

# The Social Roles and Expectations of the University Administrator in the Nigerian University System: Implication for the Social Studies Teacher

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## Abstract

The role of the University teacher and administrator is very significant. Often referred to as the “man in the middle,” the occupant of the position frequently wanders about like Moses in search of the Promised Land. The “Promised Land” which the University administrator seeks is represented by a clear role definition of what he is supposed to do, the authority to carry out his responsibilities, and the respect which he feels he deserves for handling a job which has become one of the most difficult and complex in Nigerian University system. There are many reasons why the job of the Vice Chancellor, Dean of Faculty or Head of Department in a University system has become so difficult – reasons which will be identified and discussed later in this paper. However, it is evident that if the University administrator of which the Vice Chancellor symbolizes is to respond effectively to the challenge of his position, he will need to become more aware of different role options, more knowledgeable about the role that important others expect him to adopt, and have a better understanding of the various social forces that affect his role. The following sections discuss each of these three important aspects of the job of the educational administrator.

**Keywords:** Social roles, University system, University administrator, Social studies, University teacher

## 1. Introduction

There is no shortage of opinions, proposals, or conceptualizations regarding the role of the University administrator (Melton & Stanley, 2010). A review of the literature on the subject reveals that, at one time or another, six major roles have been proposed: (1) manager, (2) instructional leader, (3) disciplinarian, (4) human relations facilitator, (5) change agent, and (6) conflict mediator. While it is unlikely that an administrator will be required to enact all six of these roles simultaneously, he should attempt to become competent in each role so that he can perform it effectively when and if the situation requires. The following summary descriptions are intended to provide the University administrator with a brief introduction to each of the six social roles.

### 1.1 Manager

In the eyes of many people, the educational manager, Vice Chancellor, Dean or school administrator is first and foremost a manager. It was based on this general concept that the position originated in the 1800s (Pierce, 2008) and though other roles have since been proposed, the concept of the administrator as manager has persisted.

As manager, the educational administrator or Vice Chancellor is expected to procure, organize, and coordinate both physical and human resources so that the goals of the organization can be attained effectively. His main role is to develop or implement policies and procedures which will result in the efficient operation of the school. In fact, the popularized notion of a manager is, “one who keeps things running smoothly” especially in the peculiar environment like our own.

It should be noted that the term “manager” conveys a negative connotation for certain individuals (Wilson, 2007). Many Vice Chancellors or administrators, in particular, don’t like to think of themselves as managers; the term “leader”, which will be discussed later, is perceived by them as a more attractive appellation. However, an educational administrator should recognize that when different people and resources are brought together in one location (in this case, a school building), there is a need for someone to organize, schedule, and coordinate the entire operation. That “someone” at the building level has typically been the administrator.

Consequently, rather than resisting the role of manager, the Vice Chancellor being an educational administrator should accept and implement the role in such a way that the school is efficiently managed, yet he is in a position to be available for other role options. By successfully performing the role of manager, an administrator can help others to accomplish tasks and goals, and in the process can generate a more positive attitude toward his contribution to the school community.

## 1.2. Instructional Leader

The role of the Vice Chancellor or the educational administrator as an instructional leader has had a long history (Cubberley, 2008). Although the educational administrator was at first more a manager than a leader, it wasn't long before the instructional leadership dimensions of the position began to be emphasized in the educational literature and at various professional meetings which administrators attended (Cubberley, 2008). It is probably safe to say that leadership, often referred to as "educational leadership", or "instructional leadership", has been widely accepted by administrators as the *raison d'être* for the continued existence of their position at the building level.

But one of the problems in connection with the proposed role of the University administrator as instructional leader is that people define the role in different ways and with varying degrees of precision, thereby creating confusion for the administrator who is expected to carry out the role (Anderson & Lawrence, 2007). For example, to some, the vice chancellorship is a leadership position, and any activities in which the vice chancellor engages in order to improve instruction are leadership activities. To others, there are certain types of activities or actions, such as classroom observation, in which the vice chancellor is expected to participate if he is to function as an instructional leader. Compounding the problem is the fact that the vice chancellor is frequently encouraged to be an instructional leader and yet may not be perceived by lecturers as possessing the subject matter expertise necessary for helping them to improve (Gorton, 2002). This problem and other aspects of the role of the administrator as an instructional leader will be explored in the later part of this paper.

## 1.3. Disciplinarian

The importance of the disciplinary role of the university administrator has been revealed by several studies. For example, when teachers and parents are asked to comment on the role which they expect the vice chancellor as a school administrator to play in the University, disciplinarian is usually cited as his major – perhaps even his most important role. Students also tend to see him or her as a disciplinarian (although there is some doubt as to whether they approve of this role) (McAulay, 2004).

On the other hand, vice chancellors tend to reject the idea that being a disciplinarian is their major role, and frequently assign this responsibility to their assistants. However, research has shown that an increasing disciplining of students as the primary responsibility of their position. Generally, vice chancellors resist or reject the role of disciplinarian because of the negative connotation of the term and because the duties associated with the role are frequently frustrating, irritating, and unpleasant to perform. The term, "disciplinarian", traditionally has implied one who punishes someone else: in this case, usually a student.

Punishing students can be a very vexing and frustrating job, as anyone knows who has had to assume this responsibility. Although modern concepts of discipline emphasize more positive approaches to improving student conduct, the fact remains that working with student misbehaviour problems represents a difficult assignment with few rewards, which may explain university administrators' negative reactions to the role. Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that student conduct still constitutes a major problem in many Nigerian universities, and important reference groups who are associated with the university will probably continue to expect the vice chancellor and/or an assistant to play the role of disciplinarian.

## 1.4. Facilitator of Human Relations

The human relations role of the vice chancellor as a school administrator originated in the early 1920s and was given initial impetus by the publication of a book by Mary Parker Follet entitled *Creative Experience*. In this book and in her other writings, Follett emphasized the importance of a university administrator's concentrating as much on meeting the personal needs of employees and developing cooperative and harmonious relationships among them, as on achieving the productivity goals of the organization. Later studies by Elton Mayo provided empirical support for Follett's approach, Mayo (1993) and books by Griffiths and others attempted to incorporate concepts of human relations into the theory of university administration (Griffiths, 1996).

The vice chancellor as a university administrator should, of course, practice good human relations in all aspects of his or her job, and in relationships with people generally. However, the two areas in which this becomes particularly important are in the developing of high staff morale, and a humanistic school environment. The specific human relations skills involved in achieving these two goals will be identified in later paragraphs.

## 1.5. Change Agent

The role of the educational administrator as change agent is of relatively recent origin (Gridges, 1986). Although the vice chancellor has always been expected to some extent to introduce change, it wasn't until the 1980's that this role assumed major importance. Since then the role of change agent has received a great deal of emphasis in

the educational literature and at professional meetings. Vice chancellors have been exhorted to introduce all kinds of changes ranging from individualized instruction to open classrooms. The basic rationale advanced for the role of the vice chancellor as a change agent is that the educational programme of the school should be changed to meet the needs of students to a greater degree; and no one is in better position to help bring about these changes than the vice chancellor bring the educational leader (Chartters, 2005).

The role of the university administrator as a change agent is a complex one, involving many aspects. However, the main characteristics of the role include the following: (1) diagnosing the need for change, (2) developing or selecting an innovation, (3) orienting the target group to the proposed change, (4) anticipating problems and resistance to the proposed change, (5) developing and implementing a plan which will introduce the innovation and which will overcome obstacles and resistance to change, and (6) evaluating the implemented innovation and making needed refinements in it.

Of course, whether or not a university administrator can be an effective change agent depends largely on the extent of his vision of educational changes which need to be brought about in the school, and the degree to which he possesses the abilities and commitment necessary to introduce those changes successfully (Gorton, 2002). Also it should be emphasized that change for change's sake is not a valid or constructive goal for the administrator to adopt. The proposed change should have the potential for improving the educational programme of the school before it can be considered desirable.

### **1.6. Conflict Mediator**

The role of university administrator (Vice Chancellor) as conflict mediator is of even more recent origin than that of change agent (Harkin, 1995). Although administrators have always been faced with the need to adjust differences, it wasn't until the mid-sixties that the need to mediate conflict became a major aspect of the university administrator's role. Since that time he has been confronted with, among others, conflicts associated with student activism, lecturers militancy, and parental and community demands for greater involvement in school decision making.

At the present time, conflict resolution comprises a major part of the vice chancellor's social job. In the role of conflict resolver, the university administrator acts basically as a mediator (Gorton, 2002). He attempts to secure all of the facts in a situation, as well as the perceptions each party to the dispute has of one another and of the issues in conflict. Generally, the university administrator's major goal is for each side to recognize some validity in the other party's position, so that compromise can take place and the conflict can be resolved. As an administrator he or she works with all parties to a dispute, whether they be students, lecturers, parents, or others, he needs to develop an understanding on their part that neither side is totally right, and that some "give and take" will be necessary before the conflict can be resolved.

When one views the turmoil surrounding education in Nigeria today, it is clear that the role of conflict mediator is an essential one for the university administrator (Stephen, 2009).

## **2. The Vice Chancellor's Social Role**

### **2.1. Reference Groups' Expectations**

No administrator can simultaneously perform all of the roles previously described, and generally different situations call for different roles. If a university administrator is to make a wise decision about the role he should adopt in a particular situation, he will need to be knowledgeable about the expectations held by various reference groups. These groups include students, lecturers, parents, union leaders, and others who may be associated with the university.

While it may be impossible for a university administrator to become knowledgeable about the expectations for his role held by all the different groups who are associated with the school, it would appear essential that he become so in the case of four of the groups with whom he has direct contact: students, lecturers, parents, and the vice chancellor's superior colleagues. Although the specific expectations of any of these groups may vary according to the nature of the group, and the local situation, research studies have provided information which should be useful in helping the administrator to develop an understanding of the general orientation of these groups.

### **2.2. Students' Expectations**

Many students have probably never even thought about the role of their vice chancellor, while others may possess well-conceived ideas about what he should be doing in the school. A review of the research on students'

expectations for the role of their vice chancellor as an administrator shows that this area of inquiry has not attracted much interest from researchers. An investigation by Pederson (2006) however, suggests the kinds of behaviour which students might perceive to be effective principal behaviour and the kinds of behaviour which they might perceive to be ineffective. Pederson's study of a random sample of students was conducted in twenty-five universities in the United States. In essence, he asked, 1,645 students to describe behaviour or actions of their vice chancellor which were (1) effective or worthy of praise, and (2) ineffective or deserving of criticism.

The behaviour or actions of the vice chancellor which students mentioned most frequently as effective were concerned with his personal relationships with them. These actions took place in situations in which the vice chancellor expressed friendship, courtesy, sincerity, consideration, praise, encouragement, interest toward students, and support of students, lecturers and all phases of the school programme. Such personal relationship behaviour was mentioned by students four times as frequently as any other behaviour (or those perceived by the students as effective) on the part of the vice chancellor and therefore strongly indicates the main nature of their expectations for the role of the vice chancellor.

Reinforcing the importance of personal relationships between the vice chancellor and students were the data on students' perceptions of ineffective behaviour by the vice chancellor. The behaviour mentioned most frequently by students as ineffective was also concerned with the vice chancellor's personal relationship with students. It involved situations in which the vice chancellor had acted in an unfriendly, humourless, discourteous, affected, phony, insincere, inconsiderate, critical, disinterested, or opposed manner towards pupils, faculty, and all phases of the school programme.

Although there is little doubt that the vice chancellor's personal relationship with students in the most important aspect of students' expectations for his role, Pederson's study produced additional findings which suggest that students also expect the vice chancellor to:

1. Organize advisory groups which represent the viewpoints of all persons interested in the school. Actions by the vice chancellor which treat groups partially would be perceived as ineffective by students.
2. Seek and utilize the recommendations of individuals and all advisory groups in the study and solution of school problems. Failure by the vice chancellor to seek or utilize the recommendations of individuals and all types of advisory groups in the study and solution of school problems would be perceived by students as ineffective. Also perceived as ineffective would be neglect by the vice chancellor in taking action or following up on proposals or recommendations of official groups or committees.
3. Act immediately to stop the misbehaviour of individuals or groups. Excessive delay and inappropriate attempts to correct misbehaviour of students would be perceived as ineffective action by the vice chancellor.
4. Reprimand individuals or groups in a calm, mature, and friendly fashion without harshness or threats. Reprimanding individuals or groups in an unfriendly fashion with harshness or threats, or exercising judgement without all of the facts and without listening to the other side of the story would be perceived by students as ineffective behaviour.
5. Explain school policies, practices, procedures, regulations, and facts regarding rumours for the entire student body. Failure by the vice chancellor to adequately explain and consistently apply school policies, practices, procedures, and regulations would be perceived by students as ineffective behaviour.
6. Refrain from censoring student publications, assemblies, discussions, books, and films.
7. Assist students directly with individual and group learning projects.
8. Intercede with higher authority on behalf of students
9. Write or speak to the entire student body, stimulating their best efforts.
10. Provide time, equipment, and facilities for the educational programme.
11. Safeguard the health and welfare of students and school personnel.

Perhaps the most dramatic finding of Pederson's study was that approximately one-half of the students rarely observed the vice chancellor working on the job (Douglas, 2008). This finding may suggest many implications, but one thing is certain: the school administrator needs to become more visible to students if he is to be perceived by them as performing an important role in the school.

### **3. Implications for the Social Studies Teachers**

Perhaps more than any other reference group, lecturers have the opportunity for interaction with the university administrator and are therefore in a better position to develop expectations for his role. As a consequence, research studies on lecturers' expectations for the role of the university administrator have been numerous.

These studies in general indicate three major expectations which an administrator may anticipate their lecturers will hold for his role:

(1) The university administrator should support his social studies lecturers on issues and problems of student discipline. Several studies have documented this particular expectation of lecturers. Becker for example, found that teachers wanted the school administrator to support them in discipline cases no matter who was at fault (Becker, 2005). In a similar vein, Willower discovered that the strongest lecturer expectation was to the effect that the university administrator always back them in matters involving discipline; and Bridges reported that the administrator's support of lecturers in regard to their problems with students was valued by lecturers more than anything else he could do (Bridges, 2010). It would appear from studies on lecturers' expectations that social studies lecturers believe it is less crucial that the lecturer administrator be a strong disciplinarian (although this may be important) than that he back or support the lecturers regardless of the nature of their approach to discipline.

(2) The university administrator should treat social studies lecturers as professional colleagues with different but equal roles, rather than as subordinates in a bureaucratic relationship. Lecturers have improved their educational and professional status in recent years, and research studies point to the fact that many of them no longer recognize the traditional superior-subordinate relationship between the administrator and lecturers that existed in the past.

Scully (2006) for example, found that social studies lecturers wanted the university administrator to cooperate with them and to regard them as fellow workers, rather than as subordinates. Bidwell's study (2004) discovered that lecturers expected the university administrator to set clear and fair standards for lecturers' behaviour. Chase's research (2001) revealed that lecturers expected the school or university administrator to show understanding and respect for their competency and work, and Sharpe (2009) noted that lecturers' expected the university administrator to communicate with them frequently and to refrain from curtailing their individual initiative or freedom.

In summary, the main implication of these studies is that lecturers expect to be recognized as professionals and to be treated accordingly.

(3) The university administrator should provide a meaningful opportunity for social studies teachers to participate in school decision making and should include a significant role for teachers in the making of final decisions about those activities directly affecting them.

All of the studies on teacher expectations that were reviewed point to the desire of teachers for a significant role in school decision making. Chase, for instance, found that teachers expected the school administrator to provide opportunities for their active participation in curriculum development, determination of grouping and promotion, and control of pupils. In addition, teachers emphasized that if they were to serve on a committee, the committee must have the power to make decisions rather than mere recommendations on questions already decided by the principal. Sharma discovered in his study that teachers wanted shared responsibility in all areas of the school programme except instructional activities, wherein they wanted total responsibility. The literature continues to show a strong expectation by teachers that the school administrator take an active role in involving them in those decisions which affect the teacher in some professional way.

Whether or not the school or university administrator should meet all or any of the three main expectations by teachers for his role depends, of course, on many factors. Obviously, it will not always be possible and may not even be desirable for the administrator to meet all of the lecturers' expectations. However, he needs to be aware that important consequences are associated with the extent to which he meets lecturers' expectations.

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