

PERCEIVED INFLUENCE OF NATIONAL UNIVERSITIES COMMISSION (NUC) ACTIVITIES ON THE MANAGEMENT OF FEDERAL UNIVERSITIES IN NORTH CENTRAL NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the perceived influence of National Universities Commission (NUC activities on the management of federal universities in North Central Nigeria. Two research questions were raised and two hypotheses were formulated for the study. The study was anchored on the Bureaucratic Theory of Management of Max Webber (1947). The research adopted a perceptual and descriptive survey design. The population for the study comprised 10,368 teaching and non-teaching staff of eight (8 federal universities in North Central Nigeria obtained from the registry departments of the federal universities. The sample for this study is 400 respondents drawn through multistage sampling procedure. A structured questionnaire developed by the researchers titled 'National Universities Commission and Management of Federal Universities Questionnaire, (NUCMFU-Q' was used for data collection. Mean Scores were used to answer the research questions while Chi-Square was used to test the hypotheses. This study found out that there is a high extent of influence of NUC policies on students' admission as well as staff promotion policy on the management of federal universities in the area of study. The study recommends that the federal government should create an enabling environment that will facilitate the NUC in carrying out its core mandate functions such as developing students' admission and staff promotion polices in the federal universities in order to promote the provision of quality university education to the recipients.

Keywords: Perceived Influence, National Universities Commission, Management, Federal Universities, North Central Nigeria.

Background of the Study

The quest for university education in Nigeria dates back to the second half of the nineteenth century when the well-to-do Africans in Lagos sent their children overseas for professional

training. Upon the completion of their studies abroad, some of them returned to Nigeria and began to demand for the establishment of institutions of higher learning in the country. Consequently, the Yaba Higher College was established in 1934. However, Adeoti (2015) opined that the establishment of Yaba Higher College was vehemently criticized and lampooned by the Nigerian Nationalists who preferred a full-fledged conventional university to the college. In order to regulate the affairs of the University College Ibadan, the colonial government established Inter-University Council (IUC). For the period it existed, the council conducted visitations, helped to recruit staff and provided advice on various administrative and academic matters. Existing side by side with the University of London, the IUC showed abiding interest in establishing and maintaining high academic standards at UCI. Not only this, Damitope (2022) notes that the IUC in conjunction with the London University and Colonial Office helped to provide colonial training in the United Kingdom for Nigerian Students who had completed their pre-medical and pre-chemical courses at the UCI. It supported UCI's policy of high standard in staff recruitment, students' selection, the protection of examination standard, the appointment of external examiners, facilities for research or library resources and urged that the maintenance of high academic standard must be paramount.

Just about two years after Nigeria's independence, the National University Commission (NUC) was established as an advisory agency on higher education in the cabinet office of the First Republic of Nigeria. According to Adeoti (2015), the NUC was charged with the responsibility of advising government on financial needs of the universities and to handle the planning of a balanced and coordinated development of university education in Nigeria. Adeoti notes that these functions were further expanded with the enactment of Decree No. 1 of 1974 that transformed NUC from advisory capacity to a statutory body. This was an outcome of the centralization of university education in the country, during which the Federal Government took over all the then existing regional universities in the country. In the view of Musa (2023), the expansion of university education in Nigeria reached its nadir in recent time with the efforts by governments, the private sector and faith based organizations establishing new universities and expanding the existing ones. This development brought with it enormous responsibilities where performance of these functions could exert a positive influence on the management of federal universities in the North Central Zone of Nigeria.

Management of public universities entails the coordination and harmonization of various daily and periodic activities by the personnel in whose hands such institutions have been placed in order to accomplish stated educational aims and objectives. According to Okoro and Kigho (2019) include adequate funding, proper staff recruitment or appointment, planning, budgeting, organization, directing, supervision, sustained provisions for staff welfare, provision of needed equipment, facilities or materials, staff development, projecting and planning for students' enrolment, proper staff retention and making arrangements for optimal staff performance of organizational responsibilities. The effective management of federal universities may be impeded if the NUC does not live up to its expectation. As Okoro and Kigho notes, every human venture thrives well when monitored by a robust regulatory body and the opposite portends serious challenges for the success of every human endeavour, the management of federal universities inclusive.

The National Universities Commission over the years could have exerted a positive influence on the management of federal universities in Nigeria with particular reference to the North Central Nigeria. NUC might be responsible for setting admission procedures which are yardsticks of getting entrance into a university for study of a course/ programme. Uwakwe (2021) & Nakorum (2022) reported that the NUC in conjunction with the Federal Ministry of Education is determined to improve the quality of students seeking admission in to Nigerian universities. In line with this thinking, the commission in 2006 introduced the post-jamb screening for intending entrants into Nigerian universities, a policy which a public commendation has linked to 'a revolution' (Wayo, 2023). Nwankwo (2021) notes that the aim of such a policy was to ensure that applicants seeking admission into various courses of study across the federal and even non-federal universities conform to stipulated admission requirements in order to facilitated their academic progression and graduation rate as well as determine their aptitudes for the chosen courses of study. Tohona, Waya and Uhikura (2021) argue that the emergence of stringent admission policies as stipulated by the NUC was not an aimed at unnecessarily punishing admission seekers but to ensure that they have the potentials to complete their courses of study as well as compete favourably in the global labour market. This policy could positively or negatively influence the management of federal universities in the North Central Nigeria. Personal observations by the researcher reveals some seemingly unwholesome practices where the students' population of many federal universities in the country seem to be above the carrying capacities of such universities pointing accusing fingers to negligence on the part of the NUC.

Additionally, another area where the National Universities Commission (NUC could influence the management of federal universities in the North Central Nigeria is by supervising staffing processes through designing staff promotion policies. There may be lack of vibrant staff development programmes in many federal universities in North Central Nigeria in the absence of any regulatory body overseeing academic and non-academic activities in the institutions. Ajo and Naena (2022) argue that promotion of staff in the university system is based on the 'publish or perish' principle which ensures that staff are not arbitrarily promoted without having contributed to knowledge through a stipulated number of publications. The NUC over the years have established a formidable landmark in the university system in Nigeria, in terms of human capital development through its regulatory framework on the promotion of lecturers in Nigerian universities. Ushinahe (2023) reports that in recent years, the push of NUC regulatory frame work on promotion of university academic staff, serves as an improvement in the professional and career development of university lecturers in Nigeria. The implication and summary of these continuous quality improvements in the professional and career development academic staff members will transfer qualitative education to the 'turn outs' from the university system. The absence of such programmes initiated and implemented by the NUC could only breed a situation where staff promotion in the federal universities in the North Central Nigeria might be laced with ethnicity, favouritism, sectionalism, tribalism, political colourations and religious affiliations with unprecedented devastating impact on the quality and quantity of university education assessable to the recipients. Consequently, if staff promotion policies of the NUC are not adhered to by the management of federal universities in the North Central Nigeria, it may breed the breach of promotion parameters with negative influence on the quality of staff in such institutions.

Research evidence (Oko, 2021 and Chukwu, 2022) has also shown that the absence of a functional regulatory body in any educational system breeds systemic wastage and cohorts' inefficiency. The outcome of the absence of a regulatory body on the management of universities has been found by Gwale (2019), Obona (2020) and Satope (2021) to breed low job performance, truancy and absenteeism, low staff commitment to duties and poor quality of research and lecturing among others. Therefore, conducting a research on the influence of NUC on the management of federal universities in the area of study is timely, hence, the present research.

Statement of the Problem

In spite of the fact that federal universities are continually springing up in North Central Nigeria and there has been a sustained spate of intervention programmes like the Tertiary Education Trust Fund, it seems all is not well with the public universities in the region. There are persistent grumblings among stakeholders in education (like the students, staff, educational policy inspectors and parents) about the quality of infrastructure in the public universities. This could originate from a slack in the performance of regulatory roles by the monitoring agencies saddled with the responsibility of ensuring the provision of functional university education in the region.

Also stemming from the slack on the part of the NUC and may influence the management of federal universities in North Central Nigeria is lack of proper staff development programmes. Personal survey reveals reduced skill-effective training and re-training opportunities for the personnel of federal universities in North Central Nigeria. It is speculated that federal universities in North Central Nigeria are no longer catching up with the pace in the national and global educational development which may be the result of the influence of reduce supervision/evaluation of programmes as well as inconsistent staff promotion. The quality of products from most federal universities in the North Central Nigeria leaves much to be desired as many graduates may not possess employable skills which could have stemmed from high admission standards instituted by the management of such institutions.

The researchers speculate that other factors such as poor governance, educational corruption and even terrorism could have impacted on the performance of the NUC with concomitant negative influence on the management of federal universities in North Central Nigeria. This could be manifested in poor job satisfaction, poor job performance and low quality of lecturing and research among others in federal universities in North Central Nigeria. Based on the observations above, therefore, the problem of this study is: What is the influence of National Universities Commission on the management of federal universities in North Central Nigeria with particular focus on monitoring admission and setting staff promotion policies?

Research Questions

The following research questions are raised to guide the study;

1. How do students' admission policies set by the NUC influence the management of federal universities?
2. How do staff promotion policies of the NUC influence the management of federal universities?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses are formulated for the study to be tested at 0.05 level of significance.

H₀₁ NUC students' admission policies have no significant influence on the management of federal universities.

H₀₂ NUC staff promotion policies have no significant influence on the management of federal universities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

This section reviewed the Bureaucratic Theory of Management of Max Webber (1947). This theory was given by German Sociologist Karl Emil Maximilian known as "Max Weber" so this theory is also called Weber's Theory of Bureaucracy. Main focus of his theory is organizational structure. He focused on dividing organization into hierarchies and establishing strong lines of authority and control. He suggests that organization should develop comprehensive and detailed standard operating procedures to perform preplanned tasks. He felt that the western civilization was changing from "Wertrational" to "Zweckational", meaning it was changing from value oriented thinking to technocratic thinking. He thinks that civilization was changing to seek technical result at the cost of humanistic contents. He believes that worker should respect the right of the managers to direct activities dictated by the organizational rules and regulations.

Brief History of the Origin of the National Universities Commission

Gamode, Omiyale and Adebola (2015) observe that the Ashby commission recommended the establishment of regional universities, so as to meet up the post-independence manpower needs of the country. By 1962 there were already five universities in Nigeria namely the Universities of Ife, Lagos, Ibadan, Nsukka and Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. These Universities were established on the basis of the Ashby commission recommendations. Also established on the basis of the Ashby Commission recommendation is the National Universities Commission (NUC which came into existence in 1962. The NUC is one of the agencies of the Federal Ministry of Education with the mandate to maintain minimum academic standards in Nigerian Universities as well as carry out accreditation functions.

Functions of the Commission

The function of NUC according to Gamode, Omiyale and Adebola (2015) is to advise the President and Governors of the States, through the Minister of Education, on the creation of new universities and other degree awarding institutions in Nigeria; prepare, after consultation with all state Governments, the Universities, the National Manpower Board and such other bodies as may be appropriate, periodic master plans for the balanced development of all Universities in Nigeria; make such other investigations relating to higher education as the commission may consider to be in the national interest; Inquire into and advise the Federal Government on the financial needs, both recurrent and capital of University education in Nigeria and in particular, to investigate and study the financial needs of university research and to ensure that adequate provision is made for this in the Universities; increase block grants from the Federal Government and allocate them to Federal Universities in accordance with such formula as may be laid down by the National Council of Ministers; collate, analyze and publish information relating to University education in Nigeria; undertake periodic reviews of the terms and conditions of service of personnel engaged in the Universities; and

recommend to the Visitor of the Federal Universities that a visitation be made to such University as at when it considers it necessary. This is to ensure effective provision of university education throughout the country.

METHODOLOGY

Research design: This research adopted a perceptual and descriptive survey research design. This is a research design that collects data from only a portion of a population considered a good representative sample of the entire the population, makes analysis and generalization about the entire population. This research design was appropriate for this research because it was not possible for the researchers to reach out to all the staff of the federal universities.

Area of the Study: The area of the study was North Central Nigeria where the federal universities are located. This zone comprises Benue, Kogi, Kwara, Nasarawa, Niger and Plateau States and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT Abuja. Geographically, North Central Nigeria is situated in the middle belt region of Nigeria, spanning from the west around the confluence of Rivers Niger and Benue. The federal university in Abuja is University of Abuja, Abuja; in Nasarawa State there is Federal University, Keffi while Kwara State has University of Ilorin, Ilorin. In Benue State, there are two federal universities which are Joseph Sarwuan Tarka University, Makurdi and Federal University of Health Sciences, Otukpo while the University of Jos is located in Plateau State. Kogi State has Federal University, Lokoja while Niger State has Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida University, Lapai as the federal university located there.

Population of the Study: The population of the study comprised 10,368 teaching and non-teaching staff of eight (8 federal universities in North Central Nigeria obtained from the registry departments of the federal universities.

Sample and Sampling technique: The sample size for this study is 400 respondents from the population of 10,368 respondents from all the eight (8 federal universities North Central Nigeria. The sample size was determined through Yamane's (1967 sample size determination formula for any study. The sample was drawn through multistage sampling procedure where the researchers used proportionately stratified random sampling the respondents based on the staff strength of each federal university and lastly adopted simple random sampling to sample respondents from each of the federal university in the area of study.

Instrument for data collection: The researchers designed a structured questionnaire titled 'National Universities Commission and Management of Federal Universities Questionnaire, NUCMFUQ for data collection. The questionnaire contained items that respondents were expected to tick an option that best represented their choice.

Validation of instrument: In order to face and content validity of instrument, it was given to two lecturers from the department of Educational Administration and Planning and one expert in Measurement and Evaluation of Joseph Sarwuan Tarka University, Makurdi, to ascertain the validity of the instrument. The experts made necessary correction after which the researchers effected the corrections.

Data collection: The researchers administered the instrument on the sampled respondents. They visited each federal university and administered the instrument on the sampled

respondents. After the completion of the questionnaire, the researchers collected it from the respondents.

Data analysis and Presentation: A four point modified rating scale was used to establish the disparity in the respondents’ opinions. The response format was Very High Influence (VHI) = 4 points; High Influence (HI), 3 points, Low Influence (LI), 2 points and Very Low Influence (VLI), 1 point. The descriptive statistics of Mean Score was used to answer the research questions. A cut-off point of 2.50 was used for decision making. Chi Square statistics was used to test the hypotheses 0.05 level of significance. Data was presented based on the postulated research questions and formulated research hypotheses.

Research question 1: How do students’ admission policies set by the NUC influence the management of federal universities?

The table below provides information that was used in answering the above research question.

Table 1: Mean Scores of the Respondents’ Perception of the Influence of Students’ Admission Policies Set by the NUC on the Management of Federal Universities.

S/ N	ITEM DESCRIPTION	N	SA	A	D	SD	\bar{x}	Decision
1	Judge the nature of influence of NUC’s admission requirements on the number of students to be admitted in each programme in the federal universities.	400	164	147	66	13	3.34	HI
2	What is the nature of the influence of NUC’s policies on admission on the proliferation of federal universities?	400	142	183	59	6	2.52	HI
3	Appraise the nature of influence of NUC on strengthening the National Open University of Nigeria on reducing admission pressure on federal universities.	400	197	107	79	7	3.45	HI.
4	What is the nature of influence of the introduction of the post-Jamb screening by the NUC decreased the quantity of admission seekers?	400	189	127	66	8	3.94	VHI
5	Assess the nature of influence of NUC’s guidelines on admission on the improvement of the quality of intake into the federal universities.	400	162	184	36	8	3.86	VHI

As shown on table 1 above, respondents perceived items 1-3 as having high influence while items 4 and 5 have very high influence on the management of federal universities. The implication of this result is that respondents perceived NUC admission policies to have influence on the management of federal universities.

Research hypothesis 1: NUC students’ admission policies have no significant influence on the management of federal universities.

Analysis of generated data relating to the above hypothesis is presented on Table 2.

Table 2: Chi-Square Analysis on the Influence of NUC’s Admission Policies on the Management of Federal Universities.

Opinions	Observed N	Expected N	Level of Sig	df	χ^2 -cal	P-value	Decision
VLI	34	100	.05	3	228.62	.00	Ho rejected
LI	56	100					
HI	127	100					
VHI	183	100					

Table 2 shows Chi-square (χ^2 value of 228.62 at 3df, $P < 0.05$ and H_0 rejected. This result reveals that the null hypothesis which states that NUC students’ admission policies have no significant influence on the management of federal universities was rejected. From the result above, the implication is that students’ admission policies have significant influence on the management of federal universities.

Research question 2: How do staff promotion policies of the NUC influence the management of federal universities?

The table below provides information that was used to answer the above research question.

Table 3: Mean Scores of the Respondents’ Perception of the Influence of Accreditation of Old and New Academic Programmes by the NUC on the Management of Federal Universities.

S/ N0	ITEM DESCRIPTION	N	SA	A	D	S D	\bar{x}	Decision
6	What is the nature of influence of NUC’s staff promotion policies on the ratio of teaching staff to students in the federal universities?	400	189	137	66	8	3.94	VHI
7	Assess the nature of influence of NUC’s staff promotion policies on staff mix by rank in the federal universities.	400	162	199	36	3	3.86	VHI
8	What is the nature of influence of NUC’s staff promotion policies on staff development in federal universities?	400	181	125	93	01	3.62	VHI
9	Judge the nature of influence of NUC’s staff promotion policies on the number of professors in the federal universities.	400	142	198	59	1	2.52	HI
10	Assess the nature of influence of NUC’s staff promotion policies on number of junior lecturers in the federal universities.	400	197	117	79	7	3.45	HI

As shown on table 3, respondents perceive items 6-8 as having very high influence while items 9 and 10 have high influence. The implication of the result is that respondents perceived staff

promotion policies of the NUC to have high influence on n the management of federal universities.

Research hypothesis 2: NUC staff promotion policies have no significant influence on the management of federal universities.

Data analysis relating to the above research hypothesis is presented on table 4.

Table 4: Chi-Square Analysis on the Influence of Staff Promotion Policies of the NUC on the Management of Federal Universities.

Opinions	Observed N	Expected N	Level of Sig	df	χ^2 -cal	P-value	Decision
VLI	11	100	.05	3	518.90	0.01	Ho rejected
LI	24	100					
HI	159	100					
VHI	191	100					

Table 4 shows Chi-square (χ^2 value of 518.90 at 3df, $P < 0.05$ and H_0 rejected. This result reveals that the null hypothesis which states that NUC staff promotion policies have no significant influence on the management of federal universities was rejected. From the result above, the implication is that NUC staff promotion policies have significant influence on the management of federal universities.

Discussion of Findings

The first finding of this study revealed that that admission policies of the NUC's have significant positive influence on the management of federal universities in dimensions like the number of students to be admitted in each programme, the proliferation of federal universities, strengthening the National Open University of Nigeria on reducing admission pressure on federal universities, introduction of the post-Jamb screening by the NUC which has decreased the quantity of admission seekers and improvement of the quality of intake into the federal universities. The finding of this research corroborates findings of Ubwama (2019) who found out that there was a significant influence of Universities Management Board (UMB on the dropout rate among students and students' admission in the university system in Uganda.

The second finding of the research shows that NUC staff promotion policies have significantly influenced the management of federal universities in areas like the ratio of teaching staff to students, staff promotion policies on staff mix by rank, staff development, the number of professors and communication number of junior lecturers in the federal universities. The findings of this research agrees with findings by Saidu and Arochukwu (2019) who found out that there is statistically significant influence of National Commission for Higher Education of Pakistan on staff recruitment, staff promotion and staff retention in the university system.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the researchers therefore recommend that:

1. The university management should adhere to NUC students' admission policies to ensure that students are admitted based on the carrying capacity of each university to ensure the provision of effective university education to the learners.
2. NUC should intensify efforts to ensure that the quality of university staff is not compromised through arbitrary promotion practices so that the quality education in the federal universities is constantly on the rise.

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