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DEVELOPMENTAL UNIONISM: A MECHANISM FOR SELF DISCIPLINE AND IMPROVED ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Abstract

The predominance of negative unionism and the concomitant indiscipline and poor academic performance among university students has been of great concern to stakeholders in university education. This paper proposes developmental unionism practices as a veritable mechanism for assured self-discipline and improved academic performance among university students as well as the implications for harmonious environment for high productivity.

INTRODUCTION

The predominance of negative unionism activities by university students in Nigeria and the concomitant students unrest, indiscipline and poor academic performance among them has been the concern of stakeholders in university education and calls for close examination. The negative unionism has often been associated with the reaction of students to press on the administration or the government for their demands. It may be against fellow students, groups, individuals or organizations whose interest may be at variance with that of the students. The cockpit or the arrangement forum for muting the negative activities has always been the students union. Membership into the union is mandatory for students of the institution concerned and therefore are free to vote and be voted for.

The students union should serve a common front for protecting students interest academically, socially and otherwise; and to maintain a conducive environment for teaching, learning, research and for promoting community services. But the forum, rather than focus on the realization of the foregoing developmental areas, dwell on the negative, retrogressive, destructive and inharmonious activities that negatively charge the environment through student

unrest. This situation is documented by Oloko (1979) as a problem yet to be solved in Nigeria. This paper therefore proposes developmental unionism practices as a panacea for self-discipline and improved academic performance among students in Nigerian Universities. It has also articulated the implications for creating harmonious environment for high productivity.

UNIONISM AND STUDENT UNIONISM

Unionism is a concerted activity by individuals or groups of individuals who, based on common goals and interest, have agreed to come together, to guide, protect and work for the attainment of a common interest. The common interest may be for improved conditions, the need for change of government policy and so on. Akpet (2001) in a paper titled "Labour Union and Negotiating Strategies in the Private and Public Sectors in Nigeria" traced the antecedents of labour unions in Nigeria to the era of colonialism when wage labour became prevalent as a result of the introduction of capitalism. The disparity in pay packages and conditions of service between the white colonial workers and their African counterparts brought about disaffection among the blacks. Series of efforts to redress the imbalance led to the promotion of common front-unions.

The activity focus of unions also apply to the activities of university students tagged "Students Union". Membership into students union is the right of all matriculated students of the university with the right to vote and be voted for; the right to be protected and to participate in the union activities". The entire activities of the students through the union front can therefore be described as unionism.

Structurally the students union is organized like every other formal organization with the relevant administrative arrangements ranging from the President, Vice President, Secretary General, Assistant Secretary General, Publicity Secretary, Treasurer and so on. Students union government in Nigerian Universities are co-ordinated by the apex body – The National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS). According to the Constitution of the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS), the organizational structure includes:

- i. The National Executive Council
- ii. The Senate
- iii. The Congress of NANS
- iv. The Zones of NANS covering the geopolitical zones of the nation.

It is the aim of the Association to have a charter that expresses the position and solidarity of the rank and file of Nigerian Students on issues affecting them and the Nigerian people in general and clarify various points that often lead to crisis or misconceptions. The association realizes that the ideals to achieving the aims and objectives of the charter are through dialogue and consultation among all parties to the areas covered (<http://www.nansnigeria.org/flashsite/constitution.htm>).

Students unionism is meant to create a forum or arena for leadership development; protection of individual members; encourage dialogue with the university administration in relation to the welfare of students. It is also meant to work toward maintenance of self-discipline among members and to promote the culture of high academic performance through calm and conducive atmosphere. It might not be wrong to stress here that the students' unionism in the contemporary Nigerian Universities rather than pursue the articulated development focus, cause negative developmental trends through forming militant front to struggle against the assumed expected suppression by the University administration and for other matters of students interests. The situation has often translated into unrest.

Students unrest is explained by Oloko (1979) as a situation in which students in higher institutions of learning resort to the use of threats or use of violence against persons or property in their attempt to resolve any issue of conflict of interest they may have with other people in their own interest. The use of threats or violence to achieve personal interest by the students can be described as non-developmental unionism as opposed to developmental unionism

NON-DEVELOPMENTAL UNIONISM VERSUS DEVELOPMENTAL UNIONISM

Non-developmental unionism by students in Universities is that which is characterised by negative and retrogressive manifestations in the campuses such as:

- Opposition to the university administrations
- Cultism
- Wayward and non-studious students
- Wanton destruction of lives and property
- The predominance of gross indiscipline among students
- Stealing of individual personal and school property
- Prevalence of examination malpractices
- Violence
- Strikes

- Abuses of privileges
- Violation of rules and regulations
- Inharmonious academic atmosphere and therefore poor academic performance by the students.

Non-developmental unionism would definitely culminate into indiscipline with ultimate unrest. Indiscipline can be explained as misbehaviour, naughtiness, delinquency, defiance, disloyalty, insubordination and so on. It could be emphasized without reservations that indisciplined set of students create undisciplined atmosphere in a university community and would lead to poor productivity and other negative results. Students' unrests as articulated by Adugbo (1983) is the students expression of dissatisfaction against certain institutional or societal values. It is the students easiest strategy of expressing to the university administration their dissatisfaction about some defective situations. The effects of such approach is better imagined than described. The situation of indiscipline according to Adugbo (1983) is synonymous to student unrests.

CAUSES OF NON-DEVELOPMENTAL UNIONISM

A number of situations can lead to non-developmental unionism. Such situations include:

- external motivations
- internal insinuations
- political motivations
- students interest in using violence as a mode of conflict resolutions
- students frustrations due to poor living or study conditions in the school environment.
- characteristic social changes and the considered non-effective weapon of dialogue.

DEVELOPMENTAL UNIONISM

Despite the characteristic social changes and the non-consideration of dialogue as an effective weapon of negotiation for change, developmental unionism could be possible among university students. Developmental unionism practice is that organized, co-ordinated, dialogue oriented students government that work in harmony with the university administration, other unions on campus, the staff and so on. Developmental unionism would operate on

democratic structures that encourage membership active and democratic participation in the union activities with developmental dialogue as the watchword as presented overleaf in Figure 1.

Characteristically developmental unionism would be associated with the following:

- developmental focus in all things
- growth, progress and development
- dialogue as a weapon of negotiation
- serious minded students in private and collective academic business.
- respect for constituted university authority
- protection of available facilities
- clear line of information dissemination
- high productivity among staff and students
- attestable self discipline among students
- peaceful and harmonious labour environment
- stimulation rather than stifling of individual and collective educational interest.

THE NEED FOR DEVELOPMENTAL UNIONISM BY UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

The need for developmental unionism is to the extent of reducing the problem of negativity manifested in the university campuses through students unrests. There is the need to restore the dignity and credibility of the university system as a sanctuary of learning meant for the development of man intellectually, affectionately and in other productive aspects of life to fit effectively into the different sectors of the economy.

Developmental unionism is also predicated on the need for definitive and clearly demarcated roles of the students in governance of the universities. It would be relevant to train student leaders in management processes by involving them in some aspects of the administration of the universities. The need to create and utilize channels for free flow of information relevant to students on their welfare and upkeep for their goal attainments is worthy of consideration. Developmental unionism practices is therefore of paramount importance for high productivity.

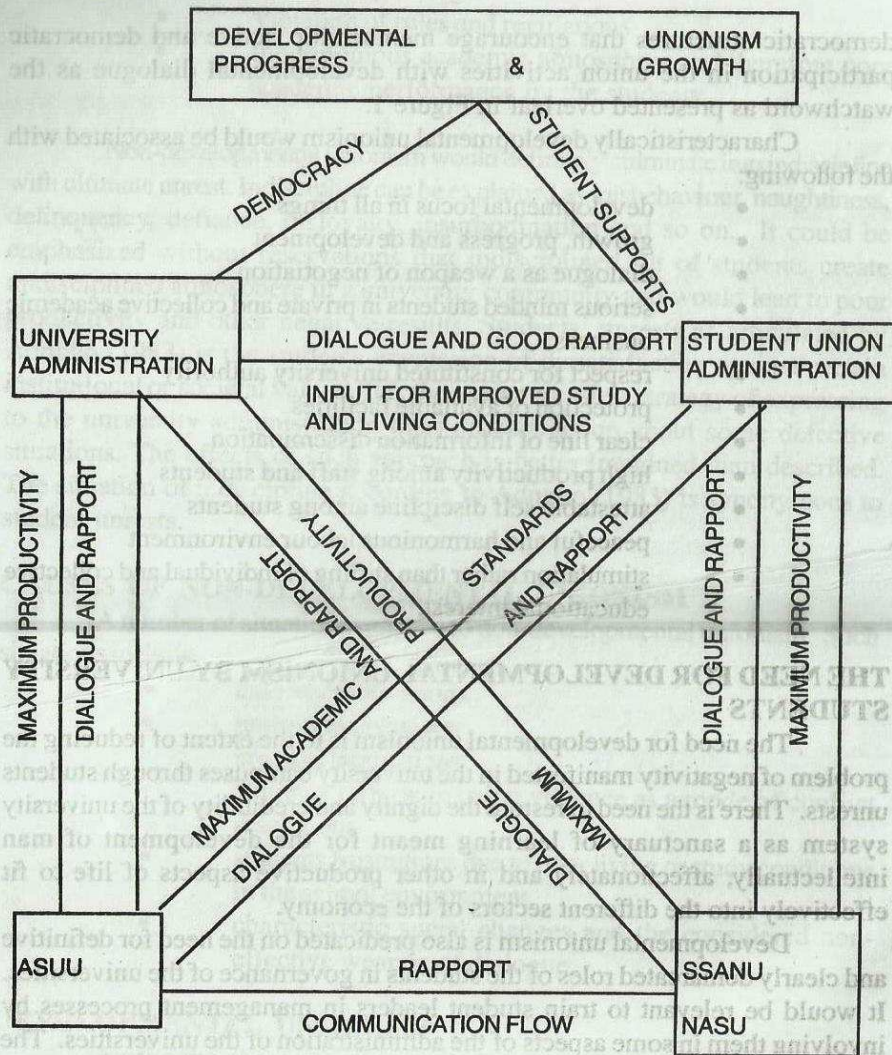


Figure 1: Network Structure for Developmental Unionism

PARTICIPATION IN STUDENT UNIONISM, INDISCIPLINE AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

Students participation in union activities in the universities has some relationship with indiscipline and academic performance positively or negatively. Discipline in the context of this paper has to do with good personal self conduct with the attributes of maintenance of order, obedience, self restraints, respect for constituted authority, diligence and dutiful; respect for the rights and privileges of others and so on. But the exhibition of behaviours far from the expected characterized by disobedience, insolence, defiance, delinquency, disloyalty, insubordination, naughtiness, etc. can be regarded as indiscipline.

The universities are known as sanctuaries of scholars (Wolf, 1970) where the scholar quietly pursues his bookish calling. The scholar is characteristically quiet, contemplative, unassuming, diligence, and peace-loving. Such qualities aforementioned cannot eschew self discipline as an ingredient.

Performance could be viewed in the context of this paper as the result or goal attained by the student comparatively in relation to other students based on pre-determined criteria. It could also explain effective, notable and appreciated participation and involvement in academic activities through obtaining of expected results. There are instances of poor academic performance by particularly student union leaders generally in terms of late or non-submission of term papers, missing of tests, non-attendance at classes; non-participation in laboratory or field practicals. In most instances active students who participate in negative students unionism have often found it difficult to graduate or do not graduate at all. Such outcome as a common experience dents the credibility of students unionism.

It is therefore imperative for a change from negative students unionism to developmental unionism for improved self discipline and academic performance

IMPLICATIONS HARMONIOUS ENVIRONMENT FOR HIGH PRODUCTIVITY

Adoption of developmental unionism practices by students union governments in Nigerian universities has implications for creating and maintaining of peaceful and harmonious atmosphere for high productivity. Students would be in a better frame of mind and self discipline to work hard and then good academic performance would be ensured.

A harmonious atmosphere within a working environment would ensure the staff concentration to programmes or schedules of their work and carry them out effectively.

CONCLUSION

The paper has discussed unionism and student unionism, developmental versus developmental unionism; causes of non-developmental unionism, the need for developmental unionism by university students, the participation in students unionism, indiscipline and academic performance as well as the implications. The trial of developmental unionism in the universities by students is hoped would go a long way for a positive change.

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