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MANAGING EMPLOYEES IN HIGHER EDUCATION TRANSFORMATION: EXPLORING THE GOAL OF VISION 10: 2022 OF COVENANT UNIVERSITY, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Education is a tool of high value to the welfare of any society as it is crucial to the resolution of complex problems and development challenges in the world today. It is in this regard that, Covenant University (CU) has set out to achieve the goal of transforming higher education by becoming one of the best ten universities in the world by the year, 2022 (otherwise known as Vision 10:2022). Thus, the objective of this study is to investigate the preparedness of the employees to accept the CU vision and the factors that would significantly motivate the desired level of acceptance. This is important because organizations can hardly grow beyond the quality and support of their workforce. The study utilized data collected from a randomly selected sample of both academic and administrative employees of the university. Thereafter, regression analysis was performed to identify the determinants of acceptance of the vision 10:2022. The results of this study show that the vision has the potential to be actualized within the set period. However, the management of the university should take proactive steps to address the factors which have been identified in the study, that could constrain the effective implementation and actualization of the vision. This is critical, especially that the mean score for the acceptance of the vision is moderate. Given the time frame within which the vision is expected to be actualized, the moderate score needs to be improved upon by strengthening the variables currently impacting the vision positively and addressing those others that have the potential to stall effective implementation and actualization. To this end, management should address more specifically the issues bordering on job security, promotion, trust and adopt a more participative approach to management.

Keywords: Covenant University, Education, Employees, Transformation, Vision 10:2022.

1 INTRODUCTION

Education is a tool of high value to the welfare of any society as it is crucial to the resolution of complex problems and development challenges in the world today. This is premised on the view that education breeds persons who are intelligent, behave rationally, able and willing to solve problems regarding their own existence as well as that of the groups and organizations to which they belong [1]. It is therefore important that universities project these goals through the production and promotion of knowledge that engender critical thinking and character development, not just in Nigeria, but in the whole of Africa. It is in this regard that Covenant University (CU) has set out to achieve the goal of transforming higher education by becoming one of the best ten universities in the world by the year, 2022 (otherwise known as Vision 10:2022). To this end, CU has continued to put in place structures to support pragmatic approach to teaching, research and community development. The vision is considered relevant when situated in the context of the current state of higher education, not just in Nigeria but in Africa as a continent where graduates have been observed to be 'half-baked'. For instance, in a recent study undertaken by the Inter-University Council for East Africa with regard to the quality of graduates in Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda, it was found that between 51 percent and 63 percent of graduates from these countries were 'half-baked' [2].

The position in other African countries cannot be said to be any much better. For instance, further evidences in the same report indicate that in 2010, Nigeria had many academic departments in over 20 universities de-accredited by the National Universities Commission (NUC), due to dearth of infrastructure and required caliber of academic staff, while in 2011, the engineering degree from three leading public universities in Kenya were refused registration by the Engineers Registration Board of Kenya due to poor curricula, lack of qualified lecturers and shortage of needed facilities. Also, as noted in the report, graduates of several public and private universities in Kenya were refused applications to practice law by the Council of Legal Education of Kenya. The situation was not much

different in South Africa in which the report indicated that many law firms found that LLB graduates are unable 'to draw up affidavits' on account of poor training [2].

Arising from the above, it would appear that many African countries are not ready to face the challenges confronting higher education even though as noted by [3], education is crucial to the "resolution of the complex problems and the development challenges that face the world in general and Africa in particular." Against this background, we believe that exploring the CU vision is imperative.

In pursuing a vision of the magnitude engaged in by CU, no matter how laudable it could be, the role of employees (at all levels) cannot be over-emphasized. This is important because organizations can hardly grow and achieve their objectives beyond the quality and support of the workforce. It is important to learn as much as possible about the workforce with a view to winning their support due to the need to have them 'buy-in' into the vision for actualization. Thus, the objective of this study is to investigate the preparedness of the employees to accept the CU vision and the factors that would significantly motivate the desired level of acceptance.

The paper is structured as follows: the next section presents CU in context. The section following presents the review of related literature, while the next two sections present the research methods, results and interpretations respectively. The final section concludes the paper.

2 COVENANT UNIVERSITY (CU) IN CONTEXT

Covenant University was founded in 2002 as a Christian Mission University with the objective to revolutionize education in Nigeria as well as on the continent of Africa. Interestingly, the establishment of CU coincided with the year the United Nations declared 2005-14 as the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development. According to [4], the vision of the University is to be a "leading world class Christian Mission University committed to raising a new generation of leaders in all fields of human endeavour."

In order to drive the vision, a set of core values was articulated and include: Spirituality, Possibility Mentality, Integrity, Responsibility, Capacity Building, Diligence and Sacrifice. The core values are taught in a *custom built* course known as 'Total Man Concept' (TMC). The TMC aims at accessing the total make-up of man from the 'spirit, soul and body' dimensions. The TMC, which may be regarded as a new paradigm is a unique and holistic concept that is novel in the curriculum of African universities and defines the Mission statement of CU which is to:

Create knowledge and restore the dignity of the black man via a human development and 'Total Man Concept' driven curriculum, employing innovative, leading edge teaching and learning methods, research and professional services that promote integrated life applicable and life transforming education relevant to the context of science, technology and human capacity building [4].

According to [4], the core values are "universal, not culturally, socially or religion specific and can be applied in any context and have the potential to address the demand to depart from dogmatism to dynamism in the educational system, particularly in Africa."

The choice of the core values is underpinned by two factors: (i) the religious inclination of the university and (ii) a strong conviction that higher education curriculum should have foundational elements that are capable of reinforcing, shaping and guiding human conduct in a lifelong learning perspective.

3 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Higher institutions of learning (conventional universities and specialized universities, polytechniques, colleges of education, professional institutions and grandes e'coles') are saddled with the responsibility of promoting social progress through effective and quality teaching and relevant research. In all of these universities play the largest and the most central role in higher education [5]. Though the goals of higher education are laudable, there is evidence that higher education across Africa is facing varied challenges and threats. Some of the major challenges include limited access for qualified candidates, diminishing financial resources, shortage of quality faculty, poor governance, lack of academic freedom, high student to teacher ratio, academic dishonesty among others ([6], [3] [7]).

The Nigerian higher education sector is not immune to these challenges and threats. With specific reference to Nigeria, there are a number of problems to be solved in order to achieve the quality of education desired in the universities. According to [8], the challenges include "funding shortages, the negative influence of a corruptive and valueless political system, weakening of university administration, poor teaching and learning outcomes, diminishing research and consultancy traditions and questionable service to the community." Others, according to [9] include "disruptive unionism, poor commitment level by operators (teachers and policy makers), internal corruption and inability to retain talents (brain drain)."

Consequently, the Federal Government of Nigeria has always taken some step to address the situation. Some of these include the resuscitation of National Open University of Nigeria, application of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for teaching, learning and research; Post Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME), screening among others [10]. In addition, the National Universities Commission (NUC) has been conducting both programme accreditation and institutional accreditation. However, the performance of the key function of programme accreditation has been compounded by the existence of about 3,398 NUC-approved degree programmes being run in the system as at 2011 spread over the 13 disciplines [11]. Consequently, the reforms have not succeeded since there has not been "holistic approach to most of the reforms" [12]. Most times, reforms are articulated without proper examination of their consequences on other aspects and sectors of the national economy.

The challenges enumerated above notwithstanding, [12], observes that there are glimmers of light and hope considering the impact in the higher education sector of the Living Faith Church of which CU is a subset. It is believed that the CU ideal is already being realized. For instance, [13], observes that the appearance of CU is "one of the most remarkable events in the 64-year history of the Nigerian university system". He further noted that CU is 'one of the most-decorated universities' in Nigeria, through number and quality of national and global laurels as well as setting academic and physical development reference points for many of the universities in Nigeria. This is a confirmation of the need to depart from the norm.

Following from these developments, [14], further observes that:

Of all the 129 universities in Nigeria, CU has the highest per capita rate of investment in education and training. In 12 years, an estimated N70 billion (\$438) has been spent on facilities and training of about 13,000 graduates. An index of this performance is the number of CU graduates relative to graduates of other universities that are employed by blue-chip companies in oil and gas, services and top-rate global consulting firms (p.41).

This feat is happening in a country where public spending on education is very poor and has been below 8 percent of national budget as against an average of 18 percent in South Africa [15]. Two issues are critical when we examine the impact of funding and its implications for higher education. First of all, the availability, scarcity and absence of financial resources for higher education determine the capacity of institutions to function and fulfil their educational and societal missions. The second important aspect is the sheer power that is vested in the allocation of financial resources for education, and in any other social institution that translates into full decision-making power and authority over all the aspects of higher education bodies and their priorities [16]. This realism is manifested by the lack of adequate political will by the political elite in leadership position to implement the 26% of national budgetary allocation recommended by UNESCO. [13] Further observes that one of the key fallouts of the poor funding is the degraded capacity for research and access to publications. Besides, limited resources have negatively impacted on curriculum development, the governance of the university and university life, the principles and practice of academic freedom, the capacity to hire, retain and renew the teaching staff [16]. This is in agreement with [13] who further notes that a 21st century university must invest in systematic development of research and useable knowledge and innovation. At CU, the impact of encouraging academic staff toward innovative practices is considered noteworthy. There is an incentive system for rewarding good performance in research. Staff are encouraged to conduct cutting-edge research and financial incentives exist for research findings presented at local and globally recognized conferences and published in high impact journals. [12] Notes that only very few universities in Nigeria are able to provide such supportive environment for innovation and research. To further underscore the seriousness of its vision, the university organized the First International Conference on African Development Issues (ICADI) in May 2014. The event hosted two Nobel Laureates in Economics. This feat is novel and unparalleled in the history of university education in Nigeria. One of the Nobel Laureates is now on the faculty of CU as a visiting professor. It is on record that in the first and second editions of the Presidential Special Scholarship for Innovation and

Development (PRESSID), CU topped the list of successful candidates by producing the highest number of first class graduates in Nigeria universities for sponsorship to 25 top universities in the world [14].

4 DATA AND METHODS

The authors collected data for this study from a sample of 348 employees (academic and administrative) utilizing the simple random technique. The data were collected using a 4-point Likert type scaled questionnaire administered personally by the authors. In formulating the questionnaire, relevant literatures were consulted to determine the appropriate variables to be included without losing sight of the overall context of the study. To solicit participation in the study and to ensure high response rate, the respondents were promised confidentiality of information provided. The survey produced 274 usable responses, representing a 78.7 percent response rate. In order to identify factors that could represent significant determinants of the realization of the 10:2022, regression analysis was used. The authors also controlled for a number of factors that may influence an employee's acceptance of the vision. Specifically, the control variables were Age, education, gender, staff (academic or administrative) and tenure.

4.1 Descriptive overview of demographic data

In order to appreciate the analysis of the determinants of the acceptance or otherwise of the vision, the table below presents the demographic details of the employees.

Table 1: Demographic Details

Variable	No	Percent	Mean	Range
Staff: Academic	142	52		
Administrative	129	48		
Gender: Male	155	56.6		
Female	119	43.4		
Qualification: Masters and above	161	58.7		
Others	113	41.3		
Tenure: Full time	239	87		
Others	35	13		
Age (years)			36	21-63
Work experience in CU (years)			4.84	1- 12
Work experience Overall (years)			9.1	1-40

Table 1 above indicates a broad mix of respondents- academic and administrative whose ages range from 21 to 63 with a mean of 36. The table also shows that the longest serving staff have spent a maximum of 12 years while the overall mean work experience is 9.1 years with a range of 1 to 40 years. In terms of qualifications, a larger percentage, 58.7 have Masters' degree and above. Similarly, the gender position indicates that males represent 56.5percent of the total respondents while the females represent 43.4percent.

The factors that could influence the realization of the vision 10:2022 which are included in the study are grouped into the following headings adapted from [3] work place features, managerial features, employee personality traits and employee affective response. Most of the factors have previously been shown to influence acceptance of change [3]. Under work place features the following variables were considered: Job security, skill and training, promotion prospects, belief in core values, orientation programme, role conflict, supportive co-worker. At the level of management, the variables treated were Managerial ability, trust, freedom to make decision, respect for employees, and communication of core values, work environment, calm and stamina. Similarly, for employee personality traits, the variables considered included: willingness to work, tolerance of dissenting views, endurance and

enthusiasm. The variables considered under employee affective response were Job satisfaction, organizational commitment and desire to leave (change job). A number of control variables were also used in the study and include age, gender, qualification, nature of employment and tenure.

4.2 Results

Tables 2 and 3 present the mean scores and the regression results of the determinants of acceptance of vision 10:2022. As had earlier been noted, the variables were measured on a four item Likert-type scale.

Table 2: Mean Scores for Determinants of Acceptance of Vision 10:2022

Work Place Features	Mean	Std Deviation	Range
Job security	2.83	0.87	1- 4
Communication	2.83	0.87	1- 4
Job- skill Congruence	2.83	0.87	1- 4
Co-workers supportive	3.18	0.61	1- 4
Promotion Prospect	2.71	0.88	1- 4
Role conflict	2.52	0.86	1- 4
Clear duties and responsibilities	3.25	0.70	1- 4
Work overload	2.62	0.88	1- 4
Materials/ Resources adequacy	2.85	0.76	1- 4
Effective orientation programme	2.55	0.92	1- 4
I believe in the core values of the university	3.57	0.54	1- 4
Managerial Features			
Satisfaction with Management	2.85	0.78	1- 4
Trust in management	3.15	2.67	1- 4
Discretion in Decisions	2.43	0.85	1- 4
Participative Management	2.52	0.84	1- 4
Respect for differing opinion	2.64	0.82	1- 4
Faithful in communicates the Core values	2.97	0.81	1- 4
Congenial work environment	2.62	0.87	1- 4
Timely communication	2.74	0.87	1- 4
Calm and stamina under stressful conditions	2.74	0.79	1- 4
Employee Personality Traits			
Willingness to take risk	2.99	0.74	1-4
Tolerant of other's views	2.89	0.67	1-4
Endurance	3.28	0.57	1-4
Enthusiasm	3.41	0.56	1-4
Employee Affective Responses			
Job satisfaction	3.17	0.72	1-4
Desire to remain and retire	2.64	2.04	1-4
Desire to leave	3.61	0.62	1-4
Endogenous Variable			
Acceptance of vision 10:2022	1.74	0.84	1-4

Note: Scales of 1.00- 4.00 were used to measure all items. Following [3], the scores are rated as follows: 1.00- 1.59 = low, 1.60 – 2.79 = moderate, 2.80 – 4.00 = high

Table 3: Regression Results for Determinants of Acceptance of Vision 10:2022

	Beta Coefficients
I. Work Place Features	
Job security	-.182*
Communication	-.047
Job- skill Congruence	.127**
Co-workers supportive	.054
Promotion Prospect	-.088
Role conflict	.142**
Clear duties and responsibilities	.086
Work overload	.104
Materials Resources adequacy	.002
Effective orientation programme	.066
I believe in the core values of the university	-.216
II. Managerial Features	
Satisfaction with Management	-.056
Trust in management	-.113**
Discretion in Decisions	.090
Participative Management	-.052
Respect for differing opinion	-.038
Faithful in communicates the Core values	-.176**
Congenial work environment	.087
Timely communication	.026
Calm and stamina under stressful conditions	-.001
III. Employee Personality Traits	
Willingness to take risk	.118
Tolerant of other's views	.032
Endurance	-.162
Enthusiasm	-.098
IV. Employee Affective Responses	
Job satisfaction	-.083**
Desire to remain and retire	.231
Desire to leave	.027
Vision 10:2022 will be realized	3.61
V. Control Variables	
Age	-.118**
Gender (male)	-.007
Education	-.087
Academic staff	.002
Tenure	-.046
R ²	.267

Note: Standardized coefficients are reported. *p > .05; **p < .01; *** p < .00 (one-tailed tests)

As evident from Table 3 above, out of the 29 substantive variables analyzed, only seven have statistically significant net effects on the acceptance of vision10:2022. The results indicate that employees whose skills and training are adequate for their job schedule and who although experiences high level of role conflict are more receptive to the vision 10: 2022. On the other hand, employees who perceive that they lack job security are also not satisfied with their job. These categories of employees also do not have trust in the management of the university as well as believe that the core values of the university are ill- communicated in words and actions. These employees are less inclined to support any changes relating to the actualization of the vision.

The results also indicate that out of the five control variables used in the model, only one (age) had statistically significant net effect on the acceptance of the vision 10:2022. Non-the-less, the substantive and the control variables explain about 26.7 percent of the variance in acceptance of the vision.

4.3 Interpretation of Results

As indicated in table 2, the study found that employees at CU have positive attitude towards the actualization of the vision. The acceptance is, however, moderate with a mean score of 1.74. This is an indication that given the right atmosphere, the employees would support the vision and work toward its actualization. Under work place feature, eleven variables were analyzed and three were found to be significant. Two of the variables considered under managerial features were found to be significant. However, under employee personality traits, none of the variables was found to be significant, while for employee affective responses, one variable was found significant. The control variables also had one variable significant. Overall, the variable that were positively significant include job skill congruence and role conflict.

Though not significant, but positive, the following variables could, if well-handled become significant and affect the vision positively- co-worker support, clear lines of responsibility, work over load, material resource adequacy, orientation programme for new staff, discretion in decision making, work environment, timely communication, willingness to take risk, tolerance of others' views and decision to remain at CU.

Of more importance in the short run, are the variables included in the model which could have adverse effects on the smooth take off and eventual actualization of the vision. The variables need to be proactively tackled as they currently showed negative sigs though not significant. The variables include - communication flow between management and staff, promotion prospects, belief and communication of the CU core values, lack of satisfaction with the overall management of the university, lack of participation in key decision making and lack of respect for differing opinions. Others include - inability of management to demonstrate calm and stamina under stressful conditions, inability or unwillingness of employees to go through tough situations as well as lack of enthusiasm in performing on the job.

These findings are in consonance with extant literature which suggest that resistance to change by individuals may be as a result of uncertainty, lack of trust, personality conflict and differing opinions and perceptions ([14, [3]). The main goal of this study was to investigate the preparedness of the employees to accept the CU vision and the factors that would significantly motivate the desired level of acceptance. This was with a view to ensuring that the vision sits well with the employees. Thus, the main implication of the study is that the acceptance level of the vision is currently moderate. At this level, the actualization may be impaired considering that the vision is already into the third year of its implementation.

5 CONCLUSION

With a vision to be a foremost institution that moves manpower development in the direction of self – apprenticeship and to be a first class private university in research, knowledge, character and service to humanity, Covenant University, today, competes favourably with the first generation universities in terms of quality of education. This has been demonstrated in a number of feats in terms of facilities, resources and quality graduates. The transformation being engaged in by CU is imperative given the state of higher education in Nigeria in particular and Africa in general. It may be concluded, on the basis of the results of this study that the vision 10:2022 of Covenant University has the potential to be actualized within the set period. That suggest that the hope of transformation education Nigeria and Africa is not lost. However, the constraints in the way of the transformation are enormous. Therefore,

the management of the university should take proactive steps to address those factors that could constrain the effective implementation and actualization of the vision. This is critical, especially that the mean score for the acceptance of the vision is moderate. Given the time frame within which the vision is expected to be actualized, the moderate score needs to be improved upon by strengthening the variables currently impacting the vision positively and addressing those others that have the potential to stall effective implementation and actualization. To this end, management should address more specifically the issues bordering on job security, promotion, trust and adopt a more participative approach to management as basis for the actualization of CU's vision 10:2022. This is important to assure the employees that they are part of the University and important in the realization of the vision. Unless such cynicisms and fear are mitigated, there is no level of investment in infrastructure alone that could translate to effective transformation as being currently engaged in by CU.

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