Adjustment Challenges of New Academic Staff in Nigerian Universities: A Case Study of University Of Calabar

Dr. Franca Anijaobi-Idem*[1] Dr. Ijeoma A. Archibong [2]
1.   University of Calabar, Calabar. Cross River State, Nigeria.
2.   Cross River University of Technology, Cross River State, Nigeria.
E-mail of corresponding author: francaanijah@yahoo.com

Abstract
This study investigated the adjustment challenges of new academic staff in the University of Calabar, Cross River State. The survey research design was adopted. Four research questions guided the study. A questionnaire was developed, validated and used for data collection from a sample of 50 new academic staff drawn using stratified random sampling techniques. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (percentages). The results showed systemic deficiencies on the part of the university administration in terms of absence of planned orientation/training programme for new academic staff, problems associated with teaching and learning, relationship-oriented issues (mentoring)and work environment related issues. Orientation/induction programmes for new staff and provision of adequate and conducive office accommodation for staff were among the recommendations made.
Keywords: Adjustment, challenges, new academic staff, socialization, induction, Nigeria

Introduction

Globally, there is a serious quest by governments of countries to improve access to higher education as well as its quality. Nigeria is not left behind in this new move. Evidence of this is the deregulation of the higher education sector leading to private participation in the provision of tertiary education and increase in the number of state and federal owned tertiary institutions. Available data from Nigerian Universities Commission (NUC) indicates that in the existence of 36 federal universities, 37 state universities ad 45 private universities as at April, 2012. This rapid expansion is not without its challenges particularly with respect to quality of education service delivery. To cope with the increased enrolment and adequately provide staff for their various programmes, universities have had to employ more academic staff on contract, adjunct or permanent basis. These new staff are expected to immediately begin to carry out academic activities such as teaching, research, examination administration, supervision of students' projects and theses etc. One wonders whether all new recruits are adequately prepared to face the new job demands, considering their different backgrounds and previous experiences. There is no doubt that, if new staff are to establish themselves quickly, efficiently and effectively, there is a need to provide them with guidance, support and information in a planned and considered way (Cross & Rigden, 2002; Wong, 2004).

It is a known fact that starting a new job in a new work environment presents series of challenges to an individual irrespective of previous experience. For instance, it has been expressed that academic staff lack conducive work environment devoid of required resources needed for their job performance (Ajayi, Awosusi, Arogundade & Ekundayo, 2011). In this regard, Opatolu (1995), found experience, conducive work environment, possession of teaching qualification, disposition, interest in the job, dedication and commitment, among others to be more important in academic staff job performance. Akuegwu (2005) on the other hand asserted that, without a good socio-psychological and intellectual environment, the teachers and students cannot perform well in their academic activities. These multiple adjustments required of a new employee can be very daunting, stressful and challenging. An induction process serves as a starting point for the training and development of new staff. Well-meaning organizations take positive steps to cushion the effect of these demands and ensure an easy transition period for the new employee in terms of roles and responsibilities, organizational norms and relationship with work colleagues. Given the challenges confronting new staff, it is therefore vital that institutions of higher learning ensure that new staff understand the mission, vision, goals, values, expectations and demands of university education as well as learn new behaviours and 'unlearn' things acquired in previous settings. Beyond this, the institution must take positive steps to provide enabling environment, so as to ease the adjustment process of new staff.

Induction enables new staff to understand the culture of the university and how they can be most effective in it, become familiar with departmental practices, policies and guidelines, appreciate and understand fully the expectation of their role, understand the duties and activities of the job and to begin to perform them effectively

(Hassel, 1999; Breaux & Wong, 2003; Chapman, 2006).The benefits of a thorough induction are: staff feels welcome and valued; accelerated success and effectiveness, improved personal and professional well-being; heightened job satisfaction, greater self-confidence and enhanced commitment to students, school and profession (Britton, Paine, Piman & Raizen, 2003; Wong, 2004; Chapman, 2006). There is no doubt that where staff are provided with an appropriate and well-planned induction programme they: are more highly motivated, can extend their range of skills and knowledge, enabling them to be more adaptable, are less likely to waste the university's resources and staff time, and benefit from reduced levels of stress and anxiety (Fullan, 2001; Hiebert, Gallimore & Stigles, 2002). An effective induction therefore helps a new employee feel assured and comfortable in the new work environment. This is critical for early assumption of a new role (Mutsuddi, 2010). New staff induction programmes therefore help new and beginning lecturers become competent and effective professionals in the classroom (Chapman, 2006).

Werner and Desimore (2006), posited that despite the importance and benefits of professional socialization, some organizations including universities do little to integrate their new members, leaving them as it were, to find their own solutions in the complex academic world. If early socialization in their first academic appointments is deficient or unsuccessful, it could result in unmet expectations, dissatisfaction and lack of commitment on the part of new recruits. Such staff are also likely to take more time to settle down, make more mistakes and may even become disillusioned with the job and then personal frustration and institutional disappointment may ensue. What usually obtains is that university management see induction as a process of completing paper work by new staff or a series of uncoordinated events during which new academics are hurriedly introduced to the general work environment, rather than offering them experiences that inspire and prepare them for the challenges ahead. This is worrisome particularly as it concerns the quality of teaching because higher education institutions (HEIs) are increasingly being mandated to extend and improve their performance – by teaching more students better, and by promoting key or transferable skills (Jones, 1996, Harvey & Knight, 1996). It is even more disturbing especially as it concerns effective staff integration, given the fact that the early experiences of a new employee has important and lasting impact on their performance on the job and in some cases their willingness to remain in the institution. From the foregoing, it is evident that orientation/socialization of new staff is a very needful activity that should not be ignored. But the crucial question is: has this been done for newly recruited staff in the University of Calabar?

The problem

It has been observed over the years that there is no formal structured programmes to ease the absorption of new academic staff into the university system. This means that lecturers entering universities are not adequately inducted to empower them with the required professional stamina that enables them to face their occupational exercises and challenges (Wadesango & Machingambi, 2011). The University of Calabar in its bid to improve education service delivery has undertaken massive employment of new academic staff to cater for the increased student population. It is therefore not uncommon to see new academic staff sitting in the general office of their various departments, nor is it strange to see a new staff trying to locate the lecture venue, or even recognize their colleagues. This trend continues anytime new staff are employed. One cannot but ask the question are new staff given the necessary support to enable them adjust to the demands of a university academic staff? The study therefore seeks to:

1. ascertain if any orientation was organized for new staff by the university management
2. determine whether new staff were given any staff handbook or conditions of service
3. identify the challenges that new staff face in meeting the demands of their job
4. identify specific areas that new staff would require assistance to help them cope with their job demands.
   To achieve the above objectives, the following research questions are posed:
1. did the university management organize any form of orientation/training for new academic staff?
2. did the university management give any handbook/conditions of service to new staff?
3. what major challenges do new academic staff encounter in the university work environment?
4. what specific areas would the new academic staff require assistance to cope with their job demands?

Method

To carry out the study, the survey research design was utilized. Only one university, University of Calabar, located in Cross River State of Nigeria was utilized for the study. Only new academic staff who had spent less than one year constituted the population for the study. In order to get information from a cross-section of the new academic staff in the different faculties, the researchers adopted stratified random sampling technique. The reason for the sampling

technique was that the researcher sought adequate representation from each faculty in the university. A total of 70 questionnaires were distributed and only 50 were successfully completed giving a return rate of 71.4%. The 50 new academic staff consisted of 34 males and 16 females. Out of this number, 29 were between the ages of 30-39, 14 were 40—49 and 7 were 50-59 years old. The faculties covered were: Education, Arts, Science, Management Sciences, Social Sciences and Agriculture, Forestry and Wildlife Resource Management.

The research instrument used was a self-designed questionnaire Scale for Measuring Adjustment Among New Academic Staff (SMAANAS). It comprised of two sections: Section A sought demographic information on gender, age, faculty, period of service as lecturer and previous levels of teaching. In Section B, the first two questions determined if any orientation/training programme was organized for new staff and whether they were given any academic staff handbook or conditions of service on appointment as lecturers. These required 'Yes' or 'No' answers. The third question was to ascertain the major challenges faced by the new staff in meeting with the demands of their lecturing job and the last sought to ascertain specific areas they would require assistance to enable them cope with their new job demands. The instrument was face validated by two academic staff in the area of measurement and evaluation to ascertain if the items were suitable for the study. This indicated that the instrument was adequate for the study. The data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics (percentages).

Results and discussion

The results and discussions will be based on the four research questions posed earlier to guide the study.

Research question 1:

Did the university management organize any form of orientation/training programme for new academic staff?

The answer provided by the respondents on the issue of organization of orientation for them is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Organization of orientation for new staff (N = 50)

Staff response	Number	percentage
Yes	6	(12%)
No	44	(88%)

A look at Table 1 shows that only 6 (21%) new academic staff received some form of induction while 44 (88%) did not receive any form of orientation or training before being assigned their duties. This is very worrisome, given the fact that only 12% of the respondents have had teaching experience at the tertiary education level. As Table 2 indicates, 50% of the respondents have previously taught at secondary school level while 26% have had no teaching experience

Table 2: Respondents' previous level of teaching

Teaching experience	Number	Percentage (%)
Primary school level	1	2%
Secondary school level	25	50%
College of Education	5	10%
Polytechnic	4	8%
University	2	4%
None of the above	13	26%

This finding implies that the university management did not see induction of new staff as an essential phase in the success of a quality recruitment process. The result also suggests that the possession of a Masters or Doctorate as the case may be, automatically qualifies the holder to teach in the university without any other form of orientation at the point of employment. This assumption is erroneous and, indeed, misleading. To this end, Cole (2004) asserts that teaching requires specific skills by way of training and competence which can be provided by regular induction and staff development programmes. It is, however, encouraging that 12% of the new academic staff received orientation in their departments. The quality and effectiveness of that orientation need to be scrutinized and may form the subject of another research. However, it is worth emphasizing that orientation is a critical factor in helping

new academic staff develop productive lasting relationships within the university system. Similarly, mentoring by senior staff serves to provide guidance and sharpen psychological skills that will help to develop the careers of the new staff. Any university that desires effectiveness in their academic staff cannot afford to ignore orientation of her new members.

Research question 2

Did the University Management provide any academic staff handbook/conditions of service to new staff?
The response obtained from the subjects with respect to this question is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Provision of staff handbook/conditions of service for new staff

Staff response	Number	Percentage (%)
Yes	4	8%
No	46	92%

The findings in Table 3 show that 4 (8%) of the new academic staff received staff handbook/conditions of service while a very high percentage 46 (92%) did not. This result shows negligence on the part of the university management in carrying out their responsibilities. It is not surprising that a good number of academic staff have never seen the university handbook and have remained ignorant of basic terms and conditions of employment. It is important that new staff be acquainted with all necessary information, history, rules and procedures, unions and joint consultation, management, medical facilities as well as education and training facilities available among other things. This information contained in staff handbook enables a staff adjust to the demands of the institutions, and key into the vision and mission of the university. The possibility of picking any negative tendencies prevalent in the system is greatly reduced when the university management provides information on acceptable conducts to the new academic staff.

Research question 3

What major challenges do new academic staff encounter in the university work environment?
The challenges indicated by new academic staff in response to research question 3 is presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Challenges to new academic staff meeting their job demands

- Dearth of academic materials on some courses
- Inadequate and obsolete books in the library
- Illequipped resource centres for research and learning
- Obsolete library materials/journals
- Lack of departmental library
- Difficulty in getting acquainted with the course to teach
- Finding relevant materials for courses allocated to teach
- Inappropriate/lack of office accommodation
- Irregular/epileptic power supply affecting use of computer
- Absence of public address system for large classes
- Non-functional science equipment
- Lack of water supply for laboratories
- Lack of provision of markers and chalk
- General impression of new staff not wanted
- Discrimination between senior and junior staff
- Failure to pay new staff for three months after resumption of duty
- Preparation of course outline
- Poor intra-campus transportation
- Inadequate/unconducive lecture halls
- Difficulty in reaching students by staff
- Too many students in a class
- Difficulty in meeting students to teach for up to 4 weeks after resumption
- Laxity on the part of students to study thereby making teaching and learning incompatible

The findings in Table 4 reveal myriad of challenges facing the new academic staff. These can be summarized as follows:

➢ **Teaching and learning issues**

Table 4 shows that there is a dearth of reading materials on some courses. This makes it difficult for new staff to find relevant materials for courses they teach. Worse still is the problem of inadequate and obsolete textbooks, ill-equipped resource centres for research and in some cases, no departmental libraries. The issue of textbooks should be a non-issue at this time and age of information and communication technology (ICT). With internet facilities no lecturer should really bother so much about old textbooks. However, this goes to show that academic staff still rely heavily on textbooks, do not have internet facilities or are not computer literate. There was also indication that staff have difficulty getting acquainted with the courses they are to teach. In other words, some lecturers do not have the slightest idea of the courses they are required to teach or even how to prepare the course outlines.

The findings also reveal the inexperience of most new recruits into the university system. It does appear that it is only in education that a new entrant is allowed to handle chalk without the benefit of a professional teaching qualification. The new entrant may know the content or subject matter but certainly not the delivery and pedagogical skills which distinguish the quack from the professional teacher. Indeed, both the professional teachers and those without teaching qualification need orientation and training as the university system is often an unfamiliar work environment for them all.

Also, inadequate instructional resources and lack of public address systems for large classes make the job of teaching tedious and stressful. One of the greatest challenges is the issue of inadequate and unconducive lecture classroom/venue which are often overcrowded because of high student population. Students often scramble for lecture rooms as there are no permanent lecture venues leading to low student attendance. Some times new staff get to their lecture venues only to find the classroom already occupied by another lecturer. This leads to cancellation of lecture periods due to lack of space and waste of time looking for alternative lecture room. In addition, low attendance of students to lectures, unseriousness and unwillingness to study have been cited as problems experienced by staff, thereby making teaching and learning incompartible. Consequently, the failure rate is often high resulting in 'sorting' which before now was elegantly designated as 'settlement' which is another name for academic corruption (the use of corrupt means by students to get undeserved grades) (Uya, 2005).

➢ **Relationship-oriented issues**

The findings in Table 4 reveal that some new academic staff feel not wanted, that the older staff were not friendly and there was obvious discrimination between senior and junior staff (new staff). No doubt every new employee would desire to establish relationships, failure of which may expose them to unnecessary anxiety, frustration, and disappointments. Such exposure could affect both their personal and professional adjustment. This reinforced by Knight and Trowler (1999) in their own study found that the new academics were often worried and feeling isolated and uncertain about what they should be doing. Other respondents felt their work environments were friendly but not as congenial as they might have wished. New academics are bound to feel isolated when there are no guides to make their fitting into the system less traumatic. They need seniors to assist them, interact with them, go to lectures with them especially at the early stages for their tenure and explain things to them so as to make adjustment easier for them. Induction and training and mentoring can be effective agents of professional socialization as these could have made the transition into academic life much easier. Discrimination is often visible because the older staff are usually attended to first whether in the allocation of courses, or allocation of facilities etc. before the new staff. It is most desirable that there be better mentoring programmes to guide new recruits and help them cope with the uncertainties and dilemmas of the new role as academics. An effective induction therefore will help the new academic feel assured and comfortable in the new work environment. This is critical for early assumption of new roles (Mutsuddi, 2010).

➢ **Work environment-related issues**

Some of the challenges experienced by staff as revealed by the study include: transportation problems, failure to pay staff for the first three months, lack of electricity, etc. Mobility problem especially poor intra-campus transportation can be very disturbing and uncomfortable for new staff because of the absence of staff buses to convey

them from one part of the campus to the other. A situation whereby students with cars have to carry staff from their offices to lecture rooms or even take them home after work will certainly compromise the lecturers. How can such a lecturer fail the benevolent student? Inability to pay staff for three or four months is simply inefficiency on the part of the university administration. How long does it take to process the salary of staff? This will affect the staff psychologically and otherwise. Going for months without pay could lead to financial embarrassment.

Research question 4

What specific areas would the new academic staff require assistance to cope with their job demands?

Table 5:   Areas new academic staff require assistance

- Provision of textbooks for teaching and personal development
- Need for research centre
- E-library to boost the job
- Power problem to be tackled/provision of regular electricity
- Internet facilities to be installed for easy and quick access to current information for teaching and research
- Provision of laboratory reagent
- Making new staff feel welcome
- Accommodation and quarters for staff
- Sponsoring staff for conferences/seminars
- Facilitation of early payment of salary i.e. payroll
- An enabling environment for teaching
- Equipped lecture rooms, projectors, teaching aids, computers, good and well kept books

The findings in table 5 show that new academics do not get adequate support from members to help them adjust to their new environment. Mentoring programmees for new academics are required to ensure that departmental practices are learning-friendly. University management can show greater concern for effective team work and networking as part of the working environment. Team teaching and encouraging staff to carry out research which is one of the core responsibilities of academics, can be good preparation for the complex and evolving working life of a new staff. This is because adequate arrangements for positive professional socialization to make staff feel welcome and comfortable are generally lacking as revealed from the study. Good working relationships should exist between older and new staff such as helping them with teaching new and unfamiliar courses and in handling very large classes.

Inadequate facilities and equipment were major challenges to new staff as mentioned earlier in this study. Staff needs include: conducive, befitting ad well-equipped office accommodation, provision of staff buses, constant electricity supply, prompt payment of staff salaries, etc. Staff require an enabling environment for teaching such as well equipped research centres or e-library to boost their job. Nothing kills the morale and zeal of staff more than late payment of salaries. A staff who is worried about how to get to work, about basic things like food, etc can neither be happy nor effective. There must be a way of processing new employee forms to ensure early payment of salary. Financial resources are required to provide the necessary facilities to make work more enjoyable and satisfying for new staff.

With regards to information, majority of new staff were not given information booklets in the form of handbooks containing all they need to know about their university as well as their conditions of service. Experience shows that even the very senior staff who have spent more than ten years in the university system have never seen the university handbook. As a matter of curiosity the researcher tried to get a copy of the university conditions of service from the establishment division of the university under study but was told it was under revision for the past two years. Adequate information is vital to put the new staff on the right footing, to know the mission and vision of the university, the philosophy and objectives of their departmental programmes as well as other procedures.

Conclusion

The conclusion drawn from the findings of this study is that, there are systemic deficiencies in the management of new academic staff by the university administration. There is a lack of well-planned orientation

programmes and the failure to provide new staff with handbook on their condition of service. Viable recommendations are hereby made, that if carried out by the university management, would facilitate ease adjustment of new academic staff, help them overcome the challenges they indicated in this study, and above all, enable them effectively discharge their duties

Recommendations

Based on the findings in this study, it is hereby recommended that:

➢ the university management should as a matter of urgency develop and carryout orientation programmes for all new academic staff.

➢ The university management should develop programmes targeted at new academic staff without previous tertiary education teaching experience in order to equip them with skills necessary for effective teaching.

➢ the university should provide adequate teaching and learning facilities so as to ease the stress of new academic staff.

➢ the university should harness the benefits of mentoring as an important skills learning tool by establishing a well-designed mentoring programme.

References

Akuegwu, B. A. (2005). Administrative factors, job-related variables and academic staff job performance in tertiary institution in Imo State, Nigeria, unpublished Thesis, university of Calabar

Ajayi, I. A., Awosusi, O. O., Arogundade, B. B., E. Kundayo, H. T. (2001). Work Environment as correlate of Academic Staff Job Performance in south West Nigeria Universities. *European Journal of Educational Studies* 3 (1), 1-9.

Breaux, A., & Wong, H. (2003). *New teacher induction: How to train, support and retain new teachers.* New York: Wong Publication.

Britton, E. Paine, L. Pimm, D. & Raizen, S. (2003). *Comprehensive teacher induction: Systems for early career learning.* New York: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Chapman, J. (2006). *School based decision-making and management.* London: The Falmer Press.

Cole, G. A. (2004). *Management theory and practice* UK: TJ International, Padstow, Cornwall.

Cross, C. T., Rigden, D. W. (2002). Improving teaching quality. *American* School Board Journal, 189: 24-27.

Fullan, M. (2001). *The new meaning of educational change.* New York: Teacher College Press.

Hassel, E. (1999). *Professional development: Learning from the best.* London: North Central Regional Educational Laboratory.

Harvey, L. Knight, P. T. (1996). *Transforming Higher Education (Buckingham, society for Research in Higher Education and the Open University Press.)*

Hiebert, H. Gallimore, R. & Stigles, J. (2002). A knowledge base for the teaching profession. What would it look like and how can we get one? *Educational Researchers*, 31:3-15.

Jones, E. A. (1996). National and State policies affecting learning expection, in: E. A. Jones (Ed) *Preparing Competent College Graduates: Setting new and Higher Expectaion in Students Learning,* pp. 7-17 (San Francisco, CA, Jossey-Bass).

King, R. C. & Selhi, V. (1998). The impact of socialization on the role adjustment of information systems professionals. *Journal of Management Information System*, 14 (4).

Knight, P. T., & Twrowler, P. R. (1999). It takes a village to raise a child: Mentoring and the socialization of new entrants to the academic profession. *Mentoring and Tutoring*, 7 (1), 23.

Oprolu, J. O. (1995). Some salient aspects of instructional effectiveness in teaching of physical education activities in junior and senior secondary schools. The Nigeria Teachers 4 (1): 26-34

Mutsuddi, I. (2010). *Essentials of human resource management.* New Delhi: New Age International (p) Ltd. Publishers.

Wadesango, N. & Machingambi, S. (2011). What's the use of induction course? A case study of three South African Universities. *Journal of Social Sciences*, 26 (1), 1-9.

Werner, J. M. & Desimone, L. R. (2006). *Human resource development.* Ohio USA: Thomson South Western 4th edition.