

AFRICAN TIME AND ADMINISTRATION OF UNIVERSITIES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The concern of this paper was to discuss African time as it relates to administration of universities in Nigeria. African time is a term given by Missionaries to describe the attitude of Africans towards the use of time, after observing that Africans began planned programmes behind schedule. This idea has crept into the education sector, where educational plans are not carried out as slated. Formal education was introduced to Africans by missionaries with its step-by-step pattern and an academic calendar which analyzed the semester stage by stage. It stated when to begin and when to end the semester, with all activities to be performed in clear terms. This was rigidly followed during the time of missionaries. Also, there was school time-table that described how the day must be spent, bit by bit. In Nigeria today, universities seem to be administered in the light of African time where academic events are performed behind schedule. Sometimes, academic calendar is not available as and when due to give directions; there is lateness in commencement of classes; examination papers are delayed and results are not available on time. Many a time, events like matriculation and convocation do not begin as intended and students and guests are seated for a long time. Above all, students spend prolonged years in universities due to unforeseen happenings like Academic

Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) strike action, students' riot, among others. It was then recommended that the issue of African time should be controlled in Nigeria universities through prioritization, and avoidance of procrastination to enable the country achieve educational values as handed over by the missionaries. Descriptive research of correlational type was used for this study, since it attempted to solve the problems of African time in Nigeria universities.

Keywords: African time, universities, Nigeria, prioritization, procrastination, ASUU strike action, missionaries, academic calendar and school time-table.

Introduction

This paper aims at discussing the concept of African time in relation to educational programmes in Nigeria, especially university education. In Africa, most importantly in Nigeria, before the arrival of the Europeans who introduced formal education, the Quranic schools and the learning of farming and other works, as well as the duties of adulthood and participation in the community were very common. This process was often supplemented by age-based schools in which groups of boys were instructed in community responsibilities by mature men. African type of education was informal and it was transmitted in relation to African concept of time. It is the oldest form of education belonging to African society, and Fafunwa (2003) has willingly called it 'Traditional African Education' (p.3). It can be regarded as home training. It is not done in an organized manner, but by regular information from elderly people in the home and learning what others are doing through repeated process. It is transmitted through interactions with others by the use of proverbs, folktales, folklores, songs, ceremonies and art. Methodology here is oral tradition. Informal education is simply the business of the

environment, which is what a given setting is able to inculcate into the mind of individual as long as one is part of it (Omojola 2020).

Western-style of education came to Nigeria through the missionaries in the mid-nineteenth century. This was done through the introduction of boarding system of education which was properly planned and implemented in the light of European understanding of time, which is in relation to clock that segments the day and night into hours, minutes and seconds. In the school system, time was fixed for every activity. School curriculum was well planned, when schools were to be in session or to close/vacate was fixed. Time was allocated to each subject, examination periods were fixed and time for labour and other extra-curricular activities was programmed.

There was time to commence and close daily activities and when to recruit personnel. School system was between September and July, and punctuality was a must because time was equally fixed for Easter and Christmas breaks, with long holidays that could enable school administrators to make long journeys and be committed to work when school was in session, in terms of being available at work. Each session was concluded before another one began and all records were closed and neatly filed. Proper planning was done before the commencement of a new school session, as the approved school calendar was effectively and rigidly followed by the team of administrators. A student could predict to a large extent when he would finish his studies. Routine life was common to the founders of formal education in Nigeria and this helped the much they normally put into administration during official hours. They hardly performed work without adequate planning and they did not give room for distractions. Therefore, work could be performed within a stipulated time.

The European understanding of time is different from the African conception of it. Time, for Africans, is morning, afternoon and night,

and activities are performed in the knowledge of this. Mbiti (1969), in justification of the above idea, defines the concept of time in relation to Africa as “a composition of events which have occurred, those which are taking place now and those which are to occur immediately. What has not taken place or what has no likelihood of an immediate occurrence falls in the category of “no-time” (p23). He went further to explain that, time is a two-dimensional phenomenon, a long past, a present and virtually no future. The linear concept of time in Western thought, with an indefinite past, present and infinite future, is practically alien to African thinking. The issue of definite and imaginable time is stressed by Mbiti.

Looking at these two thoughts comparatively, that is, ‘a long past, a present and no future’ and ‘indefinite past, present and infinite future’, one can deduce that in Western thought, the future is endless, time-wise, while this to Africans is not within the limit of time. Therefore, Africans live for the present, and probably the past by talking of time in relation to events. This means important events mark the times in the year. For example, they refer to years like these: “During the Kiriji War”, “At the second burial of an important person”, “During the last Ogun festival” and “At the time of independence”. Westerners, however, live for the present and look up to the future greatly. The regular use of calendar makes reference to date of events very easy for them.

In the understanding of missionaries, the concept of time, to Africans, is late coming, as one can see in the society when a programme is fixed for a specific time and people do not attend promptly. This is in an effort to translate or interpret the time for events to morning, afternoon and night. This is often misconstrued as “African time”, which implies that programmes are not done at the stipulated time. Even the organizers might not be ready at the fixed time. Therefore, Jones, in Maxwell (1977), might be right by saying that, “the trouble with being punctual is that nobody is there to appreciate it”. By implication, everybody comes late to functions. This idea has crept

into Africans' lifestyle from generation to generation, and it is being extended to academic work, not only social events.

Heller and Hindle (1998) talk about cultural differences with regard to perceptions of time and its usage - to them it varies worldwide. They identify differences in the average number of working hours per day or week, the importance of punctuality, or time spent on leisure activities. There are differences in the time spent at work in the understanding of Africans and Westerners. While seasons matter to Africans, they have little influence on the work of Westerners. Punctuality in Africa is in the light of morning, afternoon and night, not according to the hourly counting of the clock that missionaries celebrate. Leisure is done at any available time, especially evenings. In Western culture, however, punctuality is according to the time schedule. Leisure is regular because they value routine life, and holiday is done at a place that is far from home and work.

Concept of African Time

In Africa, before the arrival of clocks, local cocks, the sounds and music of birds were very useful in making our forefathers keep to time. They were able to manage their time by relating the first cock crow to a given time, second one to another and third crow to a particular time of the day. This is seen in the sounds of birds like: *odere ikoko*-red eye dove (*streptophea semitoquata*) and *orofo* that sings every hour between 6am and 6pm, and *oori or oriri* that sings every afternoon between 12noon and 1pm. *Owiwi* - African barn owl - sings only at night; *oloburo* sings every other hour and *koowe* sings to announce good or bad tidings. This helped the Africans to begin their daily activities early. They worked during the day, where sunrise and sunset suggested time to them. Also they could return home before dark to have supper and engage in moonlight play. In the evening, shortly after the cocks retire, they also retired. Routine life was common.

Achunine (1998) confirms this when he says that in our traditional society, people used the position of sun and shadow direction to make an estimate of time during the day. The length of the shadow cast by the sun helped people estimate time in the morning, mid-day, afternoon and evening; when to start going to market, when children were expected back from school or when to leave the farm for the house. At the dawn of a new day, an early cock crow indicated different segments of time before the day finally breaks. The first cock crow signaled the breaking of a new day when distant travelers usually set out on their daily business.

Time is planned at every stage – time to begin work, time to marry and time to have projects as achievement, because time, to Africans, also means what one has achieved in life in terms of family, wealth and societal status. There is evaluation from time to time, especially when peer groups are compared. Peer group societies are formed to support, encourage and mainly to evaluate. Seeing or meeting one another at peer group societies enable each member to make better plan or idea on how to grow. These regular meetings/events are done at a given time as agreed upon by members.

However, the missionary era introduced the regular use of clock and allocation of time to events. The responses of Africans to events in the light of their own understanding of time made the missionaries derisively label them to have “African time”. Meanwhile, “African time” originated as a result of great respect for elders, especially in Yoruba land. Given that each day is broken into morning, afternoon, evening and night, if a celebration is fixed for morning, it is understood to be before noon. If a king as the head of the village invites his council for a meeting, it will not commence until everybody has arrived. A talking drummer announces the arrival of each member, along with the type of dress they put on. The king can change his attire several times until no one wears what is better than his. When everybody is seated, then he comes out majestically and all must prostrate to greet him. Kings enjoy this greatly and various

council members in their clan will not come for any function until all are gathered. In fact, he will be sent for when all preparations have been made. A whole day is dedicated to any planned ceremony, so when it starts does not really matter and it may end at night, since serious traveling might not be involved.

Beginning of University Education in Nigeria

The origin of university education in Nigeria can be traced to the Yaba College that was established in 1932 in Yaba, Lagos as the first tertiary institution in Nigeria. In 1948, however, the Yaba College was transferred to Ibadan and the process of that led to the establishment of University College of Ibadan. On the foundation day (17th November 1948), the British Secretary of the State for the colonies, Arthur Creech Jones, led the inauguration ceremony. This university was an extension of University of London. With this assertion, missionaries and the colonial administrators founded university education in Nigeria. It was later handed over to first Nigerian Vice Chancellor – Kenneth Dike - in 1963, and today, the school library is named after him. With this development, one would expect the administration of Nigerian universities to continue as handed over, but they seem to be administered in African ways, with African time in focus.

According to Okoli, Ogbondah and Ewor (2016), the following universities are the “First Generation Universities”:

1. University of Ibadan, Ibadan, 1948
2. University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 1960
3. University of Ife, Ile Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University), 1962
4. Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, 1962 and
5. University of Lagos, Lagos, 1962

Consequently, on the 1st July, 1970, the University of Benin was recognized by the National Universities Commission as the University of Benin, as stated by them.

Administration of University Education

Administration is an act of doing the right thing at the right time, which stimulates effectiveness. It is an everyday affair and practiced by everybody. Administration reflects greatly in the family, in various offices and even in individual lives. The issue of administration in education is as old as education itself. Effective administration is vital to education, especially in Nigerian universities. Hrsht (2014) compiled the definition of administration by various authors and the following are relevant to this work. According to Marx, "Administration is a determined action taken in pursuit of a conscious purpose. It is the systematic ordering of affairs and the calculated use of resources aimed at making those things happen which one wants to happen and foretelling everything to the contrary" (p.1). In the mind of Pfiffener, "Administration is the organization and direction of human and material resources to achieve desired ends." p.1. Also, McCanny is of the opinion that, "Administration is the organization and use of men and materials to accomplish a purpose. It is the specialized vocation of managers who have skills of organizing and directing men and materials just as definitely as an engineer has the skill of building structures or a doctor has the skill of understanding the human ailments." p.1. It can be deduced from the above definitions that administration is about coordinating human and material resources for the attainment of organizational goals.

Therefore, educational administration is an act of organizing human and material resources for the accomplishment of educational goals. Ajayi and Ayodele (2001), while citing Nwankwo, defined educational administration "as the arrangement of human and material resources and programmes available for education and carefully using them systematically for the achievement of educational objectives" (p.40). In another development, they defined educational

administration “as process by which principles, methods and practices are used in educational institutions to establish, maintain, and develop such institutions in line with the goals/objectives of the institution” (p.40).

Education in Nigeria today has the above focus, but is not done according to stipulated time. Courses of four years are concluded after four years because of issues of irregularities like Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) strike action, etc.. As a way of arriving at the proper management of education within the context of time, the opinion of Akinlua (2002) must prevail. He is advocating for curriculum planning, technical planning and manpower planning in these words: “Educational planning includes curriculum planning that is, preparation of curricula, time table and norms for assessment, technical planning which is formulating quantitative targets for the educational system and manpower planning which means determining the need for qualified manpower” (p.16). For him, all the educational objectives are clearly specified through the curriculum, and the means, procedure and methods of achieving education objectives are also provided in it.

He added that curriculum gives direction, spells out day-to-day activities of a school and makes the school to be organized and properly managed, time wise. Also, all the important cultural aspects of a society are passed on through the curriculum. Therefore, the researcher feels that educational curricular have to be planned by administrators as one of their primary assignment. This is not to save time, but because “education is not sure of occurring as wanted”, as he said. This indicates that education must not be left to chances but should be adequately planned within the space of time for effectiveness. If this is adequately adhered to, the issue of African time within the administration of education will not be an issue.

Education and African Time

Formal education in the hands of African administrators seems to be administered in the understanding of ‘African time’ where courses of four years can be extended to six years; this is different from situations that are personal, like class repetition, poverty, or cases where sickness and other personal situations do not allow one to move ahead as planned. Minor issues are allowed to disrupt educational plans and these hamper administrators in their effort to effectively push education forward. It has become a serious issue in Nigerian education, especially at higher institutions, where time is not properly managed by administrators, especially when they come late to school and leave early. It will become difficult to properly plan meetings; instead, there would be impromptu meetings.

Recruitment of personnel to time is unrealistic and planning school calendar and lecture time may sometimes be delayed. Severally, the lecture time-table is faced with regular interruptions and postponements. Students may wait for lectures without information. Tasks are not performed on schedule, interruptions are common. At times, scheduled examinations may be altered at the eleventh hour. Sometimes, events like matriculation and convocation do not begin as intended and students and guests are seated for a long time.

Achunine and Irondi (1998) are of the opinion that planning that suggests thinking ahead is very vital to administrative effectiveness. Administrators should plan an effective use of their time and should not perform tasks by chance. Planning can either be short-range, covering daily, weekly or monthly tasks or long-range, covering yearly or full six-year term. The researcher feels that the shorter the range, the more definite the plans can be achieved and the less the risk of non-achievement, especially in a school system where planning affects each set and the whole school at large.

The daily school time-table is an example of a clear, rather rigid plan of how the days in each week can be spent productively. It shows a daily/weekly plan of time allocation to the various school subjects, programmes and other activities. It ensures that everyone in the school

is productively engaged all the time, doing what the school approves as worthwhile. The scheduling of the programmes and the allocation of time are done in such a way as to ensure that important programmes receive priority attention. The school time-table highlights the significance of managing time to greater advantage.

In the experiment conducted by Mimosa (2010) on the importance of time-table, it was concluded that time-table is the best way the administrator can schedule students' time. To him, student scheduling normally occurs after the time-table has been determined. In some schools, courses can be offered in more than one section, that is, different instructors may offer the same course at different times and a student scheduling package helps the user decide which students should be allocated to each section to minimize student conflicts. Other issues in administration are the idea of not creating strategies for carrying out events, not writing down the task to be performed in the order of priority, and not making provisional time for interruptions.

Education and Prioritization

Administrators may not be perfect, because of lack of prioritization. Yager (1999) feels that prioritization helps administrators to sharpen their decision-making skills. They must continuously apply the rule of 'what is my number one priority right now?' and through this, time is saved. He continues by saying that if a new idea or approach is suggested, one should ask: is it faster or better? Is it lower or less effective? What makes the difference? These will help for effective time management.

Sometimes, administrators may use official time/hour to attending to personal issues like visitors and making lengthy phone calls. Most times, duties are not properly delegated and some administrators may be performing already delegated tasks unconsciously. Therefore, important meetings can be postponed, important issues can be

addressed any time. They sometimes accommodate extension of deadlines, as events that come up suddenly do consume some of their time and they could be interrupted by unrelated issues like re-reading old memos in the process of doing an important task.

At times, budget preparations are sometimes late and approved budgets are not readily available. Issuing of certificates may even be delayed. As a result of these, administrators may find it difficult to set organizational goals, check deviations from plans, supervise staff, build cohesive team work and assess organizational standards. All these lapses in administration are as a result of lack of proper time management and, at times, procrastination.

Education and Procrastination

As the saying goes, procrastination is the thief of time. This is a strong element in African time; there are lots of issues that should be addressed quickly but leaving it till the next moment does result in serious delay. Lay, in Eric (2005), observes that procrastination is very common among administrators, and Fiore (2006) identifies causes for this as: being over-extended, low motivation, lack of training, faulty assumptions, perfectionism, fear of evaluation and avoidance of negative experience. These points hold merit, especially the lack of training which results in low productivity. By implication, they can affect administrators. A punctual and devoted administrator will attract followers of his type

According to the research conducted by Thakkar (2010) on how administrators procrastinate, it was established that unless a deadline is fixed, many of them may not act as agreed. An example of paper writing was given – times without number. They agreed to present a yet-unwritten paper in the future, in the hope that the embarrassment of being forced to cancel or make a change would be a strong motivation for writing the paper prior to the presentation. In fact, many activities seem deadline-driven, particularly in our

contemporary society in which most people seem to be short on time. Procrastination in the academic realm, he continues, holds many negative consequences, including time loss and increased stress.

In the mind of Ajayi and Omojola (2020), while reflecting on factors affecting administrators' time usage in southwest Nigerian universities, they observed that "teachers' strike, students' unrest, sudden accident, fire outbreak, impromptu meetings and many other emergencies can interfere with administrators' daily schedule"(p.13). In the recent past, the issue of #Endsars protest and curfews, insecurity in Nigeria that comes in the form of kidnapping people, including students, and the Covid 19 pandemic lockdowns distorted time usage and affected academic activities greatly.

Recommendations

The idea of "African time", which is common among educational administrators, should be controlled through prioritization and avoidance of procrastination. Administrators will achieve more effectiveness if procrastination is reduced and planned work is executed as slated. Also, academic calendar and lecture time-table should be made available to give directions. Time should be respected and all academic programmes must be carried out as arranged.

Academic staff, however, need to be stable within office hours by being regular at lectures, attending to assignments in due time and making results available. This will be possible if work is properly planned and carefully performed; keeping in mind that procrastination is the thief of time and that large and continuous time without interruptions are needed to perform meaningful tasks.

Governments will increase the effectiveness of administrators if adequate attention is given to academic staff to avoid continuous strike action. This will encourage attainment of educational values.

Stakeholders should look into formal education to see how it can accommodate African understanding of time and enhance development through more vocational studies in future.

Conclusion

Western education in the light of African understanding of time will be suggesting “inculturated education” or living in the past or not imbibing the spirit behind education meticulously. If Africans have accepted Western education, therefore, their understanding of time is also part of it and should be retained as handed over. Western education in African understanding has brought a lot of lapses to peoples’ lives and part of it is that students spend more than the stipulated time in school, and these days, time-wasting has financial implications, especially at the postgraduate level. This creates a lot of anxiety to human life, and many are discouraged, while courses that waste time are dropped.

According to Adewuya (2004), the first critique of British educational system in Africa was made by the Phelps-Stake Commission (1920-21) where it was pointed out that the “educational services given by the missions to the Africans lacked any vocational skills that could foster development among the African peoples” (p.3). Then, the question is if this is why it is difficult to administer them as planned. There should be a revisiting of university education system to suit or accommodate Africans lifestyle.

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