

ADMINISTRATIVE AUTONOMY AND EXTERNAL INTERFERENCE IN HIGHER INSTITUTIONS IN BAYELSA STATE

AKOLOH LAURA

Department of Educational Foundation
Isaac Jasper College of Education, Sagbama, Bayelsa State

akolohlaura@gmail.com

+2348066605909

Abstract

This paper critically examines administrative autonomy and external interference in higher institutions in Bayelsa State, Nigeria. It explores the concept of autonomy as the institutional right of tertiary schools to manage their internal affairs such as personnel administration, academic programs, and financial management without undue external influence. External interference is defined as political, community, or donor influence that undermines the authority of educational managers and disrupts institutional independence. The study identifies key causes of interference, including weak oversight mechanisms, poor leadership quality, excessive political involvement in management appointments, and the politicization of institutional establishment and siting. It highlights major forms of interference such as politically motivated appointments, manipulation of staff recruitment, imbalanced resource allocation, and compromised student admissions. These interferences have produced far-reaching consequences such as corruption, poor institutional performance, regional imbalance, weak leadership structures, and declining academic standards. The paper concludes that limited administrative autonomy exposes higher institutions in Bayelsa State to political and external pressure, thereby hindering effective governance and sustainable academic development. It recommends restoring full autonomy through legislation, adopting merit-based recruitment and leadership selection, ensuring financial independence via first-line charges, and strengthening internal accountability mechanisms to safeguard the integrity of higher education in Nigeria.

Keywords: Administrative Autonomy, Bayelsa State, External Interference, Higher Education, , Institutional Governance.

Introduction

Public organizations are established with a legal framework that prescribes the composition of the structure that is saddled with managing or overseeing the personnel in order to efficiently attain its mandate in line with its goals and missions. In specificity, the ability of tertiary institutions (as public organizations) to independently coordinate or manage its affairs, programmes and plans without any form of unethical and unlawful interference is regarded as administrative autonomy. Maggetti and Verhoest (2014) generally defines administrative autonomy as public organizations' ability to determine their own preferences, plans and programmes that are eventually translated into authoritative actions and decisions that tends to depict the successful management of such public organizations (like tertiary institutions).

Tertiary education system comprises institutions namely: universities, polytechnics, colleges of education, and different post-secondary professional training institutions that are existing in Nigeria. Also, Lauritz and Eisemon (2015) opined that tertiary education institutions or system in Nigeria are bedeviled or confronted with myriad of problems such as inadequate funding, decay of existing infrastructure, poor maintenance of facilities, poor welfare package and inadequate manpower among others, which they need to surmount in order to enhance their effectiveness and sustainability. Corroborating this view, Ogunode and Abubakar (2022) stated that tertiary institutions in the course of attaining global competitiveness as well as actualizing their goal of providing quality tertiary level of education require a guaranteed and sustainable provision of adequate funds for welfare, facilities maintenance, execution of instructional programmes and recruitment of staff.

Okoli et al. (2016) observed that autonomy is a principle upon which the tertiary education system tries to maintain proficient administrative practices, highly functional systems, operational stability and actualization of goals. Hence, when autonomy is enthroned in the right, ethical and lawful perspective, it would then lead to the facilitation of the objectives of academic freedom and accountability in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Implicitly, the publically owned tertiary institutions in Bayelsa State notably, Federal University Otuoke, Nigeria Delta University Amasoma, Medical University Yenagoa, Isaac Jasper Boro College of Education Sagbama, Bayelsa State School of Health Technology Otuogidi, Bayelsa State School of Nursing Tombia, School of Tourism and Hospitality, Elebele, Bayelsa State Polytechnic Aleibiri, and African University Toru-Orua requires adequate and commensurate level of autonomy for their timely, efficient and quality realization of goals.

The issue on autonomy is an age-long debate or discuss that has been attributed to the level of development and quality of especially the publically owned tertiary institutions in Nigeria. In

specific term, many analysts are of the view or opinion that the quantitative growth and sustainable development would be recorded when the tertiary institutions in Nigeria are granted complete, total of full autonomy. Akinwumi and Olaniyan (2022) observed that governments (especially federal and state government) are usually obsessed with such debates or discusses on the ground that “he who pays the piper dictates the tune”. Accordingly, the degree of autonomy evident in public owned tertiary institutions (like polytechnic, universities, colleges of education, school of nursing and college of health technology among other nomenclatures) can also be determined by the type of regime of government that oversees the programmes. Thus, it could be clearly stated that the nature of the tertiary institutions leadership (whether sole administrator or fully constituted board) could predispose it to administrative malfeasances.

Overtime, tertiary institutions in Nigeria have been inundated with inadequate funds, planning with inaccurate statistical data, misappropriation of funds, and shortage of qualified manpower among other limitations that could impede their development (Onyeike & Owuama, 2012). This reality prompted the quest for the management of tertiary institutions to seek for supports in the form of finance, materials, patents, professional partnerships and endowments from spirited individuals, organizations, communities, professional bodies and companies in order to supplement the dwindling government allocations. In line with this, Ogunode et al. (2020) stated that the receipt of additional supports could come with the corresponding sense of gratitude and obligation that could be likened as the point of “external interferences”. Olayinka (2018) see external interference as the scenario where private individuals, community leadership, political interests and groups that are extraneous to the administrative structure in public organizations exercise varying levels of influence, interests and control that conditions and shapes the decisions and actions of the legitimate administrative structure of that particular public organization (like tertiary or higher institutions).

Okoli et al. (2016) stated that the ability of tertiary institutions to be granted full autonomy stems on their management capability to proactively and proficiently galvanize systems, resources and programmes towards the attainment of effective policy-induced good and quality education for the benefit of individuals, citizens, government and the society.

Ogunode (2020) stated that the administration of tertiary institutions (like universities, polytechnics, colleges of education, etc.) relates to the application of the institutions’ resources to implement their specified programmes. Alluding to this standpoint, Akinwumi and Olaniyan (2022) observed that the appropriate use of autonomy is considered as a stimulus and catalyst that would facilitate universities, polytechnics, colleges of education, school of nursing, etc. management independence in deciding the manner to effectively use their resources (such as personnel, facilities, fund and legal

framework) towards the timely and effectively implementing the teaching programme, research programme and community service among others in tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

From the foregoing, the enthronement of full autonomy would be evidently manifested in the formulation of the management that is saddled with implementing the programmes and educational policies without any form of political interference and leanings by the political party in power in the State (like Bayelsa State). The attainment of this which ethical stance underscores the assertion of Okoli et al. (2016) that the tenets or principles of autonomy rests on public organizations (like public tertiary institutions) unrestraint or uninterruptedly galvanizing systems and plans towards independently maintaining and deciding the administrative practices, processes and strategies that would facilitate the development of the tertiary education institutions in Nigeria. Akinwumi and Olaniyan (2022) emphasized that the degree of autonomy in tertiary institutions is dependent on the level of administrative control, financial dependency and academic freedom, which would in turn relate to the independence control and effective conduct of the schooling processes (teaching, learning, assessment and research) in such tertiary institutions. The issues that have been x-rayed in this study in respect to administrative autonomy. In view of this, the dimensions of administrative autonomy such as administrative control, financial dependency and academic freedom are considered as the main thrust of the issues that are used to measure external interference in higher institutions especially in Bayelsa State. Against this backdrop, this study would therefore, focus on examining administrative autonomy and external interference in higher institutions.

Literature Review

Administrative autonomy according to Akinwumi and Olaniyan (2022), includes the authority to independently deploy personnel and to determine such things as the timing of the school date, engagement of personnel, duration of the school year, and the language of instruction that would enhance the progress and development of tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Administrative autonomy especially in tertiary institutions rests on management, lecturers and other staff having and vested with the authority to determine school schedules, classroom practices and school activities within the limits set by abroad national curriculum, encouraged by examination and monitored and supported by educational ethics, standard, learning assessments and effective accomplishment of school inspectorate and security programmes.

Ogunode (2020) emphasized that administrative autonomy also vests on the tertiary institutions Governing Council the statutory powers of appointment, promotion, discipline of all categories of

staff as well as the management in the tertiary institutions in Nigeria. This implies that the public universities, polytechnics, colleges of education, school of nursing, colleges of health technology among others in Bayelsa State have Governing Councils that are bestowed with statutory powers of appointing, promoting, appraising and disciplining the management and certain cadre of staff. In addition, Akinwumi and Olaniyan (2022) stated that administrative autonomy permits flexibility in the combination in inputs and synthesis of resources, materials and personnel towards the improvement in the delivery of quality tertiary institutions administrators towards effectively attaining the goal of making tertiary institutions the actual citadel of learning in any society.

Administrative autonomy can influence the administration of tertiary institutions. Ogunode (2020) stated that the administration of tertiary institutions (like universities, polytechnics, colleges of education, etc.) relates to the application of the institutions' resources to implement their specified programmes with the aims of realizing the objectives of the universities, polytechnics and colleges of education administration is the mobilization and arrangement of both human and material resources for the achievement of their missions and mandates. Akinwumi and Olaniyan (2022) reiterated that the administration of tertiary institutions entails the deployment of the institutions' resources to accomplish their stipulated objectives such as: to implement the programme of tertiary institutions as defined; to allocate resources for the implementation of the programmes and activities; to ensure implementation of teaching programme, to ensure implementation of research programme; to ensure delivery of quality community services programme, to ensure effective staff development, to ensure effective student administration, to ensure smooth implementation of academic calendar and to ensure quality education in Universities, Polytechnics, Colleges of Education, School of Nursing, College of Health Technology, Institute of Tourism and Hospitality, etc.

The avalanche of problems that could affect the realization of effective administrative autonomy of tertiary institutions in Nigeria can be categorized into internal and external influences or interferences. Akinwumi and Olaniyan (2022) stated that internal interference focuses on the activities of the Academic Staff Union of University (ASUU), Non-Academic Staff Union (NASU), Colleges of Education Academic Staff Union (COEASU) and Academic Staff Union of Polytechnics (ASUP) as the strongest associations that are existing in the university, college of education and polytechnic respective community, which could very much influence on the daily running of the university. While Olayinka (2018) emphasized that external interferences as the name applies comes from external bodies such as private individuals, community leadership, political interests and groups that the daily pursuit of their requests, aspirations and goals could greatly impact the decisions and schedules of the administrators in that tertiary institutions. Comparatively, Akinwumi and Olaniyan (2022) stated that the external interferences rank above the internal interference on its capacity to exert undue pressure on the authorities thereby, impeding the realization of the goal of

improved conditions of service and effective administration that could burden the tertiary institution management. Hence, the external interferences would be examined.

External Interferences

Olayinka (2018) stated that external interference occur in scenarios where an individual and group that are not in the management of tertiary institutions wield influence and control that determines the decisions and actions of legitimate authority. In addition, external interference exists when politically connected persons like legislators, commissioners, ministers, community leaders, high placed individuals, captains of industry etc. controls and influences the decisions of the legitimate instrument and structure of administration in tertiary institutions. Ogunode (2020) submitted that another big challenge facing the administration of public universities in Nigeria is external interference. The management and governing council structure in public tertiary institutions can be externally influenced by the whims and caprices of the political officer holders or politicians that influenced their appointment. Alluding to this standpoint, Akinwumi and Olaniyan (2022) stated that the manner in which the administrative structure in public tertiary institutions are designed to function to be answerable to the governing council constituted by the government to manage their affairs could trigger external interferences.

Gbenu (2012) observed that external interferences occurs when outsiders that are not directly connected with the management of public organizations (including tertiary institutions) influence the day-to-day running, personnel management and decisions (like recruitment, employment, etc.) in that public organization. Also, Ogunode and Musa (2020) observed that when the activities of these governing councils affect the effective administration of public tertiary institutions in Nigeria it triggers an alarming level of external interferences that could upset the effective administration of public tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Akinwumi and Olaniyan (2022) stated that the wrongful exercise of the discretionary powers of appointive authorities (like Governor or President) in appointing and selecting their cronies as members of the boards and management of public tertiary institutions could enthrone incompetent administrators that would be susceptible to external interference that would seriously jeopardize the administration of tertiary institutions in Bayelsa State (in particular) and Nigeria (in general).

Tertiary institutions in Nigeria are not totally free from the hand of politicians, individuals, community leaders and groups outside the tertiary education system (Ekundayo & Ajayi, 2009). This situation of external interference whereby the management and even governing council are not totally free to choose who their head should be, employ staff, admit students and perform certain services without un-statutory external intervention would not augur well for the tertiary education

system. Although, external interference could be said to affect both federal and state-owned tertiary institutions. However, Akinwumi and Olaniyan (2022) observed that state-owned institutions suffer a great deal of interference in virtually all its programmes such as admission, recruitment, selection and choice of the chief executive, deans, departmental heads, directors of programmes and above all the selection of vice-chancellors, rectors and provosts for universities, polytechnics and colleges of education respectively.

Causes of External Interferences in Tertiary Institutions in Bayelsa State

Absence of Oversight

Alemika, submitted that absence of vertical and horizontal oversight and accountability within and across the education sector, resulting in poor oversight of admission policies and capacity as well as admission and employment in flagrant violations of the constitution and federal character policy, thereby turning universities into enclaves of ethnic and religious groups instead of universal and globally competitive centres of learning, research and scholarship. Alemika, (n.d.) opined that absence of effective oversight of incompetent and unaccountable management officials and organs (principal officers, Senate, A & PC committees, faculty and departments boards and heads) due to weak oversight and primordial considerations that are existing in tertiary institutions.

Lack of Quality Institutional Leaders

Nwachukwu, Stella and Obaoda (2018) revealed that the lack of institutional leaders' values like integrity, effectiveness, competence, accountability, honesty and fairness explains the unsuccessful and ineffective management of tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Daniel-Kalioi, (2019) pointed out that it is however painful to specifically observe that one major leadership issue that plagues the management of the tertiary education system is the lack of quality leadership provided internally by some Vice Chancellors, Rectors and Provosts in universities, polytechnics and colleges of education respectively.

Dominance of the Political Level of Management

Daniel-Kalioi, (2019) stated that the organogram of the universities shows that tertiary institutions has three levels of management viz; the political, the Administrative and the Academic. The political level consists of the tertiary institution Governing Council, the senate, the congregation and convocation. This is considered political because the heads of these groups are all political appointees and their position makes them to dominate in the affairs, roles and responsibilities of

other levels (like Administrative and the Academic). Ademola et al. (2014) asserted that a good number of appointees in the university council had no business being in a university not to talk of being in the Council. They are merely politicians pursuing the interest of their sponsors in most cases that are antithetical to the universities realization of its goals.

For instance, the Director General of the Institute of Research Technology (IRT) was found to have presented a forged PhD certificate from the University of Benin Cotonou which disqualified him from being appointed as the Director General of IRT. Also, another example occurred when the Former Council Chairman of Ignatius Ajuru University of Education (IAUE) made contradictory statements and decisions on the expiration of tenure of the former vice chancellor that were at variance with the State government's stance on the Tenure of the immediate past Vice Chancellor of IAUE.

Political Interference in the Establishment of Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria

Okoli et al. (2016) observed that there has been intense political interference in the establishment of universities, colleges of education, polytechnics among other tertiary institutions in Nigeria especially since 1999. For instance, Akinwumi and Olaniyan (2022) noted that the spate of government's influenced establishment of Federal universities continued began in 2002 when the Obasanjo administration resuscitated the National Open University Nigeria Lagos, which was suspended in 1984, this increased during the Jonathan's administration where nine federal universities (including Federal University Otueke in Bayelsa State) were established in 2009. This has continued with the Buhari administration establishing more Federal Universities among which include; Nigerian Army University Biu Borno State. Ogunode and Ajape (2021) and Ogunode and Omenuko (2021) stated that political influences is a major problem hindering effective planning of tertiary education in Nigeria.

Manifestation of External Interference in Public Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria

Public tertiary institutions in Nigeria experience political influences and external interference from the members of the political party in power, host communities, friends of board members, extraneous bodies among others that affects the administration of public tertiary institutions. Thus, the external interferences manifests in the following ways: employment/recruitment, the appointment of school administrators (VCs. Rectors, Provost, Bursar, Registrar) planning and establishment of public tertiary institutions, location of tertiary institutions, the appointment of council members, expansion of statutory unions in the particular tertiary institution like polytechnic, university, college of education.

Employment/Recruitment

Many politicians, community leaders, individuals and groups in Bayelsa State are fraught with using their political influence, contacts and closeness to the “powers that be” to influence employment of their cronies and friends into the public tertiary institutions (like universities, colleges of education, polytechnics, etc.). Corroborating this view, Ogunode et al. (2020) opined that politicians, individuals, community leaders and other groups are personally allocated at least a slot in any recruitment processes in the Nigerian tertiary institutions. This issue breeds nepotism and has jettisoned meritocracy as sometimes the candidates presented for employment by these external interferers may not be very qualified and as such they use their contact and connections to influence the employment of their cronies even against the policies of the tertiary institutions.

Thus, Akinwumi and Olaniyan (2022) assert that the continuation of these external interferences in recruitment processes by political officeholders, politicians, individual, groups, community leaders for personal slots are threats to the sustainability of tertiary education policies as well as the realization of the motto of excellence and hard work by tertiary institutions. This standpoint aligned with assertion of Omemu (2015) observed that qualification and hard work which are supposed to be the parameters for the appointment of principal officers in tertiary institutions of learning are hardly adhered to when political forces and other interests sets in.

Appointment of Vice-Chancellors, Provosts and Rectors

The appointment of vice chancellors, provosts and rectors in many public universities, colleges of education and polytechnics respectively is most times influenced by external interferences in Nigeria. This external interference begins during the constitution of the governing council members in order for them to in turn do the bidding of the government who are always disposed to interfering with the appointment of vice chancellors, provosts and rectors. Consequently, this interference has prompted the Minister of Education, Malam Adamu Adamu as reported by Guardian (2021) to accuse some state governors of hijacking the process of appointing vice chancellors, provosts and rectors from their hitherto state to now permeating into many public universities, colleges of education and polytechnics. Adamu described this vested interest as responsible for the due to apathy of many qualified persons during the selection processes and unimaginable crises in the selection processes of the vice-chancellors for those particular universities in the country, citing the development as leading to “unnecessary frictions and tension in the institutions”. Also, Alemika (n.d.) noted that external interference has increased emphasis on the appointment of indigenes as vice chancellors, provosts and rectors including other principal officers above the criteria of merit,

integrity, and academic excellence is among the problem hindering development of universities, colleges of education and polytechnics in Nigeria.

Planning and Establishment of Universities

The planning and establishment of public universities, polytechnics and colleges of education in Nigeria are supposed to be through strategic planning and needs assessment. However, this planning imperative have been altered by political power and connection, which has become the planning requirement for the establishment of public tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Okoli et al. (2016) submitted that there has been political interference in the establishment of tertiary institutions in Nigeria. This according to Ololube (2013), is based on the fact that the existing political arrangement has influenced the control over educational planning in Nigeria. Olayinka (2018) opined that planning, administration and management of educational sector are influenced by the political party in power. Gbenu (2012) posited that legislature has a direct influence on the planning processes as the body responsible for policy formulation on educational development.

Location of Public Tertiary Institutions

The location of public tertiary institutions in Nigeria has come under great political influence and external interference. This has led to universities, polytechnics and colleges of education not to be located based on needs assessment, planning exigency and national interest but now based on political interest and influence from political office holders and politicians that have considered the establishment of university as part of their constituent project while in public office. In view of this, Nigerian politicians have bamboozled educational planners into siting tertiary institutions (like universities, polytechnics and colleges of education) in their communities. Ogunode and Ajape (2021) observed politicians both at the federal and states level especially those at the position of president and state governors influences location of higher institutions to their states and communities to attract development and achieve political gain by altering the national document on siting of educational institutions in the country.

Appointment of Council Members/Visitation Panel

Another area where the government applied the political influence in the administration of the public universities is the used of visitation panels. Adegbite (2007) and Ekundayo and Ajayi, (2009) submitted that another area of political interference is constitution of Visitation Panels by the Visitor at wills instead of the minimum five years intervals, the main aim of which is to witch-hunt or crucifies the vice-chancellors and the university authorities. Akinwumi and Olaniyan (2022) observed that the government involvement and external interference in the governance of tertiary institutions has been a point of strife between the government and the Academic Staff Unions.

Admission of Students

Admission in some public tertiary institutions such as universities, polytechnics and colleges of education are hacked by political officials, high echelon individuals, groups, community leaders etc. send their candidates to various vice chancellors, rectors and provosts respectively. In this regard, Ogunode et al. (2020) opined that politicians in Nigeria influence admissions for their family members, friends, colonies and themselves even when they don't meet the standard. Corroborating this view, Akinwumi and Olaniyan (2022) stated that the admission of students at the tertiary levels are heavily tainted by corruption, nepotism and egregious discrimination in favour of indigenes of states in which the university, polytechnic and college of education is located, beyond and in violation of prescribed guidelines.

Conclusion

This study concludes that lack of full administrative autonomy manifested in the upsurge of external interference in public tertiary institutions in Bayelsa State in the following ways: employment/recruitment of staff, appointment of school administrators (VCs, Bursar, Registrar), planning and establishment of public universities, location of universities, appointment of council members, expansion of National Universities Commission powers and admission of students into the various public universities. The paper also identified corruption, overconcentration of public universities, poor leadership, uneven development of public universities and poor ranking of public universities as effects of political influence on the administration of Nigerian public universities.

Hence, the issue of non-administrative which has led to the appointment of incompetent administrators has thereby, correspondingly heightened the existence of external interference in tertiary institutions in Bayelsa State. Against this backdrop, many tertiary institutions especially in Bayelsa State now serve more as sanctuary for political, ethnic and religious miscreants, many of whom are at the helms of affairs, and whose decisions and conducts threaten national unity, security and development.

Suggestions

The following have been suggested:

11. The National Assembly and Bayelsa State House of Assembly in conjunction with their controlled Ministry of Education should enact a legislation that would restore full administrative autonomy.

12. The Governing Council, Senate and those saddled with the responsibility of managing tertiary institutions in Bayelsa State should consider administrative pedigree, leadership traits, efficient goal attainment, and intellectual competence.
13. Vice Chancellors, rectors and provosts in universities, polytechnics and colleges of education respectively are encouraged to recruit staff (both academic and non-academic) on the basis of education, intellectual capacity, skills, competency among other qualities and not based on political affiliation, connection, religion, ethnic origin, hegemony.
14. The Federal and State Governments should ensure that universities, polytechnics, colleges of education among other tertiary institutions under their jurisdiction should be funded from the first line charge in order to avoid interferences that could likely affect the attainment of effective administration and planning.

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