Teaching Adjustments by Nigerian Faculty in an American Style University in Nigeria

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Abstract

In today’s economy, global competitiveness forges new relationships between employees and employers and these new relationships demand innovative and more flexible ways of doing business. With more American style educational institutions springing up worldwide, local-host teachers are finding themselves in unfamiliar work-approach environments and, as a result, have to adapt their teaching to their new settings. This paper describes the teaching adjustments made by Nigerian lecturers at the American University of Nigeria in Yola, Nigeria. The results of our findings will enable the authors to suggest recommendations for school management to develop policies and programs to assist local faculty to adapt better to an American style education system.

Keywords: American, Teachers, Student, Faculty, Nigeria, American Style University

Introduction

With the privatization of higher education institutes, it is expected that a number of international teachers may find Nigeria home. However with strict immigration, foreign investment laws, and public insecurity there have been compromises in the living standards of international workers and these workers soon return home or move on to ‘greener pastures’. With security, health, education, and other basic amenities challenges, American teachers think twice on whether or not to renew their contract, leaving vacancies and voids in policy and procedural matters.
With increased interconnection and interdependency on foreign investments there is a political shift in that the host country becomes more dependent on activities of foreign resources. Conversely when international workers resign from their duties, and there are no expatriate replacements, which puts pressure on the employer to seek employees locally. In other words, with the demands of quality education and American standards, employers will hire locally trained Nigerian faculty.

This study was provoked by the need to assess how the locally trained faculty members are adjusting to an American style educational system at the American University of Nigeria (AUN) in Yola, Nigeria. Our study determines the levels of teaching adjustment of Nigerian faculty and how it directly relates to their teaching conduct.

To determine the teaching adjustments made by Nigerian teachers, the authors conducted personal interviews with Nigerian faculty about their work adjustments related to their classroom experiences that took place during the fall semester of 2011. Of particular interest to the authors were the adjustments made in four significant teaching areas: grading, syllabus, teaching methodology, and assessment. The results of the findings enabled the authors to determine recommendations for school management to develop policies and programs to assist local faculty to adapt better to an American style education system.

**Background**

With the ever increasing presence of american style schools, fashion, fast-food, and movies, it would seem that American values, culture and behaviours would challenge the current prevailing norms and practices in Nigeria. With an increase demand for american style education, it is expected that more teaching professionals will seek employment at AUN. With personal security concerns, limited health care facilities, and rampant malaria, typhoid outbreaks, it would seem that international workers would be less willing to forfeit their safety and well-being by residing in the north eastern state of Nigeria. In order to sustain an american level of education, it is expected that more local hires will dominate the staff numbers. At the time of this research, 61% of the teaching staff were Nigerians.

In our study, we aimed at determining what adjustments, if any, the Nigerian lecturers had to make in four key teaching areas: grading, syllabus, teaching methodology, and assessment. We were also interested in any other adjustments the Nigerian lecturers made in the delivery of their subject matter.

Grading is the process of assigning a level of achievement to a student for a course. A common approach to grading adjustment is the use of statistics (Young, 1993). However, there has is little research in the area specific to grading adjustments made by local teachers in a foreign setting. We are therefore reliant on a description of the changes made by Nigerian teachers to their grading in their summative and formative assessments.
Syllabus is an outline of a course. Adjustments to syllabus include removing or reducing the amount of content in a course because of the perceptions of the teacher towards his/her students (Salatian et al, 2012). However, there is little research in the area specific to syllabus adjustments made by local teachers in a foreign environment. We are therefore reliant on a description of the changes made by Nigerian teachers to their syllabi.

Teaching methodology is the principles and methods used for instruction by the teachers that focus on the students’ mastery of the curricular aims that are currently being pursued as defined by (Popham, 2008). Again, there has is little academic research in the area specific to teaching adjustments made by Nigerian teachers in non-Nigerian settings. This leaves the researchers to depend on the descriptions and observations made by subjects themselves.

Finally, assessment is the evaluation of a student's achievement on a course. Much has been written in the area of assessment, but little valuable contribution has been made specific to the issues of Nigerian lecturers. Again, the researchers are reliant on the description made by the participants from the summative and formative feedback. We are also interested in any additional changes in the delivery of their courses that the teachers had to make. This, again, is based on the observations and experiences of the teachers in our study.

The Study

As AUN continues to set higher admission standards and obtain higher national and international publicity, it became an interest of the researchers to determine the adjustments that specifically Nigerian faculty undergo to meet the exclusive standards set by administrators and the needs of the students. Nigerians are considered as local hire and are offered unique remuneration packages. They bring a distinctive set of skills and work behaviours then what one may find in a ‘western’ culture setting. There are about 250 different languages on record which include a diverse set of cultures rooting up a number of subcultures. This study is exceptional in respect to the information it captures first-hand about the experiences of Nigerian faculty in an American higher education setting. Personal accounts are recorded and the information gathered is pertinent and applicable as data was collected from participants that were fully engaged in their teaching assignment.

The participants in our study were Nigerian lecturers. (Creswell, 1998) states that the participants are to “be individuals who have experienced the phenomenon being explored and can articulate either conscious experiences” while conducting a phenomenological study. The researchers had ready access to five Nigerian faculty who were articulate and willing to share their recent and relevant experience. The participants were men and women currently employed as full time faculty with expertise in varying disciplines and across all three schools (Business & Entrepreneurship, Information Technology and Communications, Arts & Science). A purposive sample method was employed since specific and relevant characteristics were necessary of the population.
Purposive sampling was the method of selecting the participants, by which it “is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore select a sample from which most can be learned” (Merriam, 1998). Faculty members were invited to speak to the researchers, as well as, the researcher met with the participant in their offices. The interview involved meeting with willing faculty for a one-one interview that lasted about 20 minutes. The faculty qualifications ranged from Master degree holders to PhD. The conceptual basis of this study lies in the sub-cultural work context in higher education and the significance of phenomenological theory in understanding the real life situation from the faculty themselves as they describe their experiences in the classroom. It is expected that a level of interpretation will follow the description of the study providing a meaningful discussion. It was imperative that the data collected and analyzed was from untainted perspective of the faculty participant and it was important that the researcher did not influence the ideas by any preconceived notions. One of the researchers that conducted the interview was not a faculty member, reducing any biases or influential misconceptions. While reviewing the study and data, if any clarifications were required, the researcher would call back to the participant for an extended conversation.

Results

Based on our data analysis, this section reveals the specific results as foretold by the Nigerian participants regarding adjustments they made in four key teaching areas: grading, syllabus, teaching methodology, and assessment. We were also interested in any other adjustments the Nigerian lecturers made in the delivery of their courses.

The Nigerian lecturers had to make a number of adjustments to their grading. The most notable comment was that the AUN grading scheme was considered rather high and adjustments to the scheme needed to be made. The Nigerian lecturers had to incorporate more components that made up the grade such as attendance, participation, midterm, homework, and final exams. The letter grade distribution also varied, that is to achieve an ‘A’ grade in the American system is equivalent to a mark in the range 95 - 100% whilst in Nigerian university it ranges from 70 – 100%. There were no notable observations with respect to any adjustments that Nigerian lecturers made to their syllabus.

The Nigerian lecturers had to make a number of adjustments to their teaching methodology. They noted that the American system has shorter lecture hours, for example some classes are 50 minutes each three times a week so adjustments to the amount of content needed to be adjusted to suit the timeframe. Based on the end of semester evaluations, one of the questions relate to the use of technology and so teachers are rated on this, as well, it is expected that teachers keep abreast of new developments in their field, which requires access to e-books, library and the internet. One of the strategic goals is to incorporate technology into the learning and research, hence the use of laptop, and other technology become expected teaching practice. The use of powerpoint became a very prominent tool for teaching since data projectors have been installed in all classrooms. Again, based on the faculty evaluation forms, the use of technology including effective use of data projector to support such programs as
PowerPoint is evaluated. They had to set office hours as expected practice. They also integrated discussion and group work into their courses.

The Nigerian lecturers had to make a number of adjustments to their assessments of students. There were expectations of more assessment opportunities such as including quizzes, homework, mid-terms exams and make-up exams. Nearly all the respondents stated that there was clearly a lot more work from the teacher’s perspective with respect to grading and evaluating and assessing students on a weekly basis.

No other significant changes were made and the results confirm that a wide range of adjustments needed to be made in order to support an American style educational experience.

Discussion

Given our findings, we suggest recommendations for administrators and school management to develop policies and programs to assist Nigerian faculty to adapt readily to an American style education system. We suggest the following two recommendations: mentorship and coaching initiative; and facilitating intellectual discourse. We shall look at each in turn.

Mentorship is a relationship between two people, one being the mentor and the other the protégé. The mentor uses their expertise, knowledge and experience to guide and coach the protégé. In this case an experienced American faculty would be the designated the mentor, while a Nigerian faculty would be the protégé. The American faculty would their expertise of an American style education system to offer guidance and advice to the Nigeria faculty member where this initiative would support the Nigerian faculty to readily and easily anticipate the adjustments to the American teaching standards.

Facilitating intellectual discourse is where an exchange of ideas and experiences are shared amongst peers and mentors in a non-threatening and comfortable environment. This discourse might take place over the course of a semester or academic year and may be part of the professional development plan of the faculty member. It is part of the learning experience for the Nigerian faculty member, and it could be highly recommended that full participation is expected. This discourse can be facilitated in many forms (e.g. online, face to face with special guests, or as a lecture series), where the emphasis is on sharing of opinions, ideas, and philosophies.

Since there has not been much written in terms of Nigerian faculty and their adjustments to an American style education environment, it leaves the researchers compelled to encourage further dialogue and research in this area.

Conclusion

From our study, it is evident that an American style university in Nigeria is unique from a Nigerian style university that is also based in Nigeria and that teaching adjustments that have
been documented may be driven by the socio-cultural disparities that the teachers find themselves in. It is apparent that the Nigerian lecturers need to adapt quickly to their new surroundings and so it is only reasonable to offer recommendations for them that would enhance the teaching and learning experience. In identifying these adjustments, it is expected that the information will be disseminated to administrators and school management so appropriate and effective policies and programs can be adopted to be able to better serve students and improve teacher effectiveness.

Reference


