
Bureaucratic Dysfunctions in Nigerian Public Schools

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Abstract

Since inception, Nigerian public schools were planned based on bureaucracies which is a system based on logic, order and the legitimate use of formal authority. Hierarchy of offices and authority exist in schools and the practice is more pronounced in the ministries. A close look at Nigeria's public schools today reveals basically bureaucratic organization. There is hierarchy of authority system based on super-ordinate-subordinate relationship, division of labour, a body of rules and impersonal procedures governing work and strict emphasis on organizational goals. The element of bureaucracy is characterized by the following components: division of labour, impersonal orientation, hierarchy of authority, rules and regulations and career orientation. Today, bureaucracy has attained negative or derogatory connotations such as waste, inefficiency, delays, red-tapism alienation of highly trained professionals, undue emphasis on procedural matters and creation of a certain resistance to change, distortion of the professional - client relationship with a resultant tendency to treat the public service in a formal impersonal manner. There is also development of a legalistic attitude towards the performance of official duties, avoidance of responsibility and minimization of commitment within the organisation. The crux of this paper is bureaucratic dysfunctions in the context of the Nigerian public school and realization of organisational goals. Bureaucracy has some benefits. However experience in Nigerian public schools show that it has equally created some dysfunctions. The paper recommends prudent application of school rules in other to enhance the level of productivity in the school system.

Introduction

Bureaucracy refers to a specific form of social organization for administrative purposes. It possesses a formal structure characterized by clearly defined pattern of activities in which every series of action is functionally related (Ukeje, Okorie and Nwaghara 1992:58). The first scholar to systematically describe the characteristics of bureaucracy and its role in the industrial societies of Western Europe was Max Weber, a German sociologist.

In Weber's view, one of the primary considerations in these societies was to rationalize social and economic objectives with the greatest possible efficiency. He conceived bureaucracy as a theory of organization best suited to the needs of large and complex enterprises that perform services for a large number of clients. His concept of bureaucracy was an attempt to minimize the frustrations and irrationality of large organizations in which the relationships between management and workers were based on traditions of class privilege. In 1947, Max Weber formulated the standard way of running organizations in his ideal model which he referred to as rational - legal-bureaucracy.

In his analysis of organization, Weber identified three basic types of legitimate authority namely traditional, charismatic, and rational legal authority (Ogunu 2000:24). Bureaucracy as conceived by Weber is supposed to be an "ideal type" which describes relationships and other factors that exist when people work together to achieve common goals.

Weber's bureaucracy promotes efficiency. The term is used mostly in referring to government administration, especially regarding to officials in the federal government and civil service. Hence, every formal organization today applies all or some form of bureaucratic principles. A close look at his model reveals that it is used in education particularly in planning Nigeria public schools which are human institution. These schools depend on bureaucracy, without which the system cannot function.

Characteristics of School Bureaucracy

Every organizational structure based on strict, rational and logical laws of order is said to be exhibiting bureaucratic tendencies. According to Peretomode (1991) in Oku, Eienalo and Okeke (2008:63), Weber sees the pure bureaucratic organization as having a set of characteristics that contribute to a hypothetically rational, disciplined, precise, stable, reliable and effective organization. The school as a formal organization depends on bureaucracy. The bureaucratic model adopted in school administration is characterized by some key features of Weber's ideal type bureaucracy. Peretomode (1991) identified these characteristics as:

- **Division of labour:** Tasks are divided among the various ranks as official duties to be carried out by the line and staff in the school system. It involves grouping jobs according to some logical arrangements as can be seen in dividing school programmes into Departments (science, Arts, social science, law1 medicine etc) and assigning teaching staff to them based on specialization.
- **Hierarchy of Authority:** In every school setting, positions of authority are hierarchically organized and clearly defined. Authority is delegated from the chief Executive (School Head) who is at the top of the pyramid in a typical school organizational chart to the subordinates. The delegations of authority, creates a chain of command that is the formal channel that defines the lines of authority from the top to the bottom of the organization.
- **Rules and Regulations:** These are policy guidelines, rules and regulations formally established by the school authority as a way of controlling the behaviour of staff, students and also guide administrators in taking and implementing decisions. In the school system, teachers and students are provided with manuals and handbooks containing guidelines on how to behave, the dos and don'ts and consequences of misbehavior.
- **Impersonal Orientation:** School Officials are expected to relate with their students and among themselves without any emotional attachment in carrying out their official assignments. This will help the school staff in implementing rules and regulations. It calls for justice, equality and fair play on the part of Administrators in dealing with the subordinates.
- **Career Orientation:** Technical competence determined by degrees and certificates passed by an employee determines employment or not into the school system. Promotions are determined by seniority and scholarship.
- **Record Keeping:** This is one of the statutory functions of the school officials. School records are written statements about the activities and the resources in the school. It states facts about the school staff, students' facilities and materials including subjects/courses available in a school and time allotted to each. Written records serve very useful purposes when they are honestly, accurately and faithfully kept.

Bureaucracy in the Nigerian Public Schools

Bureaucracy in the Nigerian Public Schools is an outcome of colonial bureaucracy that introduced European-oriented education. The type of colonial bureaucracy introduced in the Southern part of Nigeria differed from that of the Northern part according to differences in

traditional, political, cultural structure and complexity as well as the value of the Colonial Administrators charged with policy decisions at that time. (Uwazurike 1998:39).

Colonial bureaucracy emphasized the importance of careful procurement of data “logical analysis of data, the application of information to the solution of specific problems and obedience to authority” .It is no wonder the European- oriented schools bequeathed to Nigeria especially in the southern part reflected the ideals of a bureaucratic organization that is pivoted on western culture rather than on the traditional authority system and values of the Nigerians. (Uwazurike 1998:40).

Obasi (1987:75) in Uwazurike (1998:40) explained how Nigerian Public Schools today are basically bureaucratic in nature as thus:

At the formal level of interaction, individuals (either as head teacher, teacher or pupil) find their place in the school hierarchy and relate to others in a way dictated by the position occupied. For instance, teachers being lower in rank than the head teacher would be expected to submit to his authority, students to submit to the authority of teachers; students in general to submit to the authority of school and class prefects; junior students to submit to the authority of senior students etc.

Also official tasks to be performed and usually graded; expected to be carried out at a specific and duration of time and in a particular way. Generally, authority flows accordingly from government through its appointed agencies like the Ministry or Board to school principals, vice-principals, the classroom teachers, and pupils. As can be noted, this structure thus facilitates coordination and control within the school. Another advantage inherent in this structure is unity of command with its attendant clarity and precision in the definition of organizational goals. Clearly defined goals result to unambiguity, which improves the rationality efficiency and effectiveness of bureaucrats (Ukeje et al, 1992:60). However, the absence of clearly defined goals can breed frustration due to communication gap and bureaucratic red-tapism.

In a Nigerian public school system, by the authority that flows through this hierarchy, subordinates, (Commissioner of Education to the Director of Schools, to the superintendent, to the Principals) are able to direct the activities of the subordinates (teachers and other school personnel) due to their position and attendant status. As can be noted, the principal’s position in this hierarchy is between the school Board and the teachers and other school personnel. The principal receives directives from the school Board and disseminates these among his staff.

Specialization

According to Weber, specialization encourages a high degree of technical expertise among staff, which in turn entails their selection according to their technical qualifications. Specialization leads to a hierarchical structure which prescribes who gives orders and to whom and establishes the relationships between subordinates and superiors (Edem 1987:27).

The concept of specialization based on division of labour is clearly illustrated in Secondary Schools and Universities where individual members of staff are expected to handle the highly specialized tasks for which they have been specifically trained. For instance, in School Organizations, the efficacy of division of labour and specialization is clearly manifested in subject area specialization of teachers to maximize their contribution towards enhanced

teaching and optimized student learning. Division of Labour as a dimension of bureaucracy refers to the practice of subdividing functions according to one's specialization or expertise by the organization. Nigerian Public Schools are organized according to this principle. Principals of Secondary Schools assign subjects and classes to teachers according to their areas of specialization or competence. They are allowed discretionary autonomy on how to teach their subjects but not what and when to teach.

Rules and Regulations

Activities in organizations according to Ukeje, et.al; (1992:60) are guided by specifications of required behaviors through rules and regulations. Coordination of the various departments in the organization is achieved largely through these written rules and regulations that define acceptable behaviour. One important function of rules and regulations is that they can be applied equally to superiors and subordinates, thereby providing a sense of equal rights among the employees. They also permit organizational members to accept directives from superordinates in subordination to whatever their personal feelings about these directives may be. Thus, rules and regulations produce reliability and conformity in the organization.

Rules dimension as Hall (1968:95) labelled it refers to the extent of member's subjection to organizational control. Schools share this feature as basic school routines that are governed by stipulated rules and regulations. For instance, Educationists are regulated on syllabus or curriculum and duration of teaching, rules are set for standard behaviour and certain sanctions are also set for wrongful behaviour. In school organizations also, administrators control teachers and elicit their reliability and compliance through rules and regulations. In the same manner, teachers control the behaviour of students through a system of rules and regulations. With a clear knowledge that a breach of rules and regulations will result in certain types of sanctions, subordinates view such resultant punishment as legitimate. Thus rules and regulations legitimize and impersonalize the use of punishment. Rules and regulations in Bureaucracies are therefore, an important means of impersonal control of behaviour, and they are to be enforced.

Career Orientation

Career Orientation according to Ukeje et. al; (1992:61) provides for a sense of employee loyalty and motivates employees to maximize efforts because bureaucrats are protected through such institutionalized devices like tenure and civil service from arbitrary dismissals and denial of promotions. Employment and promotions are based on technical competence, qualifications and service. Uwazurike (1998:48) noted that technical competence defines the extent to which an organization utilizes and conforms to the organizationally set standards for its selection and promotion process. Nigerian Public Schools have this feature even though there are some untrained and un-certificated teachers in some schools.

Impersonal Orientation

Impersonality is defined as the extent to which both employees within an organization and outsiders are treated without regard to personal consideration or sentiment. Impersonality in orientation allows the bureaucrat to approach issues with emotional detachment so that he is able to relate equally to both organizational members and the public. In this manner, preferential treatment to a section of the public or clients is avoided.

The operation of Nigerian Public Schools dictates that official matters be treated formally and consequently impersonally. Teachers and principals relate to themselves impartially and work is assigned and coordinated without passion or sentiment. For instance, through the use of

circulars, rules and regulations are enforced without particular humble respect to individual feelings in Nigerian Public Schools. Oku, Emenalo and Okeke (2008:64) pointed this out when they stated that school officials are expected to relate with their students and among themselves without any emotional attachment in carrying out their official assignments. This will help the school staff in implementing rules and regulations. It calls for justice, equality and fair play on the part of Administrators in dealing with the subordinates.

From the above, it follows that the Weber's ideal type bureaucracy suggests impersonality and objectivity as management principles in the administration of personnel such as management, teachers and students. Indeed, if bureaucratic principles are strictly adhered to in educational organizations, then the school would be a well-oiled machine capable of rationally organizing human talents for the production of efficient educational services to its client.

Bureaucratic Dysfunctions in the Context of the Nigerian Public Schools.

Even though Weber conceived his bureaucratic models as best suited to social organizations in IDEAL circumstances, he recognized that the rational-legal-bureaucracy would not be fitted in all social, economic and political contexts (Nigro and Nigro, 1973:127 in Ukeje et.al;1992:61). Many scholars have suggested important dysfunctional consequences of the bureaucratic organization. Uwazurike (1998:49) observed that attempts to structure and reduce personalized relationship in school bureaucracies aimed at ensuring the realization of organizational goals might indeed lead to bureaucratic dysfunctions. Although bureaucracy is expected to promote efficiency and equity, it has many unanticipated consequences among which include: alienation of employees, apathy, red tape, rigidity, lack of Coordinator, inefficiency, work to rule and resistance to change. However, Weber (1946: 214) in Ukeje et. Al; 1992:59) described the benefits of "a fully developed bureaucratic mechanism" as a production model in which precision, speed, unambiguity, knowledge of the files, continuity, discretion, unity, strict subordination, reduction of friction and of material and personal cost — these are raised to the Optimum point in a strictly bureaucratic administration... Weber's ideas sound plausible especially his optimism about the effect of ideal bureaucracy on efficiency, but experience in the Nigerian Public Schools seem to be different from this ideal.

The importance of rules and regulations in achieving organizational efficiency need not be overstressed. Rules and regulations provide for stability, predictability, uniformity and continuity. Nonetheless, layers and layers of regulations and rules that Nigerian public schools have, make goals very difficult to attain. In other words, excessive dependence on the school rules and regulations in the maintenance of law and order can alienate principals from their followers. A rule can achieve a reasonable minimum requirement, but not a maximum one. For instance, a school regulation may require a teacher to serve as a games-master for tenn, but the extent to which the teacher must exert himself to be one cannot be stipulated by the regulation. Inevitably, School goals cannot be attained if the performance of the teacher is based on minimum behaviour [Edem, 1987:14].

In trying to articulate the effect of over-reliance on rules and regulations, Ukeje et. al. [1992:64] noted that it promotes bureaucratic red-tapism and ritualistic behaviour. Over conformity and rigidity of behaviour becomes the order of the day. Apathy and sterile atmosphere result since employees are aware of precisely what constitutes minimum acceptable behaviour as Hoy and Forsyth in Ukeje et. al, put it "minimums become maximums".

Rules are viewed as ends in themselves rather than the means to ends. This result to goal displacements as the original goals are abandoned in pursuit of disciplined compliance with

rules and regulations. Uwazurike (1998;50) noted that principals and teachers in the Nigerian public schools are assumed to be rule conscious and to emphasize conformance to rules in keeping with the expectations of the Ministry of Education and State Education Boards whom they are responsible to. Principals and teachers are supposed to follow official instructions and it is the government that sets up these rules and regulations.

According to Edem [1987:14], Weber regards bureaucracy as the most efficient form of administrative organization because it fosters impersonal relationship and social distance between officials in the organization through dependence on formal rules. Members owe obedience to the organization's rules and regulations only and not to the individuals in it. Impersonal detachment prevents the personal feelings of officials from distorting their rational judgments in carrying out their official duties. The idea sounds good when one considers the necessity to reduce partiality among school leaders in their dealings with both students and staff. Like those of efficiency movement, they ignored the psychological elements, the goals of the individuals and the impact of informal groups on the behaviour of the members of the organization. Principals must be impartial in their dealings with their students and the teachers, but cannot be socially removed to the degree Weber advocates.

Impersonality as component of bureaucracy is dysfunctional when the human interface of schools is subordinated to impersonal relationship which reduces men into machines or mere factors of production. Bureaucratic emphasis on rationality obscures the human side of education. Little wonder that these scholars and writers like Merton (1940), Gouldner (1954) and Roy and Forsyth (1986) in Ukeje, Okorie and Nwagbara (1992: 62) are all in agreement that the unintended results of treating individuals in the organization as machines (for instance the rigid use of bureaucratic rules for the maintenance of organizational structure), actually encourage a continued use of machines model of organizations. That means that bureaucracy may work against what is generally considered as good teaching which implies flexibility rather than rigid compliance to set rules, syllabus and personal interest in the student. From a bureaucratic perspective, the school is viewed as a well oiled machine that is capable of rationally organizing human talent for the efficient production of educational services to clients. It has been argued that if this mechanistic view of the school system should hold, it then follows that the major task of the school administrator is to manipulate diverse inputs in a manner that will produce standard outcomes. This would mean that students irrespective of their needs, interest, and abilities are processed similarly in accordance with identical standards in pursuit of common goals.

Conclusion

The discussion in this Paper has revealed that bureaucracy has many benefits. It also showed that Nigerian public schools to a certain extent, is a bureaucratic organization with some dysfunctions. The paper went ahead and examined some of these bureaucratic dysfunctions in the context of the Nigerian public schools. Although bureaucracy is expected to promote efficiency and equity, yet it has many dysfunctions in its system of division of labour, based on functional specialization, formal n' s and regulations, hierarchy of authority and impersonal orientation etc. This has led to many unanticipated consequences such as alienation of employees from administrators that eventually the Nigerian public school system performance suffers.

Recommendations

Academic achievement will take a quantum jump when policy Makers free up teachers to select their own processes (i.e. to control their own destiny in the classroom and use their professional judgment) in return for accountability for outcome from using this process.

Further, in the Nigerian Public Schools, bureaucratic hierarchies in schools serve a useful function of indicating precisely tasks but its application in schools may be detrimental to its efficiency. For instance a hierarchy of authority may stifle creativity and innovativeness in subordinates because they are essentially implementers of decision taken at the upper level of bureaucracy, so they are often afraid to use their initiatives because the system bestows its rewards for disciplined compliance with directives from above. Most times bureaucracy decisions are rarely made with students in mind. Those working directly with the students (teachers and administrators) rarely have a voice about what is best for their students. The powers of the teachers and students are limited to interpretation of policy. Though Bureaucracy has certain dysfunctions, a high level of prudence should be applied by school administrators to enhance the level of productivity in the school.

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