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Leadership Challenges among Undergraduate Students: Case Study of Dominion University, Ibadan

Afatakpa Fortune and Okedare David Olubunkunmi

Abstract

Student leadership is critical too for the smooth running of the University. Unlike other areas of human endeavor, leadership challenges among undergraduate students are a phenomenon. It is against this background; this chapter examined the leadership challenges among students of Dominion University, Ibadan, Nigeria. It is an empirical study. It is a qualitative study. Data; were gathered through in-depth interviews, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions. The study also made use of non-participant observation. Data; were gathered from 100 L, 200 L, 300 L students and staff of the University. Data were zanalyzed using content analyzed and using the narrative style. Findings show that Dominion University has the mandate of producing; value-based education. Leadership challenges undergraduate students include lack of support for selected leaders, lack of respect, and the wrong perception. The chapter concludes that with the right kind of training, Dominion University leadership skills acquisition can transform the plethora of challenges facing undergraduate leaders in Dominion University.

Keywords: leadership, challenges, dominion university, undergraduate

1. Introduction

The management of a university system is a tripod stand: The University Management led by the Vice-Chancellor, the lecturers, and organized student body. But, this chapter focuses on the leadership challenges among undergraduate students. According to Kunz and Garner [1], excellence in the students can empower others while managing themselves. Consequently, leadership is critical to undergraduate students in our contemporary world. It entails the development of student leadership teams and helping the University Management team to implement the decisions of management. Aymoldanovnaa et al. [2] acknowledge the active participation of students in corporate governance. It is a crucial element needed for a university to thrive. Aymoldanovnaa et al. [2]; maintain that engaging students as part of the governance structure would open spaces to develop their leadership skills, increase management skills, take responsibility, and manage competitiveness. These are relevant skills needed to thrive and survive; in the global

market. Universities have their traditions and characteristics; they are critical to determining how undergraduate students can manage and govern themselves. This chapter provides an exploratory insight into the leadership challenges among the undergraduate students of Dominion University. The chapter has six sections. Section one is the introduction; it gives the background to the study. Section two deals with reviews of extant studies to identify the gap(s) to fill. The methodology is in section three. Section four focuses on the findings and, section five will discuss and analyze. While section six concludes the study.

2. Literature review

Student leadership among undergraduates has attracted attention of scholars. Zuokemefa and Sese [3] focus attention on the challenges of student union leadership in Nigeria's polytechnics, colleges of education, and universities. They contend that the insensitivity of the authorities to the needs of students is a trigger of conflict between them and the student's leadership. The article speaks to the importance of university authorities lending listening ears to other layers of leadership; to forestall conflict. Ezekwem [4] believes that conflict emanates in a University system when the Authorities do not respect the opinions of student leaders. The submission of Ezekwem establishes the cultural idiosyncrasy that youths should be seen but should not be heard. Rachel and Odey [5] uncovered that there is; a high level of conflict emanating from undergraduate students in their leadership pursuit. Furthermore, conflict among undergraduate leadership is a result of the accruable financial and material benefits. They maintain that as long as a leadership position among undergraduate students is economically lucrative, the conflict will be rife. Leadership challenges among undergraduate students are often by the University Authorities. They provide financial and material resources to students' leadership to tame their fellow students. Accordingly, the extravagant lifestyles of student leaders on campus is a critical challenge to undergraduate leadership in Nigerian universities [6]. Rachel and Odey [5] and Usman [6] establish the effects of elite conspiracy in creating toxicity among students. Olaniyi [7] believes that leadership challenges among undergraduate students are traceable to the high level of corruption in the university system. He explained that some students do not respect student leadership because of their connection with lecturers. Equally, students tagged as "lecturers' boys" are known to display flagrant disrespect to their fellow students occupying leadership positions. Also, student leadership challenges are traceable to the inability of University Authorities to provide enabling environment for them to thrive. Where a platform is for students' leadership, they micromanage them. It is a cause of friction between student leadership and the University Authorities in Nigeria [8]. It speaks to the thesis that constituted authority manipulate because of their hidden agenda. Leadership challenges among undergraduate leaders are traceable to the lack of leadership skills. The leadership challenges among students are attributed; to the failure of the Nigerian Universities to equip them with the relevant skills. According to Anunobi [8], twenty-first century students must develop leadership skills that can enable them to engage their fellow students. Twenty-first century leadership skills such as critical thinking, emotional intelligence, and financial intelligence; should be developed in students. She believes the failure to incorporate these skills will lead to contentions between students and leaders. Muftahu [9] opines that leadership challenges are endemic when institutional leaders (including student leaders) because many are untrained. It is sacrosanct to integrate leadership training in the learning management of tertiary institutions in Nigeria. As important as these studies, they offer no insight on leadership challenges

among undergraduate students in Dominion University, Ibadan, Nigeria. This chapter fills the gap.

3. Methodology

It is empirical. It is also a qualitative study that engages case study research design. The study was at Dominion University, Ibadan, Nigeria. It is a seven (7) month research; conducted between January and July 2021. It relied on primary data collected from the students, lecturers, and management of the University. The students' population of Dominion as at the time of writing this chapter is three hundred and fifty-four (354) comprising 100 L, 200 L, and 300 L students. The staff population of the University is sixty (60). A total of Ninety (90) interviews were carried out; In-depth with Lecturers (14). Key informants' interviews with Course Representatives (20); Students Female Hall Residence 1 Representatives (5); Student Female Hall of Residence 2 Representatives (5); Male Hall of Residence Representatives (10). Dean of Students Affairs (1). Female Hall Wardens (3); Male Hall Warden (1); Presiding Bishop of Victory International Church. Three Focus Group Discussion (FGD) comprising 10 participants were for; 100 L, 200 L, and 300 L students. The study also made use of non-participant observation. The respondents were purposively selected. The interviews are in the English Language. Data collected were content analyzed using the narrative method.

4. Leadership in the context of this study

The new Oxford Dictionary of English explains that leadership is "the action of leading a group of people or an organization, the state or position of being a leader". Merriam-Webster Dictionary believes that leadership is "the office or position of a leader, the capacity to lead, and the act or instance of leading" [10]. However, among the numerous synonyms proposed by Merriam-Webster, the following should be taken note of administration, direction, shepherding, care, and stewardship. This definition shall apply to this chapter.

5. Findings and discussion

5.1 Brief history of Dominion University, Ibadan

The proprietor of Dominion University is Rehoboth Cathedral, Victory International Church. The Church is well experienced in the management of educational institutions. Rehoboth Cathedral, Victory International Church, has two other institutions performing excellently. The schools are the; Victory Christian Academy and the Victory Christian College. The Presiding Bishop of Rehoboth Cathedral, Bishop Taiwo Adalakun affirms that the idea of providing access to university education was conceived by the Church out of its desire to contribute to the promotion of academic standards of university education in Nigeria. He explained that providing access to university education was conceived by the Church. It was born out of the desire to add value to the eroding standards of tertiary education in Nigeria. His explanation substantiates Bowman [11] that corporate goals are; enhanced through vision. It dictates change by inspiring motivation and galvanizing an integrated corporate pursuit. In the words of Bishop Taiwo Adalakun:

The desire to establish a university started some twelve years ago when as the Visioner, I was praying for the Nation, Nigeria. I was burdened by the vices bedeviling the Nation's tertiary institutions. I then received a vision from the Lord asking me to take positive steps in curbing the menace. I was told to take a child from birth into the Daycare Center, then through Nursery and Primary School up to the Secondary and University, instilling the fear of God into them while training their souls academically [12].

The above statement corroborates Bowman [11] vision helps to clarify purpose. According to Bowman, vision; enhances the clarity of the bigger picture. The “take a child from birth into the Daycare Centre, then through Nursery and Primary School up to the Secondary and University, instilling the fear of God into them while training their souls academically” speaks to submission of Bowman [11] that dreams and passions are driven; by vision. It goes beyond the setting and attainment of goals. It provides the vigor and energy for the generation of results.

Bishop Adedokun attested that Dominion University is raising generational leaders in all fields of endeavor. It also boils down to the power of vision providing meaning to life. Fishman [13] espouses that vision propels a meaningful life. It is the compass that dictates the pathway of the choices we make. Thus, every life's pursuit should be guided; by the vision. Bishop Adedokun contends that Africa is the most endowed continent. In terms of resources, one of the poorest continents on earth hence, the need for a university that will address leadership deficiency in the African Continent.

The motto of Dominion University is “Raising Generational Leaders” who are morally upright and passionate about their nation. It is an institution of excellence both in infrastructure as well as educational delivery. Dominion University is our humble contribution to the development of our nation (Nigeria) and our blessed continent (Africa) [12].

This first line of the above statement strengthens the advocacy for value-based education. Patil [14] discusses the importance of value-based education as an integral part of the educational curriculum. Since the youths in most societies are carried away with the vagaries of technology, coupled with exposure to violence, value-based education; must be given attention. Many undergraduates in Nigeria are confused. To raise generational leaders with strong value-based orientation would require establishing a University that would initiate and implant value-based spiritual learning to the younger generation [14]. It exposes the mind of Bishop Taiwo Adedokun that Dominion University would instill the fear of God into her students while training their souls academically.

Currently, Dominion University has two faculties: The Faculty of Computing and Applied Sciences and Faculty of Arts Social and Management Sciences. As at the time of writing this chapter, Dominion University does not have a Student Union Government. So, it does not have a formal leadership governance structure for the students. The student leadership is adhoc. Few students were selected to help manage some aspects of the campus. And departments based on recommendations. It is a unique feature of the university. Therefore, the findings are on the informal student leadership governance structure.

6. Leadership challenges among students of Dominion University

6.1 Lack of support

One of the leadership challenges among the undergraduate of Dominion University is the lack of support from the student population. According to

Respondent 1, a 300 L student in the Department of Mass Communication, “we are not enjoying support and cooperation from our fellow students. It is a great challenge because it makes tasks given to us laborious [15]”. Another respondent admitted that “presently, we do not have a formal self-governing system as students. Some of us were hand-picked by the school authorities to take off some issues. But I discovered that some of our colleagues do not want to cooperate with us [16]”. Participants in the three Focus Group Discussion concur that most of the students’ leaders are not enjoying the cooperation of their fellow students. As a result, the student leaders always run to the University Management to rally their support. A respondent in 200 L remarked that “we only listen to them out of fear of being sanctioned by the University Management. They are fond of reporting those not cooperating with them [17]”. Some of the leaders confirmed utter defiance of some students to instruction. In the words of a Course Representative, “the majority of the student only comply when we threaten to report them to a higher authority [18]”.

6.2 Lack of respect

Disrespect among students to their fellow leaders is a leadership challenge. According to a 200 L student, “they see us as peers. Consequent on this perception we are not respected. It makes it difficult for us to get compliance [19]”. Rudolph et al. [20] maintained that respect is crucial for leadership. The leadership cannot properly galvanize group members when there is a lack of respect. It also validates Rudolph et al. [20] that respect is the assessment of the leadership status of the group. It is one of the factors that can engender the influence of the leaders in the exertion of authority. Respect reflects one’s evaluation of their status within the workgroup, and voice can engender respect. A member of the Sanitation Committee cited this example “I saw a fellow 200 L student throwing a bottle Coca-Cola on the floor after exhausting the liquid content. When I confronted him, he asked me what authority I have to challenge him. He said, after all, we are both in 200 L [21]. It coheres with the concept of particularized respect espoused by Rogers and Ashforth [22]. Particularized respect in leadership; is the worth a person deserves based on attributes, achievements, and behavior. Analyzing the statement indicates that there is nothing to offer for the fellow peer.

The Dean of Students Affairs made these observations “because they are peers, most of the same age bracket, the tendency is to take their leadership for granted [23]”. It corroborates Pont et al. [24] that leading other peers is a challenge because of the possibility of taking each other for granted. A 300 L student detailed that “how can they place a junior student as a leader over me and you expect me to give such a person respect? How can I be taking instructions from a lower-level student in the name of leadership? [25]”. Lack of respect for some of the students chosen to lead resonated among the participants in the three FGDs. Lecturer also acknowledged “our university is unique. Most of our students know themselves right from their high school days. Even our new 100 L students are familiar with many of our 200 L and 300 L students. It is, therefore, not out of place to find them handling their leaders with a certain level of levity [26]. Literature that were reviewed such as Sashkin [27], Siddaway et al. [28], The Neuroscience of Respectful Leadership [29], Van Quaquebeke and Felps [30], did not capture junior undergraduate students dishing orders to senior undergraduate students as a leadership challenge among undergraduates. This finding is unique to this study.

7. Wrong perception of leadership

Leadership challenges among the undergraduate students of Dominion are traceable to the wrong perception. One Hall Warden said that “they think leadership is all about the title. They do not understand that leadership is sacrifice. It validates Helms [31]. He posits that the perception of followers about their leaders is critical to leadership any outcome. The wrong perception creates the “we” versus the, “they” dichotomy. A Lecturer posits that “many of the students only look at the privileges. They forget the responsibility attached to the work of leadership [32]”. The FGDs are unanimous in their responses that the wrong perception is instrumental to the lack of cooperation. Helms [31] argues that leadership can produce positive effects; based on how they are perceived. The positive perception of leaders in the heart of those they lead can help to promote cooperation and collaboration. Where there is the wrong perception, dissonance will be the order. Helms also affirm that wrong; perception of leadership by the followers also reduces the effectiveness and accomplishments of leaders.

A female Hall Warden attested that “the result of the wrong perception is jealousy. You hear them make remarks like, if not for the higher authority that some of them are close to, can they ever smell leadership? [33]”. The dominant narrative among respondents is that some students believe that their leaders will always be subjective to those who appointed them. As a result, they seem not to be enjoying the cooperation of their fellow students. It verifies the claims of Thompson et al. [34] that negative perceptions can produce jealousy. They affirm that the presence of jealousy in the system paralyzes leadership effectiveness. Jealousy from followers leads to resistance to leadership. They believe that social loafing by followers is closely associated with; jealousy. It is also counterproductive to leadership effectiveness. Another lecturer stated that “it is the general trend among students that their leaders are stooges of management. This perception is a major challenge facing our student leaders [35]. It resonated among the three FGDs that students are careful of the presence of their student leaders in some gatherings. Students believe that leaders are informants to the university management. The researcher observed that students are suspicious when they see appointed leaders in their midst. They are also not trusted by their peers. They even change the subject of their discussion for fear of being quoted by a student before a member of the management team [36]”. According to Kutsyuruba and Walker [37], trust is critical; to the survival of leaders. Where trust; is lacking, it will affect the leaders. The wrong perception of followers can break the speed of trust. The destruction of trust can also make followers take malevolent action. It constitutes an impediment to the productivity of undergraduate leaders in the discharge of their duties.

8. Lack of leadership skills

Respondents argue that lack of leadership is a critical challenge. The 100 L FGD respondents agree that majority of their leaders lack basic leadership skills. Seven out of the ten respondents concurred leadership skills are lacking among their leaders. A Hall Representative in the male hostel admitted that “we need to be trained, in basic leadership skills; especially now that it has to do with leading our peers [38]”. Another Hall Representative in the female hostel remarked that “sometimes, the manner they communicate with their peers shows that they need training in fundamental leadership skills [39]”. One of the Lecturers mentioned that “you still find that modicum, of impatience among some leaders. Well, since they are youth, it is expected. But patience is a virtue needed for leadership. They need training in

that respect [40]”. It corroborates the thesis of Gonfa [41] that the possession of leadership skills is essential to motivation, persuasion, and mobilizing followers to achieve set goals. Gonfa [41] believes that leadership is an all-inclusive word. He contends that it encompasses communication, management, developing visions, and establishing goals. Leadership skills are critical to the seamless of an organization. Leadership skills resonated in all the FGDs. In the 100 L FGD, emphasis was on communication skills. It validates Gonfa [41] that communication; is an essential tool for leadership to thrive. The 200 L FGD Respondents; are more particular about the listening skills, mobilization skills, and manner of approach. One of the respondents in the 300 L FGD stated that “some of them are acting as bosses since they are course representatives. They forget that we are peers and classmates [42]”. The majority of the respondents contend that leadership skills; can be learned. Accordingly, to enjoy cooperation, peers that are leaders; should seek to develop the needed skills to be effective in the tasks assigned to them. Gonfa [41] submits that the absence of leadership skills will make leading difficult. The dearth of leadership skills reduces the effectiveness of leaders and leads to the fall of productivity. Therefore, the lack of leadership skills can be, removed by the training of undergraduates at all levels. Gonfa [41] affirms that leadership skills development for students can produce a lasting impact.

9. Student exhibiting deviant actions

The three FGDs affirmed that the university is a common ground for all kinds of people. Some are morally defiant and non-morally defiant. The Dean of Students Affairs pointed out that “those who are bankrupt of morals try to exhibit their defiance. They are the ones who make the work and actions of the leaders more cumbersome [43]”. Through their defiant attitude, they attempt to lure other students. According to another female Hall Warden, “the morally defiant ones; that cause chaos for the leadership. They make the work of the leaders more cumbersome [44]”. This submission signifies the need for the student leader to develop the capacity to deal with such groups of students. Sherman [45] attributes to the promulgation of certain; rules and regulations by the leadership of an organization. The deviant tendencies of Dominion University students towards their leaders are traceable to their not accepting some of the extant rules and regulations. Manifestation of deviance is also linked; with the lack of knowledge. Sherman [45] believes that not knowing the rules and regulations can lead to deviance from the followers against the leaders. Also, defiance and violation of the rules can be caused by malice from the students against their leaders.

10. Power struggle between two different classes

All the respondents noted an unholy power struggle between three different classes. The researcher observed that the 300 L students believe they deserve more respect from the 200 L and 100 L students. The 300 L students think that attention is; given to the 200 L and 100 L students. So, they longer command respect from lower-level classes. The students still believed that the school authority must be involved in such matters. Equally, some respondents attested that a clash of leadership goals ultimately constitutes a challenge among students. It can also lead to a power struggle because each side wants to establish its authority. Managing such clashes for undergraduate leadership can be frustrating. Karl Marx discussed the concept of power or class struggle within an economic context. He contends that

conflict is endemic because society is structured to favor certain; classes of people. However, power or class struggle, as a leadership challenge among undergraduate students is not in the thesis of Karl Marx. It is a distinctive finding in this study.

11. Conclusion


One of the basic instincts and features that man shared with other organized creatures of creation is not just the ability to live in a communal way or a community. Both man and animals have seen the need to live together communally to preserve their species; for continuous existence. In this light, the bees lived in such an organized community to the extent that a queen bee can lead and direct all other bees for protection and the necessity of sustenance. Still, in the same vein, Gorillas also live a communal life organized around an alpha male for protection and procreation. Human beings are the apex of created beings by God. They have the quality uniquely projected. As a sentient being, everyone has the ability and capability to use intelligence as they desire. However, to care for and cater to the human species, human beings need more organization than the primitive organization found in nature. To achieve this common goal, all must work together without coercion. While some are to guide and lead, others are to follow. It brings up the quest for leadership. Against this background, this paper interrogated the leadership challenges among undergraduate students of Dominion University. Leadership challenges are not limited to the corporate world. It is also evident among university graduates. However, there is a need for consistent capacity building in terms of leadership skills for undergraduate students. It is expected leadership skills acquisition can transform the plethora of challenges facing undergraduate leaders in Dominion University.

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