Feedforward Control and Admission into Nigerian Universities: Implications of Jamb 120 Cut-Off Mark

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Abstract
The paper presents a theoretical analysis on the JAMB policy of 120 cut-off mark as an acceptable minimum score for admission into 2017/2018 session. The paper adopts a logical interpretative approach to connect the JAMB policy and extant body of knowledge within the context of the management control function. It presents possible implications of the policy on universities ultimate outcomes. The paper contends that the standard of inputs largely determines the cost of operations and ultimately the standard of the outputs of any production or operations system. It thus, implies that the lowering of the entry standard of entrants into the university will bring undue pressure on the learning and teaching process, and ultimately implies diminished standard of faculty of most graduates of the universities.

Keywords*: Management Control, Feedforward Control, Feedback Control, Concurrent Control, University Control System and JAMB Cut-off Mark.*

Introduction

Organizations are purposive and efficiency seeking systems. The consciousness of this makes organizations to plan, organize, direct and control their pre-desired, activities and actual outcomes (Pfeffer, 1982). Although there are flowing linkages within process stages of the organizational management functions, there exist a direct feedback linkage between planning and controlling, despite being at the opposite extremes of the management continuum. Planning predetermines standard of objectives, while controlling check the extent to which the standards are met (Kootntz, O'Donnell, and Weihrich, 2010; and Ross, 2000).

However, to prevent the cost of pre-process and in-process errors, feedforward control is usually conducted at the level of input selection (Newman, 1985). This disposition neatly cuts into the rationale for establishment of entry requirements for every input element, including student intakes into universities are taken in. The reason is to avoid the entry of sub-standard inputs (students) into the university. To this end, the recent policy of JAMB to reduce the Matriculation Examination score down to 120 marks (representing 30%) does not only raise a political question, but also raised a management question.
Considering the management question, the 30% considered by JAMB as acceptable minimum entry score is 80% below average. Their reasons may be politically, socially and economically melodious, but the management implication from a behavioural perspective appears devastating with far-reaching adversaries. This paper provides a critical analysis on the cost and pressure this will lay on the university input transformation process, and the possible quality of the university ultimate product, including the consequences this will have on the university image.

Feedforward Control

Control is a management function targeted at the attainment of pre-determined quality standard. Hartzell, (2006) defined control as "the aspect of management concerned with the comparison of actual versus planned performance, as well as the development and implementation of procedures to correct substandard performance". He further contended that "control function includes those activities designed to compel events to confirm to plan or to recognize deviation therefrom. It is thus, the measurement and corrective function...". This establishes the link between planning and controlling as fundamental to quality standards. In the same way, but from a behavioural paradigm, Armstrong (2010) explained that the control theory "… focuses attention on feedback as a means of shaping behaviour. As people receive feedback on their behaviour they appreciate the discrepancy between what they are doing and what they are expected to do and take corrective action to overcome the discrepancy. Feedback is recognized as a crucial part of performance management process".

However, a broader view of the constituencies of the control process include: feedforward control; process control and feedback control. These process taxonomies of control tend to explain material control as distinguished from Armstrong's (2009) view above. The feedforward control process is occasioned to check if input materials meet the stipulated quality standard. This means that only input materials that meet the standard are selected into the transformation process (Jones & George, 2008 and Anthony, 1990). The feedforward control process guides against the cost that may be wasted on substandard input materials in the transformation process. It also prevents the production of sub-standard or defective output in the system (Ross, 2000). The concurrent or in-process is the process control, which is a check on in-process materials, and the precision of equipment to meet standard; and the feedback control is a check to be sure that only outputs that meet the standard leave for the market, otherwise feedback into transformation system for correction.

However, on a general note, Koontz, O'Donnel & Weihrich (2010) argued that "Control, however does not mean just reacting to events after they have occurred. It also mean, keeping an organization on track, anticipating events that might occur, and then changing the organization to response to whatever opportunities or threats have been identified". Control helps managers to obtain superior efficiency, quality, responsiveness to customers, and motivation. *See fig. 1 and 2.*

The Nexus between Planning and Controlling

Because of the unstable nature of organizations and their goal driven characteristics, organizations undertake planning as a primary function of management. Thus, the primacy function of planning presupposes that every undertaking should commence with planning. Dalton Mcfarland in Obi (2005) argued that "planning involves anticipatory decision making as an activity by which managers analyze present condition to determine ways of reaching a desired future state…" White (2004) contended that planning can be loosely or strictly defined, depending on the depth of and scope of the plan. He argued that "planning is probably the most used and misused word in the lexicon of management studies". Planning is the predetermination of objectives and standards to be achieved and choosing line of actions necessary to achieve such objectives efficiently and effectively (Alexander, 2001). This implies that planning has a futuristic focus involving pre-determinative goals and actions of organizational members, and unites individuals and group focus within the organization. It provides an image of what the organization wants to achieve and how it wants to achieve it. Thus, it tends to answer the questions: What and How? It does this through forecasting (Lorange, Paul & Morton, 1990).

The actual value of planning is defined in the extent to which the plan is implemented and achieved. To measure the extent of this, control becomes the check. Controlling is the process of measuring the extent of the achievement of a plan by comparing actual outcomes with predetermined standard of the objectives set to be achieved.

Controlling is the last function in the management function continuum. It tends to answer the question: To what extent is the plan achieved? Thus, it is a check on the efficacy of plan implementation. It thus implies that controlling is the barometer of measuring the objective reality of planning (Dumaine, 1991). Because planning is futuristic, most of the forecasts are done within the context of high uncertainty. To avoid spurious planning outcomes, controlling is done on three fundamental stages of the organizational operations: The input stage (feedforward control), transformation stage (in-process control), and output stage (feedback control). Thus, controlling corrects deviations from the plan and even ensures that the plan is modified, if it proves unrealizable (Koontz, O'Donnel & Weihrich 2010; Newman, 1985; Ross, 2010). Obi (2005) contended that the controlling process helps to create better output, faster business cycles, add value to products and services, and facilitate delegation and teamwork through monitoring and correcting inputs in-process and output inventories.

The University Operating System

The University is a social system because it is an organization with subunits designated with specific functions, all performed for a common organizational teleology. It interacts with its environment for its continuous existence. It has input subsystem, transformation subsystem, and output subsystem. The input subsystem consists of the newly admitted students and all materials necessary. The transformation subsystem is the combined framework through which lecturers used the designated curricula and programmes to teach the students, and the output subsystem consists of the students who are qualified to be graduated. The university depends on the environment for the source of its inputs; it processes the inputs and sends it back to the environment as graduates.

Control in the University System

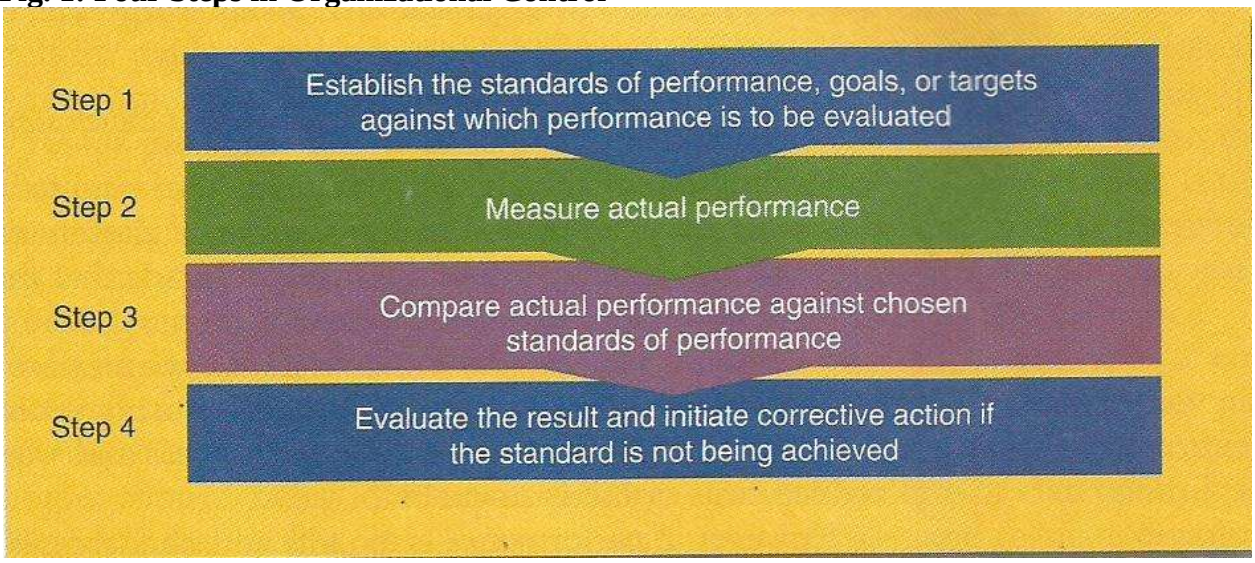
This paper adopts a strict view of the control function, and focused on students as the cardinal element in the university operating system.

The feedforward control function in the university entails ensuring that only students who possess the minimum entry requirements are admitted into the university to pursue the degrees. The basic entry requirements are: 5 ordinary level credits with emphasis in English Language and Mathematics, faculty specific subjects, a specific score in JAMB examination, and health status, etc. The rationale for these restrictions is to ensure that the new entrants have the mental, emotional, physical and intellectual capacity to withstand the rigor of pursuing a degree in the university. Feedforward control is the control that allows managers to anticipate problem before they occur (Koontz, O'Donnel & Weihrich, 2010). *See fig. 2*

The in-process or concurrent control function is focused on the transformation stage. The in-process control (also called concurrent control) in the university involves series of checks consisting of class attendants, continuous assessments tests and semester examinations. Students who failed their semester examinations, carryover the failed courses and are expected to write it again at the next available opportunities. Most courses are pre-requisite to others, as such; the introductory courses must be passed before taken advanced version of the successive ones. Concurrent control – Control that gives managers immediate feedback or how efficiently and inputs are being transformed into output so that managers can correct problems as they arise (Koontz, O'Donnel & Weihrich, 2010). *See fig. 2*

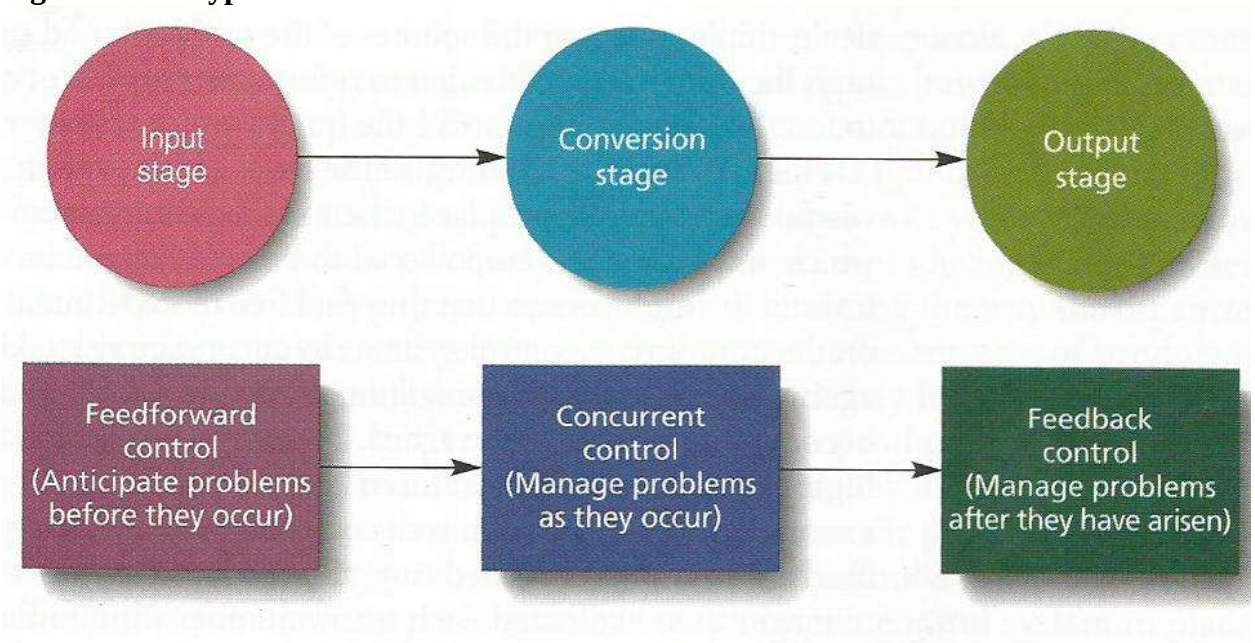
The feedback control function consists of checks to ensure that only students who meet the stipulated quality standard are graduated out of the university. This involves checking to confirm that they pass all prescribed courses; ensuring that *ab initio* their entry qualifications and admission were genuine. Those lacking, particularly the university courses are required to stay behind to pass their failed courses. Those who over stayed or falsified the entry qualifications are withdrawn from the system. "Feedback control – the control gives managers information about customers' reactions to goods and services so that corrective action can be taken if necessary" (Koontz, O'Donnel & Weihrich, 2010). *See fig. 2*.

Fig. 1: Four Steps in Organizational Control



Adopted from Koontz, H., O'Donnell, C. and H. Weihrich (2010) Management, New York: McGraw-Hill

Fig. 2: Three Types of Control



Adopted from Koontz, H., O'Donnell, C. and H. Weihrich (2010) Management, New York: McGraw-Hill

The Implications and Conclusion

The lowering of JAMB entry cut-off marks gives rise to several implications. The intention to give admission to candidates who scored as low as 30% implies that candidate with very low academic ability will be admitted. This will bring pressure on the universities operating system. The lecturers will be expected to spend more time explaining knowledge that the students are expected to have known before their entry into the university. This will demand more credit hours and efforts that are usually not available. If more time is needed, then programme time should be elongated beyond the minimum 4 years. These low academic intelligent students may be forced to resort to other means to escape failure, and these other means may negate ethical standards.

The entry of students with low academic intelligence will have a contagious effect on bright students as they form class interaction and friendship clusters. Thus bright students may be dull as iron is not sharpening iron. For the candidates preparing to write JAMB, their zeal will be weakened knowing that 30% is a celebrated pass mark. Ultimately, the standard of graduates will diminish below the average level that these universities are currently experiencing. The control valves and filters are slackened and anything goes. The worst is about to happen to university education in Nigeria, amidst the infrastructure problem and poor human capital development culture, as quality is compromised from the feedforward control system.

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