



The Role of Administrative Staff in Student Relationship Management (SRM); A Tool for Quality Teacher Education

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ABSTRACT

The preparation of pre-tertiary school teachers by colleges of education in Ghana is beset by varied challenges of quality. A lot of the products of the colleges are unable to measure up to desired standards of competence. It appears that efforts at promoting quality teacher education seem to centre mostly on enhancing the academic capabilities of teachers to enhancing students' capability to act as agents of their own learning. This article brings to the fore, the drivers of student-centred learning and how colleges of education can empower students as clients with absolute responsibility to drive their own learning. It clarifies the role of the administrative staff in the implementation of students' relationship management and how their functions constitute the bedrock for effective teacher preparation.

Keywords: Administrative staff; relationship management; teacher education.

1. INTRODUCTION

Quality education is the pivot, on which the human capital development of any nation is anchored. To achieve and sustain an enviable state of socio-economic advancement, the preparation of teachers cannot be compromised since they constitute the nerve centre of any educational enterprise. For teaching to produce the desired learning outcome, teachers must be equipped with adequate knowledge of their subject, relevant teaching methodologies and the professional competence required to create an enabling environment for learning [1,2]. Unfortunately, there appears to be an assumption that the making of a good teacher is the sole responsibility of the teacher educator. Perhaps informed by that notion, almost every initiative or reform aimed at promoting quality teacher education in most countries revolves around teacher educators. Among several of such reforms in Ghana, the ministry of education through the Transforming Teacher Education and Learning (T-TEL) initiative recently launched the transition support fund to support teaching and non-teaching staff of colleges of education to upgrade their qualifications to a minimum of research master's degree [3].

This notion seems to undermine the role of Student Relationship Management (SRM) as an administrative function with indispensable impact on students' engagement and consequently, the making of a good teacher [4]. Hence, instead of functioning from the broader perspective of facilitators of effective teaching and learning, the administrative staff of colleges of education seems to have been cultured to conceptualise their role merely as processors of documents in conformance to institutional bureaucracies.

In most tertiary institutions around the globe, the diverse and complex needs of students have posed a serious challenge to the traditional functions of administrative personnel purely as document processors. According to studies by [5,6,7], students' experience of institutional culture and how they perceive administrative support services impact their academic engagement especially during their first-year encounter with tertiary education. Consequently, the effort and expertise of teacher educators alone cannot guarantee the making of a competent teacher without a corresponding administrative system of effective and efficient students' relationship management [8]. For teacher educators to succeed in equipping

teacher trainees with the requisite tools for effective job performance, the administrative staff of colleges of education must come to grips with their relationship management functions as a tool for enhancing students' preparation for their task. Beyond dealing with documents and maintenance of institutional bureaucracy, they should enhance students' experience and consequently, their academic engagement. In view of the current paradigm of service delivery by the administrative staff of public colleges of education, this article sheds light on the prospects and benefits of adopting student relationship management as a tool for facilitating the preparation of teacher students' for the teaching profession.

2. TEACHER EDUCATION IN GHANA

Preparation of teachers for the basic education subsector in Ghana is the responsibility of Colleges of Education (CoE). Upon completion of CoE, a teacher is expected to have acquired knowledge, skills, competence and values required for teaching at the basic school. Unfortunately, the products of basic education in Ghana show evidence of shortfalls in the capacity of teachers to prepare the Ghanaian child for further education and socioeconomic progress in life [9,10]. According to [11], the shortfall is a result of poor preparation of teachers. [12] attribute the situation to the perpetuation of a system of teacher education which sees the teacher student as an empty vessel that needs to be filled with facts and given guidance.

On the contrary, teachers need a repertoire of interdisciplinary knowledge which should empower them to implement a curriculum that addresses the unique needs of their students and that of a society that keeps evolving [9]. The empty vessel conceptualization can certainly not produce such caliber of teachers. Until the system of teacher education in Ghana evolves to a point of having reflective, innovative, cross-curricular and research-minded educators [13], and also, educators who are endowed with the capacity to prepare teachers to appreciate their career as a profession, an alternative means has to be adopted to foster student-driven learning and appropriate conceptualization of their role in Ghana's education enterprise. This can be attained through enrichment of their college experience and granting them the environment to become agents of their own learning.

3. COLLEGE EXPERIENCE AND STUDENTS ENGAGEMENT

Teacher students come to college from different backgrounds with varied motives and diverse needs. The diversity in their backgrounds and aspirations often influence their college experience, which in turn impacts their engagement and quality of learning. In Ghana, a lot of high school students choose to attend college of education with motives of job security and social mobility rather than a passion for teaching as a career and as a profession [10,14].

Against the backdrop of ill-equipped teacher educators and the inability of colleges to attract the appropriate caliber of students, colleges need to adopt a culture where administrative staff performs functions that enrich students' experience. This may include student relation services that foster students' understanding of the education enterprise, their role in the enterprise and more importantly, their training as the beginning of an endless process of career and professional development. Unfortunately, [10] allude to the fact that teacher students in Ghana's colleges of education are groomed like high school students under strict institutional protocols. No doubt that the protocols, informed by how authorities perceive the students and the teaching profession, interfere with their creative potentials and the capacity to assume personal responsibility for professional and career decisions. Beside the conflicting perceptions about the model of their preparation, a lot of teacher students are often overwhelmed by anticipations of unpredictable work conditions and expectations that they might face after the completion of school. With that state of mind for the teacher under training, there is the need to foster a college-student relationship that boosts their self-efficacy.

In the context of Western Higher Education, the college experience is seen as a key determinant of intrinsic motivation to learn. According to available research, when students are seen as their learning agents capable of constructing knowledge in pursuit of their career goals, they tend to exhibit high engagement [15,16,17]. For that reason, several student support services exist in western higher education that seek to ease students' navigation through tertiary education, enhance their sense of self-worth and empower them to direct their learning. At DePaul College of Education in Chicago for example, students have online access to personnel and

resources on academic counselling, academic success, use of technology for education, field experience, teaching practice, licensing, graduation procedure, career development, employment, library use, registration, finance, accommodation and many more [18]. No doubt that such provision is informed by the anticipated needs of students that are deemed to have serious consequences on their preparation for the job of teaching. The administrative staff of Colleges of Education constitutes the pivot for the implementation of such provisions.

4. THE COLLEGE ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF

[19] defines a college administrator as an employee of a tertiary institution responsible for non-teaching duties of admissions, course registration, material disbursement, curriculum planning, salary payments, facilities maintenance, employee welfare, records handling, students learning materials, students' navigation through college, finance, housing, job placement, alumni development, career services and any other service that supports the college objective of teaching and learning, research and community service. Similarly, [20] stretches the administrative functions in tertiary education to include institutional research and planning, student services, human resource management, financial administration, research and innovation services, alumni affairs, public relations and property management.

From the definitions, the services associated with some of the functions of college administrative staff are also associated with the functions of the teaching staff. This calls for a stronger and more strategic student-centred collaboration between the teaching and administrative staff to produce the desired caliber of teachers. Areas for such collaboration may include course registration, use of library resources, use of technology, use of assessment results, procurement of learning resources, college alumni relations, career services, institutional quality assurance and service innovations. It will imply a breach to the quality of teacher preparation if administrative and teaching functions are not perceived as mutually responsible for the making of a good teacher. As to whether the collaboration is principled on student relationship management and focused on enriching students' experience and not just about the routine assessment and award of certificates is yet to be explored. That notwithstanding, it is apparent that college

administrative personnel are accountable to students by way of ensuring students' wellbeing from the point of enrolment into the college to the point of graduation. Through their functions, they ensure that the various structures and systems of the college operate in consonance with the college's charter to enable effective and efficient deployment of college resources in support of teaching and learning.

The administrative staff of Colleges of Education in Ghana comprise the secretaries, administrative assistants and clerks [21]. Their duties as prescribed in the harmonized scheme of service for staff of colleges of education are as follows:

Office of Secretaries:

- a. Human resource management
- b. Keeping and maintenance of an inventory of college assets
- c. Management and development of college assets
- d. Administration and organization of admissions
- e. Organization of examinations and publication of results
- f. Organization of official ceremonies like matriculation, congregation and convocation
- g. Students record management
- h. Report writing
- i. Organization of meetings
- j. Public relations

Office of Administrative Assistants:

- a. Organization of training programmes for staff
- b. Supervision of personnel
- c. Covering of meetings
- d. Typing of reports
- e. Keeping of confidential files
- f. Maintenance of discipline

Office of Clerks:

- a. Typing of documents
- b. Handling of files
- c. Interpretation and application of regulations
- d. Responding to enquiries

A close examination of the duties of the administrative staff indicates that the secretaries and administrative assistants are responsible for

the effective and efficient service delivery by all other employees of the college. Specifically, the public relations function of the secretaries and the function of responding to enquiries by the clerks all fall under SRM. However, the two functions are likely targeted at the general public and not the students. Again, the administrative staff may be inadequately informed about how the concept SRM can be harnessed in public colleges of education to enhance teacher preparation. Notwithstanding, so long as students are the ultimate beneficiaries of all administrative functions, it is important to determine what they think and say about how the administrative staff is working to provide the experience they require to drive their learning. Though it is standard practice for administrative quality assurance in tertiary education [22], public colleges of education in Ghana may not be inclined to adopt such practice as part of measures to enhance teacher preparation for various reasons. It must be noted however that the gains of considering the teacher-student as a client with rights to excellent and quality college experience cannot be underestimated. If the making of good teachers will thrive on seeing teacher students as agents of their learning, then it is apt for colleges of education in Ghana to consider adopting principles of SRM in the preparation of teachers.

5. THE CONCEPT OF STUDENT RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

Student relationship management (SRM) is derived from customer relationship management (CRM) which takes its root from relationship marketing and service marketing in the corporate world [23]. In the business world, CRM was invented with the aim of understanding and satisfying customers as unique entities with unique needs [24]. It arose out of the need to establish, maintain, develop and continually renew a company's relationship with its clients in a way that helps both parties to achieve their goals. Though the concept appears not to fit into public institutions, its adoption and adaptation to tertiary education in the form of SRM has shown to enhance students' experience, satisfaction, loyalty and engagement [25]. Its core value is to develop organizational capabilities that enable educational institutions to construct a holistic understanding of their students, and consequently, to increase student retention levels [23]. In educational settings, the implementation of SRM involves modification of an institution's tacit and explicit culture to create

a student-friendly environment and to build relationships with students that inspire them to drive their learning.

According to [26], close to 64% of universities in the United States of America practiced CRM. The same authors assert that 59% of University in Mauritius have recorded successful outcomes from the practice of CRM. [27] noted that the practice of CRM in tertiary education has produced significant levels of student retention, needs satisfaction and emotional loyalty. But what are the tenets of CRM and SRM that justify its relevance to teacher preparation in colleges of education? Again, how can the tenets be applied to facilitate the making of a competent teacher. [28] throw light on the tenets of CRM in the form of statements presented as follows:

1. Interaction with clients involves an ethical analysis of issues and reduction of client's tension.
2. It is built on customer-oriented relationship and puts the human being first.
3. It is built on virtues of trust, commitment, loyalty and diligence.
4. It is built on dialogue, transparency and mutual understanding.
5. It is built on honesty and keeping to promises.
6. Services provided exceed the minimum legal threshold.
7. Management provides moral guidance for the implementation of CRM

These tenets can be modified and adapted to deal with students of colleges of education as follows.

1. All interaction with students should be guided by ethical considerations and reduction of tension.
2. In all transactions with students, their total needs should take utmost priority.
3. Employees should work hard to earn students trust, commitment and loyalty.
4. Employees should adopt dialogue, transparency and mutual understanding in serving students
5. Employees should frankly render services to students as their entitlements and not as a privilege.
6. Students' satisfaction with college experience should constitute the motive behind all services.
7. Management through administrative staff should support employees to implement SRM.

6. THE NEED FOR SRM IN COLLEGES OF EDUCATION

Several theories can be used to explain the rationale for adoption of SRM to enhance teacher preparation. Classical examples include Baxter Magolda's theory of Self Authorship [29] and Molly Schaller's Model of Sophomore Student Development [30]. However, since college experience is the chief predictor of students' satisfaction, which in turn predicts their engagement, and consequently, the competency they acquire from their preparation, the Happy-Productive theory of [31] is preferred.

The theory considers academic achievement as a product of students' satisfaction with their college experience. Corroborators with this view [32,33] cite academic advising, student support services, student centeredness, relationship with staff, the responsiveness of faculty, staff helpfulness and feedback as key factors that influence college experience. This suggests that students can truly become agents of their own learning when colleges provide them with services that enrich their experience. The feeling of elatedness owing to satisfactory college experience is often underscored by the quality of SRM. This adds logic to the proposed adoption of SRM by colleges of education to enhance teacher preparation.

However, for colleges of education to use SRM as a tool for assuring quality in the outcome of teacher education, there should be a shift in the conceptualization of the teacher-student, the institution and its culture. Currently, the institution still perpetuates the founding model of a training ground for imparting prescribed knowledge onto empty vessels [12] under a regimental climate that rides on a tutelage culture. Perhaps the situation is due to the poor caliber of candidates enrolled into the colleges. In the current era of socialization in a global context where young people are creating their own schema through instant exposure to information and communication technology, a regimental approach to teacher preparation can certainly not guarantee the making of a competent teacher.

In view of the global context of socialization, the proposed framework for teacher preparation considers the teacher-student as a client, the college as a service provider and employees as facilitators of students' learning experience. That relationship, however, does not seclude the student from the consequences of any conduct

that may undermine academic freedom and professional ethics as well as the safety and security of the college community. In that context of a college-client relationship, the student should be seen as a unique entity in need of relevant information to excel in a chosen career. What about students enrolled in colleges of education with motives beside a passion for teaching as a career, those are motivated by government allowances, and those with vague career objectives and ambition? SRM requires that the college enables such students to visualize pathways and opportunities for career development and growth, starting with the college experience as a foundation. Considering the diversity of students' needs and their goals, the conceptual framework advocated for the implementation of SRM in colleges of education is shown in Fig. 1.

to facilitate the implementation of SRM. To produce a competent teacher with passion and expertise in their field of interest, students admitted into colleges of education need to be induced to become agents of their own learning. As a tertiary institution, achievement standards must be set for students to attain through self-driven learning. Since students of tertiary institutions are regarded as co-creators of knowledge [34], what the college must do is to create the enabling environment to promote student-centred learning. A typical strategy for promoting student-driven learning is to stretch students with challenging research-oriented tasks whilst supporting them as clients to accomplish the tasks [35]. Through collaborative teaching and learning relationships, educators can arouse the self-believe of students and zeal for autonomous learning. But the biggest question is whether the educators have the experience and predisposition to build such relationships with learners as co-creators of knowledge in an intellectual community.

According to the framework, teaching and learning support services are inextricably intertwined with administrative support systems

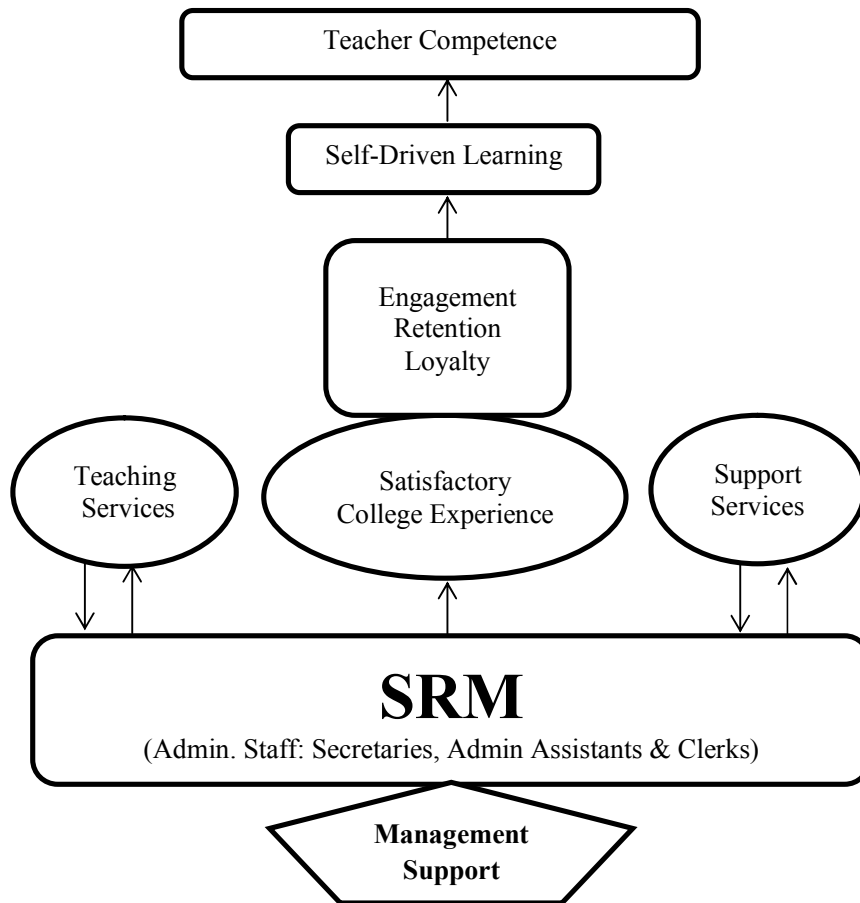


Fig. 1. Conceptual framework for SRM in colleges of education

For students to steer their own learning with persistence, they should have attained a state of affective commitment to their programme of study or the ethos of their college or both. Such commitment is manifested as an overt attitudinal and behavioural expression of inner cognitive and emotional loyalty to the ethos of a college [7]. That mindset, based on feelings of satisfaction with their college experience, provides a strong inducement for independent learning and self-regulation. For example, prompt completion of the task and voluntary compliance with institutional regulations can be overt indications of satisfaction with college experience and pride in membership of a college.

The SRM framework for assuring quality in teacher education can thrive on three grounds, based on a strategic mix of technology with organizational culture and employee commitment. Firstly, educators must understand the concept, adopt it and integrate it into their interactions with students. Secondly, college employees responsible for support services that have a crucial impact on student-centred learning must become active practitioners of SRM. Thirdly, the administrative staff must take full responsibility to ensure that SRM is endorsed by all college employees as the new paradigm for dealing with students. The implications for the three role players are as follows:

Implications of SRM Framework for Teacher Preparation:

Educators:

1. In mindset, attitude toward students and interaction with students, educators need to see teacher students as clients en route their career path who are in need of:
 - i. Information as a resource to build their knowledge base and create their own knowledge.
 - ii. Exposure to diverse ways of imparting knowledge, skills and values.
 - iii. Professional experience to build a successful career.
2. Educators need to re-conceptualise their role as service providers and facilitators of learning. They should take greater responsibility for clarifying, explaining, guiding and inducing students to exert their mental and physical energies toward knowledge creation and task accomplishment. [27]. For example,

students' assessment task should involve more of research, critical thinking and applications to work situations rather than recalling of knowledge.

3. Due to the influence of globalization and rapid information sharing on students' learning [26], educators need to be abreast of new developments in their subjects so as to be able to meet the expectations of their students. Specifically, they should be abreast of technology and proactive in assisting students to use technology for learning.
4. Since SRM is about enriching students' experience to promote self-driven learning, educators should conduct student experience surveys to determine the impact of their teaching on students' attainment of curricular objectives. Such surveys should form the basis for teaching reforms.
5. Educators should be approachable, receptive, respectful and responsive to the unique needs of students. This in turn, provides motivation for their engagement [36].

Support Service Providers:

Due to students' transition challenges and possible disenchantment with the academic and social life of college, support service providers should be poised to ensure that students are academically, emotionally and psychosocially engaged with all facets of the college experience [37,38]. According to [39], the most salient of the services are counselling services – for psychosocial and emotional needs; learning support services – for academic needs; facility services – for physical needs; and lastly, career services – for employment and financial security. Considering the impact of student services on academic achievements [37], a lot of institutions have well trained personnel with experience in SRM to deliver student services. At Adelaide University for example [40], students have uninterrupted online access to support service providers on any issue of concern to students. Colleges of Education in Ghana can adopt best practices of SRM from such examples and adapt them to their local context. SRM can be practiced in the four key services to enhance student engagement in the following ways.

1. Counselling Services

- i. Counselling services and how to access them should be advertised, publicized,

promoted and advocated through print, electronic and public communication systems of the college. Proliferation of the services would engender students trust and loyalty to the ethos of the college. That in itself is a motivation for students' engagement.

- ii. The college counsellors should conceptualize their functions as more of service marketing than consultancy services. Acting proactively to communicate the college's preparedness with resources to address students' challenges is a great inducement for students' engagement.
- iii. Communications on counselling services should specify the broad range of issues that the college is poised to address. For example, mental health, financial crisis, relationships, burnout, academic difficulties and so forth.
- iv. The counsellors should render their services with strictly adherence to all the features of quality services, that is, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and worthiness of service provider. Similarly, they should comply with the professional ethics of counselling in order to continue to sustain student engagement, retention and loyalty.

2. Learning Support Services

- i. For effective utilization of learning support services to maximise students' engagement, the academic, library and ICT staff of the college need to synchronise aspects of their activities to address the learning needs of students. They should collaborate to identify and abate the obstacles to students' engagement with learning. Specifically, they should conduct surveys to understand students' challenges and their perceptions about the quality of learning support services. The outcome of such surveys should be used to develop student friendly resources with unrestricted online access by members of the college community.
- ii. The providers of learning support services should see themselves as more of service marketers than service consultants. They should innovate and promote their services across the entire college community using electronic, print

and public communication systems of the college.

- iii. They should organize joint seminars to inform students about available resources and support, strategies for successful learning, strategies for conducting research and how to go about academic communication.
- iv. As service providers, they should see students as their clients and observe all the features of a quality service in the development and delivery of student support services. They should continually scout for global best practices and adapt benchmarked practices to local context.

3. Facility Services

An online tour of tertiary institutions around the world show that students are particular about the appeal of campus infrastructure, their fitness for student's needs and the savvy of the personnel responsible for the use of the infrastructure to meet student's needs. Topmost among students' facility concerns are classrooms, hostels, laboratories, multimedia, library, internet, sports, cafeteria, clinic, transport and common room [41]. In conformity with the earlier stated tenets of SRM, personnel responsible for facility services should conduct student satisfaction surveys to determine the perceptions of students about the quality of facility services. The outcome of such survey should be discussed with students to work out appropriate actions for service improvement.

4. Career Services

The ultimate goal of every college student is to build a successful career for livelihood sustenance. When students are clear about where their education could lead them, it spawns commitment to self-directed learning [37]. Hence it is the responsibility of colleges to assist students to explore, identify, plan and develop their careers along pathways compatible with their capabilities and interest [40]. Colleges of education can use SRM tenets to provide career services to students by:

- a. Creating an office for career services with online presence and unrestricted students' access.

- b. Posting information about diverse career options available for college graduates in the field of education and graduate studies.
- c. Creating opportunities for telecommunication access to the centre for enquiries.
- d. Organising seminars with speakers from the education industry and graduate schools.

7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

From the perspective and benefits of service marketing and customer relationship management, quality teacher preparation has been conceptualised as a function of the quality of students' college experience. That experience is no doubt the product of effective SRM. Effective SRM has been identified as the pivot to students' commitment to the ethos of a college and higher achievement. Since college experience induce or impede students' engagement, which in turn determines their learning outcomes and competence, there is the need to create and maintain a bond of relationship between students and the actors of a college such that the feelings of satisfaction with the college experience spurs students to take responsibility for their own learning. Attaining a culture of student driven learning in a college community evidently has the capacity to guarantee the making of a competent teacher.

Based on the NCTE's description of the functions of the administrative staff of colleges of education, it is clear that responsibility for institution wide implementation of SRM falls within their jurisdiction. With management endorsement, the administrative staff under the leadership of the College Secretary should implement in-house reforms that enjoin all employees of the college to adopt and apply the tenets of SRM as the new paradigm for dealing with students. Considering the potential benefits that can accrue to students and colleges for adopting a SRM paradigm, the following reforms are recommended for implementation by the administrative staff.

- a. Training of all employees of the college on the new paradigm for service delivery. The training should encompass the rational, philosophy, objectives and benefits of SRM as well as its mode of implementation and the role of employees in the pursuit of the

objectives. The training should pay particular attention to educators and learning support staff.

- b. Conduct of student satisfaction survey at the end of every semester to determine students' perceptions about the implementation of SRM by employees of the college.
- c. Revision of the code of ethics for staff and students to include sanctions, rights and responsibilities of students and staff in the light of the new SRM paradigm.
- d. Update of college infrastructural, technology and material resources that have dire impact on the successful practice of SRM.
- e. Upgrade of the responsibilities of the office of college secretary to include monitoring and evaluation of the progress of implementation of SRM. The secretary should audit the SRM system annually and report findings to management for subsequent reforms.
- f. The functions of the administrative staff should be reconstituted to include front desk functions of SRM. Their role should be re-conceptualised to reflect the frontline interface between students and the college.

DISCLAIMER

The products used for this research are commonly and predominantly use products in our area of research and country. There is absolutely no conflict of interest between the authors and producers of the products because we do not intend to use these products as an avenue for any litigation but for the advancement of knowledge. In addition, the research was not funded by the producing company rather it was funded by personal efforts of the authors.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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