

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

The Role of Human Resource Management in Institutional Effectiveness: A Comparative Study of Two Ghanaian Universities

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ABSTRACT

This paper examined the role of human resource management in institutional effectiveness. The objectives were to examine innovative strategies adopted by two public universities in Ghana to promote effectiveness in human resource management as part of the quality assurance strategies of such universities and compare the various systems used in managing human resources in both institutions. Using a comparative qualitative case study research design through semi-structured interviews and content analysis, the study found that both institutions did not have comprehensive (stand-alone) human resource (HR) policies to guide everyday HR practices however, separate policies existed for specific HR functions. Again, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology has a decentralised section for specific units but University of Energy and Natural Resources operates a centralised human resource division. The study found that both institutions did not have strong systems for conducting HR audits. The study recommends that universities put structures and mechanisms in place to ensure continuous organisational feedback, perform a functional audit and design systems for assessment of HR policies to ensure that they are responsive to institutional/national laws and policies and promote effectiveness.

Keywords: Human resource management, institutional effectiveness, quality assurance.

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INTRODUCTION

Every higher educational institution (HEI) has a defined objective that it intends to achieve within a stipulated time frame. These are often stated in their strategic plans. Where there are indications that such objectives are not being achieved or may not be achieved based on available evidence, it becomes apparent that the HEI is not performing effectively and therefore, the necessary actions must be taken to salvage the situation. As a result, increasing institutional effectiveness and or performance continues to be an objective being pursued by organisations across the globe. Willems et al., (2014) defined organisational performance as a concept that measures a firm's position in the marketplace and the firm's ability in meeting its stakeholders' needs. Slack et al., (2010) observed that organisational performance refers to the degree to which the operation of a firm fulfils its performance objectives and meets the needs of its customers. HEI like any other organisation strives to have the best of human resources for optimum performance. The role of HR in ensuring institutional effectiveness is critical as staff and administrators exists to train and develop the next generation of thinkers and innovators for transformational development.

The Problem Context

HEIs around the world have functional systems of HR with a well-integrated management system. This is not the case in developing countries like Ghana. HR is still evolving from its former role of personnel management. Institutions of higher learning in Ghana often do not have adequate resources to deploy effective Human Resource Management Systems. There are often not enough well-trained specialists to manage the HR departments. But research shows a correlation between effective and quality HRM and institutional advancement (Hayton, 2005; Sun et al., 2007; Messersmith & Guthrie 2010; Batt & Colvin 2011; Zhang et al., 2012; Fu et al., 2015). Again, research has shown that employee performance is positively related to several HR management systems such as recruitment, training, selection: compensation and benefits. However, these HR systems will yield an effective result when there is a well-established and functional HR department in place (Ferguson & Reio Jr, 2010; Lee et al., 2010; Jiang et al., 2012; Noe et al., 2017). There are limited studies in respect of the role of HR in institutional effectiveness in Ghana. Most studies in the Ghanaian context have focused on HR and productivity and performance (Ashmond et al., 2022; Kusi et al., 2020). There is, therefore, the need to examine HR policies, procedures, and practices and how it will impact institutional effectiveness in the Ghanaian context. There is the need to conduct a comparative analysis between HEIs in Ghana to appreciate their HR policies and practices and make recommendation(s) for improvement.

This paper therefore has the following objectives:

1. examine innovative strategies adopted by two public universities in Ghana to promote effectiveness in human resource management as part of the quality assurance strategies of such universities, and
2. compare the various systems used in managing human resources in both institutions.

Review of Related Literature

Human Resource System and Organisational Effectiveness

Every HEI through its HR department has the responsibility of selecting, training, and developing their human resources to achieve a competitive advantage. Vanderpyl (2018) noted in his article on HR's Role in Organisational Effectiveness that HR departments are often seen as the enforcers of an organisation; the unbendable glue that

protects it from litigation and unscrupulous employees, but HR leaders also need to see their role as one of building and valuing personal networks that bolster their organisation's effectiveness.

Some studies in human resource management have shown that for organisations to achieve some level of effectiveness and performance, a combination of human resource procedures and practices must be used rather than a single human resource practice (Zhang et al., 2012). The combination of HR practices is known as high performance work systems (HPWSs). This concept is a strategic HR term which has been defined as a set of HR practices aimed at enhancing the abilities, motivation, and opportunities of employees to achieving a competitive advantage (Huselid, 1995; Pfeffer, 1998; Pak & Kim, 2018). HPWS is the improvement of employees' job knowledge and skills (Sourchi & Liao, 2015). This definition suggests that a business can be made more competitive by using HPWS to improve the integration of HR functions for increasing the competitive advantage of a business through the skills and knowledge needed by employees to execute job responsibilities. This thinking resonates with the idea that HPWS is aimed at making the most of employees to achieve business goals through the management of their capabilities and potentials (Heffernan & Dundon, 2016).

It could be said that HPWS could be adopted by HEIs to ensure that employees' competencies, ingenuity, creativity, and innovativeness are used to improve the effectiveness of HRM systems. The importance of HPWS can possibly be better understood when its various dimensions are discussed. These dimensions are the various practices that make up a high-performance management procedure in an organisation. Different researchers have used different sets of these practices depending on the context of their study.

Notwithstanding, findings from these studies revealed a significant positive influence of HPWS on organisational outcomes such as performance (Hayton, 2005; Sun et al., 2007; Messersmith & Guthrie, 2010; Batt & Colvin, 2011; Zhang et al., 2012; Fu et al., 2015). Some empirical evidence on the role of HR on organisational effectiveness are presented as follows:

The first is communication and involvement, which has been defined as the ability to communicate, network, work in teams, and achieve job responsibilities through interaction with other employees and customers (Fu, 2013). The HEI is made up of interrelated departments and faculties. This makes effective communication very critical among staff so that they appreciate the dynamics and distinction within each unit. It includes the ability to understand the organogram of the organisation and be able to navigate its ranks to receive or disseminate information. Since every organisation has a communication system, employees are also expected to muster how to tap into information flow at both lower and higher-level management (Aiyadh et al., 2015). In HR practices, these communication potentials accord employees the basis of efforts towards achieving productivity. In most HEI this is achieved through orientation, mentoring and coaching. This means that, HEI must constantly evaluate their strategies in this direction to ensure that all staff become aware of key structures in the institution to support its growth.

The second is training and development. This is another traditional facet of HR practice. HEI exist to transmit knowledge. This means employees must also receive knowledge to update their skills in modern ways of doing things. If employees must achieve goals towards high performance, they need to be trained regularly. Training and development are essential towards coping with competition and new trends in the industry. That means without training and development, the competencies of employees will become outdated and irrelevant as market competition increases and new methods of doing things emerge especially in higher education management. Training and development are functions that involves regular training of employees and providing other

opportunities (i.e., seminars, continuing education, short courses, conferences, symposia, mentoring, etc.) for these employees to advance their job knowledge and skills (Mahdi et al., 2014; Joy, 2017). The role of HR is to employ the best training and development methods, administer them promptly, and evaluate the impact of these programmes on the progression and impact of competencies (Aiyadh, et al., 2015; Fu et al., 2015).

The third dimension is performance management and rewards, which is an integral part of HR practices. HEI has a system of reward often seen in job titles. Rewards include compensation, the allocation of fringe benefits, pensions, allowances, and intangible benefits in the form of fairness, prestige, and recognition (Abutayeh, 2017; Joy, 2017). Employees are duly rewarded when their intrinsic and extrinsic needs (as implied by the two-factor theory of motivation) are met. Performance management is concerned with knowing how rewards, training and development programmes are translated into performance and taking steps to improve productivity in the passing of time (Mahdi et al., 2014).

Career development is another facet of HR practice and can be considered a long-term way of tapping into human resources. It represents efforts made by an organisation's HR to increase employees' job security by prolonging their job tenure, promote learning and performance improvement in the progression of one's employment, create opportunities for being promoted and diversifying job roles, and making it possible for job accomplishments to translate into a sense of fulfilment and life satisfaction (Martins et al., 2011). This aspect of HR practices requires that the HR blends other HR Policies/strategies - Human resource practices that are interconnected and internally consistent and are complementary to one another to increase job and life satisfaction concurrently, particularly for the long term. Joy (2017) reasoned that career development is about managing the lives of employees in terms of their aspirations, current happiness, and what they make out of their employment in the organisation in the distant future.

Studies have proven that human resource interventions such as training, performance management and career development have an influence on building employees' capabilities which transcends to organisational effectiveness (Kehoe & Wright, 2013; Sung & Choi, 2014; Potnuru & Sahoo, 2016). In the same vein, Clardy (2008) identified that organisations make use of HR interventions to stimulate positive behaviour in individuals and impact their knowledge, skills, and attitudes, which can increase productivity and performance.

In HEI, HR audit is increasingly becoming important. It consists of the identification, analysis, evaluation as well as outlining the actions needed to be taken in the future to reduce risk in the institution. According to Flamholtz and Randle (2008), HR audit comprises assigning strengths, limits, and strategic needs of development of employees already in the organisation for adequate performance. In HR audit, there is the need for exhaustive auditing and specific HRM functions including compensation and rewards, HR development, performance management and appraisal. According to Shiri (2012) every HR audit performs two core functions. First it serves as an information system which aids in providing feedback to management concerning situations related to HR development. Again, HR audit serves as a control in evaluating policies applied within the organisation. Auditing HR helps in identifying challenges facing the HR departments as well as its potential for growth. HEI institutions together with their respective quality assurance departments/units would be designed mechanisms to address these issues for institutional growth.

Internally, there is the value and cost of every action. In this case, the capability of the HR department will depend on its ability to adequately supply the organisation with services at the lowest cost as possible. Internal auditing is measured based on the quality, quantity, and reliability and hence focus is placed on the cost of activities

and ratios of productivity.

From the perspective of external auditing, if the measurement of HR effectiveness is mainly based on the impact the department has on the results of the organisation, the measurement must inculcate results achieved outside the HR department. The conformity or performance entails an inventory into social situational instances considering labour laws, norms, and applicable conventions (Abdul, 2001).

Human Resource Management and Organisational Effectiveness

Effectiveness refers to an organisation's internal health and efficiency as well as the efficiency of its internal processes and procedures. Generally, the term organisational effectiveness has been defined as a set of both financial and non-financial indicators capable of assessing the degree to which organisational goals and objectives have been accomplished (Roy & Dugal, 2005). Organisational performance is a multi-dimensional concept that covers key performance indicators including the satisfaction of all stakeholders especially employees. Organisational effectiveness has been perceived based on financial indicators. That notwithstanding, some researchers have advocated for a broader perspective of the concept that includes aspects of non-financial indicators such as quality, effectiveness, efficiency prestige amongst others (Waiganjo et al., 2012). This is important in HEI as the training of students may not be strictly seen in terms of goods and services for which monetary value can be placed. HEIs have a unique role to play in human capital development which requires effectiveness to ensure that graduates are fit for purpose, our research can address societal needs and our services to our community become vital to graduates' survival.

Amah and Ahiauzu (2013) examined the extent to which employee engagement or involvement impacts organisational effectiveness and the results of their study showed that employee involvement or engagement positively influences organisational effectiveness. This suggest that organisations with high employee involvement culture is likely to encourage employee participation in decisions that affect the organisation at all levels. This in effect will create in the employee a sense of ownership and responsibility. Accordingly, this sense of ownership and responsibility generates high levels of commitment to the organisation (Denison, 2007).

Employees' knowledge is crucial to achieving organisational effectiveness and competitive advantage in every industry. Thus, employees require more information to be able to contribute significantly to decision making in the organisation (McShane & Von Glinow, 2003). This could be made possible when leaders encourage employees to share knowledge and information pertaining to the core aims and objectives of the organisation. Evidence of this assertion was seen in the study of Yang, (2007); Abu-Shanab et al., (2014) who found that organisational learning and knowledge sharing are positive predictors of organisational effectiveness. At the individual level, an effective sharing process enables individuals to think about their ideas and insights and learn from them. This would result in the enlargement of individual capabilities which will reflect in organisational effectiveness. Moreover, Rahman et al. (2013), found that training employees to acquire individual/managerial skills and process skills helps in improving organisational effectiveness. Further, knowledge acquisition, knowledge application and knowledge protection interact with process skills training to enhance organisational effectiveness especially in educational administration and management.

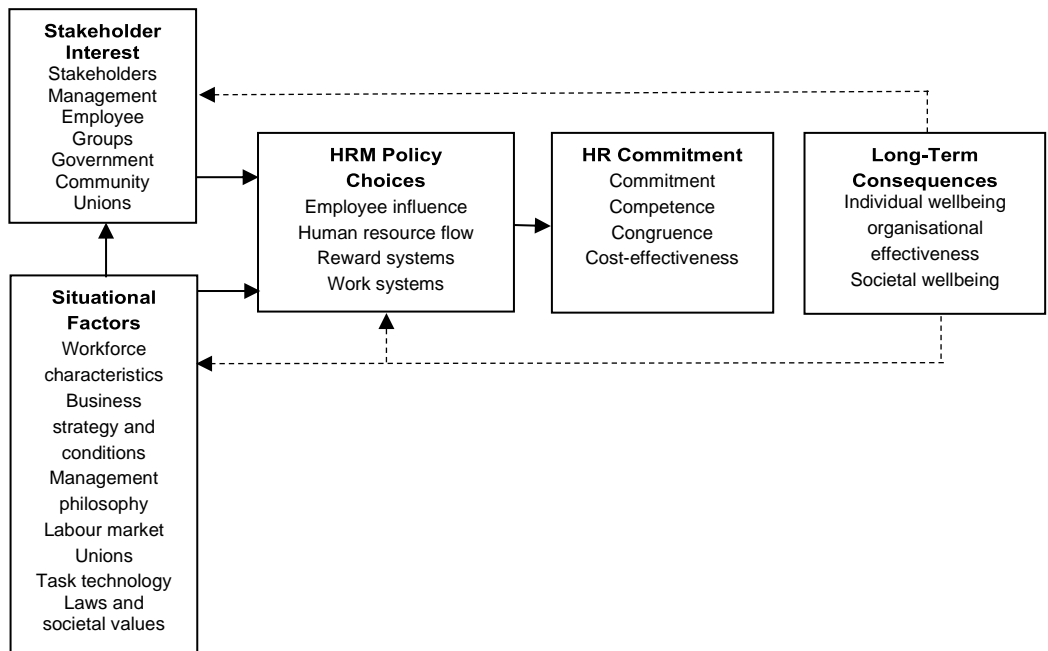
Effective human resource management leads to employees' satisfaction and commitment and tend to be innovative and have higher productivity (Kramer et al., 2011). Boxall (2013) also observed that managing human resources strategically contribute to the attainment of competitive advantage which help to improve organisational

performance. Voorde et al., (2010) contend that organisations like HEI are increasingly becoming aware of the fact that developing human resource policies and practices may improve performance in several ways including productivity and quality. This makes the employees in our HEI the most important resource and therefore, must be managed well to ensure higher performance. Thus, if the right combinations of human resource practices are adopted and executed effectively, there will be improvement in the performance of our HEI especially in this age and time where Ranking and Benchmarking have become important in attracting funding and in our quest to become globally recognised.

Conceptual Framework for HRM

The Harvard model in Figure 1 below is adopted as a conceptual framework for this study. The model was initially developed by several experts led by Michael Beer in 1984 at Harvard University.

Figure 1: Harvard Model for HRM as Conceptual Framework



The model is adopted since it supports the principles underpinning this study. The Stakeholder Interest represents major stakeholders in our public universities including staff, management, unions, and government. Situational factors relate to workforce characteristics, labour laws and societal norms on work ethics among others which are all prevalent in Ghana's higher education space. HRM policy is fundamental to HR management and any organisation including HEIs have Labour laws, University Acts, statutes, and policies which guides them. The outcome of any HR strategy is important especially in relation to how it supports the staff to be committed, competent, cost-effective among others leading to higher productivity as reviewed in literature. Lastly, the long-term consequence of any HR strategy is to ensure institutional effectiveness, staff individual well-being and institutional growth taking into consideration stakeholder interest and situational factors. The model will assist the examination of the objectives of the study in these two universities in Ghana namely the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi and the University of Energy and Natural Resources, Sunyani.

The Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi (KNUST) was established by Government Ordinance on October 6, 1951. It is a public funded HEI with a vision: to build on KNUST's leadership as the premier Science and Technology University in Ghana and to be among the top ten Universities in Africa (KNUST, 2016) as noted in their Corporate Strategic Plan 2016 -2025. It has a well-functioning HR division made of sections for: Staff Training and Development; Junior Staff Appointment and Promotion; Senior Staff Appointment and Promotion; and Senior Member Appointment and Promotion. The division is headed by a deputy registrar and supported by senior and assistant registrars.

The University of Energy and Natural Resources, Sunyani (UENR) was established in December 2011 by an Act of Parliament Act 830 (2011). It is public funded HEI with a vision: to train the next generation of experts and provide cutting-edge research to support Ghana and Africa's development on energy and natural resources. UENR has a functioning HR department headed by an assistant registrar.

METHOD

The research design is a comparative qualitative case study. This design was selected because the focus of the study was to answer how and why questions without manipulating the behaviour of participants of the study as well as, consider contextual conditions which are relevant to the phenomenon under study (Yin, 2003). The study used content analysis of the HR related policies, manuals, and practices to do a comparative analysis. Content analyses were done because Gall, Gall, and Borg (2007) indicate that, to fully understand a document or record, there is the need to study the context in which it was produced, the author's purpose, intended and actual audiences. Thus, the policy documents of the two universities were reviewed to identify their policy practices and then compared. Phrases that were common for a theme were grouped together. The two institutions were purposefully chosen as they provide the required strata of "older university" (above 50 years) and "younger university" (below 10years) based on their year of establishment. These institutions were chosen because they use to be one university until they were separated into two. Semi-structure interviews were also conducted to get the perspectives of the respective heads of the HR department in the two HEI to validate the information obtained from the content analysis. The interview lasted for thirty (30) minutes This was to enable the researchers obtain more detailed information from the two (2) heads who implement the HR policies and therefore can share their professional opinion. Expert reviews were used to ensure content validity and reliability of the interview guide and procedure for content analysis. All the ethical procedures including inform consent were followed in obtaining and interpreting data including assuring the anonymity of those interviewed from the two institutions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The information obtained from the content analysis and interviews were summarised and presented in Table 1 below. Inferences were made which aided the discussions.

Table 1: Analysis of HR Policies and Practices in KNUST and UENR

HR Practices	KNUST	UENR
Recruitment of Staff: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advertisement • Screening • Interview • Credentials verification • Orientation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policies for staff recruitment, verification of credentials exist • System for orientation for all staff exist but not effective • But there is no comprehensive HR policy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policies for staff recruitment, verification of credentials exist • System for orientation for all staff exist but not effective • But there is no comprehensive HR policy

Staff Training and Development:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentoring policy exists • Policy exists for study leave and attending conferences. • Institutionalised Annual Summer School for all staff. • Inadequate funding for staff training especially foreign courses. • A draft Training and Development Policy exist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentoring policy exists • Policy exists for study leave and attending conferences. • No Institutionalised training for all staff. • Inadequate funding for staff training especially foreign courses. • Draft policy for Staff Training and Development exists 	
Performance Management System (PMS):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rewards • Punishment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PMS being introduced to replace annual performance appraisal system. • KNUST Excellence Awards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traditional Performance Appraisal is used
System for HR Monitoring/Audit:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Auditing HR policies and procedures • Evaluation top management • Student evaluation of faculty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff evaluation of senior management • System in place for student evaluation of the teaching and learning process • There is no effective mechanism for HR audit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff evaluation of senior management is yet to be formalized • System in place for student evaluation of the teaching and learning process • There is no effective mechanism for HR audit
Promotion and Appointment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Criteria for appointment and promotion exists 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Criteria for appointment and promotion exists 	

From Table 1 above, both institutions do not have a stand-alone comprehensive HR policy after careful review of their existing policies. However, policy exist for most specific HR activities like Appointment and Promotion, Staff Training and Development among others.

An HR Officer 1 in an interview indicated that:

The University has separate policies for each of its core functions like Appointment and Promotion, Staff Training and Development, and Performance Appraisal. Having specific policies for each core function has its advantages as staff members can easily relate to it.

This point was supported by HR Officer 2 who also observed that: “We technically have an HR policy for each core function, but it is not in one document.” The need to have a policy framework is very important for any organisation as observed by Voorde et al. (2010) who contend that organisations like HEI are increasingly becoming aware of the fact that developing human resource policies and practices may improve performance in a few ways including productivity and quality.

Again, from analysis of the various policies, it was observed that KNUST has a decentralised section for specific units, but UENR has one composite office for HR. Decentralising human resource management in institutions has the potential to improve quality, efficiency, equity, innovation, and access to healthcare services while also increasing local engagement in educational sector decision-making demanding staff strength and resources. Having an effective system for human resource management is imperative for the optimum operations of any organisation is observed by Kramer et al., (2011) who opined that effective human resource management leads to employees’ satisfaction and commitment and tend to be innovative and have higher productivity. Boxall (2013) further supports this observation by indicating that managing human resources strategically contribute to the attainment of competitive advantage which help to improve organisational performance.

Also, KNUST have a formalised system of evaluating senior management and Performance Management System (PMS) policy and manuals, but UENR is yet to have similar policy and manual. However, both KNUST and UENR have mentoring policies and both institutions require adequate funding and institutional support for the HR departments to function effectively.

From the interviews, it was realised that both institutions do not have strong systems for conducting HR audit. However, HR audit is very important to evaluate the HR functions to discover the strengths and existing weaknesses at both strategic and operational levels of the organisation (Hussey, 1999). According to Flamholtz and Randle, (2008), HR audit comprises assigning strengths, limits, and strategic needs of development of employees already in the organisation for adequate performance.

The interviews with HR officers provided some prospects in relation to implementing an HR policy in both Institutions. The HR Officer 1 observed that: "HR policy helps to streamline things, ensure uniformity, fair treatment, ensure industrial harmony and contribute in the long term to higher productivity among others." HR Officer 2 also indicated that: "HR policy helps to regulate our activities in terms of human capital development, and it also helps to enhance productivity."

The role of HR in institutional advancement and development as indicated by HR officers interviewed is corroborated by similar studies by Aiyadh et al., (2015) and Fu et al., (2015) who observed that when HR managers employ the best training and development methods, administer them promptly, and evaluate the impact of these programmes on the progression and competencies, it leads to institutional effectiveness and higher productivity.

The study also found that both institutions have systems and procedures for staff promotions, training, and development. These serve as rewards for staff which eventually motivate them. This is supported by studies by Abutayeh (2017) who opined those rewards including compensation, the allocation of fringe benefits, pensions, allowances, and intangible benefits in the form of fairness, prestige, and recognition play a key role in staff motivation.

In respect challenges with implementation of an HR policy in a higher education institution, the respondents observed that some staff become apprehensive when the policy does not favour them which makes them to resign at short notice. Also, staff numbers keep increasing which require regular updating for staff members especially new ones. Again, some HR offices lack HR experts while those on the job have limited training opportunities due to limited funding.

It can therefore be concluded from this study that, the institutions studied to achieve institutional effectiveness are yet to have a stand-alone comprehensive human resource management policies and systems although separate policies exist for specific HR functions. HR audit have not been a regular activity for both institutions but sometimes it is done through a request by a regulator like Ghana Tertiary Education Commission or by Governmental Agency like the Fair Wages and Salary Commission. Lastly, resource allocation to HR department has not been adequate for them to attend special courses and seminars to appreciate modern trends in HR management especially in higher education.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It can therefore be concluded from this study that, the institutions studied to achieve institutional effectiveness are yet to have a stand-alone comprehensive human resource management policies and systems although separate policies exist for specific HR functions. HR audit have not been a regular activity for both institutions but sometimes it is done through a request by a regulator like Ghana Tertiary Education Commission or by Governmental Agency like the Fair Wages and Salary Commission. Lastly, resource allocation to HR department has not been adequate for them to attend special courses and seminars to appreciate modern trends in HR management especially in higher education.

It is recommended from the above analysis of the HR policies of the two institutions that, there is the need for them to put structures and mechanisms in place to ensure continuous organisational feedback. This is necessary to enable employees to provide valuable information for institutional growth. Institutions must use the feedback and put in a place a system for implementing High Performance Work Systems.

Again, there is the need to perform functional audit. This process examines the HR systems and processes including career development, training and development and organisational development. HR audit serves the purpose of conducting an in-depth investigation of the HR department in identifying the weaknesses and strengths and areas which demands improvement.

Moreover, there should be the assessment of the degree at which HR compliant with law and legislation. HR procedures must be in line with the Labour Act, University Acts, Statutes, and other Policies. There should be constant training for all administrative professionals who perform HR any HR functions. Again, there should be constant evaluation after the training to examine how it translate into provision of services evidenced in response rates and times, the willingness to help employees and the level of knowledge current HR practices in HEIs.

Also, the HR departments must have close working collaboration with other departments like the Quality Assurance and Planning Offices to design systems for audit and evaluation of performance. They must collaborate with the Counselling Departments to design programmes and strategies for staff who may need psychological and emotional supports as a results of HR related problems like failure in promotion exercise.

Lastly, HEI in a quest to ensure institutional effectiveness must make adequate budgetary provision for HR related activities. HR Registrars must be supported to attend conferences and study tours to broaden their knowledge in current trends in HR especially in higher educational administration and management. HR officers must be supported to belong to professional associations like the Institute of Human Resource Practitioners of Ghana. There is the need for Registrars to have specialization in specific areas of HR to enable them give top class professional services.

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