

NATIONAL UNIVERSITIES COMMISSION (NUC) AND MANAGEMENT OF FEDERAL UNIVERSITIES IN NORTH CENTRAL GEO-POLITICAL ZONE NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study investigated the extent of influence of National Universities Commission (NUC) 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 Socio-technical theory by Abbas and Michael (2023). The research adopted a 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 385 respondents drawn through multi-stage sampling technique. A structured questionnaire developed by the researchers titled 'National Universities Commission and Federal Universities Management Questionnaire, (NUCFUM-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 minimum academic standard set by the NUC as well as the accreditation of old and new courses 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 in order to maintain or improve the quality of university education in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Influence, National Universities Commission, Management, Federal Universities.*

1. Background to the Study

A university is an educational institution saddled with the onus of producing high level manpower than can man all the facets of human social, economic, technological, scientific and political endeavours among others. Otonko (2019) notes that a university is an academic institution saddled with the creation of protected space—intellectual, physical, temporal and political—to allow people, individually and collectively, to think the unthinkable, to push the limits of the possible and to reflect and re-asses knowledge for the development of the entire society. The Nigerian universities are expected to be intellectual warehouses saddled with the onus of producing high level manpower. The importance of university education in nation building cannot be over-emphasized mostly in the area of knowledge creation and

dissemination. Corroborating this view, Adeosun and Oni (2019) note that education in general and university education in particular is fundamental to the acquisition of knowledge, economy and society in all nations. On this basis, every nation of the world seems to be much more concerned about global acceptability of university education through the provision of functional university education to the recipients. Adekunle (2021) sees university education as a catalyst to stimulate other levels of the education system, and enhance its contribution in the development of the whole educational system, notably via improved teacher education, curriculum development, educational research and community relation.

The provision of functional university the world over is not left at the discretion of the management of the institutions but is usually undertaken by specialized bodies that oversee the conduct of university of education in order to conform to global best practices. Based on this premise, the National Universities Commission (NUC) was established in 1962 deliberately to ensure that the value, goals and expectations within and around the university system are protected and promoted. Awajo (2020) opines that Decree (Act) No. 16 of 1985 as contained in the National Universities Commission amended Decree (Act) No. 48 of 1988 empowers the Commission to lay down minimum standards for all programmes taught in Nigerian universities. The National Universities Commission (NUC) is a national regulatory body vested with the responsibility of ensuring efficiency, effectiveness and quality university education in Nigeria. According to Akpan (2022), the major objectives of the commission include advising the President and governors of states, through the minister, on the creation of new universities and other degree-granting institutions in Nigeria; making recommendations for the establishment of new academic units in existing universities or the approval or disapproval of proposals to establish such academic units; making such other investigations relating to higher education as the commission may consider necessary in the national interest; making such other recommendations to the Federal and State Governments, relating to universities and other degree-awarding institutions as the commission may consider to be in the national interest; and carrying out such other activities as are conducive to the discharge of its functions under the Act. The performance of these functions could exert a positive influence on the management of federal universities in the North Central Zone of Nigeria.

Management of 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 Ariyola and Umaur (2018), management of educational institutions is a concept that entails the quest for putting the formal educational system under control, regulation or supervision in order to judiciously manage scarce human and material resources towards accomplishment of the educational goals and objectives.

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 minimum for ensuring maximum control of universities in Nigeria. According to Akpan (2022), one of the principal responsibilities of the NUC in the management of federal universities is to ensure quality in university education through the setting up of the 'Minimum Academic Standards (MAS)'. Akpan stresses that the NUC established the MAS in 1989. This document was a result of wide

consultation with universities and expert academics in the broad discipline taught in Nigerian universities. To facilitate adherence to the policy document, the NUC organized stakeholder conference in 2021 on curriculum review in which experts in various disciplines and professional bodies drew up subject Benchmark statement for all undergraduate programmes in the universities. This document drawn by the NUC could to a very large extent influence the management of federal universities in North Central Nigeria by ensuring adherence to the minimum academic standards. This might not be the only influence of NUC on the management of federal universities in the North Central Nigeria.

The establishment and accreditation of old and new academic programmes in the federal universities in North Central Nigeria could also be an influence of NUC on the management of federal universities in the North Central Nigeria. Uza (2019) reports that new programmes in the federal universities are not set up based on the whims and caprices of the management of such institutions. Uza stresses that the establishment of new academic programmes in universities follows a rigorous internal process as proposals emanate from the departments and are carefully scrutinized by the faculty boards before they are sent to the committee of Deans for further screening. When this committee is satisfied with all sections of the proposal, it is then sent to the senate for consideration and approval. Before the implementation of the programme, the university concerned must seek and obtain approval from National Universities Commission (NUC) in this way, the NUC ascertains the claims made by the universities in their submission to the commission about their readiness to establish the proposed programme, without which the programme cannot commence (Hunde, 2017; Ali, 2018; Ajoola, 2020; Jike, 2020). Thus, this process ensures that new academic programmes are scrutinized to meet up to the expected global standards of university education before such programmes are mounted. It is however lamentable that today, it appears most of the new courses mounted in some federal universities do not conform to the academic standards as university education is yet to fully produce an egalitarian Nigerian society. Therefore, conducting a research on the influence of NUC on the management of federal universities in the area of study is deemed timely, hence, the present research.

2. Statement of the Problem

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 to boost the provision of university education in the region. Nevertheless, there are persistent grumblings among stakeholders in education (like the students, staff, educational policy inspectors and parents) about the quality of instruction and management going on in those citadels of learning. Normally, minimum academic standards are a sine qua non for the success of any educational institution. Unfortunately, a visit to many federal universities in North Central Nigeria will reveal dwindling academic standards which could consequent upon the management's negligence stemming from derailed or delayed oversight functions of the regulatory body, NUC. This anomaly could account for the surge of unemployable graduates in the Nigerian labour market. The researcher speculates 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 setting minimum academic standards, accreditation of old and new academic programmes.

3. Objectives of the Study

The major objective of this research is to investigate the extent of influence of National Universities Commission on the management of federal universities in North Central Nigeria. Specifically, the research seeks to:

1. ascertain the influence of NUC's minimum academic standards on the management of federal universities in North Central Nigeria.
2. investigate the influence of NUC's accreditation of old and new academic programmes

4. Research Questions

The following research questions are raised to guide the study;

1. How does minimum academic standard set by the NUC influence the management of federal universities?
2. How does accreditation of old and new academic programmes by the NUC influence the management of federal universities?

5. Hypotheses

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

1. NUC's Minimum academic standard has no significant influence on the management of federal universities.
2. NUC's accreditation of old and new academic programmes has no significant influence on the management of federal universities.

6. Literature Review

This section reviewed pertinent literature related to the topic of the study. Review was organized under Theoretical framework and Conceptual framework.

6. i Theoretical Framework

This section reviewed the Socio-technical theory by Abbas and Michael (2023) on which the study was anchored. The socio-technical theory was propounded by Abbas and Michael in 2023. The major preoccupation of the theory is that the socio-technical research is about mutual benefits derived from the intersection of social and technical elements.

6. ii Brief History of the National Universities Commission

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 Ahmedu 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) (Akomolafe & Adesua 2019). Decree (Act) No. 16 of 1985 as contained in the National Universities Commission amended Decree (Act) No. 48 of 1988 empowers the Commission to lay down minimum standards for all programmes taught in Nigerian universities.

6. iii Functions of the Commission

The functions of NUC according to Akpan (2018), Faniran and Akintayo (2019), Ebuara and Edet (2020), Iguodala (2020) Saliu (2020) and Ogunode, Ukozor and Ayoko (2023) are advising the President and the Governors of the States, through the Minister, on the creation of new universities and other degree-granting institutions in Nigeria; preparing, after consultation with all the State Governments, the universities, the National Manpower Board and such other bodies as it considers appropriate, periodic master plans for the balanced and coordinated development of all universities in Nigeria and such plans shall include the general programmes to be pursued by the universities, in order to ensure that they are fully adequate to meet national needs and objectives; making recommendations for the establishment and location of new universities as and when considered necessary, and in accordance with the Commission's approved guidelines; and recommending the establishment of new academic units in existing universities or the approval or disapproval of proposals to establish such academic units, among others.

7. Research Methodology: This section treated the research methodology under the following subheadings: Research design, area of the study, population, sample and sampling technique, instrumentation, validation of the instrument, method of data collection as well as method of data analysis.

8. Research design: This research adopted a 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.

9. 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 region itself is rich in alluvial soil and other natural features that boost the Nigerian exciting scenery. The region is mostly agrarian in nature. The only public university in Abuja is University of Abuja, Abuja. The public university in Nasarawa State and Kwara state are Federal University, Keffi and University of Ilorin, Ilorin respectively. The public universities in Benue state are Joseph Sarwuan Tarka University, Makurdi and Federal University of Health Sciences, Otukpo while the University of Jos is located in Plateau state. In Kogi state, the federal university is Federal University, Lokoja while Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida University, Lapai is located in Niger state.

10. 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.

11. Sample and Sampling technique: The sample size for this study is 385 respondents from the population of 10,368 respondents from all the eight (8) federal universities North Central Nigeria. The sample size was considered to be adequate since it is in line with Yamane (1967) that a complete census of the population can be done where the elements of the population

can be included in a survey; but where the population is above 10,000, a sample comprising 385 is acceptable for a study. This sample statistics was drawn using the Yamane formula. The sample was obtained through multistage sampling technique. In the first stage, the researchers used proportionately stratified random sampling the respondents based on the staff strength of each federal university. In the second stage, the researchers adopted simple random sampling to sample respondents from each of the federal university in the area of study.

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

13. Validation of instrument: In order to elicit relevant information from the respondents the constructed questionnaire was presented two lecturers from the department of Educational Management and one expert in Measurement and Evaluation of Benue State University, Makurdi, to ascertain the validity of the instrument. This was done in order to eliminate ambiguous statements from the questionnaire while those that were not relevant were eliminated based on experts' advice. The experts made necessary correction after which the researchers effected the corrections.

14. Data collection: The researchers personally collected data from 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. This increased the return rate of the distributed questionnaire, however, six copies of the questionnaire were not returned.

15. Data analysis: A four point modified rating scale was used to establish the disparity in the respondents' opinions. Thus, Strongly Agree (SA) =4; Agree (A) =3; Disagree (D) =2; Strongly Disagree (SD) =1 were used by respondents to respond to each item in each cluster. The descriptive statistics of Mean Score and Standard Deviation were 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.

16. Data presentation: Data was presented based on the postulated research questions and formulated research hypotheses.

Research question 1: How does minimum academic standard 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 and Standard Deviation of the Influence of minimum academic standard set by the NUC influence the management of federal universities?.

S	ITEM DESCRIPTION	N	SA	A	D	SD	\bar{x}	σ	Decision
1	The prescriptions by the NUC concerning minimum academic programmes have influence on the provision of university education in the federal universities.	246	92	101	23	30	3.41	0.55	Agree
2	NUC's policies on minimum academic programmes reduce the arbitrarily mounting of new academic programmes in federal universities.	246	79	129	28	10	3.47	0.21	Agree
3	NUC's policies on minimum academic standards do not ensure quality academic programmes offered in the federal universities.	246	28	14	69	135	1.47	0.25	Disagree
4	NUC's minimum academic standards on mounting of relevant academic programmes in the federal universities have facilitated the quality of education.	246	138	82	7	19	3.15	0.82	Agree
5	NUC's academic policies do not ensure that programmes of universities meet minimum global quality standards.	246	11	3	98	134	1.82	1.06	Disagree

As shown on table 1 above, respondents agreed with items 1, 2 and 4 which have a mean score above 2.50 but rejected items 3 and 5 which have a mean score below 2.50. The implication of this result is that respondents were of the view NUC's minimum academic standards has influence on the management of federal universities.

Research hypothesis 1: NUC's Minimum academic standards 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 Minimum academic standard on the Management of Federal Universities

Opinions	Observed N	Expected N	Level of Sig.	df	χ^2 -cal	P-value	Decision
SD	12	61.5	.05	3	282.05	.001	Ho rejected
D	8	61.5					
A	126	61.5					
SA	100	61.5					

(P-value=0.001; P=0.001<0.05; Ho rejected).

Table 2 shows Chi-square (χ^2) value of 282.05 at 3df, P<0.05 and Ho rejected. This result reveals that the null hypothesis which states that NUC's minimum academic standards have no

significant influence on the management of federal universities was rejected. From the result above, the implication is that NUC's minimum academic standards have significant influence on the management of federal universities.

Research question 2: How does accreditation of old and new academic programmes by the NUC influence the management of federal universities?

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

Table 3: Mean Scores and Standard Deviation 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	SD	\bar{x}	σ	Decision
6	NUC's accreditation does not assist lecturers to utilize various teaching methods in the teaching-learning process.	246	12	7	57	286	1.06	0.33	Disagree
7	NUC's accreditation of old and new programmes ensures the quality of teaching staff in such programmes.	246	7	4	139	212	3.15	3.61	Agree
8	NUC's policies regarding old and new academic programmes have discouraged university management to recruit the recommended number of qualified lecturers in the federal universities.	246	9	18	88	247	1.21	0.46	Disagree
9	NUC's prescriptions regarding mounting of new and old academic programmes have not brought improvement in the quality of education in the federal universities.	246	24	14	106	218	1.24	0.37	Disagree
10	NUC's policies on accreditation have brought about job training for lecturers in newly mounted academic programmes in the federal universities.	246	206	132	9	8	3.35	3.22	Agree

As shown on table 3, respondents disagreed with items 6, 8 and 9 and accepted only items 7 and 10. The implication of the result is that respondents agreed with the view that NUC's accreditation of old and new courses has influence on the management of federal universities.

Research hypothesis 2: NUC's accreditation of old and new academic programmes has no significant influence on the management of federal universities.

Table 4: Chi-Square Analysis on the Influence of NUC’s Accreditation of Old and New Academic Programmes on the Management of Federal Universities

Opinions	Observed And	Expected N	Residual	Level of Sig.	df	χ^2 -cal	P- value	Decision
SD	1	61.5	-49.5	.05	3	282.05	.001	Ho rejected
D	8	61.5	-53.5					
A	126	61.5	64.5					
SA	100	61.5	38.5					

(*P-value=0.001; P=0.001<0.05; Ho rejected*).

Table 2 shows Chi-square (χ^2) value of 282.05 at 3df, $P<0.05$ and H_0 rejected. This result reveals that the null hypothesis which states that NUC’s accreditation of old and new academic programmes has no significant influence on the management of federal universities was rejected. From the result above, the implication is that NUC’s accreditation of old and new academic programmes has significant influence on the management of federal universities.

17. Discussion of Findings.

The first finding of this study revealed that NUC’s Minimum academic standard has a significant influence on the management of federal universities. This finding agree with Ogunode and Samuel (2022) who found out that using indices such as quality of academic staff, academic content, physical facilities, library and funding, the Commission has also been able to conduct regular comprehensive accreditation of all undergraduate programmes in Nigerian Universities. The accreditation exercise by the NUC has ensured standardization of all academic programmes in Nigerian Universities. Similarly, Kalama, Etebu, Martha and John (2019) found out that NUC’s policies on minimum academic programmes have ensured quality academic programmes offered in the federal universities.

The second finding of this study revealed that NUC’s accreditation of old and new academic programmes has significant influence on the management of federal universities. This finding corroborates previous findings by Faniran and Akintayo (2019) who found out that accreditation standards and guidelines in Nigerian university system is aimed at strengthening programme for quality assurance and quality improvement, is periodically conducted in the university system. In a related finding, Kalama, Etebu, Martha and John (2019) found that NUC’s policies on minimum academic programmes has ensured quality academic programmes offered in the federal universities..

18. Recommendations/ Implications for Educational Management.

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

1. Government at all levels should financially empower the NUC to be able to effectively review the minimum academic standards so that the graduates can compete favourably in the global knowledge economy and labour market.
2. NUC should intensify efforts in the accreditation of new and old programmes of all degree awarding institutions across the country to ensure that the quality of university education in the public universities is not compromised.

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