



Universities' Leadership Compliance with the National Universities Commission's Benchmark on Minimum Academic Standard and Its Impact on Quality of Nigerian University Education

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Author's contribution

The sole author designed, analyzed and interpreted and prepared the manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the level of Nigerian Universities' leadership compliance with the National Universities Commission's benchmark on minimum academic standard, and its impact on the quality of Nigerian university education. This is consequent upon the observations of the some stakeholders in university education, that the failure of universities' leadership to comply with the National Universities Commission (NUC) benchmark on minimum academic standard, has been the major problem of quality decline in Nigerian university education. Descriptive research of survey design was employed in the study. The population consisted of the staff members from public universities in south-west Nigeria, while the sample consisted of 50 members of staff each from 3 federal and 3 state universities. The finding revealed a moderate level of universities' leadership compliance with the NUC benchmark on minimum academic standard. The finding was compared with the table on quality of Nigerian university education. A significant relationship was established between universities' leadership compliance with NUC benchmark and quality of Nigerian university education, and no significant difference was established between the federal and state universities'

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staff assessment of leadership compliance with the NUC benchmark. Based on these findings, conclusions were drawn and recommendations made.

Keywords: National universities commission; benchmark on minimum academic standard; university education; university leadership; compliance; staff; quality.

1. INTRODUCTION

It is a common knowledge that the bedrock of higher institution is good governance, and that this depends significantly on institutional leadership. Corroborating this assertion, Akomolafe [1] argued that the importance of sound leadership to the quality of university education is central to the success of the school system. Leadership as a concept, has been variously defined among psychologists, sociologists and scholars of different schools of thought, with no universally acceptable definition. Gibb in Zaccaro, Kemp, & Bader [2] defined a leader as a person who co-ordinates the behaviour of others, while MC Farland [3] submitted that leadership is the ability of an individual to influence others to work beyond ordinary levels to achieve goals. Mills [4] also argued that, leadership is a process by which one person influences the thoughts, attitudes and behaviours of others.

Authors and researchers often have different perception on the concept of 'university leadership'. Middlehurst [5] opined that many see university leadership as the domain of those in certain positions of power or authority such as Vice-Chancellors, Deans and Professors, Heads of Departments and Heads of functional areas such as the registry. This view was supported by Imrie cited in Ibijola [6], who asserted that the idea of leadership in the university system can be reduced to the Principal Officers of the university administration. On the contrary, Akomolafe and Ibijola [7] posited that, university governance is a team work and that issue of leadership should be seen beyond the level of Vice-Chancellor or the Principal Officers in the university system. Supporting this view, Imrie, cited in Ibijola [6] submitted that, within a university system, members of staff are by virtue of employment, involved in the regulation of the activities of their institutions.

The Nigerian university system was perceived as replete with examples of institutions which have, through poor governance, failed to achieve reasonable growth, adequate development and acceptable quality [8]. Akomolafe and Ibijola [7]

while citing Akindutire opined that, the quality of leadership in a tertiary institution, its mission and vision, effectiveness and efficiency, inevitably influences the standard of productivity by Staff, and the achievement of students. On this premise, university leadership may be used to describe all the members of staff who occupy positions of responsibility in the university system. Hence, the issue of leadership in the university system could be seen as extending beyond the Vice-Chancellor, the principal officers and senior post holders in the university system, in view of the fact that the implementation of the rules governing the university or quality of university education could be made defective at every level of university administration, if the leadership at the level of management, faculties, departments and units are not effective and efficient. It is in this connection that, the World Bank [9] posited that the specific solutions to problems confronting higher education have to emerge from within the creativity of high education professionals.

It is perceived that the problem of quality assurance still poses a strong threat to Nigerian university education notwithstanding the external performance audit of Nigerian universities by regulatory agencies, Ibijola [10]. Some stakeholders opined that the poor performance of the NUC has been the major cause of quality decline in university education [11,12]. To corroborate this assertion, Ibijola [13] in an empirical study established a significant relationship between the NUC performance of its regulatory roles and the quality of Nigerian university education. However, many of the stakeholders in Nigerian university education attributed the university leadership disregard for the regulatory agencies within the system as a major cause of the observed quality decline in Nigerian university education.

According to Awosusi [14], the standard of education has not fallen, but what has happened is that people have failed to comply with standards. Some researchers also argued that the university leadership has been the main cause of the decline in quality of Nigerian university education because they often fake the

accreditation processes [15,16,17] and that their failure to total compliance with NUC benchmark on minimum academic standard has remained a big problem [18,19,20,21].

Alechenu [22] reported that the quality decline in Nigerian university education can be attributed to the inadequate infrastructure and manpower challenges, while Odenigo [23] posited that overcrowded classrooms, inadequate infrastructure, and poorly motivated teachers have contributed to the poor state of education in Nigeria. NUC [19] also confirmed that in the absence of adequate facilities, many universities often exceed their carrying capacities. Consequently, observations seem to be pointing towards university leadership's non-compliance with the NUC benchmark on minimum academic standard. Okojie [24] noted that some university leadership run NUC unapproved programmes. On this premise, George [25] re-iterated the need for universities to be concerned with the quality of their products, instead of basing their judgment on the number of students enrolled for their programmes. Corroborating this view, Odunuga [26] asserted that the NUC should continue to monitor the universities and ensure continuous compliance with its extant guidelines and regulations.

On the contrary, Aboluwade [27] reported that the major problem of education in Nigeria is inadequate funding which according to him is the mother of all other problems such as decay facilities, lack of instructional materials. On this premise, the inadequate funding of Nigerian public universities seems to have been the immediate and the root cause of other problems that have undermined the issue of quality of Nigerian university education. Aina [28] opined that funding of universities by the federal government below the UNESCO recommendation of 26% of the nation annual national budget has corresponding calamitous effect on teaching and research. All these no doubt would contribute to the observed quality decline in university education in Nigeria. Agbu [29] posited that the fund allocated to education is too small for the country to make meaningful progress in the sector. Consequently, Thompson and Wood [30] concluded that, "without good budgets, there are no school,"

It is upon this background that the Researcher investigated the level of Nigerian university leadership compliance with the NUC benchmark on minimum academic standard, in order to

ascertain the level of compliance and its relationship with the quality of Nigerian university education.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In the recent time, many of the stakeholders in education have attributed the major cause of decline in quality of Nigerian university education to the failure of university leadership to comply with the National Universities Commission (NUC) Benchmark on Minimum Academic Standard. Consequently, the study investigated the level of university leadership compliance with the NUC Benchmark on Minimum Academic Standard, to ascertain this claim, and also investigated its relationship with the quality of Nigerian university education.

3. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study was carried with the purpose of providing an empirical evidence on the opinion of stakeholders in university education that, the level of university leadership compliance with the NUC benchmark on minimum academic standard, is a major cause of quality decline in university education. The study investigated the relationship between the leadership compliance with NUC benchmark and quality of Nigerian university education, so as to provide solutions that can inform policy decisions on how to promote university leadership effectiveness. The federal and state university staff assessment on universities' leadership compliance with NUC benchmark on minimum academic standard, was also investigated, compared and tested for significance difference to ascertain if institutional ownership affects level of compliance with the NUC benchmark on minimum academic standard or not.

4. GENERAL QUESTIONS

The following general questions were raised to guide the study:

1. What is the level of Nigerian universities' leadership compliance with NUC benchmark on minimum academic standard?
2. What is the federal university staff assessment of Nigerian universities' leadership compliance with NUC benchmark on minimum academic standard?

3. What is the state university staff assessment of Nigerian university leadership compliance with NUC benchmark on minimum academic standard?
4. What is the level of quality of Nigerian University education?

4.1 Research Questions

The following research questions were raised for the study:

1. Is there any relationship between universities' leadership compliance with NUC benchmark and the quality of Nigerian university education?
2. Is there any difference between the state and federal universities' staff assessment of the level of leadership compliance with NUC benchmark?

4.2 Research Hypothesis

1. There is no significant relationship between universities' leadership compliance with NUC benchmark and the quality of Nigerian university education.
2. There is no significant difference between the state and federal universities' staff assessment of the level of leadership compliance with NUC benchmark.

5. METHODOLOGY

The study employed a descriptive research of survey type. It was a descriptive research because it described and interpreted the existing situation, attitudes and prevailing practices regarding universities' leadership compliance with the National Universities Commission's benchmark on minimum academic standard and its impact on quality of Nigerian university education. A survey research studies large population to discover the relative incidence, distribution and interrelationship of sociological variables. This research conforms to the characteristics of the survey research described above. Therefore, the descriptive survey design provided appropriate conceptual and methods for investigating the problems of this study. A survey design was adopted because the population is large. The study drew samples from a large population of universities in Nigeria from where inferences were drawn about the characteristics of the defined and chosen population.

The population for the study consisted of the staff from public universities in Southwest Nigeria, with a sample of 300 subjects, consisting of 50 staff from 3 federal and 3 state universities. Multi-stage, stratified, purposive and simple random sampling techniques were used to select the samples. Multistage sampling technique was used to select the sample as it was not feasible to reach all the population of the study. The first stage was a purposive sampling selection of the South-West geo-political zone out of the six geo-political zones in Nigeria. The zone comprised six states with 13 public universities. The second stage was also a purposive sampling selection of six universities (3 federal universities and 3 state universities) out of the 13 public universities in south-west geo-political zone of Nigeria. The purposive selection was to allow one university each from the six states, to include three federal universities and 3 state universities. In the third stage, proportionate stratified random sampling technique was used for selecting the sample. The stratified random sampling technique was done to first divide the population into strata i.e. the teaching staff and the non-teaching staff. This sampling technique was able to cater for the sub-groups within the population i.e. the teaching and non-teaching staff. In the fourth stage, a simple random sampling technique was used to select 300 respondents in all, which comprised 50 staff (25 teaching and 25 non-teaching) from each of the six sampled universities.

Data were collected with an instrument titled 'University Leadership Compliance with NUC Benchmark on Minimum Academic Standard. (ULCNUC). The instrument (ULCNUC) consisted of Sections A and B. Section A was meant for the bio data of the respondents, while Section B consisted of 30 items which sought information on Universities' leadership compliance with NUC Benchmark on Minimum Academic Standard' on; admission processes, curriculum delivery, evaluation culture, students support services, management and leadership, and provision of infrastructure, equipment and consumables. The researcher administered the instruments by direct contact with the respondents with the assistance of trained research assistants. The research Assistants were trained on the significance of the research instruments, the meaning of each of the items and how to approach the participants in ensuring that the instruments were well filled. The procedure gave the researcher the opportunity to reach out faster to the subjects as well as to receive maximum

co-operation from them. All copies of the questionnaire were retrieved within six weeks.

The respondents indicated their responses for Sections B of (ULCNUC) in terms of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). Scoring was done using the Likert rating method, Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1). Table 3 on level of quality of Nigerian university education was adapted from Ibijola [13]. The face, content and construct validities of the instrument (ULCNUC) was done by experts in test and measurement, while the reliability was done using split-half method, which gave a co-efficient of 0.87. Descriptive and inferential statistics were employed to analyze the data. Simple percentage was used to answer the research questions, while the hypothesis raised was tested at 0.05 level of significance using t-test statistic. The mean score on the instrument and its corresponding standard deviation were used to categorize the subjects into three groups each representing level of compliance. The results are presented in Table 1.

6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Question 1: What is the level of Nigerian universities' leadership compliance with NUC benchmark on minimum academic standard?

In order to answer this question, respondents scores on 'Universities' leadership compliance with NUC benchmark on minimum academic standard was computed. The mean scores and the standard deviation were used to categorize the subjects into three groups representing levels of compliance. Using the mean score and standard deviation, respondents whose scores ranged between the minimum score and the

difference between the mean and standard deviation (X-SD) were grouped into 'Low' level compliance. Respondents whose scores ranged from the sum of mean and standard deviation and the maximum score were grouped as 'High' level compliance. "The moderate' level of compliance constituted the respondents whose scores fell between the 'low' and 'high' level.

The finding revealed that the Nigerian universities' leadership compliance with NUC benchmark on minimum academic standard was at a moderate level with 64.7% of the respondents adjudging the Universities' leadership compliance as moderate. 60% of state university staff and 69.3% of federal university staff also adjudged the level of compliance as moderate respectively. The findings are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

The result presented in table 3 shows that quality of Nigerian university education was at a moderate level with 66.7% of the respondents adjudging the level of quality of Nigerian University education as moderate, while 64.7% of respondents on universities' leadership compliance with the NUC benchmark on minimum academic standard adjudged level of compliance as moderate.

Table 1. Level of university leadership compliance with NUC benchmark on minimum academic standard

Level of compliance	Frequency	%
Low: Min-(X-SD) 43.00 – (72.84 – 11.82)	53	17.7
Moderate: 61.03 – 84.65	194	64.7
High: (X + SD) – Max = (72.84 + 11.82) – 103.00	53	17.7
Total	300	100

Table 2. A comparative assessment of the state and federal universities' leadership compliance with NUC benchmark on minimum academic standard

Level of compliance		Type of institution		Total
		State	Federal	
Low	Count	27	26	53
	% within Type of institution	18.0%	17.3%	17.7%
Moderate	Count	90	104	194
	% within Type of institution	60.0%	69.3%	64.7%
High	Count	33	20	53
	% within Type of institution	22.0%	13.3%	17.7%
Total	Count	150	150	300
	% within Type of institution	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

6.1 Testing of Hypothesis

Hypotheses generated for the study were tested for significance at 0.05 level.

6.1.1 Hypothesis 1

Ho: There is no significant relationship between universities' leadership compliance with the NUC benchmark on minimum academic standard and the quality of Nigerian university education. In order to test this hypothesis, scores on NUC benchmark on minimum academic standard and quality of Nigerian university education (adapted in Table 2) were subjected to statistical analysis using Pearson Product Moment Correlation at 0.05 level at significance. The result is shown in Table 4.

Table 3. Level of quality of Nigerian university education

Level of quality of Nigerian University education	Frequency	%
Low: Min-(X-SD) 141.06 – (168.88–11.74)	48	16.0
Moderate: 157.15–180.61	200	66.7
High: (X+ SD) – Max =(168.88 + 11.74) – 203.82	52	17.3
Total	300	100

Table 3 was adapted from Ibijola (2015): *International Journal of Education and Practice*, 3(2) p.109

The result in Table 4 shows that r-calculated of 0.476 is greater than r-table of (0.195) at 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis was rejected. This implied that there was a significant relationship between quality of Nigerian university education and Nigerian university

Table 4. Pearson correlation analysis of level of universities' leadership compliance with NUC benchmark on minimum academic standard and level of quality of Nigerian university education

Variable	N	r cal	r table
Quality of Nigerian University Education	300	0.476	0.195
University leadership compliance with NUC regulatory roles	300		

*P<0.05 (Significant result)

Table 5. t-test analysis on federal and state universities' staff assessment of Nigerian universities' leadership compliance with NUC benchmark on minimum academic standard

Type of University	N	Mean	SD	Df	t-cal	t-table
State	150	73.37	12.16	298	0.781	1.960
Federal	150	72.31	11.49			

P<0.05

leadership compliance with NUC benchmark on minimum academic standard.

6.1.2 Hypothesis 2

Ho: There is no significant difference between the assessment of the federal and state university staff, on Nigerian universities' leadership compliance with NUC benchmark on minimum academic standard.

Mean scores of Federal and State Universities' staff assessment on Nigerian universities' leadership compliance with NUC benchmark on minimum academic standard were compared for statistical significance at 0.05 level using t-test statistics. The result is shown in Table 5.

The result in Table 5 shows that there is no significant difference between federal and state university staff assessment of universities' leadership compliance with NUC benchmark on minimum academic Standard at 0.05 level of significance (t=0.781, p>0.05). The null hypothesis is therefore accepted. This implies that institutional ownership has no effect on the level of universities' leadership compliance with NUC Benchmark on Minimum Academic Standard.

7. DISCUSSION

The study established that university leadership's compliance with NUC benchmark on minimum academic standard was at a moderate level. This finding corroborates Awosusi [14] who posited that the standard of education has not fallen, but what has happened is that people have failed to comply with standards.

It also corroborates NUC [19] when it noted that in the absence of improved facilities to cope with increased demand for university education, many of the universities had to exceed their carrying capacities, which is the maximum number of students that each university can sustain for qualitative education based on available human and material resources. The finding also corroborated Aboderin's [18] observation when he pointed towards disregard of regulatory system within the Nigerian university system.

The established moderate level of university leadership's compliance with NUC benchmark on minimum academic standard, confirms the stakeholders' perception that the major cause of decline in quality of Nigerian university education has been the failure of university leadership to comply with the NUC benchmark on minimum academic standard. The finding is a confirmation of the stakeholders' outcry on university fake or window dressing form of accreditation processes. It follows logically that if leadership can only comply moderately with the benchmark on minimum academic standards, then the quality decline should be expected. By implication, a total compliance will amount to an automatic increase in the level of the quality of Nigerian university education. This finding corroborated the submissions of some researchers who argued that the university leadership has been the main cause of the decline in quality of Nigerian university education because they often fake the accreditation processes [15,16,17] and that their failure to total compliance with NUC benchmark on minimum academic standard has remained a big problem [18,19,20,21].

The study revealed how significant, the impact of leadership is in achieving the goal of any organization. Akomolafe [1] while stressing the importance of leadership to the quality of university education asserted that sound leadership is central to the success of the school system. Akindutire [31] also argued that, the quality of leadership in a tertiary institution, its mission and vision, effectiveness and efficiency, inevitably influence the standard of productivity by Staff, and the achievement of students. This confirms the assertion of Mills [4] who posited that a good leader can make a success of a weak business plan, and that a poor leader can ruin even the best plan. Consequently, the success or failure of the university system in achieving its goal(s) depend significantly upon its leadership. It was on this premise that, the World Bank [9] concluded that the specific solutions to

problems confronting higher education have to emerge from within the creativity of higher education professionals.

The study established a significant relationship between the university leadership compliance with NUC benchmark on minimum academic standard and the quality of Nigerian university education. The established moderate level of Nigerian university leadership compliance with the NUC benchmark on minimum academic standard, and the moderate level of Nigerian university education established in Table 3 implied that an increase in the level of university leadership compliance will amount to an automatic increase in the level of the quality of Nigerian university education. This finding corroborated Awosusi [14] who asserted that the standard of education has not fallen, but what has happened is that people have failed to comply with standards. On this premise, Odunuga [26] submitted that the NUC should continue to monitor the universities and ensure continuous compliance with its extant guidelines and regulations. The study established no significant difference between federal and state university staff assessment of universities' leadership compliance with NUC benchmark on minimum academic Standard at 0.05 level of significance was an indication that institutional ownership has no effect on the level of university leadership compliance with NUC benchmark on minimum academic standard.

8. CONCLUSION

Quality can only be acquired when set standard are achieved, but may be difficult where funding is inadequate. The moderate level of universities' leadership compliance established by the study was an indication of leadership failure to comply with NUC benchmark on minimum academic standard. This confirmed the stakeholders' observation that the failure of leadership to comply with NUC benchmark on minimum academic standard has been a major problem of quality decline in Nigerian university education. However, this finding may not have been unconnected with the poor funding pattern of government as rightly noted by Aboluwade [18] and Aina [28]. The non-significant difference established between the assessment of the federal and state university staff, on Nigerian university leadership compliance with NUC benchmark on minimum academic standard is an indication that ownership status has no impact on universities' leadership level of compliance.

Conclusively, Nigerian universities' leadership should not only give a total compliance to NUC benchmark on minimum academic standard, but improve upon it, by attaining a level higher than the set standard in order to improve on the quality of its education. The government should increase on its budgetary provision for university education as "without good budgets, there are no school," Thompson and Wood [30].

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the empirical evidence established by the study, the following recommendations were made;

1. Government should improve on the funding status of its university system, as the major problem of education in Nigeria has been attributed to inadequate funding. The National Universities Commission should provide solutions that can inform policy decisions on how to promote university leadership effectiveness in Nigerian university system, more importantly in ensuring adequate monitoring of the system to ensure that set standard are fully complied with.
2. The Nigerian universities' leadership must not only ensure a total compliance with NUC benchmark on minimum academic standard, but strive to improve on it, for quality outputs.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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