HRD POLICY IMPLEMENTATION IN MALAYSIAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES- AN INVESTIGATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ORGANISATIONAL FACTORS AND IMPLEMENTATION

Aniah Baharom, PhD Candidate,
Faculty of Economics and Administration,
University of Malaya
Tel: 019-2165006
Facsimile: 03-55443001
e-mail: aniah@salam.uitm.edu.my

ABSTRACT

There have been major developments in the way organisations are dealing with the changing patterns and increased speed of the workplace. Organisations public and private have to currently wrestle with the need to improve their human capital and to answer the requirements for a highly skilled workforce to address the challenges they are facing in a more dynamic and globalise work environment. The workplace has now been re-orientated to be one of the best and most effective venues for learning.

This discovery has prompted the Malaysian government to put added emphasis on developing first class mentality in the human capital in the country. These requirements and the cry for improvements in implementation activities in the public sector have compelled the government to improve competencies of public personnel and service delivery within their workforce. The concern of the population is for a transformation in the implementation system that is currently perceived to be bureaucratic and slow to change with the times. The government's seriousness in addressing these issues is visible when the Prime Minister set up a body with the sole responsibility of looking into ways to improve implementation and service delivery in the nation. Public policies, procedures, guidelines are the public sector's mantra towards efficiency. However, without sound implementation, policies and programs will be an utter waste of time and resources. It is on this note that this study has taken place.

The objective of this study is to investigate organisational factors influencing policy implementation with special focus on HRD policy within the Malaysian public universities. Factors included in this study are departmental communications, characteristics of implementing departments and dispositions of implementers. This study will also highlight findings pertaining to the relationships between organisational factors and implementation in public universities.

Keywords: Policy implementation, human resource development, Malaysian public universities.

Introduction

There have been major developments in the way organisations are dealing with the changing patterns and increased speed of the workplace. Organisations, public and private have to currently wrestle with the need to improve their human capital and to answer the requirements for a highly skilled workforce to address the challenges they are facing in a more dynamic and globalise work environment. The workplace has now been re-orientated to be one of the best and most effective venues for learning. Thus, organisations and governments have started to put added emphasis on the development of human resource, or human capital for organisational

development and nation building. The reliance on human resource for the sustainability of organisations and development of nations is not a new phenomenon and has been in existence since many decades ago (MHE, 2006; Rahman, 2004).

The abundance of literature apparent on human resource development is also an indicator of the importance of competent human resources as an organisation's most valuable capital and its vital source of competitive advantage (Aliaga, 2001; Amat, 2001; Bennett, 2002; Oltra, 2005; Schuler, 1987; Wognum & Lam, 2000). Sound implementation of human resource development policies is an essential activity to ensure the development of capable human resources within the organisation. Global pressures and the internationalisation of business transactions demand that the human capital of an organisation be fully equipped with current development and knowledge to ensure organisational sustainability. The anecdotal evidence of the importance of effectively implementing human resource development policies and initiatives has convinced and converted many public organisations although the actual monitoring of effectiveness is still sadly lacking.

Within the broad area of policy implementation, there has been a wealth of studies carried out in a variety of areas for instance, school reforms and education policy, welfare reforms, social policy, the medical and nursing field, information and communications technology, financial control and budgeting system, and management (Deane, Crowe, King, Kavanagh, & Oades, 2006a; Ewalt & Jennings Jr., 2004; Exworthy, Blane, & Marmot, 2003; Friedman, 2003; Hill & Hupe, 2002; Matland, 1995; L. J. J. O'Toole, 1997). Although there are numerous conceptual and empirical articles on policy implementation, academic literature on the implementation of human resource development policy in the context of implementation studies is almost non-existent. As such, in an environment where human resource development is seen as a major catalyst towards organisational development and nation building, this study is timely and necessary.

Purpose of the Study

Malaysia is a nation currently sitting on the brink of becoming an industrialised and developed nation in the year 2020. As the nation embarks into its final phase towards Vision 2020, it is faced with a world of rapid changes in technology, turbulent political climate, demand for integrity and transparency, and a more fluid and responsive working environment. The Ninth Malaysia Plan (9MP) has been earmarked to act as the nation's blueprint outlining policies and activities to ensure the culmination of the vision. The National Mission guiding the path towards Vision 2020 aims to '*concentrate the country's efforts on priority areas encompassing the nation's global competitiveness, human capital development, national integration, ethnic relations, distribution of income and wealth and the quality of life*' (Abdullah, 2006). The 9MP is the first of three Malaysia Plans encompassed in the period of the National Mission in the nation's passage towards achieving Vision 2020. The 9MP states that the most valuable assets of a nation are its people. Thus, development of the nation's human capital by upgrading the cognitive and intellectual capabilities to be of world standing will be one of the biggest challenges in implementing activities for the 9MP. The plan goes on to stress that to be a developed nation, development of its human capital is obligatory and is indeed an inevitability (NST, 2006). The second thrust of the 9MP includes improving access to education and knowledge, making national schools the 'School of Choice', increasing the level of vocational and technical skills, producing Institutions of Higher Learning of international standard, strengthening research and development capacity, fostering a cultured society with strong moral values and empowering women and youth (Abdullah, 2006; EPU, 2006).

However, it is indeed prudent to note here that policies, programmes and blue prints are of no use to the nation, organisation or department if they are not implemented and enforced properly to produce the required results for the benefit of the nation and to fulfil aspirations, goals and aims previously decided. Manifestoes, policy documents and policy formulation without sound implementation will only be a futility and a waste of material, human, time and financial resources.

This study thus, is an attempt to offer some empirical substantiation of organizational factors affecting policy implementation. Factors included in this study are departmental communications, characteristics of implementing departments and dispositions of implementers. This study will also highlight findings pertaining to the relationships between organisational factors and implementation in public universities. Although these factors are by no means exhaustive, they act as a vehicle to encourage more studies on this important area of policy implementation and human resource development focusing on the effectiveness of both fields in the Malaysian civil service.

Past Studies

As mentioned in the above section, the field of policy implementation as an academic area has attracted an abundance of research which has been carried out in relation to a multitude of other areas. This attention given to the field of policy implementation testifies to the fact that policy implementation is a worthy field of research. Some of the areas which have prompted research on policy implementation are the medical and nursing field (Deane, Crowe, King, Kavanagh, & Oades, 2006b; Exworthy, Blane, & Marmot, 2003; Friedman, 2003), curriculum and education reform (Alashloo, Castka, & Sharp, 2005; Clayton, 1994; Velazquez, Munguia, & Sanchez, 2005), public works and utilities (Drezner & Bradley, 1998), welfare and reform(Ewalt & Jennings Jr., 2004), international relations (Dimitrakopoulos & Richardson, 2001) and management (L. J. O'Toole, 1995). However, from the above list, there is a surprising lack of literature on the implementation of human resource policy and an investigation on factors influencing the implementation of the policy. Hence, this study was undertaken under the premise that there is a need for such a research to be done especially pertaining to a Malaysian context in view of current developments in Malaysian human capital development and the rising concern about the efficiency of the Malaysian public service.

Malaysian Public Sector

As graphically mentioned in Figure 1, this study aims to investigate whether a relationship exists between organisational factors and policy implementation focusing on Malaysian public sector with specific reference to Malaysian public universities. The Malaysian public sector in general can be traced back to its origins in the form of the British public service. Malaysia inherited the public sector system from the British during the days of colonisation. Article 132 of the Malaysian Constitution stipulates that the Malaysian public service consists of the general public service of the Federation, the state public services, the joint public services, the education service, the judiciary and the legal service and the armed forces. In addition to that, for all intents and purpose, statutory bodies and local authorities are also considered to be a part of the public service since they too adopt the procedures of the public service pertaining to appointments, terms and conditions of service and the remuneration system. The public sector hence, refers to all the government agencies that undertake activities deemed to be the

responsibility of the government or are financed by the government which include public institutions paid for by public money.

Malaysian Public Sector HRD Policy

In view of the government's concerns in developing first class human capital and human resources as one of the more important catalyst towards building a developed nation, this study will look at the Malaysian public sector human resource training policy and its implementation within Malaysian public universities. On January 1, 2005, in tandem with the focus of the National Mission and 9MP, the Public Services Department (PSD) circulated for implementation the Public Sector Human Resource Training Policy (Policy 6/2005). The policy is also congruent with the National Vision Policy (Vision 2020) for Malaysia to be a developed nation in 2020. Emphasis of this policy is to develop the human capital or human resource serving in the public sector. Implementation of this policy will be the realisation of the second and fifth thrusts of the 9MP as it is intended to develop human capital in the public services and improve efficiency and delivery system of the public sector. Objectives of Policy 6/2005 include; to provide qualified, able and competent workforce; to achieve quality work; to improve productivity and competency; to shape good values and promote positive attitudes; to create and add value in the public sector; lastly but not least, to provide a direction for career development of personnel. In order to achieve the said objectives, Policy 6/2005 also recommends implementation strategies to be emulated by agencies and organisations in the public sector.

Policy Implementation

Policy in the government sector has many competing definitions. However, there are aspects that seem to be the key factor in those definitions. Most definitions agree that public policies result from decisions made by legislative bodies or government and it involves both the decision to remain at a status quo or altering the current condition (Heclo, 1978; Howlett & Ramesh, 2003). Hill and Hupe (2002) explains policy as an action adopted or pursued by the government or ruler considered to be beneficial or advantageous to the nation.

The above descriptions show that policy may sometimes be identifiable in terms of a decision, groups of decisions, a stance or an orientation. More often than not, policy involves a course of action and will evolve and change over time. A policy's main function is to provide direction for future actions or to address a problem or specific issue.

Implementation on the other hand generally means to put into effect something according to some definite plan or procedure. Consistent with the above statement, Pressman and Wildavsky (1984) affirm that implementation happens after an action has begun and it can succeed or fail subsequent to an evaluation by a certain predetermined criteria. Implementation can mean following procedures established in regulations with no regard to outcomes or it can focus entirely on the achievement of goals stated in the policy with little regard to means (Bardach, 1979). Thus, implementation can be said to be an action performed with a certain direction in mind. Implementation however, is an integral part of government and organisation in the sense that it shows direction and solve various ailments and problems in the organisation, society, government, or civil service (Mazmanian and Sabatier, 1981; Ingraham, 1987; Palumbo and Calista, 1990;.Matland, 1995).

From the abovementioned definitions and explanations, policy implementation in the public sector happens when a government policy, rule, regulation or programme is put into action and being carried out by parties entrusted with the accomplishment of pre-determined goals and

objectives. The study of policy implementation is all about exploring and investigating activities carried out by agencies given the responsibility to carry out what is stipulated in a given policy. The policy can be a decision, a stance, or orientation; however, for the purpose of this study, it will be taken to mean a directive or decision of the legislative body in the government to direct the behaviour or decisions of other parties. Public policy implementation has always been studied in the context of it not achieving its objectives or failure to produce required changes in society. In actual fact, policy success or failure comes from many sources, says Palumbo and Calista (1990). It is due as much, to inadequate problem definition or policy design as it is to administrative malfunction. Administrative failure may also stem from the inattention paid by legislators to program constraints during a consequence of flaws in the policy formulation process and in the environment in which implementation takes place as they are due to specific problems of administration per se. Implementation studies have explored and found out numerous factors leading to effective or ineffective policy implementation. As implementation takes place in an organisation, public or private, some organisational factors if not all are believed to have the capability to influence implementation initiatives. This paper proposes three factors and they are, organisational communication, characteristics of implementing departments, dispositions of implementers (Lipsky, 1980; Mazmanian & Sabatier, 1983; Van Meter & Van Horn, 1975).

Departmental Communication and Policy Implementation

Previous studies (Long & Franklin, 2004; L. J. J. O'Toole, 1997; Pynes, 2004)portray departmental communication as an essential aspect of organisational development and implementation success. Mazmanian and Sabatier (1983) talked about hierarchical integration within and among implementing institutions and attitudes of constituency groups in their model. O'Toole (1993) in network theory discussed the need to work in inter-organisational settings and the utilisation of both formal and informal linkages to implement policy. Hence, in a networked situation, organisational communication and information sharing are key components for decisions and directives to be transmitted for the benefit of all actors involved in the implementation initiatives. As such it is posited that:

H1 – Departmental communication has a significantly positive relationship with policy implementation

Characteristics of Implementing Departments and Policy Implementation

Studies on policy implementation have identified characteristics of the implementing departments or organisations as an essential element towards effective policy implementation (Lipsky, 1980; Mazmanian & Sabatier, 1983; Palumbo & Calista, 1990; Van Horn & Van Meter, 1977). Organisational characteristics such as their internal environment, their inter-functional cooperation and the organisation's link with the external environment play a major part in the manner implementation activities are being carried out within the department or organisation. Hence, this paper also hypothesises that:

H2 – Characteristics of implementing departments has a significantly positive relationship with policy implementation
**Dispositions of Implementers and Policy Implementation**

Implementers of policy or whatever their position may be, have always been linked to the success or failure of policy implementation. By virtue of their function, implementers have constantly

taken the brunt of ineffective policy implementation either by their superiors, the policy formulators or their clients, the public. This statement is substantiated by various writers of implementation (Lipsky, 1980; Mazmanian & Sabatier, 1983; Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973; Webster, 2005; Zetter, 2005). It is thus suggested that:

H3 - Dispositions of implementers has a significantly positive relationship with policy implementation.

FIGURE 1: *Relationships between Organizational Factors and Policy Implementation*
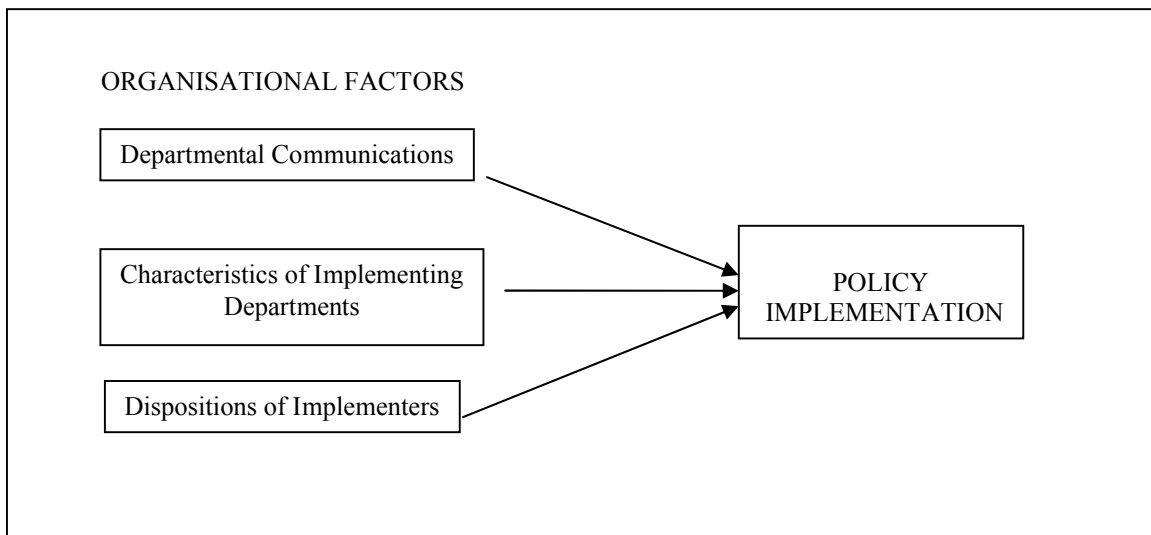
Methodology

       This paper is part of a cross-sectional study using a quantitative approach carried out to determine factors affecting policy implementation. Data was taken from the pilot study conducted at the initial stage. The respondents of the study comprised 70 university career administrators, defined as non-teaching staff doing administrative work in the university (Szekeres, 2004), from departments including faculties, academic centres, and administrative departments in a public university in Malaysia. The unit of analysis for this study is individuals within the public universities performing administrative tasks and implementation duties. They are employed as career administrators and do not have teaching duties in the universities.

       The respondents produced a mean of about 10 years working experience in the university with a minimum of two months and a maximum of thirty two years serving in the university environment. All participating respondents had staff under their supervision with a minimum of two staff and a maximum of sixty two staff yielding a mean score of fourteen (14) staff and a standard deviation of 13.18.

       Data collection for this pilot study began in April 2007 and ended in May 2007. Implementers of the 'Public Sector Human Resource Training and Development Policy', namely the career administrators of the universities, completed a self-reported questionnaire designed to gather information on variables associated with policy implementation. The questionnaire was divided into several sections that tapped input on policy implementation from the perspectives of

departmental communications, characteristics of implementing departments and the dispositions of implementers. In total the questionnaire is comprised of 85 items. Measures for departmental communications with 15 items were adapted from Smialek (1998), Brown (1984), Melhem (2004) and Van Meter and Van Horn (1975). The measures were taken from various sources to ensure suitability with the context of the study. Next, measures for characteristics of implementing departments with 21 items were adapted and modified from Jaworski and Kohli (1993) and inferred from Van Meter and Van Horn (1975). The bulk of the questionnaire with 38 items is the dispositions of implementers whose measures came form a multiple of sources namely Jones (1986), Blau (1985), Kanungo (1982), Rizzo et al. (1970), and Van Meter and Van Horn (1975). All 38 items have been identified by policy implementation researchers as factor explaining dispositions of implementers (Mazmanian & Sabatier, 1981; Palumbo & Calista, 1990; Van Meter & Van Horn, 1975). The dependent variable for the study policy implementation had 11 items from Brown (1984), Van Meter and Van Horn (1975) and Policy 6/2005. Due to the multiple of sources utilized to develop a suitable questionnaire, reliability tests were conducted to ensure measures used in the study conformed to the levels of reliability typically recommended (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2006; Pallant, 2005).

Results

All variables in the study were tapped on a 7-point Likert scale. On a 7-point scale, the following criteria to indicate a low or high mean score is used: a score of 2.99 or less indicated a "low" mean; a score of 3.00 to 4.99 was categorised as a "moderate" mean; while a score of 5.00 to 7.00 was termed a "high" mean score (Pallant, 2005). Data was subsequently analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 12. Descriptive statistics were conducted to establish frequency distribution for the demographic profile of respondents. Then, Pearson product-moments correlation coefficient or zero-order correlations were carried out to determine the relationships between organisational factors and policy implementation.

Of the 70 questionnaires distributed, a total of 54 questionnaires were returned, yielding a response rate of 77.14%. The respondents comprised of 20 (37%) males and 34 (63%) females. All the respondents were Malays. The mean age of administrators involved in this study was 39.03 years old (SD = 19.04) and the mean of years worked in a university was 13.64 years (SD = 10.94). All respondents who took part in the survey had staff under their supervision with the mean number of staff being 13.96 (SD = 13.17).

Zero order correlations results of the study are shown in Table 1. The means for departmental communications 5.16 (S.D.: 0.69), characteristics of implementing departments 5.35 (S.D.: 0.71), dispositions of implementers 5.06 (S.D.: 0.53), and policy implementation were 5.17 (S.D.: 0.99), respectively. Cronbach's Alpha reliabilities for organisational factors were; departmental communications (0.82), characteristics of implementing departments (0.86) and dispositions of implementers (0.86). The range of the correlation for variables measured were from $r = 0.244$ to $r = .580$. Both departmental communications (r = .580, p< .01) and characteristics of implementing departments (r = .576, p< .01) were found to be positively correlated to policy implementation. Dispositions of implementers had a correlation value of $r = 0.244$ but no significant relationship with policy performance.

TABLE 1
Descriptive statistics, Cronbach's Alpha and Zero-order Correlations of all Study Variables

Variables	1	2	3	4

1	Departmental communications	**.82**			
2	Characteristics of implementing departments	.59**	**.86**		
3	Dispositions of implementers	.29	.42*	**.86**	
4	Policy Implementation	.58**	.58**	.24	**.93**
	Mean (M)	5.16	5.35	5.06	5.17
	Std. Dev. (SD)	0.69	0.71	0.53	0.99
	Number of items	15	21	38	11

N=54
Note: Diagonal entries indicate Cronbach's Alpha values
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2 tailed)

Discussion

The purpose of this study is to determine organizational factors specifically departmental communications, characteristics of implementing departments and dispositions of implementers as determinants of policy implementation. In this respect, the findings furnish initial empirical support of the importance of organizational factors towards policy implementation.

Firstly, in tandem with earlier prediction (*H1*), there is a strong, positive and significant relationship between organisational communication and policy implementation. Departmental and organisational wide communications have been indicated by many theorists of policy implementation as a determinant for implementation. Mazmanian and Sabatier (1983) talk about hierarchical integration within and among implementing institutions and attitudes of constituency groups in their model. O'Toole (1997) in network theory discussed the need to work in inter-organisational settings and the utilisation of both formal and informal linkages to implement policy. Van Meter and Van Horn (1975) in their 1975 model of policy implementation identified organisational communication and enforcement activities as imperative for policy implementation. Hence, in a networked situation, organisational communication and information sharing are key components for decisions and directives to be transmitted for the benefit of all actors involved in the implementation initiatives.

The next investigation about the relationship between characteristics of implementing departments (*H2*) was also proven where departmental characteristics had a strong positive and significant relationship with policy implementation. Van Meter and Van Horn (1975) identified characteristics of implementing agencies as having the potential to influence policy implementation. Factors within the variable include top management support, inter-functional cooperation and general characteristics of the departments. Top management support in Van Meter and Van Horn's model was reiterated by Mazmanian and Sabatier's model of the sovereign's support. Leaders or top management of the organisation must project and give clear signals on the importance of implementing a policy or policy initiative by providing consistent objectives and direction. It is with this mandate that administrators will be able to carry out initiatives and gain cooperation from other actors within the implementation system. Next to top management support, actors in the policy cycle need to work together as emphasised by O'Toole (1997). Inter-functional cooperation is valued when all relevant parties work together and communicate with each other. Network theory professes the importance of working in an inter-linked manner in an organisational or multi organizational context. For multiple actors to carry out implementation activities effectively, cooperation across organizational and hierarchical boundaries must be promoted (L. J. O'Toole, 1997).

In addition to that, the department need to be structurally strong and have a good relationship with other stakeholders of the organisation for policy to be implemented effectively. Internal environment of the department must be conducive for implementation to take place.

Contrary to previously theorised (*H3*), this study shows that dispositions of implementers do not have a significant impact on policy implementation. This finding is however unexpected as previous studies found dispositions of implementers to be a vital determinant of policy implementation. Van Meter and Van Horn (1975) named dispositions of implementers as the central influencing factor of policy implementation. Other researchers who found dispositions of implementers or street level bureaucrats a significant aspect of policy implementation include Mazmanian and Sabatier (1983), Lipsky (1980), Elmore (1980), Palumbo and Calista (1990), and Webster (2005). Cultural or contextual and societal aspects may have an influencing effect on this finding as other studies have been predominantly conducted in the Western world.

Thus, it can be said that the contribution of this study lies in the fact that it is an empirical and quantitative work. As, Hill and Hupe (2002) mentioned in their work, implementation researches have been predominantly conceptual and literature search has also found implementation studies to be qualitative in nature. It is also a study carried out in an Asian context and in institutions of higher education where human resource development aspects may have been taken for granted. . Hence from a theoretical aspect, this study provides an additional aspect into the study of policy implementation where the field of human resource development is linked to the public administration domain. From the academic domain, the fact that this study proves empirically administrators, street level bureaucrats or implementers may not always be a contributor towards the failure of policy implementation. Studies on implementation since the work of founding fathers Pressman and Wildavsky (1973) have more often that not put implementation failures at the doorstep of implementers or people entrusted with the responsibilities of implementing the policy earlier formulated by policy makers. It was only after the works of Lipsky (1980) that implementers were given credit to have done their best and failure can also be attributed to a host of other factors.

This study therefore, also contributes to the fact that implementers are not the only party involved and responsible for the sound implementation of policies. As aforementioned, the findings may also be due to some cultural or country specific reasons. It is suggested that future research include cultural factors to be investigated as a moderator or as an additional extension of the framework. As this is a pilot study, it is also recommended that more samples are used in future and the respondent profile be extended.

Conclusion

Organisational factors are paramount to effective implementation. Factors surrounding organisations are important to bring about the successful accomplishment of objectives set out during policy formulation. As Malaysia embarks onto her final journey towards becoming a developed nation, it is vitally important that the public sector or the nation's implementation arm identify factors with the potential to influence implementation activities. This will then enable the public sector authorities to address matters before implementation progresses and to improve the percentage of success. In summary, this study demonstrates support on the proposition that organisational factors play a significant role in policy implementation.

On the premise of human capital development, implementers or administrators in Malaysian public universities should be developed to play a more significant role in their functions as implementers of policy. This development and increase in competence will have advantageous effect as implementers will subsequently have more presence in the strategic focus

of the university. More knowledgeable and involved administrators will also be beneficial to the institution in their advancement and quest for excellence (Szekeres, 2004; Zahrah, 2006).

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