QUALITY ADMINISTRATION IN HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN AFRICA: THE SERVANT-LEADERSHIP PANACEA

Abari, Ayodeji Olasunkanmi
Department of Educational Management,
Lagos State University, Ojo.
E-mail: ayodeji.abari@yahoo.com

Kayode, Sunday Joseph
c/o Department of Educational Management,
Lagos State University, Ojo.
E-mail: sundayyyode@yahoo.com.uk

Oyetola, Idowu Olufunke
c/o Department of Educational Management,
Lagos State University, Ojo.
E-mail: funkeoyetola@yahoo.com

Abstract
The paper examines the concept of Administration from the holistic point of view as practically applied to higher educational institutions and with reference to Africa. A similar examination is visited on the concept of leadership. This is with a view to placing the administration of higher educational institutions on the pedestal of leadership and showing that the former can only stand where the latter is pivoted on servant-hood. The paper, therefore, espouses the practice of servant-leadership by all those in leadership positions in higher educational institutions as a singular and particular measure in quality administration for higher education management in Africa.

Key Words: Quality Administration; Higher Educational Institutions; Servant-Leadership

Introduction
The establishment of higher educational institutions is not without a purpose and as such these institutions must not only be seen but also made to be focused and achieving the goals and objectives for which they were established. It is therefore incumbent on those charged to manage and administer the affairs of the higher
institutions to ensure and assure activities that are geared towards the vision and mission of the institutions. It is also incumbent upon those so charged not only to make certain and reassure that the institutions are properly managed and administered but also to guarantee that they are effectively and efficiently managed and administered for quality so that they can stand among their equals not only in Africa but also in the world over.

Of Management and Administration, while the former is of a broader concept and understanding than the latter, the two, Management and Administration, are almost always used interchangeably. However, one tool of significance to the two is leadership. That is, to manage or administer, one has to provide leadership. The leadership dimension of management or administration is therefore one important factor that must necessarily be considered and understood in the achievement of the goals and objectives of an organization including higher educational institutions.

Towards the understanding and comprehension of the terms Management, Administration and Leadership, there have been and there continues to be several propounded theories. However, the practical application of these theories separately and jointly seems to remain a mirage particularly in higher educational institutions in Africa in order for the latter to effectively and efficiently achieve their objectives. The question that is then posed is that of bringing the administration of higher educational institutions in Africa to that quality level that would make the institutions compete favorably with their counterparts elsewhere in the world. And, in the opinion and context of this paper, the possible and probable answer to the question lies in the practise of servant-leadership practice.

Higher Educational Institutions in Africa and their Administration
Higher education, also referred to as tertiary education, is that given after the secondary education and is usually offered in Higher or Tertiary Educational Institutions, which are mainly of three conventional types namely; Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education. In her National Policy on Education, the Federal Republic of Nigeria defines tertiary education as “the education given after secondary education in universities, colleges of education, polytechnics, monotechnics including those institutions
offering correspondence courses” (FRN, 2004). UNESCO (1998) defines higher education as “programmes of study, training or training for research at the post-secondary level by universities or other educational institutions that are approved as institutions of higher education by the competent state authorities and/or through recognized accreditation system”. The term higher education therefore includes a greater diversity of institutions than just the university, polytechnic and college of education. The other higher educational institution types are usually unique, special and professionally established and sparsely distributed like the Administrative Staff College of Nigeria (ASCON), Nigerian Defence Academy (NDA) and the Ghanaian Institute of Journalism (GIJ), just to mention but a few.

Our focus, however, is on the conventional types that usually have a head, the Vice Chancellor, Rector and Provost of a University, Polytechnic and College of Education respectively, who is the academic and administrative head that sees to the day-to-day running of the institution with the able support of other principal officers such as the Registrar, Bursar, Director of Works and Director of Health Services. Each of these institutions has a governing policy making and political body, the Governing Council of Universities and Governing Boards of Polytechnics and Colleges of Education, usually appointed by the proprietor, public (government) or private, to whom the governing body is responsible. In universities, the proprietor as represented by the head of government in public universities or head of owning agencies or an individual owner, is referred to as the Visitor while in some polytechnics and colleges of education, the proprietor is called the Moderator.

There is also the Senate (in universities) or Academic Board (in polytechnics and colleges of education), the highest academic body charged with academic matters but still responsible to the Governing Body. The academic body, chaired by the Vice Chancellor, Rector, or Provost is constituted by Deans of Faculty, Head of Departments, Professors, Chief Lecturers, Provosts of Colleges and Representatives of the Lecturers. The governing body is however constituted by the nominees of the proprietor one of whom is appointed as the chairman, representatives of the academic body, representatives of the congregation and representatives of other allied bodies outside the community of the institution. In
universities, the chairman of the Governing council is also referred to as the Pro-chancellor.

Generally, individuals that make up the higher educational institutions are of two major categories namely the staff and students. The staff is also of two major types namely academic and non-academic. These various personnel, including the students, undertake various activities and interact in various ways in the matter of their duties and responsibilities towards achieving the goals and objectives of the higher institutions. Again, the various personnel are distributed and allocated to various positions in various units, departments, faculties, schools, sections and divisions, both academic and non-academic, for the same purpose of achievement. However, the extent to which the personnel carry out their functions, albeit, administratively, would determine the extent to which they achieve. The quality of administration offered at the institutional level is, therefore, significant and must be addressed squarely.

**Administration in its Quality Perspective**

To administer and make use of available resources to achieve objectives, is one thing; to do it such that the objectives achieved are of quality and up to the required standard, is another thing. In other words, there is a mark of difference between administration in its simplest form of the term and administration in its quality sense. By implication, then, on needs to understand the meaning and concept of administration and its quality as well as have an idea of how the quality can be measured and what factors affect it, the key to the understanding of what administration means lies in the following picture:

![Functioning of organizations from the process perspective](image)

Administration, then, means “people running processes based on rules using tools” (Bider, 2008). Therefore, administrative quality depends on the interplay between people, rules (operational instructions), and tools used in the administrative work (Bider, 2008). Bider (2008) also observes that “as the ultimate goal of administration is ensuring smooth running of the organization’s processes, the quality of administration should be measured by how smooth the processes actually run. Smooth run means with steady pace and without unnecessary delays and stops.

However, given that quality is a complex multi-dimensional concept that may not simply be defined by relying on a sole index, and that it has always been a human desire to reduce complexity to understandable dimensions, quality may be seen as consisting of conformance to requirements specified as a list of technical characteristics (Loffler, 2001). But, the definition of a set of quality measures is only a first step in the process of quality measurement (Loffler, 2001). Thus, scholars as well as practitioners have made various attempts to find a quality measure which can capture several dimensions of quality and, as a result, there are different charters for different conceptions of quality in society (Loffler, 2001). Loffler (2001) further observes that a detailed comparison identifies the following organizational and managerial key criteria which are also found in most Western European national quality awards that involve public service organizations: leadership, policy and strategy, people, resources, processes, different categories of ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’ results. In Bider’s (2008) perspective, when evaluating smoothness and, therefore, the quality of administration, the following type of criteria should be used:

1. The length of the time gaps between “do-it in the real world” activities that cannot be attributed to external factors. The smaller the gaps the better the administrative quality.
2. Chances that a person stops running and becomes forgotten. The lesser the chances the better is the administrative quality.

Of the several criteria that could be employed in the measurement of quality administration; according to Loffler (2001), leadership stands out as one, even as offered by Bider (2008), the role of leadership in reducing the gaps and the chances of stoppage cannot
be overlooked. Okeke (2001) also corroborated this as he included leadership in his own charter of quality schooling, thus:

*the quality of schooling can be measured in terms of the number of contact hours, curricular, class size, students’ motivation, characteristics of teaching staff, leadership style, how well the system prepares the products for the life they are to live...the level of attainment of goals as enshrined in the national policy on education.* (p.25).

**The servant-hood context of Leadership**

Of the many fundamental factors including strategy, people, structure, process, culture, non-human resources, among others, that may be used as determinants of an organization's performance and success, leadership is arguably the most critical factor. And, according to Aguda (2008), management and leadership are the vehicles by which purposes are fulfilled. Therefore, effective leadership in any organization is a pre-requisite for effective utilization of other resources towards accomplishing pre-determined objectives.

However, while Fingel (1999) asserts that traditional leadership approach emphasizes trait and a strong centralized, authoritarian style of administration, the emerging leadership thinking is anchored on servant-hood. Servant-leadership develops, as Brown (1999) puts it, from the primary motivation to help others, even if this will mean taking a risk. Such a leader, if he is worth his salt must be ready to risk everything, even his life. (Solarin, 1994).

Servant-leadership itself is a paradox that looks like a rational absurdity, an oxymoron, a contradiction (Sims, 1997). Ordinarily, the two words, servant and leader, are perceived as two opposite extremes. The former suggests being a follower or a subordinate while the latter suggests being in power or in control as the head of groups or clubs or places. However, the paradoxical conjunction of the two words, servant and leader, must be seen as a metaphor for a better understanding of what it tends to convey. Otherwise, shifting metaphors from leaders as autocrats to leaders as servants with its slave-like connotation may open up a new angle of debate for critics of the concept.

Although, leadership position confers power and authority to accomplish certain tasks and objectives in the organization, such power and authority do not make the leader (Lagos Indicator,
2008). Rather, it only establishes a command-like administrative structure in which the subordinates simply oblige and obey the boss. Good leadership differs in that it makes the followers want to achieve goals willingly. Good leadership is anchored on servant-hood which emphasizes selflessness, stewardship and authenticity. Organizational servant leaders are, therefore, those leaders that value and appreciate the contribution of others to the success of their organizations. Such leaders often take responsibility for mistakes and poor results and give credits for successes to other people.

The theoretical anchorage of this paper is hinged on servant-leadership theory as propounded by Greenleaf (1970). Over the years, major leadership theories which are known to have stimulated academic debates are traits approach, the leader’s behaviour and style approach, the situational and contingency approach, and the group dynamics approach. Greenleaf attempts to build on the assumptions of these theories by looking at the role of leaders and the view the leaders have of others. His assumption on servant-leadership emphasizes the true motivation of the leader to lead and to serve. He goes on to say that a ‘servant first’ leader is “more likely to promote a paradigm on what serves another highest priority needs than ‘leader first’”.

Patterson (2003) equally corroborated the assertion made by Greenleaf that servant leaders are those leaders who lead an organization such that the followers’ interest become more paramount over and above the leader’s self interest and ego sponsored activities. Greenleaf metaphorical categorization of a leader as servants as against the traditional top-bottom pyramidal conception lays bare the paradoxical use of power and authority.

Traditionally, leaders are perceived as the boss occupying the top pyramidal position in the organizational structure in possession of power and authority to enforce compliance irrespective of the impediment they pose to result delivery. This diametrically opposed Greenleaf servant-hood proposition of using power and authority for service that will promote the good of those led.

Greenleaf elucidation of servant-leadership however turns the traditional hierarchical pyramid upside down with the leader at the base and the organizational roles reversed (Kelly and Williamson, 2006). His assumptions promote a new paradigm, a
paradigm of respect and dignity for subordinates. It also calls for collaboration, trust, empathy and the ethical use of power and authority.

Traditionally, leadership authority flows from top downward. This form of top-down leadership authority is based on the domineering model that puts someone at the top controlling everything and everybody below.

![Flow of Support and Power](image)

**Figure 1**: Traditional flow of leadership authority from top downward

**Source**: Fingel (1999). The Top Mistakes Leaders Make

The model therefore suggests that the higher one goes up the organizational ladder the more prestige and personality one radiates and the more others under are responding to one’s commands.

The new model of leadership however turns the traditional top-down hierarchical pyramid upside down as captured in Fingel (1999) pictorial representation shown below.
Figure 2: The New Model flow of leadership authority from down to up
Source: Finogel (1999). The Top Mistakes Leaders Make

The servant leader is seen bearing on his shoulders, all the people. This form of bottom-top model differs because, servant leader is not about personal ego or material rewards but because power flows from the people. It is about motivation to serve the interest of others. The objective is to enhance the growth of individuals in the organization and increase teamwork and personal involvement.

Historically, the essential idea that leaders must be servants first predated Greenleaf (1970) essay. Ward (1996) speaks of servant-hood and leadership as basic concepts in the biblical record. Dissatisfied with the prevailing master-servant leadership style of his time, Jesus called them together and said... whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave... just as the son of man did not come to be served but to serve and give his ransom for many (Mathew 20,25-28). With the emergence of Greenleaf thought provoking theoretical proposition, interest in servant-leadership increased in both political and academic arena.

Socrates identified ability to meet human needs as the core element of service in all leadership (Adair, 2002). A survey of Japanese societal life shows what a true servant leader should be. Adair discovered that the Japanese managers tend to wear same uniforms and eat in the same canteens as their workers. This
shows that a servant leader as asserted by Fingel (1999) must be willing to get down and dirty his hands with his troops in the implementation of his objectives. He must not only be seen showing his followers what to do, but leading them to do it. Besides, he must be prepared to suffer and take unavoidable risk at whatever cost. And, as Fingel (1999) puts it, servant-leadership requires us to sit and weep with those who weep within the organization. According to Joseph (1995), the greatest example of servant-leadership is perhaps epitomized in Mao Tse Tsung that:

Chairman Mao built no house, had no landed property. He used his own life for the nation. He suffered throughout the period of his leadership. Mao was said to have led his followers through an un-chattered 6000 miles despite all odds from south east China, to the North West. While the journey lasted, Chairman Mao was the last to accept to eat his own ration of food. He made sure that everyman, everywoman, every child ate first (p.27).

This underscores the fact that true leadership is impossible without preparedness for commitment to the service of others at whatever cost. It involves the determination to accomplish a noble task out of a guiding vision and passion without compromise.

Servant-Leadership versus Quality Administration

In the administration of an organization like a higher educational institution, human resources are the most important and critical of all the resources that are employed. According to Martinez-frias (2003), "the world's most valuable resource is its people". Even while noting the use of the web as an important tool in modern management, Byrne (2006) is of the view that management is still intensely interpersonal and human. Therefore, the significance of the people in the administrative process is paramount and they, the people, must be seen to be truly running processes based on rules using tools to achieve the goals and objectives of an organization. Herein lies the crux of the matter, people seen to do what they are supposed to do, doing it rightly, being effective, and doing the right things at the right time, being efficient. The onus here lays in the leadership in an organization, right from the apex down to the various levels to the last man on the rung of leadership and superordinates. This connotes, of course, that leadership, especially in a
A complex organization like a higher educational institution, does not rest with a single individual at the helm of affairs but with all others who have cause to direct, precede and show the way for others to follow. The leadership so offered would ensure the smooth running of an organization with a steady pace and without unnecessary delays and stops. In essence, the leadership offered should be such that guarantees quality administration, that guarantees effective and efficient administration.

Since “practically, everybody working for an organization participate in the administrative activities” (Bider, 2008), that kind of leadership lies in the one that serves the people, one that sees people as human beings who should be placed and considered first in all relevant matters before the leader himself. That kind of leadership is the one that would make people work willingly and conscientiously having observed that their leader is not selfish; that their leader is ready at all times to respond to their own needs before his or her own. This servant-leadership model not only matches the values and ethos of higher educational institutions as service institutions, but also allows for the use of other leadership practices and styles without destroying the model’s beauty (Kayode, 2011). Where the leader places priority on the people, the chances are that they would rather remain on the job with a system that thinks of them first and “all men and women who are touched by the effort grow taller, and become healthier, stronger, more autonomous, and more disposed to serve” (Greenleaf, 1970).

Moreover, in servant-leadership, where followers are not considered used, competed with or judged, and they are seen as partners in progress and, power is employed to promote their good by the leader, the personal growth of organization members is enhanced and the organization is improved through a combination of teamwork, shared decision-making and ethical caring behaviour. Therefore, leaders who fit a servant-leadership model emphasize service to others, a holistic approach to work, a sense of community and shared decision making (Kelly and Williamson, 2006). Such leaders exhibit the servant-leadership characteristics of valuing people, developing people, displaying authenticity and sharing leadership as identified by Greenleaf, all of which could not but facilitate quality administration.

Moreover, Pollard (1986) observes that a leader who is willing to serve can provide hope instead of despair and can be an
example to those who want direction and purpose in their life and who desire to accomplish and contribute. This leader is the servant of the future. Anderson (2008) opines that servant-leadership takes place when leaders assume the position of a servant to their fellow workers. He asserts that the fundamental motivation for servant-leadership should be the desire to serve; meaning servicing others.

The other motivation is that people tend to follow those whom they perceive as providing a means of achieving their own desire, wants and needs (Abari and Mohammed, 2006). It is the ability to meet and identify subgroup needs that constitute leadership power of influence on subordinates and their drive towards accomplishment of the pre-determined goals albeit, through quality administration.

Moreover, while there is still a lack of adequate qualitative studies on servant-leadership since it is still a new area (Laub, 1999), a few studies however try at establishing correlation between servant – leadership and organizational variables. David’s (2003) study, for example, found that a positive correlation exists between servant-leadership and students’ achievement. Lary (2004) also found that a strong positive relationship exists between servant-leadership behaviour of school principals and teachers’ job satisfaction. And, results from Kayode’s (2011) study indicate a positive significant relationship between organizational servant-leadership and junior secondary school principals’ effectiveness in South West Nigeria.

**Implications for Higher Educational Institutions’ Management in Africa**

Higher educational institutions in Africa are currently bedevilled with a lot of problems and crises to the extent that achieving their goals and objectives is becoming more and more difficult. As observed by Emetarom and Enyi (2007), “contemporary higher education managers, in Africa, seem to have found themselves in a changed environment, with increased and increasing challenges, to operate and achieve success”. These authors further observed that “although there are divergent priority issues among higher educational institutions, there are nonetheless common challenges, which have general application to them”. From the inadequate provision and availability of fiscal and material resources, to the
problems of unbalanced demand and supply of academic staff cum high teacher: pupil ratio, to the demand for satisfactory welfare services by both staff and students and, to the disrespect for institutional autonomy and academic freedom, these enormous challenges do not make the educational institutions comparable with their counterparts in other parts of the world. Yet, the institutions are under pressure to improve their products. Where then lays the problem?

Going by the contention that management involves decision making and problem solving, problems there are and problems there will always be. However, problems are meant to be solved and the solution lies not only in servant leadership but also in the quality administration that goes with it. Managers, administrators and, indeed, all those in the position to exhibit leadership in higher educational institutions in Africa should imbibe and display the servant-hood model characteristics of valuing people, developing people, building community, sharing leadership, displaying authenticity and providing leadership as identified by its advocates for effective service delivery towards the attainment of excellence, which is a cardinal education policy.

Today, empirical research has shown that solving organizational leadership related problems in African higher educational institutions, goes beyond reliance on the existing traditional leadership model. However, servant-leadership offers a viable alternative as, according to Kelley and Williamson (2006), it emphasizes service to others over self-interest and self-promotion. The reality is that, true leadership must lead, not dominate, it must inspire and encourage not force and be a bully. Therefore, in Africa, effective institutional leadership anchored on servant-hood model is imperative towards effective service delivery, and toward promotion of excellence currently required to reposition the education sector and regain the lost glory in higher education provision.

Oladipo (2002) opines that the school as an organization has developed to the extent whereby the employment of administrative method based mainly on personal traits of leadership is inadequate for the achievement of set objectives. All stakeholders of education in Africa must then come to grip with the reality that the myriad of problems affecting higher education is arguably an evidence of true leadership vacuum. This therefore calls for a re-examination of the
current leadership dimensions of higher education managers and administrators for effective service delivery in institutions.

Spear (1995) corroborates Greenleaf’s view that great leaders must first serve others, and that this simple fact is central to the leader’s greatness. Added to this is that servant-leadership demands that leaders become good facilitators for change and progress. It is, thus, the opinion of this paper that, such a leadership culture can be made more contagious and more rewarding if it is imbibed and practised among higher educational institution leaders.

Conclusion and Recommendations
Operating on the premise that an institution is as strong as the capabilities of its leader(s), then it stands to reason that the quality of administration of higher educational institutions, particularly in Africa, is a function of the leadership provided and exhibited. The one kind of leadership that readily fits into this logic is none but servant-leadership. The principles of servant-leadership can, therefore, be integrated into the operations of various organizations, including higher educational institutions, as a way of motivating the workforce and nurturing their talents and gifts so that they can develop fully to become servant leaders themselves (Kayode, 2011). The result can only be competent people running processes smoothly based on fair functional rules and using tools judiciously.

Therefore, it is recommended as follows that:

1. A continent-wide workshop on the servant-leadership style should be organized to expose the leadership of higher educational institutions in all ramifications to servant-leadership constructs.

2. Once placed in a leadership position, Vice Chancellors, Rectors, Provosts, principal officers and all other heads of sections, units departments, faculties, schools and divisions of higher educational institutions, by whatever appellation so tagged, should be exposed to professional development opportunities requiring collaboration and relationship towards building the dimension of servant-leadership.

3. Inadequate Welfare Services that reduce employee commitment to work and that are detrimental to the effectiveness of servant-leadership should be checkmated through the adequate provision of such amenities.
4. Appointment of individuals into headship positions from the apex down to the least head in higher educational institutions should be based on the characteristics of servant-leadership.

5. Heads of tertiary educational institutions in Africa, including other heads in senior positions within the hierarchy, must be certificated, at least up to the Diploma level, in educational administration.

References


Martinez-frias, J. (2003). The importance of ICTs for developing countries. *Inter-disciplinary Science Reviews*. Centre for Astrobiology, Madrid, Spain and UNCSTD, Geneva, Switzerland. 28 (1).

