

IMPACT OF LEADERSHIP SELECTION ON GOVERNANCE IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN NIGERIA, A CONVOCATION LECTURE DELIVERED BY THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF TERTIARY EDUCATION TRUST FUND ARC. SONNY S. T. ECHONO AT THE 36TH CONVOCATION CEREMONY OF THE FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY, OWERRI ON 5TH DECEMBER, 2024.

PROTOCOL

Let me start by expressing my profound appreciation to the Management of the Federal University of Technology, Owerri (FUTO) for the invitation graciously extended to me to deliver the 36th Convocation Lecture of this great University on the topic: ***“Impact of Leadership Selection on Governance in Public Universities in Nigeria”***. It is a homecoming of sorts for me having served in the Physical Planning Department of the University from 1985-1986 (NYSC). FUTO has come a long way as a specialised University of Technology, and as one of the foremost and best-run universities in the country. You have every reason to be proud of your track record, having been at the forefront of raising the quality of technology education through quality teaching, innovative research and excellent community service.

1.0 Introduction

Historically, formal education in Nigeria can be traced to the advent and activities of European Missionaries and Colonialists. Formal education was introduced with a view to creating the manpower, capacity, and competencies to run the new economic, social, political, and administrative set up that was established during the period. University education, however, has

its roots in the Elliot Commission set up in 1943 by the colonial administration which laid the foundation for the establishment of the University College, Ibadan in 1948. (Okorosaye-Orubito, 1995).

1.1 The Importance of University Education

Undoubtedly, university education plays a critical role in the development process, particularly in the global context in which knowledge-based innovations and products fetch high value in the market. Beyond economic benefits, university education also offers cultural and community development scope.

The transition from the Stone Age to the Iron Age, the invention of agriculture, the advent of traditional and modern technology, development in science, energy, and communication have all been ascribed to tertiary education, capacity building, and the search for knowledge. Throughout history, human beings have often sought to advance their well-being by improving and mastering their environment and have succeeded overtime primarily due to improvement in the quality of human capital. The desire to improve living conditions and vigorous pursuit of same, has resulted in discoveries in various fields that have direct impact on modern societies.

Thus, the laudable inventions whether in the field of medicine, energy, agriculture, or communication, have been the result of education and knowledge, which constitute the essence of university education. Knowledge arising from education and research has been critical to existence and survival, and as society

progressed, its transformation for sustainable development became inevitable. Hence, the quest for education and scientific breakthrough continued to occupy a crucial place in the scheme and affairs of societies and nations.

It is widely believed that the level of development in any nation reflects their education system, and development strategies are mostly rooted through universities research activities and innovations. It is also true that most of the challenges in many developing countries today stemmed out of their poor or inadequate attention to the education system.

2.0 Evolution of Public Universities in Nigeria

The Nigeria University System began with the establishment of the University College, Ibadan (presently University of Ibadan) as an affiliate of the University of London in 1948. According to Fafunwa (1994), Nigeria did not have access to university education until more than a century after the introduction of formal education through agitation by the Nationalists. The reason for this long delay was not unconnected to the fear of increase in pressure for equal rights by elites if they allow large numbers of people to acquire university education.

The University College did not attain full fledged status till 1963, due to existence of protocol withholding such status; hence, the students were awarded University of London Certificates. The University of London determined the syllabus, examination scheme, carried out the setting and grading of question papers, and the

ultimate award of degrees. The University College was criticized for being over reliant on Colonialists for staffing and curriculum, which brought about the clamour for an indigenous University that was established in the Eastern Region of Nigeria, named University of Nigeria, Nsukka on the 5th October, 1960.

In 1962, three additional universities came on board: the Ahmadu Bello University Zaria, the University of Ife, and the University of Lagos. They were later joined by the University of Benin, in 1970. The Third National Development Plan (1975 to 1980) for the country gave Nigeria seven new Federal Universities known as second generation universities; namely: the University of Ilorin, University of Sokoto, Bayero University, Kano, University of Calabar, University of Port Harcourt, University of Maiduguri and University of Jos. The third-generation universities are the Federal University of Technology, Owerri; Federal University of Technology, Minna; Federal University of Technology, Akure; University of Agriculture, Makurdi; and Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University, Bauchi. Likewise, State Universities sprang up in Bendel (now Edo), Imo, Ondo, Lagos, and Cross River.

The fourth and subsequent generation universities were established after 1991. This period also witnessed the introduction of private universities which have outgrown government institutions. In 1999, private ownership of universities was liberalized and individuals and religious organizations became increasingly interested in establishing universities (Abdulrahman-Yusuf, 2012). The number of public universities has grown to 125, while the total number of

universities in Nigeria has risen significantly since the approval for the first private universities was granted in the year 1995. The current number of universities according to the NUC website is highlighted below:

- Federal Universities - 62
- State Universities - 63
- Private Universities - 149
- Total - 274**

2.1 Regulatory Framework of Nigerian Universities

Obviously, freedom as a platform for growth and progress is supposed to be the heritage of a university to enable it to function optimally to enjoy a unique autonomy in choosing a lecturer, curriculum, methodology and who should be a student. There should be freedom of expression on the part of both the lecturers and students. Thus, a university should be able to enjoy autonomy in managing its internal affairs without interference from any external body. However, the level of freedom and operations of universities in Nigeria, like in other parts of the world, is guided by various regulatory bodies which include the Federal and States Ministries of Education, the National Universities Commission (NUC), the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB), the Council for Legal Education (CLE) and other professional education bodies. The Nigerian public universities do not have financial autonomy, which makes them to be subjected to rules and regulations on how to utilize any allocated funds. The government provides

grants/allocations and the onus rests on them to ensure effective monitoring of the utilization of the funds.

2.2 Mandate of the Universities

Traditionally, universities as ivory towers have three core mandates which are teaching, research and community service. According to Oyedeji (2023), Nigerian Universities dynamically pursue their goals through knowledge generation and dissemination, research activities and dedicated services to the communities, as well as international cooperation, in line with global standards.

Research creates and rediscovers knowledge, which is deployed to impact on the community, whereas teaching helps in the transmission of knowledge. Universities must balance their teaching, research and community service; focusing on one area of their mandate should not lead to the neglect of the others altogether. The significance of university education as a propellant of development cum innovation, technology, industrialization, civilization, mechanization, and the well-being of society lies in its ability to contribute to national development through the production of high-level relevant manpower, advancement of knowledge and honing of skills.

Specifically, and as contained in the 2013 National Policy of Education (NPE) of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, university education is intended to:

- a) Contribute to nationwide development via upper-level pertinent manpower training;

- b) Advance and instil right ethics for individual and societal continued existence;
- c) Improve mental ability of individuals to appreciate as well as value their internal and external surroundings;
- d) Develop both physical and mental abilities required for self-sufficient and functional memberships of the society;
- e) Encourage and strengthen research and the public service;
- f) Build and strengthen nationwide harmony, and;
- g) Uphold nationwide and global understanding and relations.

3.0. LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Research has shown that leadership and governance are essential aspects of both organizational success and societal progress, but also one of the greatest inhibitors of progress. Ogunraku (2016) explains the concept of leadership as the discipline of deliberately exerting special influence within a group to move goals of beneficial permanence that fulfil the group's needs.

Leadership is not just a title; it is a responsibility. It is not merely about directing others, but about inspiring, guiding, and serving those who place their trust in you. It is about the responsibilities we carry and the example we set. Steve-Beke et al. (2020) defined leadership as an accepted force of influence that coordinates others and inspire them to willingly comply with the aspirations and goals of the group through adopting the right motivation. John Spacey (1995), who identified 32 styles of leadership, further espoused this definition by maintaining that "leadership is the art of getting people moving in the same direction with a common purpose and goals". He argued

that it is a fundamental social role that naturally emerges in group, which is separate from official authority such as management structure.

At its core, leadership is about taking responsibility. Leaders are entrusted with the task of making decisions that impact not only their immediate teams or organizations, but the community at large. The responsibilities of leadership extend far beyond merely managing operations; they involve shaping vision, setting direction, and making choices that affect the lives of others. True leadership is grounded in service. A leader must understand that their role is not to command from above, but to serve the needs of those they lead. These includes the responsibility to make decisions that are informed, fair, and in the best interest of the people or organization they represent.

Leaders must bear the weight of their decisions with integrity. They are entrusted with the welfare of others, and that requires transparency, accountability, and the courage to make difficult choices. It also comes with the duty to nurture talent, create opportunities for others to grow, and to lead by example.

What are the qualities that make a good leader? A leader's qualities are the foundation upon which they build the trust of their followers. Leadership is not just about expertise or position, it is about how one engages with others, how one inspires confidence, and how one earns respect. Effective leadership requires a blend of qualities that empower a person to lead with both strength and

humility. The first of these qualities is vision. A great leader is someone who can see the bigger picture and inspire others to work toward a common goal, even in the face of adversity.

Leaders must have visionary direction; an ability to define the path forward. They must have a clear vision of where they want to go and inspire others to follow. This means anticipating challenges, adapting to change, and maintaining focus even when the road ahead is uncertain.

Another responsibility of leadership is Decision-Making: Effective leadership involves making difficult decisions that balance short-term needs with long-term goals. These decisions should always reflect the best interests of the people served and the mission at hand.

Leaders must be accountable. They must have the ability to hold not only themselves accountable, but also those they lead. They must ensure that their actions, and the actions of those around them, align with core values, ethical standards, and the greater good of all. This responsibility also means being willing to listen, to acknowledge mistakes, and to learn from them. Governance thrives when leaders are open to constructive feedback and understand that they are part of a broader community, not separate from it.

A great leader must possess Integrity: the ability to be consistent, honest, and principled in his or her actions. Integrity builds trust, and trust is the cornerstone of any successful leadership relationship. A

true leader must be empathetic. Understanding the needs, struggles, and aspirations of others is essential. Empathy enables leaders to connect with people on a deeper level, ensuring that decisions reflect not just logic, but compassion.

A true leader must have Courage: Leadership often requires standing up for what is right, even when it is difficult. A courageous leader takes risks, when necessary, challenges the status quo, and remains steadfast in the face of adversity. He must be resilient as leadership is not without its setbacks. One needs the ability to persevere through challenges, adapt to changing circumstances, and keep moving forward with determination.

The ability to collaborate through networking has become increasingly imperative in modern organisations. Leadership is not a solo endeavour. It is about working with others, leveraging their strengths, and creating an environment where every voice is heard and valued. A good leader must possess decisiveness. The ability to make tough decisions, often in uncertain circumstances, is what sets apart effective leaders from others. Leaders must have the confidence to trust their judgement, while remaining open to new information and perspectives.

Governance on the other hand, is the practices and procedures through which power and authority are exercised responsibly in decision making to achieve set goals and objectives. When we speak of governance, we are referring to the systems, processes, and policies that guide the management of resources, decision-

making, and accountability in a community or organization. Agu et al. (2024) describes governance as encompassing the structures, processes, and institutions through which authority is exercised and decisions are made for the collective wellbeing of a society.

Governance refers to the framework through which leadership operates, ensuring that power is utilized wisely, justly, and for the good of all. Together, leadership and governance play a pivotal role in the success of any endeavour, whether in government, business, or community. A government, a corporation, or an institution can have the most efficient processes, but without strong leadership, those processes will not fulfil their potential. Without strong leadership, governance structures risk becoming inefficient, disconnected, or even corrupt. In any form of governance - whether in business, politics, or social organizations - leaders are the stewards of accountability, transparency, and ethical conduct. Leadership in governance involves:

- a) **Promoting Transparency:** Leaders must ensure that decisions are made openly and that there is clear communication about how and why decisions are made. Transparency fosters trust between the leaders and those they govern. It also means creating a culture of inclusivity and fairness. A leader must understand that governance is not about serving a select few, but about ensuring that all voices are heard, especially the marginalized and vulnerable. True governance requires the active engagement of stakeholders, and leaders must work to create opportunities for participation and dialogue. It is

through inclusivity that governance becomes truly democratic and just.

- b) **Ensuring Accountability:** A leader in governance holds not only themselves accountable but ensures that all individuals and bodies within the system adhere to their duties and responsibilities. Accountability is crucial in maintaining the integrity of any governing body.
- c) **Upholding Justice:** A good leader ensures that governance structures support fairness and equality. Justice is not merely about enforcing laws but about creating systems that are equitable and accessible to all.
- d) **Fostering Sustainable Development:** Leadership in governance should also aim at long-term sustainability. This means making decisions that benefit future generations, balancing economic growth, social welfare, and environmental stewardship.

Governance, at its best, reflects leadership that is not only focused on managing the present but also on anticipating and preparing for the future. Leaders in governance must be forward-thinking, adaptable, and constantly working to improve the system for future generations.

Leadership and governance are two sides of the same coin. Leadership gives governance its direction, its moral compass, and its dynamism. Governance, on the other hand, ensures that leadership remains accountable, transparent, and committed to the well-being of those it serves. Effective leadership fosters strong

governance, and good governance enhances the ability of leaders to serve their communities and organizations. As leaders, we must recognize the weight of our responsibilities and to embody the qualities that inspire others to follow.

As we reflect on the leaders in our lives, let us remember that true leadership is grounded in responsibility, nurtured by qualities of character, and defined by its ability to guide and serve others through effective governance. The work we do in leadership and governance shapes the world we live in. Let us strive to lead with purpose, integrity, and vision, and let us govern in a way that reflects the values of justice, fairness, and service.

4.0 Governance Structure in Public Universities

The governance structure of Nigerian Public Universities is in line with the British Universities system where they are established by Acts of Parliament (Oshagbemi, 2017). In the case of Nigeria, the Public Universities were established by an Act of the Federal Government (including military decrees) or an Edit by the State Government. Nwokocha et al. (2020) outlines the typical structure of a university to include:

- a) Visitor – He is the Head of Government that established the institution. The President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria for Federal Universities and the Governors for State Universities (Ekundayo & Ajayi, 2009).
- b) Chancellor – He is the highest principal officer of a university and is appointed by the Visitor. He presides over the convocations and any other conferment of degrees.

- c) Pro-Chancellor – Also appointed by the Visitor to a 4-year renewable tenure of office. He is the Chairman of the Governing Council charged with the responsibility of institutional policy making and overseeing the operations of the University. He is also responsible for matters of finance, staff conditions of service and discipline, the use and maintenance of the university property, establishment of academic programmes, engagement of staff, and mobilization of resources for the university.
- d) University Governing Council – They consist of the Chairman (Pro-Chancellor), the Vice Chancellor, Deputy Vice Chancellor(s), four members representing various public interests, four members appointed by the Senate, two members representing the Congregation, one person each from the Ministry & Alumni. Their responsibilities are the same as that of the Pro-Chancellor.
- e) The Vice-Chancellor – Yee & Razzaly (2024) describes the University's Vice-Chancellor (VC) as the chief executive and academic officer responsible for the university's overall strategic leadership and management. The VC ensures that the university meets its academic, financial, and operational objectives as well as develops implementation strategies to remain competitive. Additionally, the VC is responsible for liaison and relationship management with external stakeholders such as government, industry, parents, and the community.

- f) Senate – It is headed by the Vice Chancellor, and it is the highest decision-making body on academic matters like admissions, teaching, student discipline, and courses, etc, in line with guidelines from the NUC. It is made up of different sub-committees to decide on the various academic matters.
- g) Faculties - The academic staff, including lecturers, researchers, and scholars.
- h) Departments – This is a division of the faculty that specializes in a particular course/discipline.
- i) Congregation - The general assembly of all senior members of the University Staff both Academic and Non-Academic who hold degrees from recognised Universities, not being an honorary degree.

5.0 Leadership Selection in Public Universities

Ogona & Ololube (2022) explains that leadership is one of the basic and most important needs of a university as it is considered the solution to most organizational problems. It is a determinant of an institution's quality as the success of an institution is determined by the leader (Wali & Ololube, 2015; Heffernan et al, 2021). Thus, for a university to succeed and attain its goals, the leadership selection process, retention, and succession are very important as it is critical to maintaining academic excellence and institutional stability.

The leadership selection process in Nigerian public universities, particularly for the appointment of Vice-Chancellors and other Principal Officers, is guided by a combination of statutory provisions, university regulations, and government policies. They include the

age of the candidate, academic qualification, experiences in teaching, research, professional, managerial, administration, honours and fellowship of appropriate societies/institutes, relevant trainings, ICT proficiency, robust societal linkages, impeccable character, and community service. The process requires the Council and Senate Joint Search Committee to screen and recommend three names in order of merit to the Governing Council who will appoint the VC and notify the Visitor through the Honourable Minister. Below is an outline of the typical process, though it may vary slightly depending on the university's governing rules:

a) Vacancy Declaration

When the tenure of a Vice-Chancellor (VC) or any principal officer (such as a Registrar or Bursar) is about to expire, the University's Governing Council declares the position vacant via an official notice/advertisement in national newspapers, the university's website, and other platforms, inviting applications from qualified candidates.

b) Eligibility Criteria

Applicants for the position of VC must meet specific requirements, including:

- i. Academic rank (usually a full professor for at least 10 years).
- ii. A demonstrable track record in research, teaching, and administration.
- iii. Visionary leadership and strategic planning capabilities.

- iv. Adherence to the age limit, which is sometimes specified (e.g., not exceeding 65 years at the time of appointment).

c) Application Process

Interested candidates submit a detailed application, including:

- i. Curriculum Vitae (CV).
- ii. Vision statement for the University.
- iii. Supporting documents (credentials, publications, and administrative achievements).

d) Shortlisting by a Search Committee

The Governing Council appoints a Sub Committee to review applications based on the stated criteria and subsequently, shortlists eligible candidates.

e) Interview and Selection by a Joint Council and Senate Committee

The interview panel is composed of members from the Governing Council and Senate, ensuring representation of both administrative and academic interests. Shortlisted candidates are invited for interviews, which typically include:

- i. Presentation of their vision for the University.
- ii. Assessment of their academic and administrative credentials.

f) Final Appointment by the Governing Council

On conclusion of the selection process, the Committee makes a recommendation to the Governing Council, usually presenting the top three candidates ranked in order of preference. The Governing

Council deliberates and selects one candidate based on merit and/or consensus.

g) Ratification by the Visitor

For State Universities, the appointment is subject to ratification by the Visitor, who is the Governor of the respective state.

h) Announcement

The decision is formally announced, and the appointed Vice-Chancellor assumes office. All other positions are appointed by the Governing Council.

5.1 Challenges in the Leadership Selection Process

Ordinarily, due process that is devoid of political and financial influence should be allowed to reign, thus allowing universities the right to screen and appoint candidates without any form of bias or external influence. Despite the structured framework, the selection process is often times marred by extraneous issues which include:

- a) **Politicization:** External influences, including political pressure and nepotism, can affect the selection process. Ogunode et al. (2023) explain university education politicization as the application of politics in the administration and management of universities. Our universities have become increasingly local with majority of academic and non-academic staff sponsored by local politicians and other leaders from the host communities. Political affiliation has also assumed overarching importance in the selection process.
- b) **Ethnic and Religious Bias:** Tribalism and favouritism sometimes undermine the pursuit of meritocracy. The selection process is

to attract, secure, create, promote, and assemble a team of competent, professional, efficient, career-minded, and productive human resources, but this is often hindered by factors relating to ethnicity and religion. The role of Federal universities as melting pots to foster national unity and integration has been lost in the process. The federal character principle is observed more in the breach than in practice.

- c) **Corruption:** The selection process for principal officers (Vice Chancellors, Bursars, Registrars etc) is now riddled with corruption as competition is fierce and ruthless. Members of Governing Councils view this assignment as the most lucrative aspect of their duties and often bow to the highest bidder. Principal officers exert enormous influence especially in procurement (Tenders Board) and payments for projects, goods and services. Contractors have been known to sponsor candidates for Vice-Chancellor in return for patronage.
- d) **Involvement in Elections:** INEC involvement of University Leaders in the conduct of elections has become counter productive as politicians now sponsor candidates for the position of Vice-Chancellor in anticipation of returning the favour either to them or their preferred candidates to various electoral offices.
- e) **Role of Staff Unions:** Staff unions are taking more than a passing interest in who emerges as Vice-Chancellor, Registrar or Bursar. Sometimes, they can be divisive and overbearing, brewing conflicts and crisis in the institutions.

- f) **Lack of Inclusiveness:** The odds are stacked against external candidates, and until recently, almost firmly shut, against the female gender. Overcoming cultural barriers and perceptions is crucial for equal opportunity and the enthronement of merit and inclusiveness.
- g) **Lack of Transparency:** Complaints about opaque procedures have been observed in the selection process.
- h) **Protests and Litigations:** Disputes often arise when stakeholders perceive the process as unfair. This is often the case where the prevalent practices disregard due process in favour of various unethical methods where merit is overlooked for mediocrity. This is an open invitation to protests and strikes among other avenues to convey the disapproval of stakeholders.
- i) **Brain drain:** To source and recruit the right person for the job often proves to be a big challenge. Akinwale et al (2023) argued that the education sector has witnessed the exit of its best hands in multitudes in recent times due to the continuous brain-drain of Nigeria's university lecturers to other countries.

5.2 Recommendations for Improvement

- a) There should be accountability on the part of decision-makers during the leadership selection process to ensure that a transparent process with clear criteria is implemented.
- b) The autonomy of universities needs to be Strengthened to minimize political interference.

- c) There should be an independent monitoring mechanism throughout the selection process to ensure compliance with guidelines.
- d) Promotion of stakeholder engagement to enhance trust in the process.

6.0 Governance Challenges in Public Universities

Governance in universities refers to the frameworks, processes, and structures that are applied to manage operations to achieve the intended outcomes (Bianchi & Caperchione, 2022). Accordingly, for public universities to design and deliver high-quality education, develop and ensure sustainability while playing their critical role in shaping societies, there is a need for appropriate governance. Oftentimes, this is not the case as Public Universities face complex governance challenges that can hinder their effectiveness. Some of the most common governance challenges faced by public universities include.

6.1 Funding

Omobola & Success (2019) maintained that the major challenge of Nigerian universities is inadequate funding. Public universities are often heavily reliant on government funding. Underfunding of education has affected all aspects of university activities (Wali & Ololube, 2015). This is further buttressed by Ogunode & Musa (2020) who emphasized that our higher institution education systems are in dire need of funds to cater for both their capital and recurrent needs". The major source of funding for most public universities,

particularly for capital projects is the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund). As attested by most Tertiary Institutions, TETFund Interventions through funding and project management, have been pivotal to the development and stability of public institutions in Nigeria. This dependency on government funding can often create challenges in times of economic downturn which leads to budget cuts and reduced resources. Additionally, government funding models can sometimes favour certain disciplines over others, leading to imbalances in resource allocation. Jacob (2020) identified the implications of underfunding public universities to include: inadequate infrastructural facilities, shortage of academic staff, poor quality of education, brain drain, and strike actions.

6.2 Autonomy

Public university autonomy in Nigeria is an ongoing debate marked by a complex interplay of government oversight, financial dependence, and the pursuit of academic as well as institutional interdependence. Sabo & Junaidu (2016) defined institutional autonomy as the necessary degree of independence from external interference that the University requires for its internal organization and governance. The International Association of Universities (IAU) policy statement gives institutions the fundamental right to academic autonomy/freedom, administrative autonomy, and financial autonomy. In addition, the Nigerian Constitution and various Education Acts acknowledge the need for university autonomy. Accordingly, it is expected that autonomy should be easily operational in our institutions, but this is not the case. This can be attributed to the multifaceted nature of autonomy in public

universities which is often caught in a delicate balancing act between the need for government oversight, transparency/accountability, and the university's need for academic freedom and self-governance. Wali & Ololube (2015) posit that the existing political arrangement has influenced the control over policy formulation, management, and planning processes in universities in Nigeria. While government funding and public accountability are essential to the effective operations of a university, excessive control can stifle innovation, limit responsiveness to changing needs, and erode the very principles of higher education that public universities are meant to uphold.

6.3 Leadership and Management:

Ineffective governance structures can lead to bureaucratic inefficiencies, slow decision-making, and a lack of responsiveness to changing needs. Leadership quality can make or mar an institution as lack of experience, poor leadership skills, or a focus on short-term goals can negatively impact the institution's long-term aspiration.

6.4 Resource Allocation

Solanke & Olatunji, (2015) asserted that resources are allocated due to perceived relative needs and are constrained by the availability of resources determined by fiscal policies and regulations. This brings about internal competition for resources in parallel to the existing competition for resources with other public sectors, making it difficult to secure adequate funding for research, maintenance of infrastructure/utilities, and faculty development.

6.5 Transparency and Accountability

Lack of transparency in the allocation of resources can erode trust and lead to accusations of favouritism or inefficiency. Onah et al. (2021) explain accountability to be answerability for the completion of deliverables and transparency as openness of processes or procedures. One of the major deterrents to achieving set objectives is a lack of accountability and transparency in the judicious allocation of scarce resources in Public Universities.

6.6 Inadequate Infrastructure

Many public universities have ageing infrastructure, which can hinder research, teaching, and student life. Inadequate infrastructure can exacerbate existing inequalities, limiting access to quality education for students and hampering internationalization and global ranking of Nigerian universities.

6.7 Technological Advancement

The rapid pace of technological advancement has created a digital divide, with some universities lagging in adopting new technologies for teaching, research, and administrative processes.

6.8 Inadequate Manpower

Inadequate staffing especially of academic staff poses a huge challenge in Nigerian public universities. According to Omolola & Jacob (2022), the student-to-lecturer ratio is unmanageable and presents a gap that needs to be addressed. Most recently, TETFund implemented a special Intervention for the upgrade of equipment in Workshops and Laboratories in selected universities and

polytechnics/colleges of education (technical). In the course of visitations to various workshops and laboratories in the institutions across geopolitical zones, we observed that there was a shortage of technologists and technicians to operate and maintain laboratory equipment in all the institutions visited.

7.0 Leadership Selection Process as Impetus to Good Governance in Public Universities

It is acknowledged that effective leadership is one of the greatest challenges of Nigerian Universities (Oshagbemi, 2017). Hence the importance of an effective leadership selection process to select the best among equals. A transparent and inclusive selection process can deliver leaders who make informed and strategic decisions that benefit the University. Such leaders usually embrace accountability and drive academic excellence, reducing the likelihood of conflicts, corruption, and mismanagement (Nwokocha et al, 2020). Steve-Beke et al. (2020) posit that the leadership in tertiary institutions have a burden of making sure that quality is continuously attained in the content, process, and output of the institution.

A diverse and representative leadership selection process ensures that various stakeholders' interests are represented fostering a sense of inclusivity and ownership, thus, boosting both staff and students morale (Asiyai, 2015; Wali & Ololube, 2015; Awodiji, 2021; Ekunday, 2012). Leaders who emerge from such a process typically champion consultation and collective decision-making. They can manage university resources to achieve a status comparable to

global standards. They carry the burden of responsibility to meet the expectations of stakeholders and pursue progressive ideas and initiatives in the areas of research, innovation, and overall student success (Irtivange & Orsaaly, 2000). On the contrary, a flawed leadership selection process can lead to conflict and instability, poor decision-making, lack of transparency/accountability, and stagnation or decline in academic standards. In such an environment, both staff and students feel alienated and disengaged, feeling that their views are neither sought, heard, or valued (Otobo, 2016).

I want to bring to light one important criterion that can be included in the leadership selection process, and that is exposure. Leadership exposure is vital to facilitating good governance and achievement of the institution's developmental goals and aspirations.

8.0 Strategies for Enhancing the Quality of Governance in Public Universities.

Governance challenges in public universities are complex and require multifaceted solutions. I will focus on a few key areas:

8.1 Strengthening University Autonomy

University autonomy as explained by Ojedele and Ilusanya (2006), is protection from political and oversight interference in the daily administration and management of the institution. Oshagbemi (2017) maintained that over-regulation and excessive interference lessens institutional flexibility which is essential to improve efficiency and productivity. Striking the right balance between government oversight and university autonomy is crucial for the success of

public universities as it promotes academic freedom, fosters innovation, and ensures the long-term vitality of these institutions. Some steps to be taken to achieve this include:

- a) Granting Greater Financial Autonomy: Increase the proportion of funding universities generate directly, reducing reliance on government allocations and allowing for greater control over resource allocation.
- b) Decentralizing Decision-Making: Empower universities to make more decisions at the institutional level, particularly regarding curriculum development, research priorities, and faculty appointments.
- c) Ensuring Independent Governing Councils; Strengthen the autonomy of university governing councils, ensuring they are composed of qualified individuals with diverse expertise and a commitment to academic excellence.

8.2 Increase Funding

I believe this is the solution that you are most interested in. There are several ways that this can be done, the obvious is more government allocations. Other ways to improve funding are sharing costs, diversifying income sources, creating new sources of income, building partnerships at home and abroad, and creating wealth beyond teaching and research. These shall include ventures related to their core business of education delivery and services such as clinical medical services, ICT consultancy, agricultural ventures, vocational and enterprise centres/innovation hubs and commercialization of research output.

8.3 Institutionalizing a Culture of Transparency and Accountability

Agu et al. (2024) explain transparency as the accessibility and clarity of information related to government actions, decisions, and policies. Accountability involves stewardship and providing an explanation/justification for actions and decisions and accepting responsibility for the consequences of actions. Ojiagu et al. (2020) assert that accountability denotes reliability. The Universities are obligated to be open through responsive communication about all processes of budgeting, procurement, and decision-making as well as every other facet of university operations to build trust. Adeusi et al. (2024) asserted that stakeholder trust and confidence are essential for the sustainability and success of any institution. There should be strict upholding and enforcement of university laws, rules and guidelines in all aspects of university administration.

8.4 Prioritizing Academic Excellence:

This entails Implementing robust, transparent systems for hiring and promoting faculty based on merit, expertise, and scholarly achievements and sustaining investment in faculty development through professional development, research training, and skill-building programs as well as encouraging a research culture and fostering innovation are key success factors.

8.5 Embracing Technological Advancement

Education delivery systems are changing; and investing in digital infrastructure; promoting technology integration and implementing programs to enhance digital literacy for faculty, staff, and students are crucial to this transition, and improving the learning experience of students/graduates.

8.6 Addressing Challenges Related to Political Interference

As much as possible, universities should be insulated from political activities such as Vice Chancellors serving as retuning officers in elections. Otherwise, a randomized, process, excluding Vice-Chancellors, should be put in place. Consideration may be given to nominations by staff unions or attestations by them.

8.7 Promoting Inclusivity and Diversity

Our universities should promote diversity in leadership by encouraging and supporting the representation of women, minorities, and individuals from diverse backgrounds in university leadership positions. Employing a merit-based selection process will foster gender equality and social justice.

8.8 Building Strategic Partnerships

Universities should foster collaboration and seek both international and local partnerships leading institutions with private companies and organizations to support research, innovation, academic exchange and student internships.

They should also explore avenues to engage with alumni and communities to create awareness, mobilize support, and build a strong network of advocates for public universities.

8.9 Implementing Continuous Evaluation and Improvement

This should include: -

- i. **Establishing Performance Metrics:** Develop robust metrics to evaluate the effectiveness of university governance, including measures of academic quality, student satisfaction, and institutional impact.

- ii. **Regular Reviews and Assessments:** Conduct periodic reviews and assessments to identify areas for improvement and implement necessary adjustments.
- iii. **Fostering a Culture of Continuous Improvement:** Cultivate a culture of continuous improvement within universities, promoting open dialogue, feedback mechanisms, and a commitment to excellence.
- iv. **Staff Welfare:** General staff re-orientation, capacity building and improved remuneration/welfare are sine-qua non for any improvements in our education system.

By implementing these recommendations, Nigeria can pave the way for a more robust, efficient, and equitable governance in Public Universities which would ultimately contribute to the nation's long-term development and prosperity.

9.0 Conclusion

Nigeria is finely poised to reap demographic dividends from our young and rapidly growing population. To do this, we need to invest in our people; to prepare our youths as global citizens to fill the manpower gaps in the fast integrating global economy. Universities are responsible for educating future leaders and producing the high-level technical capacities that constitute the bedrock for economic growth and development. Thus, to achieve a high quality of education in our public universities, there is a compelling need for good governance and collaborative efforts of all stakeholders, including the government, university leaders,

faculty, staff, students, and everyone involved in the Public Tertiary Education Ecosystem.

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