



Implications of Nigeria Federal Polytechnics (Amendment) Act of 2019: Roles and Challenges Ahead of Polytechnic Libraries towards Driving the New Act

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Abstract

The struggle for amendment of the old Polytechnic act decree 33 of 1979 has been on for some time. The need for the amendment centres on the need to improve the quality of teaching, remove some obnoxious parts of the old act and make Polytechnic education more attractive to prospective students, support the development of the nation and empower Polytechnics to offer bachelor's degrees. The paper looks at the amendment and the place of the library as a major stakeholder in Polytechnic education on how it can contribute to the implementation of the act to achieve its goals. Certain new roles and challenges to be faced by libraries attached to Polytechnics are reviewed and presented with the mind of preparing the library managers and staff for the achievement of the objectives of the new act.

Keywords: Amended Act 2019, Polytechnic Libraries, Polytechnic Education

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1. Introduction

The agitation and struggle to amend the Federal Polytechnics Act - Decree 33 of 1979 (referred to as the Principal Act) by various stakeholders began more than two decades ago. The necessity to amend the 40 years old law had always been part of the Polytechnic employees' demands. The agitation for the amendment reached its peak during the 6th and 7th assemblies of the Federal Legislatures when the bill was mentioned on the floor of the National Assembly. With the effort of the Senior Staff Association of Nigeria (SANU), the agitation intensified, and the bill eventually got read and received some public hearings though without positive results (Adeoti, 2019). The amendment bill, however, sailed through during the 8th Assembly and the Federal Polytechnics (Amendment) bill was signed into law by President Muhammadu Buhari in June 2019.

Prior to the amendment act of 2019, the Principal Act witnessed a minor amendment in 1993 via Decree 5. In this act (known as Federal Polytechnics (Amendment) Decree 5 of 1993), the Minister of Education became the Visitor to the Polytechnic, the tenure of the principal officers, namely the Registrar, Bursar and Polytechnic Librarian was fixed for a renewable term of 5 years while that of Deputy Rector was fixed for a renewable period of 2 years. The amendment also set the proper stage for the appointment of the Rector which must be approved by the President and Commander-in-chief of Armed Forces - the power of which hitherto had been vested in the hand of Commissioner (who was then the Visitor) in consultation with the Council. However, this amendment did not meet the expectation



of the stakeholders who looked towards fundamental and radical changes that would facilitate the attainment of the Polytechnic goals and objectives in meeting the country's need for technological advancement.

The new Act “The Federal Polytechnic (Amendment) Act 2019” came into being through the efforts of the Academic Staff Union of Polytechnics (ASUP), Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Polytechnics (SSANIP), as well as late Senator Mallam Ali Wakili (the initiator of the bill), sought to reposition the Nigerian Polytechnic System. It makes provision for enhancement in the quality of learning, the relevance of Polytechnic education and foster employability of Polytechnic graduates.

2. Review

Indeed, the need to amend the bill was long overdue if Nigerians dream of technological emancipation of the country will be realized. It was generally believed that a law that is as old as 40 years could no longer meet the yearnings and aspirations of today's stakeholders. Afolayan (2011) believed that the law establishing the Polytechnic, as it was, before the amendment, is retrogressive and outdated - a form of neocolonialism as well as repressive to technological innovations. This predicament, according to Afolayan (2011) accounted for the reason why the Polytechnics continued to witness brain drain and unappealing to both staff and students. Given great impediment, the principal Act establishing Polytechnics had been to the development of the technological education, there was therefore urgent need to amend the Act to remove those aspects that negate the effect of government investment in the sub-sector.

This ugly and unhealthy situation bedevilling the Polytechnic education sub-sector formed the basis upon which ASUP premised her long agitation to amend the act enacted in 1979 under the Military administration of General Olusegun Obasanjo. This amendment, the union believed will throw up the modern-day Polytechnic that would serve as the brain behind the technological emancipation of Nigeria.

Agreeing with the fact that the Nigerian Polytechnics had not been able to achieve their primary objective of being agents of technological emancipation of the country, Otache (2019) stated that the Polytechnic sector in Nigeria is faced with a lot of challenges, which have prevented the Polytechnics from delivering on their mandate of producing high-quality technical manpower required for technological advancement and self-reliance of the country. Consequently, it became necessary to amend the bill establishing the Polytechnics in Nigeria as the structure as provided for under the principal act is inimical to the attainment of the Polytechnic goal.

It is an indisputable fact that the level of development of any nation depends largely on its technological advancement. Also, the honour, respect, and dignity a nation is accorded in the comity of nations are proportional to its advancement in the field of science and technology. Sharing the same view with ASUP, Afolayan (2011) pointed out that the inadequacies in the enabling act establishing Polytechnics in Nigeria accounted for the slow pace of technological development in the country compared with other developing nations of the world.

Adeoti (2019) equally believed that the principal act deserved an amendment because of the perceived maladministration in the Polytechnics. According to him, the maladministration was a result of the gaps, inconsistencies, ambiguities, and overlaps in the principal act which turned the rectors into “Lords of the Polytechnics”. Due to these weaknesses in the extant legal framework, the Polytechnics were at the mercy of the Rectors who assumed the positions of “fill in the gaps”, especially in areas where the principal act remains silent and/or unclear. This resulted in a wide range of conflicts and administrative differences within the Polytechnic sector.



Fundamental Changes in the New Polytechnic Act of 2019 and its Implications

There are new fundamental provisions in the amendment act to reposition, revolutionize and put technical education on the path of economic and industrial growth in Nigeria. The amendments introduced into the new Act are targeted at ensuring peace, progress, and sustainable development of technological education in Nigeria.

The Federal Polytechnic Amendment Act of 2019 now introduces a clear, specific, and unambiguous category of manpower that the Polytechnics can now produce in the course of their instructions and training. The principal Act has been silent on the category of manpower that the Polytechnic can produce as it only stated inter alia in Section 2 (1)(a) “to provide full-time or part-time courses of instruction and training”. Adeoti (2019) however traced the history of how “middle level” manpower became the function of the Polytechnics to 2006 when the Federal Government made a pronouncement to the effect that Yaba College of Technology and Kaduna Polytechnic would be upgraded to City Universities while other Polytechnics would be merged to the nearest universities as their campuses. Consequently, the Gray Longe Presidential Technical Committee for the Consolidation of Tertiary Institutions was set up. The report of the Committee which recommended that the Polytechnics should concentrate on the training of middle-level manpower was accepted by the Government, and this eventually foreclosed the desire to consolidate higher institutions in Nigeria.

The Polytechnics are now empowered to produce middle and high-level manpower in various fields of disciplines – technology (engineering courses like mechanical, civil, computer, building), science or applied science (science laboratory technology, computer science, mathematics, statistics), financial (e.g. banking, insurance, accounting), environment (Architecture, Urban and regional planning,), management (business administration, secretarial or office technology practice), agriculture and other programmes relevant to the needs of the development of Nigeria. The Federal Polytechnics (Amendment) Act of 2019 (herein referred to as the Amendment Act) clearly defined the functions of Polytechnics in Section 2(1)(a) of the Amendment Act, “to provide full-time or part-time courses of instruction and training to produce middle and high-level manpower.” This new provision, according to Adeoti (2019) is similar to Section 1(3)(6) of the Federal Universities of Technology Act 2004 CAP F23, and by implication, the Polytechnics should start thinking of mounting Master of Technology (MTech) and PhD programmes. This is in line with what is obtainable in the UK where the concept of Polytechnics originated from, and up to when they were renamed as universities in 1992 by the Further and Higher Education Law, the Polytechnics offered diplomas and degrees up to PhD level. In a similar vein, and relying on the Adamu Yabani Report of 1999, Polytechnics in South Africa were empowered to award degrees in 1993, while still running the diploma programmes. Further, in Europe and America, to be precise, Polytechnics in Italy and the US are offering PhD programmes in different academic disciplines.

Canvassing appropriate role, in line with the desire of the new Polytechnic act, Afolayan (2011) stated that the dynamic nature of the modern-day economy, as well as the global technological advancement, no longer have room for middle-level manpower, but rather skilled high-level manpower. Coincidentally the new Federal Polytechnics (Amendment) Act of 2019 which confers the function of producing middle and high-level manpower on Nigerian Polytechnics conforms with the National Policy of Education (2013) as it affects tertiary education. Section 5 Subsection 80 defines tertiary education as “the education given after Post Basic Education in institutions such as universities and inter-university centres, and institutions such as colleges of education, monotronics and Polytechnics and other specialized institutions ...”. Sub-Section 81(a) stipulates that “the goals of tertiary education shall be to contribute to national development through high-level manpower training”.



Given the above provisions and expert opinions cited above, there is no doubt that the stage is now set for the Nigerian Polytechnics to commence mounting degree programmes in their various institutions since the legal framework had settled that. Recommending suitable structural policies for the nation's technological education, Afolayan (2011) suggested that the Polytechnic should be made to produce both middle level and higher-level manpower as it is currently being practised in USA and Britain. This means that the Polytechnics will change to degree-awarding institutions.

Buttressing the implication of the new Polytechnics Amendment Act, Otache (2019) believed that Polytechnics can be enabled by law to award Bachelor of Technology (B.Tech). He emphasized that upgrading of Polytechnics to universities is practicable in Nigeria because it has happened successfully in other countries such as the United Kingdom. The British government, in response to the challenges of industrialisation and the need for self-reliance, had to convert the Polytechnics to universities.

To engender quality decisions that would facilitate the attainment of short and long terms goals and objectives of Polytechnic education in Nigeria the membership of the Governing Council under the new Act has been rationalized such that internal members outnumbered external members. With eight members from within the Polytechnic system as against five from outside, it is expected that the Governing Council would formulate policies and programmes devoid of the political consideration that take care of personal interests rather than public interests. Such policies and programmes will not be inimical to the growth and development of the Polytechnics and by extension the attainment of technological goals of the country. By this arrangement, the Amendment Act now shifts power back to the Polytechnics, now that those appointed based on political patronage is less than the members from within the Polytechnic system as provided for in Section 3(2)(2) of the new Polytechnic Act.

Under the Amendment Act, the President and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces now become the Visitor to the Polytechnics which hitherto had been under the watch eyes of the honourable minister for education. Issues relating to Polytechnic education generally must be brought to his attention. This implies that the neglect that Polytechnic education suffered over the years is over as quick intervention of the President is guaranteed especially in cases of staff-management crisis. Since development can only take place in an atmosphere of peace, it is believed that the Polytechnic sector would also enjoy relative peace since the crisis emanating from it would receive immediate Presidential attention. All bucks now end on the President's table as far as Polytechnic education is concerned. As the Visitor, the President and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces would now be held responsible for whatever becomes the state of Polytechnic education in Nigeria.

The tenure of Polytechnic principal officers is now pegged at a single term of five years from the previous two terms of four years for the rector and two terms of five years for the registrar, the bursar, and the Polytechnic librarian. The deputy rector's terms are now four years instead of a renewable term of two years. This arrangement is similar to what is obtainable in the university system. It is envisaged that peace, orderliness and sanity will now be restored in the Polytechnic community as leadership change will move fast especially in the face of leadership that is perceived to have exhibited highhandedness.

The appointment of Heads of Departments, Deans, including the deputy rectors is now by-election. The power of appointment had been vested directly or indirectly in the hands of the rector before. While the HODs are elected by all the academic staff in each department, the deans are elected by all the lecturers in the school/faculty. In the case of deputy rectors, their election is by the academic board - membership of which has now been enlarged to



accommodate all chief lecturers as it is the practice in the universities where all professors are members of the senate.

This new provision and arrangement have moderated the power of the rectors as chief executives of various Polytechnics and returned power to every member of the Polytechnic community through the democratization of the leadership emergence at various levels in the Polytechnic except that of the rector whose appointment is approved by the President and Commander-in-Chief of Armed Forces as Visitor to the Polytechnics. Now that the power of appointment is vested in the people, it is expected that many staff who eye one position or the other will now exhibit good conduct and characters to merit and win the hearts of their colleagues. This will surely have a positive impact and multiplier effect on the entire system as it will facilitate a productive lecturers/student's relationship.

The retirement age of Polytechnic academic and non-academic staff has now been pegged at 65 years like their counterparts in the universities. This will ensure the preservation and retention of the experienced lecturers in the system. Apart from nurturing students to maturity and being able to stand alone, the younger lecturers will also be mentored to be able to easily take over from the old and experienced lecturers at retirement. Such an arrangement will also quicken the process of technological emancipation of the country.

The management committee now extended from five or six principal officers to now include all deans and directors in the Polytechnic. This expansion will bring about wider consultations that will translate to a generally acceptable decision-making process. Decisions emerging from such a body will be better since two good heads are better than one. Such arrangements also reduce the influence and moderate the power of rectors. If the extended management committee channels all her energy towards the growth and development of the Polytechnic, it would not be long before the Polytechnic reaches its goal of transforming the country into a technological nation.

The composition of the Polytechnic congregation which involves all staff who possesses at least first degree, or its equivalent is an attempt to provide an opportunity for members of staff to express themselves and participate in the running of the institution through their power of the vote to elect representatives that would take part in the selection process of the Polytechnic principal officers. It is also a forum for the Management to articulate the thought and ideas of every member of staff on a certain decision that would affect the well-being of the institution. The essence of this democratization process is to give power to the community members and to engender their full participation in the affairs of their institution now that the whole world has embraced democracy as a way of life.

3. Roles, Challenges and the Way Forward

Roles and Challenges Ahead of Polytechnic Libraries

- Library and information canterers have become the backbone of modern society as it provides the means to the development process of every segment of the society apart from being an important Centre of cultural heritage, to promote thinking ability, to educate people, to enlighten people, to know the world and helps to buildup human networking (Kumar, 2016). Newer and higher quality of services is expected of the Polytechnic library with a view of improving the quality of academic work imposed on Polytechnics by the provision of high-level manpower.
- Actualising the new status of Polytechnics is not going to be without some new roles and challenges to various organs, units and school/faculty/departments to meet up with the new responsibilities. The areas that will be of paramount immediate action is new roles, mandate, accreditation requirements; upgrade in teaching, research and technology; upsurge in staff and students' population with an attendant increased



need for funding, infrastructures, tools, space, library staff strength, training and retraining. Florida Library Association (2015) highlighted some valuable roles of academic libraries to include information resources provision, partners in teaching and curriculum, builders of community, research partners, enduring values and making education to be affordable. Other necessities that would facilitate the requirement of running a “Bachelor’s degree” awarding status institution library in conformity with what is obtainable all over the world must also be properly taken care of. Among these various organs is the library which is very important and has been described as the heart of the institution in any higher education setting.

- The first major role that Polytechnic library must embark upon is strong advocacy, enlightenment and sensitization campaigns among the stakeholders in the Polytechnic sector. The focus of the campaigns will be to ensure the prompt realization of the objectives of the new Polytechnic Act and the need to reposition the Polytechnic libraries to meet the challenges brought about by structural, technical, and academic adjustment in the Polytechnic course of training and instructions. American Library Association (2016) reiterates that library professionals promote opportunities for individuals and progress for communities since libraries today are less concerned about what they have for people and more about what they do for and with people.
- The second role to be performed is the provision of quality information sources and resources for use. Information is the stimulus of all the thoughts and actions of living creatures, and it is regarded as a prerequisite for the functioning of modern society because success in every area of human endeavour is premised on its intelligent use (Bamgbose & Etim, 2015). The library must rise to provide information in the right quality and quantity to support the training of high-level manpower.
- Section 10 (3) of the Polytechnic (Amendment) Act provides that the Polytechnic Librarian shall be responsible for the administration of the Polytechnic library and the coordination of library services in the teaching units of the Polytechnic. By implication, the various departments and faculties must be properly served by the library through the provision of adequate human and material resources. Other important roles expected of a Polytechnic library under the envisaged status of a degree-awarding institution include:

Research collaboration: there is growing recognition of the importance and contribution of librarians in research teams/projects. The higher level ordered research expected of high-level manpower institutions will involve librarians more than ever for it to be successful. Foutch (2016) claimed that faculty and librarian collaboration has been identified as a successful approach to complete project/research.

- Greater information resources: Greater and larger quality and quantity of information in the area of research, collaboration, sponsorships and networking should be provided by the library. This is necessary to allow the Polytechnic staff to develop themselves, contribute more meaningfully to society, and promote growth in academics and innovations. Academic library has been described as highly dependable in pushing the frontier of knowledge through various cutting edge library services (Folorunso & Lucky, 2016).
- Polytechnic library as learning enterprise: Polytechnic libraries must move from mere information repositories to become learning enterprises centres. As a learning enterprise centre, it means the library must give what the users want, take library services to users, support the research needs of users and



collaborate with all the users to ensure production and dissemination of such research. Libraries must actively engage students in learning and not just provide resources for them.

- Provision of rare and unique manuscripts: this is done by digitization to make the resource available to a larger number of users and preserve the resource for the future generation.
- Consolidation of inter-library loan system: the Polytechnic library will experience a surge in admission and number of users to be attended to and there is never a single library that has all the resources needed, there will be the need for them to establish/strengthen the collaboration among libraries of their status.
- Builders of community: library in physical or virtual space can provide platforms and access to resources for use in group works, collaborative activities, presentation rehearsals, tutoring and/or consulting.
- The need for a stronger partnership among the Polytechnic libraries than what is present now. Such a partnership will enable the Committee of Monotechnic and Polytechnic Librarians in Nigeria (COMPLIN) and Polytechnic and Monotechnic Library Foundation (POMLIF) to constitute themselves into a pressure group to actualize the objectives of the new Amendment Act.

Challenges Associated with the Polytechnic Library's New Status

- Lack of adequate staff to perform the new responsibilities that come with the new status of the Polytechnics. The need for increased incompetence of the library staff, the new roles of the libraries will require a new level of quality performance which will mean that the staff will need to be trained and retrained or even re-skill to discharge their responsibilities.
- There is a general role changing performance among librarians in an academic environment especially when it comes to degree-awarding. These new changes will be new to some old library staff of the Polytechnics who are mainly traditional librarian practitioners. James, Shamchuk and Koch (2015) chronicled new roles of academic librarians as: being more of administrators, presenting more at conferences, coordination of projects, strategic planning like data collection and analysis, more committee work, more instruction and scholarly work such as research, presenting and publishing.
- Funding in the area of information resources provision as hardcopy, offline and online databases. Some of these will be acquired for the first time in most institutions and increasing the quantity will not be without antecedent costs.
- Increase in the number of students and staff to attend, there will be slightly more pressure on the human and material resources that are available. The need to manage and get the maximum value from these resources will be challenging.
- Involvement in interdisciplinary academic discourse may be another challenge as most of the present crop of librarians were appointed on the first degree which is not in tandem with the university system where you are not a librarian except you possess a master's degree. This lower-level qualification may not make some Polytechnic librarians contribute meaningfully to the academic discussions.



- Meeting up with the new level of accreditation requirement for a degree programme. The requirement of accreditation for a bachelor's degree is quite higher than what is known in the present diploma awarding programme.

3. Conclusion

The new Polytechnic amendment act is a good development for the Polytechnics and the nation at large due to various progress and development that is expected to take place in the Polytechnic education and Nigeria economic and technology sector. For an improvement in education, there is also corresponding new roles and challenges that will follow. It is expected that stakeholders will not just be basking the euphoria of the new amendment act but rather take a proactive step and implement all that is necessary as highlighted to reap the full benefits of the new amendment. The library as a major stakeholder in the accomplishment of quality education in the tertiary sector should be given adequate attention, and necessary assistance should be given to attain the desires of the pioneer of the struggle for the amendment.

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