

STAFF SOCIAL WELFARE POLICY IMPLEMENTATION IN NIGERIAN TERTIARY EDUCATION: ADDRESSING EMERGING CHALLENGES THROUGH STRATEGIC RESPONSES

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Abstract

Staff social welfare plays an important role in promoting employees' well-being and job effectiveness. When staff welfare is neglected, it can result in poor job performance, frequent industrial disputes, and poor quality of tertiary education. This paper examined the implementation of staff social welfare policies in Nigerian tertiary education, the challenges affecting implementation, and strategic responses for improvement. Staff welfare was viewed as an institutional responsibility which encompasses remuneration, healthcare, housing, pension benefits, professional development, workplace safety, and conducive working conditions. Drawing from the reviewed literature, the paper argued that effective welfare provision is essential for improving staff motivation, commitment, productivity, retention, industrial harmony, and overall institutional performance. However, the discussion revealed that the existence of welfare policies does not automatically ensure their effective implementation. Key challenges identified include inadequate funding, weak implementation mechanisms, poor infrastructure, and limited institutional monitoring, which often create gaps

between policy provisions and staff's actual welfare experiences. To address these challenges, the paper proposed improved funding, effective welfare monitoring systems, regular policy reviews, greater transparency and accountability, and the use of technology in welfare administration. It also emphasized the need for coordinated efforts between government and tertiary institution management, with active participation from staff unions in welfare-related decisions. The paper concluded that staff welfare should be treated as a strategic investment in sustainable tertiary education rather than merely an employee benefit. It suggested, among others, that government and institutional management should give staff representatives meaningful opportunities to participate in the development, review, and implementation of welfare policies. Such participation can help institutions better understand staff needs, improve decision-making, and strengthen cooperation between management and employees.

Keywords: Staff Social Welfare, Policy Implementation, Tertiary Education, Teaching Staff, Non-Teaching Staff.

Introduction

The Nigerian educational system is structured to provide learning opportunities at different levels, with the broad objectives of promoting individual development, human capacity building, and national advancement. It encompasses early childhood education, basic and secondary education, tertiary education, as well as technical, vocational, adult, and other forms of non-formal education. Through these levels, education provide students with a comprehensive education, equipping them with the knowledge, skills, and competencies needed for academic and social success as they move on to higher academic or vocational pursuits. It also includes preparing students for meaningful participation in society by fostering moral, civic, and vocational abilities (National Policy on Education, 2013; Nwokonko & Obona, 2024). The administration and management of education in Nigeria involve the federal, state, and local governments, although their responsibilities vary according to the type of education.

Tertiary education represents the highest level of formal education and is provided after secondary or post-basic education through universities, polytechnics, colleges of education, monotechnics, and other institutions approved by the relevant regulatory authorities. The effectiveness of tertiary institutions depends substantially on the quality of both academic and non-academic staff. These two categories of employees perform complementary functions that are essential for the effective administration, teaching, learning, research, and attainment of institutional goals. Consequently, staff welfare is an important consideration in enhancing employee productivity and maintaining institutional effectiveness.

Staff welfare, however remains a significant concern within Nigeria's tertiary education system (Ogunode et al., 2026). Economic pressures, including inflation and rising living costs, coupled with difficulties in accessing affordable credit, housing and transportation challenges, and limited opportunities for professional development, have placed considerable pressure on employees in tertiary institutions (Federal Ministry of Education, 2025; Ogunode et al., 2026). These conditions have also contributed to recurring disagreements between tertiary education

staff unions and government over issues relating to remuneration, working conditions, and the implementation of previously negotiated welfare agreements (Vanguard, 2025). Also, the poor and most time zero implementation of agreements contribute to industrial disputes which dampen staff morale, productivity, and institutional stability. Therefore, improving staff welfare is essential not only for promoting the well-being of employees but also for strengthening institutional performance and ensuring the effective delivery of quality tertiary education in Nigeria (Ogunode et al., 2026).

It is against this backdrop that this study sought to examine the implementation of staff social welfare policies in Nigerian tertiary education. Specifically, the study seeks to identify staff social welfare policy, assess the extent to which existing social welfare policies are implemented in tertiary institutions, identify the major challenges hindering effective implementation, and examine their implications for staff well-being and institutional performance. The study also aims to propose strategic responses that can strengthen the implementation of staff social welfare policies in Nigerian tertiary institutions.

Conceptual Clarification

Tertiary Education

Tertiary education represents the highest level of formal education in Nigeria and is provided through universities, polytechnics, colleges of education, and other higher education institutions. Beyond its academic mandate, it is legally expected to provide essential social services to students, staff, host communities, and the wider society (Madukwe et al., 2024). Omorobi and Obona (2018) describe tertiary education as an intellectual community where knowledge is pursued freely within an environment of academic freedom, metaphorically referring to it as a “universe in a city.” Similarly, Eimuhi and Obona (2025) emphasized that tertiary institutions serve as centres for advanced learning, research, and professional training. The primary objectives of tertiary education include providing advanced education, promoting research and innovation, developing a competent workforce, and contributing to national development by equipping graduates with the knowledge, skills, and entrepreneurial capacity for self-reliance and productive citizenship (Federal Republic of Nigeria [FRN], 2013; Obona et al., 2023). Consequently, tertiary education is widely recognized as a strategic vehicle for addressing major socio-economic challenges such as unemployment, corruption, political instability, tribalism, nepotism, disease, malnutrition, and economic underdevelopment (Eimuhi & Obona, 2025). To remain relevant, the sector must continually respond to the evolving needs of society and the economy.

In addition to awarding qualifications such as National Diplomas (ND), Higher National Diplomas (HND), National Certificates in Education (NCE), and university degrees, tertiary institutions perform broader functions of teaching, research, innovation, and community service (FRN, 2013). They are established to develop students’ intellectual abilities, critical thinking, creativity, technical competence, and responsible citizenship while fostering lifelong learning. Through these functions, tertiary education contributes significantly to the production of skilled human capital and sustainable national development. For this reason, both the federal and state governments regard investment in higher education as a crucial strategy for strengthening the managerial, professional, and technical capacity required for national growth

(Obona et al., 2020). However, the realization of these objectives depends greatly on the effective implementation of staff social welfare policies that promote the motivation of academic and non-academic personnel.

Meaning of Staff Social Welfare

Staff Social Welfare is a set of policies and institutional measures designed to improve employees' socio-economic, physical, psychological, and professional working conditions. In Nigerian tertiary institutions, staff social welfare is both financial and non-financial and includes remuneration, healthcare, housing, pension, insurance, staff development, counseling, recreational facilities, and work environment. The study reveals that staff social welfare has become a key human resource strategy in modern organizations. This is because it boosts workers' motivation, morale, and productivity while ensuring organizational effectiveness and sustainability. At the same time, the absence of welfare policies tends to reduce staff commitment, motivation, and performance (Okorie, 2024; Koku, 2025).

Staff social welfare policies in Nigerian tertiary institutions comprise inter alia healthcare, housing, transport, pension and insurance schemes, staff development, counseling, and working conditions conducive to achieving organizational objectives. Recent studies on social welfare in Nigerian universities demonstrate that welfare policies enhance staff morale, motivation, productivity, and trust in the employing institution. They also contribute to improved quality of service and research, as well as overall institutional performance. Therefore, staff social welfare is a critical indicator of an institution's commitment to supporting its academic and non-academic staff through appropriate working conditions to achieve sustainable higher education (Okafor et al., 2025).

Meaning of Welfare Policies

Welfare policies are the formal institutional provisions established to promote the social, economic, physical, and psychological well-being of employees. As strategic human resource instruments, welfare policies create supportive work environments that enhance employee well-being, commitment, engagement, and organizational sustainability (Medina-Garrido et al., 2024; Loncan, 2025). In Nigerian tertiary education, welfare policies provide the framework through which universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education support the well-being of academic and non-academic staff in line with institutional regulations and national labour standards. According to Sulyman et al. (2020), compensation is an important factor which needs to be given adequate attention by the employer to enhance employees' job commitment in an organization. Thus, welfare policies contribute to the achievement of institutional goals.

Importance of Welfare Policies to Academic and Non-Academic Staff

Welfare policies are essential to the effective functioning of Nigerian tertiary institutions because they enhance the motivation and productivity of both academic and non-academic staff. Academic staff are responsible for teaching, research, publication, innovation, and community engagement, while non-academic staff provide valuable administrative, technical,

financial, library, health, security, and maintenance services that support the daily operations of higher education institutions (National Universities Commission [NUC], 2019). As both groups contribute directly to institutional success, the implementation of comprehensive welfare policies creates an enabling work environment that promotes commitment and quality service delivery.

For academic staff, welfare policies provide the conditions necessary for excellence in teaching, research, and knowledge production. Access to competitive remuneration, conducive office accommodation, reliable electricity, internet connectivity, healthcare, research grants, and professional development opportunities enhances job satisfaction and encourages higher levels of productivity. Empirical evidence by Okoi et al. (2025) demonstrated that welfare provisions, including incentives, healthcare services, office facilities, and digital infrastructure, significantly improved the performance of academic staff in federal universities in South-South Nigeria. Similarly, Taiwo et al. (2024) reported that adequate salaries, favourable working conditions, and continuous staff development positively influenced academic staff commitment and job performance in federal universities in South-West Nigeria.

Welfare policies are equally important for non-academic staff, whose contributions ensure the smooth administration and efficient delivery of institutional services. Employees in administrative, technical, library, ICT, finance, health, and maintenance units require supportive welfare programmes to remain motivated and effective in their responsibilities. When institutions provide fair salaries, safe working conditions, healthcare, pension benefits, training opportunities, and other welfare incentives, non-academic staff are better positioned to deliver timely and high-quality support services to both staff and students. Taiwo et al. (2024) found that these welfare provisions strengthened the commitment and performance of non-academic personnel, thereby contributing to improved organizational effectiveness. Recognizing the importance of employee welfare, the Federal Government of Nigeria introduced the Tertiary Institutions Staff Support Fund (TISSF) as a major intervention to improve the living and working conditions of personnel in tertiary institutions. The programme was established by the Federal Ministry of Education in collaboration with the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) and is implemented through the Bank of Industry (Education Vanguard, 2025).

According to the Federal Ministry of Education (2025), TISSF is a soft-loan scheme designed to support staff in areas such as housing, transportation, healthcare, and small-scale enterprise development. The initiative reflects the government's commitment to strengthening staff welfare as a means of fostering a more effective tertiary education system. At the institutional level, effective welfare policies promote staff retention, reduce industrial unrest. According to Ogunode et al. (2026), the welfare, motivation, and productivity of employees are fundamental determinants of institutional performance and educational quality in Nigerian higher education. This suggests that staff welfare should not be viewed merely as an employee benefit but as a strategic investment in institutional development and sustainable educational excellence.

Dimensions of Staff Social Welfare Policies in Nigerian Tertiary Education

Staff social welfare policies extend beyond salary administration to include benefits such as remuneration, healthcare, housing, pension, professional development, workplace safety.

i. Remuneration: Remuneration is one of the dimensions of staff social welfare policies that is significant to employees. It constitutes the monetary payments made in exchange for services rendered. In this regard, Nigerian tertiary institutions provide basic salary, academic allowance, promotion increment, responsibility allowance, and other statutorily allowances as part of their social welfare policies towards their staff. Ideally, remuneration is a crucial component of employment as such, poor or delayed payments can lead to reduced morale and industrial actions. Therefore, appropriate remuneration packages enable tertiary education institutions to retain highly-skilled academic and non-academic staff, thus promoting quality teaching and research.

ii. Healthcare Support: Healthcare services play a critical role in ensuring employees perform optimally while minimizing the occurrence of employee absenteeism. Healthcare support is among the welfare policies that remain significant in Nigerian tertiary education institutions. This encompasses medical insurance schemes such as NHIS, treatment and screening, maternity, and parental benefits. Therefore, institutions that provide comprehensive healthcare welfare packages encourage employees to seek medical services whenever needed.

iii. Housing: Housing includes staff houses, mortgages, loans, and rents provisions meant to provide better living conditions for the employees. Housing welfare policies promote employees' general well-being while supporting their sense of belonging. Suitable housing increases staff commitment and minimize the stress associated with meeting mortgage payments. Thus, when institutions provide or support affordable housing options, they will attract and retain skilled academic and non-academic staff and by extension quality higher education as well.

iv. Pension: Pension welfare policies provide a reliable income for the employees after retirement. Pension schemes in Nigeria have been a subject of debate, and the contributory pension scheme being the preferred option for institutions and employees as opposed to the former government-sponsored pension scheme. In this regard, Nigerian tertiary institutions have statutory obligations of purchasing pension funds on behalf of their staff while ensuring timely deductions of contributions from employees' monthly salaries. As a result, institutions that provide excellent pension benefits retain highly-skilled staff.

v. Professional Development: Professional development encompasses various opportunities provided to academic and non-academic staff to further enhance their knowledge, and acquire professional qualifications. Professional development includes providing resources for conferences, seminars, workshops, research, and training, and other relevant areas of study. It also includes continuous professional development and technical training in various fields relevant to the staff's specialty while supporting their supervisory responsibilities. According to Madukwe et al. (2024), teachers must be trained in educational principles and practices to gain a deep understanding of classroom management and instructional methods, which are fundamental for students' academic success. Thus, professional development opportunities promote quality teaching and research, ultimately influencing the institutions' productivity and performance.

vi. Workplace Safety: This encompasses the regulations and guidelines provided in an institution to guarantee a conducive working environment devoid of personal or property risks.

This safety policies include occupational health and safety regulations, fire and disaster response, as well as security and emergency procedures. Notably, workplace safety has become a significant concern for institutions because it minimizes the impact of risks while promoting a healthy working environment. Therefore, institutions consider workplace because they prevent adverse consequences such as employee injury, harassment and violence.

Challenges Hindering Effective Implementation

Effective implementation ensures that welfare provisions are translated into practical services that improve employees' quality of work life and contribute to the achievement of institutional goals (Medina-Garrido et al., 2024; Loncan, 2025). Despite its noble objectives, the effective implementation of staff social welfare policies in Nigerian tertiary institutions may be constrained by several institutional, financial, and administrative-related challenges (Musa, 2026). This section examines the major factors that hinder the successful implementation of staff social welfare policies and limit their capacity to improve staff well-being and institutional performance.

i. Inadequate Funding: Inadequate funding remains a major challenge to the implementation of staff social welfare policies in Nigerian tertiary institutions. Welfare programmes depend on adequate and regular financial resources to support healthcare, staff development, allowances, housing, office facilities, and other employee needs. Icha (2024) raised concerns about the adequacy of funding for personnel, overhead, and capital projects in federal universities, while Ambali (2025) identified inadequate funding as a continuing problem affecting staff well-being and working conditions. When funds are limited or released late, institutions often give priority to essential operational needs, leaving welfare programmes delayed, underfunded, or unevenly implemented.

ii. Weak Implementation Mechanisms: Having a welfare policy in place does not necessarily mean that staff will enjoy its intended benefits. Effective implementation requires clear procedures and responsible officials for handling staff concerns. Taiwo et al. (2024) found that existing industrial-dispute and collective-bargaining mechanisms in Nigerian universities had not adequately improved academic staff welfare. Salau et al. (2018) identified inadequate funding and deteriorating facilities as major concerns affecting the work environment in public universities. This suggests that weaknesses in administrative processes can create a gap between welfare policies and what staff actually receive.

iii. Poor Infrastructure: Poor infrastructure can limit the effectiveness of staff welfare policies because employees need a supportive working environment in addition to financial benefits. Facilities such as functional offices, reliable electricity, internet services, healthcare facilities, and suitable workspaces are important to staff productivity. Oyewole et al. (2019) found a significant relationship between the work environment, instructional facilities, and academic staff performance, while Ambali (2025) identified infrastructure deficits as a challenge to staff well-being. Aina and Olorunsola (2023) also reported a significant relationship between physical infrastructure, instructional materials, and staff performance. Thus, deteriorating facilities can reduce the benefits of welfare policies and make it difficult for staff to work effectively.

iv. Weak Institutional Monitoring: Weak monitoring is another challenge because institutions need to regularly check whether welfare policies are being properly implemented and whether staff are actually receiving the benefits provided for them. Without effective monitoring, implementation gaps may remain unnoticed. Okafor et al. (2025) identified resource mismanagement, inadequate funding, infrastructural decay, and inconsistent policies as challenges to staff welfare and emphasized the need for stronger monitoring and accountability. Effective monitoring can therefore help institutions track welfare resources, identify problems early, and take timely corrective action to ensure that welfare policies achieve their intended purpose.

Strategic Responses for Improving Implementation

i. Strengthening Funding

Adequate funding is essential for effective staff welfare programmes in Nigerian tertiary institutions. It is necessary for these institutions to provide realistic budgets for healthcare, staff development, housing, allowances, and suitable working facilities. Funds from additional legitimate sources such as alumni support, grants and institutional partnerships should be used to improve institutional welfare services. Therefore, funding should not only be increased but also released on time and properly protected to ensure that resources meant for staff welfare are used for their intended purposes.

ii. Establishment of Effective Welfare Monitoring Mechanisms

Tertiary institutions need effective monitoring systems to ensure that staff welfare policies are actually implemented and that employees receive the benefits intended for them. Welfare monitoring committees involving management and staff unions should regularly assess welfare programmes, collect staff feedback, and recommend improvements. Nnaji et al. (2026) noted continuing governance and implementation challenges in Nigerian higher education. Therefore, effective monitoring can provide institutions with reliable information about the delivery of welfare services and help address problems before they become more serious. Also, there is need for a more collaborative implementation mechanism to turn welfare commitments into meaningful benefits for employees.

iii. Regular Review of Welfare Policies

Staff welfare policies should be reviewed regularly because employees' needs change with economic, social, and technological developments. For instance, rising living costs, inflation, and emerging workplace demands may make some existing welfare provisions inadequate. Institutions should therefore involve staff representatives in periodic policy reviews and use information from staff surveys to identify areas requiring improvement. This regular review will help ensure that welfare policies respond effectively to gaps between policy intentions and actual implementation.

iv. Promoting Transparency and Accountability

Transparency and accountability are important for building staff confidence and ensuring that welfare resources are properly managed. Institutions should clearly communicate welfare policies, budgets, and procedures to employees. They should also provide accessible channels

for complaints and feedback. Very importantly, proper financial records, regular audits, and transparent reporting should also be maintained. Nnaji et al. (2026) emphasize that stronger governance and transparent administrative processes are increasingly important in Nigerian higher education. Therefore, when institutions are open and accountable, they can reduce perceptions of favouritism and misuse of resources which will strengthen trust between management and staff.

v. Leveraging Technology for Welfare Administration

Technology can make staff welfare administration faster and more transparent. Digital platforms can help institutions maintain staff welfare records and process applications effectively. They can also provide useful data for assessing the effectiveness of welfare programmes. Omeluzor et al. (2023) observed that technology can improve communication and administration in Nigerian higher education. Therefore, institutions should combine digital welfare systems with reliable ICT infrastructure, staff training, and clear policies to ensure that technology improves rather than complicates access to welfare services.

Conclusion

This paper examined the implementation of staff social welfare policies in Nigerian tertiary institutions, focusing on the needs of both academic and non-academic staff and how their welfare affects institutional performance. The discussion showed that staff welfare goes beyond salaries to include healthcare, housing, pensions, professional development, workplace safety, and supportive working conditions. When these needs are adequately addressed, staff are more likely to be motivated, committed, productive, and willing to remain in their institutions. However, the presence of welfare policies does not always translate into effective implementation. Inadequate funding, weak implementation processes, poor infrastructure, and limited monitoring continue to create gaps between policy provisions and staff experiences. Addressing these challenges requires better funding, stronger monitoring, regular policy reviews, transparency and accountability, and the effective use of technology in welfare administration.

Staff welfare should therefore be seen as an important part of a sustainable tertiary education rather than simply an employee benefit. Academic and non-academic staff are more likely to perform their teaching, research, administrative, and technical responsibilities effectively when they work in supportive environments. On the other hand, poor welfare can lower morale, encourage industrial disputes, and negatively affect the quality of educational services. It is therefore not enough for institutions to formulate welfare policies, but they must be properly funded, implemented, monitored, and reviewed, with adequate infrastructure and technology provided to support them.

Suggestions

Based on the issues discussed, the following suggestions are proposed:

1. The Federal Government should ensure that tertiary institutions receive sufficient funding to meet staff welfare needs, including healthcare, housing, and other essential

benefits. Also, welfare commitments should be clearly included in government budgets and released on time.

2. Government should provide clear welfare policies and monitor compliance across tertiary institutions. Agreements reached with staff should be honoured consistently to reduce dissatisfaction and recurring industrial disputes.
3. Tertiary institutions should treat staff welfare as a priority. The management should see staff support as an investment in institutional performance rather than an unnecessary expense.
4. Management of institutions should establish effective systems for tracking the implementation of welfare policies and obtaining regular feedback from staff. Periodic welfare reports should also be reviewed by relevant institutional authorities to ensure that identified problems are addressed promptly.
5. Institutions should promote transparency and accountability by keeping staff properly informed about available welfare benefits, eligibility requirements, and procedures for accessing them.
6. Government and institutional management should give staff representatives a meaningful role in developing, reviewing, and implementing welfare policies. Their involvement can help management better understand employees' actual needs and encourage cooperation between staff and management.
7. Institutions should periodically assess their welfare provisions and update them to reflect changes in current living costs and economic conditions. This will help ensure that welfare policies remain relevant to the changing needs of academic and non-academic staff.

Contribution to knowledge

This paper contributes to knowledge by providing a practical view of staff social welfare policy implementation in Nigerian tertiary institutions. It brings together the welfare needs of academic and non-academic staff, the challenges limiting effective implementation, and practical ways of addressing these challenges. The paper emphasizes that staff welfare should not be treated simply as an employee benefit but as an important investment in staff motivation, productivity, institutional effectiveness, and industrial harmony. It also highlights the shared responsibilities of government and institutional management in areas such as funding, monitoring, policy review, transparency, accountability, the use of technology. The paper therefore offers a useful framework for policymakers, tertiary institutional managers, and staff unions to improve staff welfare for sustainability of tertiary education in Nigeria.

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