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DYNAMICS OF OUTSOURCING EDUCATIONAL SERVICES IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract

This study discusses the global trend of outsourcing educational services, particularly in public educational institutions. Despite concerns about service quality and financial issues involving private management of public schools, outsourcing continues to gain traction worldwide under the New Public Management (NPM) framework. The paper explores various definitions and types of outsourcing, emphasizing its strategic role in enhancing efficiency, reducing costs, and improving service quality in educational settings. It highlights specific cases such as Liberia's outsourcing of primary education to Bridge International Academies, illustrating outsourcing as a "travelling idea" adapted to local contexts. The significance, processes, benefits, and challenges of outsourcing educational services are analyzed, with recommendations for Nigerian educational institutions to leverage outsourcing for improved service delivery and efficiency amidst financial constraints.

Keywords: Outsourcing, Educational Services, Outsourcing Educational Services.

Introduction

Despite concerns about service quality and financial irregularities involving private companies managing public, federal or state owned schools in the educational sector, (Hursh 2016; Ravitch 2014), outsource based education reform continues to migrate across the globe. Ideas such as innovation, excellence and sustainability are discursively linked to alternative models for public service delivery, offered by private sector and voluntary organisations under the auspices of New Public Management (NPM) (Hood 1995; Lane 2000; Norris & Kushner 2007). Outsourcing has been framed in these discourses within a problem solution logic, as

a cost-effective solution to a range of educational problems in diverse international contexts. As the search for solutions to educational problems continues, European Municipality Outsourcing (EMO's) sell their services transactionally to governments seeking to reform their education systems. In Liberia, the entire primary education system was outsourced to a US-based for-profit provider of low-cost education, Bridge International Academies and seven smaller operators (Pilling 2017). Outsourcing has thus become a travelling idea, which is an idea that is rhetorically produced, appropriated and re-worked in specific, local situations in different countries as hotspots of change (Ellis et al. 2016).

Key words: Outsourcing, Educational Services, and 21ST Century

Meaning, Nature and Types of Outsourcing.

The phenomenon of outsourcing has gained significant attention in the past ten years, to the extent that managers, employers, and organisations are debating whether it makes more sense to handle some tasks internally or contract out to a third party. "The allocation of risk and responsibility for performing a function or service to another entity" is how Tannor, Alhassan, & Ahiadu (2022) defined outsourcing. The act of assigning tasks or operations to an outside party who is capable of completing them more quickly, more efficiently, and at a lower cost is known as outsourcing.

Therefore, Sanusi (2020) defined outsourcing as a strategic choice that comprises contracting out, for a fee, certain non-strategic activities or business processes that are determined to be essential for the production of goods or the provision of services. These activities or business processes are carried out through agreements or contracts with firms of higher capability in order to improve competitive advantage. It is the outsourcing of a company's internal operations to a third party vendor. According to Essien and Bassey (2020), outsourcing is the process of assigning certain tasks that a firm (the outsourcer) is expected to complete to another company (the vendor), allowing the former to focus on its core competencies. According to Sanusi (2020), outsourcing is the process by which a business hires a third party to provide its services. Moreover, contracting out a business function that was previously handled internally to an outside vendor is a common understanding of outsourcing.

According to Sanusi (2019), outsourcing is the process of giving control of an internal activity or any activity for which there is an instant internal capability to an outside vendor. According to Wedchayanon (2018), an outsourcing decision consists of a make or buy decision together with transfer. Chukwe and Augustine-Daddie (2017) define outsourcing as a subset of production that is done for an outside party, such a subcontractor. It is the transition of one or more organisational internal operations to an external vendor. According to Agburu, Anza, and Iyortsuun (2017), characterising outsourcing only in terms of activities purchased does not adequately convey the full strategic nature of the problem; outsourcing is more than just a choice about what to buy. The act of hiring an outside party to perform tasks or supply

services that may be completed internally is known as outsourcing (Adeniji, 2021). All significant businesses and organisations now have to adopt the outsourcing phenomenon in order to stay current and competitive in the marketplace. It also aids in lowering headcounts, cash injection, improving quality of service, accountability, and values; it also increases access to world-class capabilities and risk sharing (Momoh, 2021). Sanusi (2020) described outsourcing as the process of subcontracting out operations that are delivered internally to external agents in order to replace them. To put it simply, outsourcing is the process of assigning tasks or activities that were previously completed by a company or organisation to a person, group, or other entity that specialises in performing them. Accounting and bookkeeping, payroll processing, tax preparation and filing, creative work outsourcing, social media marketing, hiring, event management, and talents that are lacking within a company or organisation are just a few of the tasks that are outsourced.

Due to the fact that businesses and organisations outsource, Sanusi (2020) identified four crucial categories. Financial, business, technical, and political motivations are among these types. The financial justification is to implement budgets, cash infusion, and operating cost reduction. Core competencies and risk management make up the business justifications. Access to new technology, skill, and improved technical services are all part of the technical explanation. Managing time, effort, and resources optimally is one of the political justifications. Effective outsourcing has been demonstrated to improve company performance (Awolusi, 2012). Additional justifications for outsourcing include lower costs, higher sales turnover and profitability, improved expertise, higher-quality services, fewer employees, streamlined production, less administrative work and time saved, quicker access to knowledge and intellectual property, increased capacity for innovation, and the potential for price reductions that benefit consumers and society at large (Essien & Bassey 2020). Jegede (2015) listed five ways that a company can profit from outsourcing activities. These advantages centre on maintaining core competencies, reducing headcounts and staff sizes, minimising and averting labour disputes, lessening the financial load on managers, and achieving goals.

Types of Outsourcing

Manufacturing and service businesses are spreading their operations more and more in the globalisation process in order to remain competitive and offer both additional and basic services. Outsourcing labour processes is regarded as a normal occurrence in contemporary global economy (Bera, 2017). Francois (2018) categorised the aspects of outsourcing into four primary groups: manufacturing, process-specific, operational, and professional. These characteristics are frequently linked to business outsourcing that occurs within a nation, despite the long history of outsourcing that occurs outside of a nation's borders (Omoju, 2017; Etokudoh, Booklaky & Gungaphul, 2017). Akpan (2021) states that there are various kinds of outsourcing:

Professional Outsourcing: Financial services, banking, accounting, information technology, and many more specialised services, including human resource outsourcing, are all included in the category of professional outsourcing.

Information technology outsourcing (ITO): It's the kind of outsourcing where professional knowledge is necessary. It refers to the procedures used to outsource all or a portion of an organization's information technology (IT) needs. These IT responsibilities include building the necessary hardware and software, as well as providing ongoing technical support and maintenance. Because of the economy and the diversity of technology available in the business sector, IT management is the most frequently outsourced business service to outsourcing companies. For example, if a bank does not want to pay for the upkeep of new office sites, it might be more cost-effective to outsource its technical maintenance and data storage system.

Human Resource Outsourcing: Similar to ITO, HRO refers to the outsourcing of HR departmental tasks. This occurs frequently due to a lack of professionals available to complete the assignment, the potential financial consequences of carrying out the activity over time, or the desire to save time. Additionally, hiring a professional for tasks requiring on-again, off-again engagement might not be cost-effective. Programmes for employee support, drug testing, background checks, employee relocation, hiring, payroll services, benefits administration, and pension/compensation consultation are examples of HRO kinds. Under the employee support programme, the confidential counselling services that employees need to overcome personal, family, financial, or legal obstacles while working are outsourced. In order to assess a prospective employee's health, drug tests are frequently necessary as part of the pre-employment screening process. The service is typically contracted out to accredited laboratories for analysis. Although internal HR departments are capable of conducting employee background checks, investigations pertaining to specific employment positions, identification verification, verification of educational records, and other claims are outsourced.

Although the HR department's finance or accounting unit is responsible for handling payroll, some standardised services, such as keeping track of employees' time off and punching in and out, and filing tax returns, need contracting out the work to a payroll management business. Outsourcing is typically a good option when employee retirement planning include managing benefit plans like health, disability, or life insurance. Making the right decisions for both domestic and foreign employment opportunities necessitates laborious procedures, recruiting services, and consultants whose duties include finding various applicant categories for others. Most HR departments lack the necessary experience to create pay plans that effectively motivate employees, it is necessary to outsource this work to consultancies that specialise in creating unique compensation schemes. Haulage businesses are frequently tasked with transferring an employee's office and personal belongings as well as their family when they relocate due to a transfer or company

relocation (Okorie, 2010; Ohikena, 2017; Lair, 2019; Mehwish, Abeera, Aideed & Tania, 2019).

Manufacturing Outsourcing: This category includes contracts that are outsourced for the production of certain goods like cars, buildings, engine parts, etc. When a company needs to engage other companies that specialise in producing a certain operational portion of its business, outsourcing this kind of specialised operational service becomes crucial. This kind of outsourcing service is useful in areas where frequent disruptions in the energy supply cause manufacturing to halt. Some authors attributed this to economies of scale and the necessity of mass production sustainability for numerous manufacturing firms in the automotive industry that are unable to produce certain operating parts on their own (Amatucci, 2015; Vaz, Rauen & Lezana, 2017).

Process-specific Outsourcing: The term process-specific refers to the outsourcing of services that play a special role in a company's business operations. This involves contracting out the supply and delivery of goods for internet retailers, package delivery services, or confectionary businesses to outside enterprises who have demonstrated efficacy and efficiency in haulage and delivery within the allotted time frame. As a result, the majority of courier services are still used when other businesses need deliveries and mail handling. Outsourcing public sector services like community defence and security or fire service responsibilities to other private companies with greater professional management experience is another way to use process-specific type (Olive, 2004).

Operational Outsourcing: This is more typical in the manufacturing viewpoint than in other industries since manufacturing offers more opportunities for the delivery of operational tasks that can be managed externally to the company. One instance would be the upkeep and restoration of machinery and apparatus that may be conveniently obtained via outsourcing services. In cases when specific gear or equipment are available, this may also include specialised IT services. Facilities upkeep, clearing services, and estate administration are a few more examples of operational operations (Simon, 2014).

Offshore outsourcing: This is typically done as a calculated move to relocate specific business operations to a different nation in order to reduce labour costs, lessen the difficulties of entering untapped or developing markets, and access skilled labour in the new production location (Agrawal, Goswani & Chatterjee, 2010).

Reshoring: For a variety of reasons, outsourcing through reshoring might not be as economical in the long run as outsourcing abroad. The conditions that gave rise to offshore might not be the same over an extended length of time to warrant ongoing

presence in a foreign nation for the manufacture of machinery. Reshoring is the process of moving manufacturing or production back to the nation of origin. The world market's volatile crude oil prices, which frequently impact other economic factors in the producing nation such shipping costs and taxes or customs fees, are among the explanations offered for this development. Sometimes the lack of cost effectiveness may warrant the return of the outsourced business function back to the organisation to be handled internally in a reversal of process termed in sourcing or through what Plum, Peters and Shaw (2017) called vertical integration.

Near-shoring: This practice is the relocation of corporate operations from distant countries to those that are geographically closer. The convenience of transporting goods over shorter distances, the potential to reduce operating expenses, and the ability to help employees manage their time are the main factors that make proximity appealing. A small number of dangers, like socio-political and economic difficulties, have the potential to hurt the near-shoring outsourcing industry. For example, if the neighbouring country faces political and economic difficulties, it may have an impact on market trends and production, necessitating the adoption of new tactics.

Educational Services

Ataine, (2020) describe educational services as the prime facilities in schools which is viewed as space interpretation of school curriculum. He emphasized that the curriculum finds expression in edifice and arrangement of educational services which controls the atmosphere that facilitate teaching or learning process and safeguards the physical welfare of dwellers. Ataine, (2020) opined that educational services are process of construction; utilization; maintenance and management of educational services to certify the achievement of educational goals and objectives. There are various factors which impacts on building condition and student achievement in a way that controlled for, socioeconomic status of the students. It is an established fact that condition of educational services had a significant correlation with student academic achievement (Cash, 2013).

Ataine, (2020) regarded educational services as those inputs in education such as; classroom, library, laboratory, instructional materials, teachers, chairs and desk, chalkboard or whiteboard which impacts on students learning with the aim of enhancing students' academic achievement. There are a number of ways students' academic achievement can be measured although the most commonly procedure is public examination result of students as a basis for passing judgment on students, teachers and schools. Students' academic achievement is the ultimate score which students obtain after a comprehensive and logical measurement and evaluation of individual student in school milieu with the aim of making judgement on students' cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains (Ahmodu, Adaramaja, Adeyemi, 2016).

Ataine, (2020) explained that students' academic achievement is students' educational outcome as measured by Senior School Certificate Examination. Ajayi,

(2014) retained that there is no guarantee of high rating of students' academic achievement where educational services such as; classrooms, laboratories, libraries, technical workshops are structurally faulty. One of the current educational constraints is students' academic achievement which is measured through examination at various levels of learning (Kolawole & Dele, 2012). Ataine, (2020) gave credibility to when they realised that the problem of under accomplishment among students has persevered in many subjects' areas. He reverberated that the situation of students' academic achievement both at secondary and post-secondary school is worrisome (Aina & Olanipekun, 2014). Studies on relationship between educational services and students' academic achievement has emerged in literature. Everything about a child is changing rapidly, so also educational services must undergo a speedy transformation (Suleiman, 2007). Bullock (2007) discovered that students perform excellently in schools with new buildings, renovated structures, functional library and laboratory than in school with old buildings and structures. It was also discovered that general building condition, school age, and instructional facilities were positively connected to students' academic achievement. Educational services have been identified by Federal Government of Nigeria identified as the most important in school system that government has to provide for her citizens (FRN, 2013).

Public institution in Nigeria have witnessed various forms of policy reforms in recent times due to inefficiencies that are inherent in the operations of this sector. Some of the reforms were conceived in the 90's which have been implemented while some are yet to be implemented. As part of the economic liberalisation agenda, the government of Nigeria embarked on privatization and commercialisation of public educational institutions aimed at improving the service delivery and operational standard of the institution for those that could not be privatized or commercialised, the policy of outsourcing or using independent contractors was allowed. Today Nigerian universities are outsourcing some of its operations which hitherto were part of the traditional functions that supported academic activities. In some cases, it's the outright transfer of services to external service providers.

Significance and Processes of Outsourcing Educational Services.

Universities, secondary schools and educational centers at all levels are organizations which provide the essential service of educating the populace. They disseminate and popularize knowledge that promote innovation and invention. They are major vehicles for economic and social development and they have responsibility for equipping individuals with advanced knowledge and skills required for positions of responsibility in government, business and the professions (Ogbogu, 2017).

Educational centers just like most other organizations have been concerned about increasing efficiency, effectiveness, productivity, performance and accountability, by adopting various methods, prominent among which is outsourcing. In line with this, the Federal government of Nigeria in realizing the need to facilitate the development of outsourcing as a strategy for diversification of the

Nigerian economy, embarked on the formulation of the National Outsourcing Policy and Institutional Framework for Nigeria in 2007 (Ikeije & Nwaoma, 2015).

Consequently, some educational centers in Nigeria have embarked on outsourcing in order to improve service delivery. This would enable them to increase flexibility and also focus on their core competencies particularly at a time like this when the federal government has declined in fully funding the universities. Financial limitation remains Nigerian educational centers' main challenge, yet they are expected to provide quality education to their students whose population has grown rapidly in the face of stringent funds (Sang 2010). Outsourcing involves the transfer of organizations' regular business activities to a service provider outside the organization. It means vendors outside the institution exclusively handle services and functions that once were the domain of the institution's staff (Ogbogu, 2017). Ogbogu, (2017) referred to outsourcing as the process of searching for and appointment of contractors for the provision of goods and services and the execution of the contractual relations needed to support such activities. Outsourcing relationships are usually long-term propositions which are usually between 5 to 10 years range and sometimes longer considering the magnitude and the complexity involved. (Ogbogu, 2017).

Concerns over costs and productivity in educational centers have continued to grow globally. Faced with these realities, universities in most other parts of the world (United States and Europe) have already outsourced services with renewed interest in determining if external companies can provide services at a lower cost and with a higher quality product. For instance, the University of Phoenix, has been successful in keeping its costs lower by contracting the use of library services from nearby institutions. It was also found that 94 percent of colleges and universities in the United States outsourced at least one service; 34 percent outsourced five or more services and 37 percent are expected to increase their use of outsourcing over the next few years (Ogbogu, 2017).

Furthermore, Ogbogu (2017) identified the importance of outsourcing by affirming that it helps organizations to achieve the best practice. He also emphasized that it improves the cost discipline skills of managers as well as improve the quality of service. Further still, he affirmed that it helps senior managers focus more clearly on the core competences of the organization. Ogbogu, (2017) found out that the primary reasons for outsourcing is to enable organizations concentrate on key abilities, accomplish control over expenses and satisfy clients.

Elmuti (2000) noted that outsourcing is a means through which organizations solve problems related to structuring and cost effectiveness. Colleges and universities are experimenting with outsourcing in an effort to reduce costs, increase service efficiencies and boost income (Ogbogu, 2017). Ogbogu (2017) found out in their studies that outsourcing has traditionally been used to operate campus bookstores and dining services. He also found that many institutions have utilized outsourcing in facilities operation, computer services, security, childcare, residence halls, teaching hospitals and institutional management.

In the same vein, Peterson's (1995) study in the United States found that outsourcing is vast in higher education and found up that to 2000 companies, offered more than 100 services. He emphasized that more than 40 percent of college bookstores and more than 60 percent of dining halls were operated by outsourced firms. According to Ogbogu (2017), the benefits of outsourcing educational services are; improved quality of services provided, cost reduction, access to new innovations and technologies through recruiting qualified outsourced staff, educational centers are more efficient and able to focus more on core activities.

Summary and Conclusion

Faced with the realities and concerns over cost, lower endowments and support from government, the educational sector adopted outsourcing as a means to maintain quality education and delivery services. This paper therefore examined the process of outsourcing in educational centers as well as investigated the reasons, benefits and challenges of the process. It was found that in the process of outsourcing, educational centers first of all strategizes on the services to be outsourced before weighing the outsourcing options in terms of why it should be outsourced and how it should be done. Reduction in cost and an improvement in the quality of services delivered where major reasons for outsourcing amongst others. Although there is a renewed interest in bringing in external companies to provide services at a lower cost, institutions need to partner and share the responsibility for managing the service delivered in order to ensure the quality.

Recommendations

As Nigerian educational centers indulge in outsourcing services from external service providers care should be taken in selecting outsourcing vendors. Higher Education Institutions should involve in outsourcing services to enhance their quality of services provided, bring about cost reduction, increased access to new innovations and technologies through recruiting qualified outsourced staff, educational centers are more efficient and able to focus more on core activities.

Furthermore, government should formally include outsourcing as an integral strategy to improve the educational system in Nigeria.

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