

**THE EFFECT OF GOVERNMENT POLICIES ON UNIVERSITY  
ADMINISTRATORS: A Review Of Nigeria**

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**ABSTRACT**

*This paper aims to look into the effect of government policies on university administrators. It focuses on major issues affecting university administrators in positions of authority as well as obstacles affecting the implementation, development and improvement of quality management. The discussion is centred on key issues identified by the university administrators as shortcomings in their services, an approach which has not been considered by previous studies. A standard literature review was adopted for the study, with attention being paid to past literature relating to government policies and quality management in universities. The paper adopts a qualitative approach in which the interview is the only research instrument used. A purposive sampling method was employed to select 16 participants, of which 13 took part in the study. The study reveals that government policies and practices on the implementation of decisions influence or affect how the administrators respond to the development of the university. Likewise, the study finds that in many circumstances government policies in practice are unrealistic as they do not allow room for the involvement of administrators.*

**Keywords** – administrator, government policy, implementation, university.

**INTRODUCTION**

In recent times many stakeholder have continued to complain about the operation of Nigerian universities, especially the manner in which the administrators handle the daily running of these institutions. A few researchers (Okebukola, 2002; Oyebamiji, 2005; Ogbogu, 2010) have looked into the causes of the complaints, especially with regard to how they affect the country's public universities. Many of these researchers (Adeyemi, 2001; Hartnett, 2000; Oyebamiji, 2005; Ehiamentor, 2005; Obasi et al., 2010) have focused on the general issues

(such as finances, access, leadership, gender factors) that they assume have caused administrators to act in a certain way. However, the above mentioned studies have not taken a step back to look at what the university administrators consider a hindrance to their services. This aspect of the study has been unexplored both in the literature and in practice, therefore this study aims to fill this gap by exploring the opinion of administrators who are directly involved in the delivery of the services the stakeholders complain about.

University administrators are those who are employed politically by the governing council of the university. These administrators must have satisfied some basic requirements stipulated by the National Universities Commission (NUC) such as academic qualifications, year of work and the relevancy of past duties to the role of administrator. In addition, the university governing body will consider a number of other factor such as the moral and behaviour, integrity and attitude, applicants past record as well as religious, ethnicity and character among other factors. The decisions of the governing councils vary from one institution to another depending on the nature and formulation of the university. It is important to point out here that this study focuses only on the three tiers of Nigerian universities: federal, state and private. Each of these universities have their own mission and vision statement written in the form of policies that they hope to accomplish through their administrators. Therefore any appointed administrator will have to work towards fulfilling or implementing these policies.

The term ‘policy’ refers to a plan or course of action linked to a governing body, a political party or a business organisation with the intention of influencing actions, determining decisions and other matters (Okwori and Okwori, 2007; Hauwa, 2012; Ogbogu, 2013), while a university is an institution of higher learning that provides training, teaching and research opportunities and develops the community (Fabunmi, 2005; Adetunji, 2014a). Therefore, in order for Nigerian universities to function effectively, the Nigerian government, through the NUC, has developed a plan of action or policy for every university in the country to follow. In most cases these policies are handed over to the governing council of each university and then passed on to the chief administrator appointed as the vice chancellor. The vice chancellor is the executive director of the institution. He or she is always supported by the registrar, who is the custodian of all the documents and recruitment at the university (Adetunji, 2014b, 2015a), and likewise the bursar, who takes care of financial matters at the

institution. The university librarian also provides support to the executive administrator by providing a detailed inventory of all literature both physical in term of books and journals and electronic in the form of e-journals and other Internet-based formats. This group of administrators work together as the management with the support of the different committee members from departmental to faculty level (Adetunji, 2014a).

## **RESEARCH**

The administration of Nigerian university education is legally provided for in the acts and statutes established by the federal government through the NUC. The government is expected to provide the enabling policy and legal framework for universities to function (Okebukola, 2006; Okwori and Okwori, 2007). As explained by Saint et al. (2003), university administration revolves around the vice chancellor who is both the administrative and the academic head of the institution. He is supported by one or sometimes two deputy vice chancellors on administrative and academic matters and a number of senior academic staff such as the heads of faculties/schools, colleges and departments. Similarly, Erero (1996) established that the registrar, the bursar, the librarian and other administrative staff assist the vice chancellor in managing the affairs of the university. Many of these staff work on the administrative and academic activities carried out through the system of committees for the council and senate. Adamolekun (2007) has stated that universities are particularly complex institutions that have to take a variety of decisions and choices which make the university activities even more complex as the needs, expectations and requirements of students, staff, employers and society change. All of these place a premium on good policies.

A case study by Akilagpa (1992) showed that government policies are not only important for effective institutional management, but also for ensuring sustainability and good practices throughout the whole university system and its institutional development and transformation. Abdulrahman and Ogbaondah (2007) are of the opinion that issues of government policy in the administration of Nigerian universities are entrenched in the national policy on education. Saint et al. (2003) postulated that the national policies on university education are geared towards ensuring that the goals of university education are achieved. They further claimed that government policies in university education define targets for departments, roles and responsibilities of individuals in management departments and faculties in order to improve

service delivery to students in terms of teaching and learning. They also suggested that government policies for the appointment, promotion and reward of staff should be transparent processes for the effective administration of the institution (Abdulrahman and Ogbaondah, 2007; Obasi et al., 2010; Adetunji, 2015a).

The national education policy review by the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1981) stated that Nigerian education policy was an instrument of change, the product of evolution following historical antecedents. A paper by Ajayi (1998) suggested that it is the aim of the Nigerian government to use education as a vehicle to promote national development. In his presentation Ajayi clarified that education in Nigeria is more of a public enterprise that has witnessed government complete intervention in some cases and in other case has experienced government dynamic participation. Further to the national policies on education, Adamolekun (2007) affirmed that shared governance of the university community is considered as a vital consultative process which involves persons or group of person (s) in decision making through meetings or committee system or combination of both. He concluded that shared governance would be an appropriate approach in the Nigeria university only if the scope of academic administration as heads of faculties, colleges, schools and departments/institutes are specified. Adamolekun added that such specified scope and roles should be tailored towards delivering of quality teaching and research for which the senate, presided over by the vice chancellor, pronounces the results of examinations and setting broad directions clear duties. With regard to the administrative dimension, Adamolekun (2007) argued that although teamwork is appropriate and necessary, accountability and final authority lie with the vice chancellor.

Likewise, Aina (2007) came to the conclusion that in Nigeria, responsibility and decisions on institutional policy-making reside with the university's governing council whose membership is normally drawn from the government, the university and organisations from the private sector. She explained that academic affairs are managed by the university senate which possesses full responsibility to do so. Conversely, Clark (2001) explained that the main feature of any Nigerian university is its relatively fragmented organisational structure which is managed by a system of committees. Clark pointed out that Nigeria has administrative policies for universities which define the roles and responsibilities of the administration,

including the legislative requirements and legal obligations of the governing boards. The administrator ensures that all staff members of the university are aware of the nature of their duties and responsibilities (Adetunji, 2015b).

## **METHODOLOGY**

This paper adopts a qualitative approach using in-depth individual interviews as the key research instrument to gather data for the study. Thirty selected universities were considered appropriate for the study using geographical location. Four were finally selected, two public and two private universities, using a purposive sampling method to cover all three tiers of universities in Nigeria (that is federal, state and private). The criteria used for the selection of four universities were disciplinary balance, year of service and population. Four informants were selected from each of the universities according to criteria such as their role and involvement in the administrative activities of the university, their position of authority and their role in decision-making. The informants selected held the posts of vice chancellor, registrar, bursar and director of academic planning. Although the university librarian is also a key administrator the post was not considered for inclusion because the study comprised research into what affects academics and it was observed that the post of director of academic planning covered most library-related issues in the study. This is not intended to undermine the position of the university librarian. However, the set of administrators selected above were considered for this study because of the key roles they play in the delivery of the services offered by Nigerian universities. Sixteen participants emerged at the end of the selection process, although three of the selected informants were unable to participate in the study being engaged in other university activities and were out of office on official duties during the data collection period.

The interviews with the 13 administrators lasted for 30 to 45 minutes, depending on the communication flow of the participants. The interview provided a rich understanding of the effect of government policies on university administrators. The use of in-depth interviews as a research instrument in this study had the benefit of offering a chance for in-depth exploration and permitting a better understanding of participants' views, thoughts, beliefs, perceptions, feelings and experiences in relation to government policies. An exploratory analysis was used to discuss the findings. The findings were categorised into themes as

they occur in the study, the themes being selected based on their importance to the university as well as their relevance within the administrators' roles and responsibilities. All the administrators who took part in the study had assumed the duties of their office in the last three to four years. The universities selected were assigned numbers from 1 to 4 based on alphabetical order (see Table 1) where: **A = vice chancellor; B = registrar; C = bursar; D = director of academic planning**. University 1 is private, university 2 is public, university 3 is public and university 4 is private. Thus: A1 = vice chancellor from first university; B1 = registrar from first university; C1 = bursar from first university; D1 = director of academic planning from first university. Likewise: A4 = vice chancellor from fourth university; B4 = registrar from fourth university; C4 = bursar from fourth university; D4 = director of academic planning from fourth university.

**Table 1**

University	Type	Administrators			
		Vice-chancellor	Registrar	Bursar	Director of academic planning
1	Private	—	*	*	*
2	Public	*	*	—	*
3	Public	*	*	*	*
4	Private	—	*	*	*

## FINDINGS

The findings from the 13 participants suggested the following. One director of academic planning from a public university explained that government policies have both negative and positive effects on the administrators' professional practice. He maintained that government policies are a mandate that need to be followed in order to enhance promotion, while a few participants mentioned that government policies do not have anything to do with their professional practice (D2). One director of academic planning pointed out that governments

do not create room for academia to develop themselves, even the belief of the education protectorate was that education would create room for economic development that emerged from academia personal development. But the traditional system of the working environment has not encouraged academia to develop themselves to that level (D3). It was on this note that a vice chancellor stated clearly that the professional practice of Nigerian academia has been affected due to the high demand of students enrolling for university education (A2). He mentioned that the pool of staff available was not able to cater for the demands of students. He held that university managements can do nothing about these issues; instead they have admitted more students to meet other demands and the university's immediate needs that the government has failed to cater for. Meanwhile three participants – two registrars and one bursar (B2, B4 and C3) – expressed their concern by putting forward a similar example, as revealed by one bursar in a more simple explanation than that provided elsewhere:

*I have to teach and mark 2,500 students' scripts for a course and I teach four or more other courses, tell me how I can think about my professional practice? (C3)*

The issue the participants were emphasising here was the effect of overcrowding on the administration of the service delivery. Overcrowding does not only have an effect on the lecturer who is teaching the students, other resources such as the library, the reading room and other non-academic administration also suffer. One registrar mentioned that when student populations are higher than the capacity of the university, then the university is compromising on standards and this will have an effect on the general output of the university in term of quality (B2). The bursar established that, among other issues, overcrowding is a major problem that affects the implementation of government policies (C3). Other factors that were identified are discussed below.

#### ***Low wages and late payment***

Some participants identified low wages as a negative factor that affects best practice in the university. One bursar identified staff not being paid enough or on time as a major problem that has emerged to the detriment of the Nigerian university education system over the last two decades (C3). He emphasised this further by means of an example:

*I am in need of money, and government has not paid my salary, then one of my students heard me complaining about my financial need, and the student managed to help me out. When the student writes exam and failed my course, do you think it will be possible for me to fail the student who helped me out of my financial problem?*  
(C3)

Similarly, one vice chancellor also indicated that when academic staff are paid low wages, or not paid when due, those that are hard working will look for an additional job to support themselves (A2). He pointed out that the time they invest in another job is time they should have invested in their teaching or research work. This will affect their morale when they get back in the classroom. On a similar note, a dean of the faculty of a public university stated that when the government does not pay staff salaries when they are due, less attention is paid to staff welfare. This will definitely affect how effectively a principal officer discharges his or her duties (C1). One director of academic planning is not in the exemption of the view that non-payment of salaries would have impact on administrator's attitudes. He claimed that there is no written document on how to implement government policies or provide support for the end-users. He mentioned that on many occasions, funds are not provided to maintain or increase staffing levels, materials are not available to aid staff effectiveness, nor are there other resources that can promote learning in the classroom (D3). He gave the following example:

*If I am not adequately funded, and if I don't have good transportation and the university expect me to engage in networking of institution, which involves travelling in and out of the institution. It will be difficult for me to contribute positively in my role because our road is not good and I have spent all the working hours travelling, when will I have time to rest, not to talk of contributing to the institution (D3).*

The academic planning director claimed further that all these little facilities are what can influence principal officer positively because agents cannot work in isolation.

Another administrator added that, apart from being paid low wages, if you go to some universities, there is no equipment to work with – the lecturers are frustrated because they cannot do their work and some of them have moved into other sectors such as business,



government services or politics. Moreover, although they have spent several years acquiring knowledge and passing that knowledge onto students, their salary is not good enough to survive on (D2 and D4). A director of academic planning from a private university lamented that in Nigerian universities there are still lots of things that need a total clean-up. He also emphasised that late payment of salaries would always affect the effectiveness of principal officers (D4).

### ***Funding***

According to the bursar from a private university, universities do not have enough funding to put in place what they really want, especially when it comes to teaching and learning (C4). His statement was amplified by the director of academic planning for a public university who identified low funding as a pathway to overstress the teaching staff, which has in turn a negative effect on their professional practice (D2). He elaborated further, saying that if the government provided more funding for institutions, then they would probably do more to improve the quality of service they render to the students as well as to the community. A vice chancellor of a public university also mentioned that, if the institution is well funded, then university staff could participate in international conferences and research (A2).

On the other hand, a director of academic planning acknowledged that government policies also have a positive effect on practice, for instance through TETFUND, a government body where junior lecturers from public higher institutions can get fully sponsored for further studies anywhere in the world, a scheme which has really helped:

*I attend conferences where latest research outcomes are being discussed and this affects the way I teach students, as I have to update my notes very often rather than rely on old notes. (D2)*

Likewise, a bursar from a private university is in agreement with a director of academic planning from a public university, that government policies do have an influence, both positive and negative (C4 and D2). The bursar went on to say that, for instance, the government had requested that every university should prepare a budget on capital projects and the running expenses for the session, and make sure that their budgets match their income in order not to jeopardise student teaching and learning. She continued:

*Government policies guide me to match the cost, the minimal cost that we need because if this is not done, it will affect the level of affairs in the university. So we do this to match our cost to the minimal that can give us the best that we want. By this, we find that we can bring our cost very low such that students learning will not be jeopardised by lack of fund to pay the fees. (C4)*

### ***Conflict with staff unions***

One bursar from a private university indicated that on many occasions government policies conflict with the purpose for which university education was established. The bursar explained that these conflicts may be influence through various interest groups such as labour unions, that is the Academic Staff Union of the Universities (ASUU) for lecturers, the Senior Academic Staff Union of the Universities (SANU) for senior academics staff, Non-Academic Staff Union (NASU) for administrators and National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS) for students. These conflicts many be linked with various issues such as late payment of staff salaries, lack of infrastructure, increment in tuition fees and many other issues among others (C1). As a result, the contributions and influences of these various groups are very powerful in the transformation process of education. The bursar continued that conflict could take any form – take, for instance, ‘policies of academic retirement’. The bursar stated that it was only in the previous year that the federal government had changed academic staff policies. Notwithstanding this, the government has now increased the retirement age from 65 to 70 years. He continued:

*I am a Professor; I am 65 years old and my head is still correct, this is the time I can help my colleagues, mentor them to be a good successor. (C1)*

Surprisingly, a vice chancellor for a public university declared that government policies are very important in promoting understanding between government and staff unions to avoid strikes and other workplace disputes that harm the nation’s education (A2), while a registrar from a public university claimed that there should be continuous understanding between all unions to foster peace in the development of education (B1). A vice chancellor from a private university also supported the claim made by the vice chancellor in the public university, that

government policies need to promote peace within the institution if those policies are to be relevant to the end-users (A3).

*Creating access to education*

According to a director of academic planning from a private university, government policies have been set up to ensure that everybody receives a good education. But in reality, due to the large number of students who want to study at university for further training coupled with the small number of universities available to accommodate the demands of these candidates, it is difficult to achieve this objective (D1). Two participants also complained that politicians should not be campaigning to offer free education to students again, but should rather be campaigning to create more universities, educate more lecturers and provide more facilities that will enhance learning, if their priority is to increase access to university education (A2 and A4). Another administrator also added:

*I think government policies should be predicated and focused on university sustainability rather than access. He pointed that if access is created and there is no facility to training those who gain access into the university then creating access is of no use. (C1)*

Subsequently, a director of academic planning took a contradictory view to that of the bursar (C1), explaining that the government had established policies which stated that every candidate admitted into the university must be assured of receiving quality training (D2). He understood that the NUC was established for this purpose as well as to monitor the activities of the universities. Similarly, a vice chancellor of a private university suggested that government policies should ensure that there is quality education in Nigeria (A4). They say that every Nigerian should be given the chance to attend university regardless of creed, race, colour, religion and beliefs – in other words that everybody should be given a chance to gain an education.

Absolutely no one should be denied access to education in Nigeria. A vice chancellor mentioned that institutions must be open to everyone at all times (A3). One participant, a director of academic planning stated that having more universities in the country is more

important in other to create access but should not be at the cost of quality. He stressed that although things are changing now but prior to this period gaining access to the university is a matter of whom you know in terms of political office holders (C2). A vice chancellor from a public university commented on the fact that the government is concerned about access:

*What we now have to do is to ensure we do not take more than what our capacity can cater for (A2).*

## **CONCLUSION**

Education at the university level is a vital component of development at the country level. Government policies and practices accepted in the university system have calamitous influences on the socio-political and economic life of the country at large, which ultimately is the employer of graduates of the university system. Government policies and procedures for implementing decisions influence or affect the decisions of administrators on the provision of facilities (e.g. libraries, classrooms, laboratories, student accommodation, workshops, equipment, etc.) and best practices, the need for which is important. It was observed and affirmed that university management and administrative practices in Nigeria function by means of a committee system which is largely considered to be undemocratic. The committees require university administrators to discuss in broad terms matters that affect the welfare and career of students and staff. As the senate is the highest authority on academic matters, that body needs to take decisions in the best interest of the university, especially on issues concerning the process and mode of examinations, examination malpractices, the validity of curricular content, the prompt release of results, unprofessional or unethical conduct, and so on.

Likewise from the study, it was observed that government policies and practices seriously affecting the administration of universities have been identified as being unrealistic management policies, the over-enrolment of students, inadequate funding, a lack of infrastructural facilities and many others. These factors have led to the disruption of academic activities in the form of student unrest, poor class attendance, the production of poor quality graduates, strikes by the labour unions, disillusioned lecturers and the outright voluntary withdrawal of students from universities. All these problems have a direct effect on

the university administrators, which inevitably affect the way they discharge their duties. Although this study was restricted to a consideration of the effect of government policies on university administrators, it was observed during the study that further work also needs to be carried out on how government policies affect the students as well as the end-users of university graduates. This study does not claimed to have covered other aspects such as the catchment area, character commission or sudden changes in political office holders but acknowledged and suggested that future studies can be carried out to examine these issues in greater detail.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Administrators who manage government policies and practice in the Nigerian university system should be allow to work within the goals set by the institution's vision that are achievable, realistic and knowledge-driven. Educational management practices and policies should function in tandem in order to generate the expected and desired outcomes. To remedy the problematic situation in the university system the government should take action, for example a reduction in or zero intrusion into the university system. Government funding should not be discriminatory, since all universities are working toward developing the national economy. The government should go far and deep enough to end the decline in the university system standards and overhaul its university policies to ensure they meet the demands of the job market and society.

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