

ADMINISTRATIVE AUTONOMY AND THE MANAGEMENT OF UNIVERSITIES IN CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract: The study sought to investigate administrative autonomy and effective management of universities in Cross River State, Nigeria. One research question was posed and one hypothesis was postulated for the study. The study adopted the ex-post facto research design. The study covered the two public universities in Cross River State Nigeria, namely University of Calabar and Cross River University of Technology. The population of the study comprised all staff (academic and non-academic) in the two public universities in Cross River State, Nigeria. In all, a total of 857 Staff, academic and non-academic in each institution were randomly selected as sample for the study. The instrument for data collection was a 30 item questionnaire titled “Administrative Autonomy and Management of Universities Questionnaire”. A test retest method was use to ascertain the reliability of the instrument. The result shows that the reliability coefficient stood at .83 to .96, this makes the instrument to be valid and reliable. The instrument of data collection was validated by test and measurement experts before it was personally administered by the researcher. Data collected was analyzed using the Pearson Product Moment correlation analysis. Findings showed that there was significant relationship between administrative autonomy and effective management of universities. Among other things, the study recommends the reform of university education achieve the purpose of its establishment.

Keywords: Administrative, Autonomy, Management, Universities, Cross River State, Nigeria.

1. INTRODUCTION

The goal of higher education the world over is to produce skilled manpower for national growth and development. This is why huge financial allocation is set aside from the annual budget for its development. The extent to which a public a public university is able to actualize the overall objectives of its establishment depends largely on the nature of administrative practices obtainable in such institution. An institution with quality administrative practices will always produce good result. This is why this paper is concern on examining the role administrative autonomy will play in effective management of university education in Nigeria.

For some years now, the topic of autonomy in public universities in Nigeria has remained a consistent issue among stakeholders in higher education. While it is acceptable for government to put checks on the activities of universities to ensure accountability of public funds, some authorities believe that universities should be given the freedom to operate without government interference. The challenge of maintaining a balance between university administration and government interference in the running of the institutions is an unending debate among concern public in the system. According to Babalola (2014) the issue of how to address the challenges of accountability in universities for public funds sung into them in one hand and the ability of university managements to take key decision on pertinent issues that affect them, are issues which cannot be detached from the desired reforms in university education in Nigeria.

According to Akinnaso (2016) there are two historical perspectives when discussing the concept of administrative autonomy in universities. The first is the classical view, which sees administrative autonomy in universities in terms of complete freedom in decision-making, financial management, general administration, staff and academic control within the institution. During the first generation of university education, funding was through donations and free will assistance

from well meaning individuals, and so government had little or no interference because of the little role it played on funding. On the other hand, the second view sees autonomy in university administration as a contemporary development. This is because after Second World War, most governments all over the world began to introduce welfare programmes such as expansion of higher educational opportunities to its citizens. Huge amount of public funds were invested into the development and expansion of university education, so as to produce the needed man power for their industries. This therefore brought about interference by government as an oversight into how public funds are expanded in order as to guarantee accountability in the system.

Administration is the act of controlling, directing, planning and coordinating all the resources of an organization towards the attainment of its stated objectives. The university system just like any other organization is also established to achieve certain goals which are germane for all round societal development. Effective administration in universities is crucial for the development and sustainability of the sector. In recent years, higher education in Nigeria has suffered a lot of challenges due to continuous government interference in the running of the institutions. For years now, the various trade unions in the nation's universities have been agitating for autonomy so as to allow university management total control of activities in their schools. The current trend where government decides who heads the institutions, the composition of governing council and other officers of the institutions is not healthy for the development of the sector. Before further discussion on this subject matter, it is pertinent to ask the following questions, what autonomy is and how we can attain administrative autonomy in management of public universities. One major problem confronting the level of management of university in Cross River State is poor funding.

The gross under-funding of the educational system in the country has been rendering the university system incapacitated. Adepoju (2002) remarked that money is an absolutely input of any education system. It provides the essential purchasing power with which education acquires its human and physical inputs. According to Saint (2003), the university system has not had the financial resources necessary to maintain educational quality in the midst of significant enrolment explosion. Ibukun (1997) lamented that there is growing shortage of funds and learning resources in the university system. According to Oyeneye (2006) and Adegbite (2007), the major challenge facing the management of university system in Nigeria is inadequate funding meanwhile, Ajayi and Ayodele (2002) argued that there was an increase in the proportion of total expenditure devoted to education, but this has been considered to be rather grossly inadequate considering the phenomenon increase in student enrolment and increasing cost, which has been aggravated by inflation.

Also, secret cults activities has contributed to another central issue in management of universities in Cross River State How to handle the menace and aggressiveness of cult members. Never before has the potential for the destruction of lives and property on campuses been so great or escalated as fast and horrible as now (Ogunbameru, 2004). In the same vein, Adegbite (2007) remarked that the issue of cultism among the students has opened a new and very dangerous dimension to the situation of things in our educational institutions. Smah (2007) posited that where cults exist, there is no guarantee that academic programmes and activities would run normally. Hence the university may run the risk of being constantly closed or disrupted. The results of these cult activities as submitted by Smah (2007) have been feeling of fear on campus, killings and deaths and campus disturbances.

Again, the issue of political interference: It has been observed that universities these days are not totally free from the hand of politics outside the university system. Government of the day, most especially in the state-owned varsities, interfere a lot in terms of selection and choice of the chief executive, deans, departmental heads, directors of programmes and above all the selection of vice-chancellors.

The level of Management of university education can be looked at from two dimensions; the external and the internal levels. At the external level, this is the control by the federal government through the National Universities Commission (NUC), a body charged with the coordination of university management in the country. According to Ibukun (1997), the main objectives of the NUC are to ensure the orderly development of university education in Nigeria, to maintain its high standard and to ensure its adequate funding. On the other hand, the internal management of each university is represented by a simple organogram. The first is the Visitor who is usually the Head of State or the Head of Government that established it (The President in case of federal universities and the Governors in case of state universities). He usually comes to grace the convocation ceremonies where he uses the occasion to address the academic communities on matters of the moment (Adegbite, 2007). The second is the Chancellor, who is the titular head of the university, who by law, in relation to the university, takes precedence before all other members of the university and when he is present, presides at all meetings of the convocation held.

Besides, at the apex of the management structure within each university is the Governing Council, headed by the Chairman (Pro-Chancellor) which is charged with the administrative functions in the areas of goal setting, policy formulation, staff development, general discipline, budget approval and liaison activities with the government. In addition to this, there is the Senate, headed by the Vice-Chancellor and the Registrar as the Secretary. The Senate regulates the academic activities of the university following the general guidelines provided by the NUC.

According to Akinnaso (2016) there are two historical perspectives when discussing the concept of administrative autonomy in universities in terms of management. The first is the classical view, which sees administrative autonomy in universities in terms of decision-making, financial management, general administration, staff and academic control within the institution. During this era, funding of universities was through donations and free will assistance from well meaning individuals. On the other hand, the second view sees autonomy in university administration as a contemporary development. This is because after Second World War, governments all over the world began to introduce welfare programmes such as expansion of higher educational opportunities to its citizens. This therefore brought about interference by government as an oversight into how public funds are expanded so as to guarantee accountability in the system.

The term autonomy has been defined by many scholars according to how it suits the context they are using it. Autonomy is derived from two Greek words (Auto) which is 'self' and (Nomo) meaning 'law'. When put together, the two words means "to give oneself own law or being a ruler of oneself. Autonomy entails the ability of a person, group of persons or an organization to make informed decisions without unnecessary interference from external authority. It entails a degree of freedom, self independence or the capacity of an organization to act independently. Administrative autonomy in universities as the subject matter of this paper implies the extent to which an institution is given free hand in coordinating its internal affairs without interference from external forces. Bach (2016) defined administrative autonomy as public organization's ability to determine their own preference and to translate those preferences into authoritative activities. UNESCO (1997) defines administrative autonomy as the degree of self-governance necessary for effective decision making in the area of standards, management and academic activities. The European Universities Association defined administrative as the freedom of making decisions on activities such as organizing, controlling and directing both material and human resources in the institution.

Administrative autonomy, when it is fully attained in universities, it will give the institutions the freedom to independently determine the number of students to be admitted, the cut off mark for admission, the appointment and termination of university staff and heads, formulation of academic policies and general control of standards and all other activities within the institution. According to Ojedele and Ilusanya (2006) Administrative autonomy is intended to protect university education from unnecessary interference from government agents in the day-to-day running of the institutions. Ayodele in Ekundayo and Ajayi (2009) maintained that government interference in the affairs of universities has been the bone of contention between the government and Academic Staff Union of Universities, which invariably has affected the smooth running of academic activities over the years. The union has argued that for universities to actualize the objectives to which they were founded, greater autonomy must be given to them. The managers of universities should be able to act independently on issues bothering them and make informed decisions in the best interest of their institutions. Ololube, Amaele, Kpolovie, Onyekwere and Elechi (2012) maintained that the call for autonomy in Nigeria has become "part of Nigeria's national agenda aimed towards reforming the system. Babalola (2014) stressed that "without financial freedom in universities, an institution's wings to fly will be clipped and it will be left to walk or at best crawl".

Although universities enjoy the freedom to employ staff in their institutions, the degree of such freedom is limited considering the financial position of the universities. As long as the current arrangement where government is the major financier of universities, interference in their affairs is inevitable. In the area of admission, the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) have been responsible for the admission of students, a function that ought to be performed by the universities. An institution should be able to assess the aptitude and ability of candidates seeking admission into the school without internal incursion.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

For some time now, the issue of autonomy has remained a topic of discussion among stakeholders in the nation's university education system. The continuous interference by government into the internal affairs of universities has not been healthy for its development. The issue of autonomy has remained unresolved and one of the most contending issues between university workers and the government. Currently government interference is seen in administration, admission, composition of governing council as well as other academic activities of tertiary institutions in the country. This situation

has become worrisome as it negate the effective management of universities in the country. the proble of this study is how does administrative autonomy influence effective management of universities in Cross River State, Nigeria?

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the influence of administrative autonomy on management of university in terms of funding, cultism and political interference of universities Cross River State, Nigeria.
2. To what extent does administrative autonomy relate with effective management of universities in Cross River State, Nigeria.

HYPOTHESES

1. There is no significant influence of administrative autonomy on management of university in terms of funding, cultism and political interference of universities in Cross River State, Nigeria.
2. There is no significant relationship between administrative autonomy and effective management of universities in universities Cross River State, Nigeria

3. METHODS AND PROCEDURE

The study sought to investigate the relationship between administrative autonomy and effective management of universities in Cross River State, Nigeria. An ex-pot facto design was adopted. The study covered the two public universities in Cross River State Nigeria, namely University of Calabar and Cross River University of Technology. The population of the study comprised all staff (academic and non-academic) in the two public universities in Cross River State, Nigeria. In all, a total of 857 Staff, academic and non-academic in each institution were randomly selected as sample for the study.

The instrument for data collection is a 30 item questionnaire titled “Administrative Autonomy and Management of Universities Questionnaire”. It was developed for the purpose of collecting relevant data for the study. A test retest method was use to ascertain the reliability of the instrument. The result shows that the reliability coefficient stood at 0.832. With this result, the instrument was found to be reliable. The instrument of data collection was validated by test and measurement experts before it was personally administered by the researcher. Data collected was analyzed using the Pearson Product Moment correlation analysis.

4. RESULTS

The result of the hypothesis are presented below

Hypothesis one

There is no significant influence of university autonomy on management of university in terms of funding, cultism and political interference of universities in Cross River State. To test this hypothesis One-way ANOVA was employed as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: University autonomy and management of university in terms of funding, cultism and political interference of universities in Cross River State

Sources of variance (funding)	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p-value
Between Groups	363.747	2	181.874	11.934	.000
Within Groups	12923.437	848	15.240		
Total	13287.184	850			
Source of variance (cultism)	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p-value
Between Groups	334.720	2	167.360	10.957	.000
Within Groups	12952.464	848	15.274		
Total	13287.184	850			
Sources of variance(political interference)	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p-value
Between Groups	300.486	2	150.243	9.810	.001
Within Groups	12986.699	848	15.315		
Total	13287.184	850			

*p<.05

The result revealed that the p-values of funding (.000), cultism (.000) and political interference (.001) are all less than the chosen alpha of .05. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that there is a significant influence of university autonomy on management of university in terms of funding, cultism and political interference in universities in Cross River State

Hypothesis two

There is no significant relationship between administrative autonomy and effective management of universities in Cross River State

Table 2: Pearson Product Moment coefficient analysis of the relationship between administrative autonomy and effective management of universities (n = 850)

Variables	$\sum X \sum Y$	$\sum X^2 \sum Y^2$	SD	r-cal
Administrative autonomy	267	2035	.961	0.830*
Effective management of Universities	267	2308	.726	

*p < .05

The statistical result in the above table showed that the calculated r-value of 0.830 is greater than the r-critical value of 0.111 at a significant level of 0.05. With this result, the null hypothesis was rejected. This result therefore means that administrative autonomy is crucial for the effective management of universities in Nigeria.

5. DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

The result showed that funding, cultism and political interference has a significant influence on management of universities in Cross River State. This implies that university in Cross River State management is effectively due to proper coordinating of people and resources to achieve the goals of an organization. Adepoju (2002), Oyeneye (2006) and Adegbite (2007) and Adegbite (2007) who found that the issue of poor funding, cultism and political interference constituted a major problem for poor level of university management,

The result of hypothesis two revealed that administrative autonomy has a significant relationship between effective management of universities in Cross River State, Nigeria Supporting this finding, Akinnaso (2016) posited that administrative autonomy in Nigerian universities is curtailed by the activities of governmental agencies due to their interference with their independence which is needed for the actualization of their objectives. The current trend where government through its agencies such as the ministry of education, NUC and JAMB, controls academic standards and determine who get admitted into the university system is inimical to growth and development of university in Nigeria. Universities should be empowered to make their own choices especially as regards whom they admit as students and who they appoint to head them. Universities should be allowed to exercise control over their finances, employment and academic activities for the attainment of objectives as envisioned in the National Policy on Education.

6. CONCLUSION

The development of university education is essential for all round development and for attainment of national coherence. The effective management of university can only be actualized if universities are allowed to operate independently without unnecessary interference from government or it agencies. The issue of autonomy to varsities is a matter of necessity if quality output is expected, uninterrupted academic calendar is to guaranteed, an enabling teaching-learning environment is to be assured and the incessant face-off between the ASUU and the government to be put to rest. The struggle for university autonomy has been a long-standing in the university system in Nigeria.

7. RECOMMENDATION

Based on the result of the study, the following recommendations were made on how to effectively manage university education in Nigeria.

1. For effective administrative autonomy and strategic development to take place in the university system, the government must be ready to address the issue of adequate funding of universities in Cross River State.
2. Adequate finance will help solve the problem of infrastructure.

3. There is urgent need for reforms in the university system in Nigeria. Government should give the issues of autonomy which has been a topic for discussion for years now, a second thought
 - i. Universities should be given total freedom to admit students without the compulsory JAMB
 - ii. Universities should be given free hand in the appointment of vice chancellors and other principal officers of the institutions.

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