which produces the highest degree of goal achievement in the organization, Max Weber advocated the rational legal authority relationship. This is a type of a system of authority derived from impersonal, abstract rules based upon rational decisions or calculations for all members of the organization in order to achieve maximum efficiency.

Unlike the traditional authority which is based on custom, tradition and culture of the people and the charismatic; authority that is based on personality traits, wisdom and eloquence in speech, Weber advocated an organization in which an official obeys a superior person because of the office he occupies which is the legitimate personification of the rational-legal authority (Isaac, 1990; Duru, 1998).

From the Figure 1, there is a conceptualization of a general system (school) as a process that will help us to understand the relationship between and among the units and sub units within the school. The school is an example of organization where bureaucracy is highly practiced and respected. The school consists of a group of people, principals, teachers, students, these people are in purposive interactions and the interactions, that is, the teaching, lecturing, seminars, researches etc are interdependent making use of the school facilities as teaching materials to “process” the students in order to produce educated, cultured, disciplined, employable, productive individuals who will contribute to the development of Nigeria.

The relationship between the teachers, principals and students is determined by the principle of hierarchy. Order flows upward the ladder of the hierarchy. In other words, there is a set of rules and regulations which guide the conduct and behaviours of the people there in which the internal or external environment cannot control.

Table 1 shows the types of bureaucracy as proposed by Taylors (1973). He developed a typology of bureaucratic types under four headings: the economic, governmental, professional and social. Each heading has a number of functional categories of bureaucracy under it. But this discussion will be centered on professional bureaucracy and educational bureaucracy.

Professional bureaucracies are usually under the broad control of members of a particular profession like teachers and they are often concerned with certification of members, standard of practice (teaching) within the profession and in-service training for the members for effective teaching and learning.

Educational bureaucracy in the present dispensation has witnessed a high order of growth in education in most nations. Educational bureaucracy is in control of schools and colleges regarding educational standards. Educational bureaucracy makes sure that rules and regulations, norms and values are obeyed and respected in schools. In a school where rules are kept, students from such schools are highly disciplined, principled and they will be able to contribute their quota to the development of any nation.

The skills of bureaucracy

Bureaucratic power emanates in good part from resources peculiar to bureaucracy. Whether in democratic or non-democratic societies, the first and
fundamental source of power for bureaucratic organizations in the expertise they command.

The division of labour within large scale organizations such as tertiary institutions engender in their employees acquisition of specialized expertise even though they may not themselves have usual technical qualifications. It is for this reason that an organization is itself a source of expertise quite apart from the skills which its members initially bring to the job. Performing same tasks day in day out is a very important source of bureaucratic expertise.

This gives the individual and public agencies an invaluable kind of practical knowledge that comes from experience. This knowledge in time becomes part of the memory of a government organization and is transmitted to new employees by training and Indoc-trination programme (Rourke, 1976).

Table 1. Types of bureaucracy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Functional Categories</th>
<th>Economic</th>
<th>Governmental</th>
<th>Professional</th>
<th>Social</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cooperative</td>
<td>Fiscal</td>
<td>Artistic</td>
<td>Athletic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Financial</td>
<td>Legal</td>
<td>Educational</td>
<td>Charitable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Industrial</td>
<td>Military</td>
<td>Legal</td>
<td>Fraternal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Labour</td>
<td>Regulative</td>
<td>Medical</td>
<td>Interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Service</td>
<td>Service</td>
<td>Religious</td>
<td>Recreational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Syndical</td>
<td>Technical</td>
<td>Technical</td>
<td>Service</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Acquisition of skills by the bureaucrat engenders expertise which becomes channels of influence in the exercise of his functions especially in the development of public policy through “advice” and exercise of discretion.

Bureaucratic-administrative skills and national development

The indispensability of the skill of bureaucracy in tertiary education system cannot be disputed as no meaningful national development can be achieved without it. As Rourke (1976) rightly observed, the specialized skill of the bureaucrat in policy making exert enormous influence as he performs bureaucratic-administrative functions.

Bureaucrats are trained in policy making processes. As the foundation of good governance, good policies that
emanate from these bureaucrats contribute very significantly to national development.

A tertiary education institution is a perfect example of a typical bureaucratic organization with its complexity and hierarchical structure which manifest in various faculties and departments within the institution. Bureaucracy enhances equity and justice as rewards are based on educational qualification and technical competence of employees. This creates harmony within the system and subsequently brings about national development which can only strive in an atmosphere of peace and harmony.

The head of a tertiary institution as is the case in most instances may not have the requisite bureaucratic-administrative skills in the performance of his functions. This calls for assistance from well trained and experienced bureaucrats who have been exposed to the rudiments of administration over the years and are well equipped and better placed to offer time-tested advice to the political head of the tertiary institution.

As rightly observed by Duru (1998) bureaucratic norms and principles are part and parcel of tertiary education system. Employment is based on merit and technical competence, the principle of hierarchy which is inherent in bureaucracy is observed. Order flows down-ward while obedience flows upwards the ladder of hierarchy. The method of operation is based on laid-down rules which must be followed. Remuneration is according to rank and qualification. There is tenure of office for all employees. These create stability which is sine qua non to national development.

One of the fundamental goals of a tertiary education system is to contribute to national development through high level relevant manpower training. This involves development of skills of the employees to enable them contribute to national development. This goes further to confirm the position that no development can take place in a nation in which its citizens are not developed.

Contributing to this observation, Ujo (1995) outlines the following as essential features of a developed administrative institution.

Right quantity of staff: No institution can carry out its functions if workers are not enough to implement government policies.

Right quality of staff: It is not just having staff but having the right quality of staff. That is to say that the staff with relevant specialization must be obtained. A good tertiary institution must ensure that its employees are trained to meet the challenges posed by knowledge especially in this era of computers and Information Communication Technology (I.C.T). This is the only way they would be highly equipped to contribute to national development. Development is a process of socio-economic and political transformation of problem generating structures in such a way that it leads to improvement in the standard of living of the people including income, education, health and nutrition as well as other related social services, decreasing inequality in the distribution of income, urban-rural imbalances and political and economic activities.

Corroborating this view, Nnadozie (1990) sees development as the capacity of members of the society to actualize themselves by participating actively in the social engineering of their lives and destiny. That is to say, they must draw their strengths and aspirations from their socio economic milieu. The people must be free and confident to set their goals and be involved in their realization. This can only be achieved through effective and efficient bureaucracy.

Highlighting the powerful and developmental role played by the bureaucracy Dodd and Schot (1979), in Duru, (1998) subscribe to the following as reasons for these roles:

i.) The choice of professionals, the determination of their skills and the content of their work are now principally determined by their own professional elites, professional organizations and their institutions and facilities higher education.

ii.) The intense sustained attention that an individual bureau or office can devote to particular issue or problem provides a reservoir of understanding and knowledge that an agency political official finds it difficult, if not impossible to match.

iii.) The bureaucrat do not exist in a political vacuum, but rather interact with various element in their political environment- the public at large, interest or clientele groups that may affect or be affected by agency activities. This accounts for the need for tertiary education system to see the development of bureaucratic skills of its members as a priority if they must contribute meaningfully to national development.

Conclusion

Bureaucracy, despite, series of reforms is attended by some problems such as overpopulation, politicization and other inherent pathologies. These inherent pathologies, however, are not solely responsible for its non-performance in relation to national development. Rather the socio-economic milieu in which the bureaucracy operates contributes to the problems. For example, laziness, bribery, corruption and nepotism etc, have made it difficult for bureaucracy to be effective, thus hindering national development.

To contribute to national development, the tertiary education system must strengthen its bureaucracy by developing its employee’s bureaucratic administrative skills through adequate training and retraining.

Bureaucratic principles and norms should be adequately adhered to. It is by so doing that tertiary education system can be in a better position to contribute
to national development.

Recommendations

The paper advocates training and retraining of employees to develop the necessary skills to meet the challenges posed by advancement in knowledge especially in this era of Information Communication Technology (ICT). Bureaucratic Principles and norms should be adequately adhered to.

REFERENCES


