



National Universities Commission and Universities Supervision in Nigeria: The Need for Urgency

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Abstract

This paper discussed issues to urgently address in the operation of the National Universities Commission in Nigeria. This study is a review paper. Depending on secondary data that were collected from online and print publications. The paper identified issues ranging from inadequate funding, decentralization of National Universities Commission (NUC) operation, staff training, National Universities Commission (NUC) collaboration approaches with stakeholders, mobility facilities, appointment processes of National Universities Commission (NUC) Executive Secretary, shortage of personnel to the poor release of the budget as some of the major issues to urgently address to enable the commission to carry out its supervisory functions effectively. Based on these issues, the paper hereby recommends that there should be an immediate increment in the budgetary allocation of the commission. The Executive Secretary of the commission should engage university stakeholders more on issues concerning the policy and programme development of the commission. The Executive Secretary of the commission should create a medium where Private institutions and international institutions can support the commission in terms of finance and technical assistance.

Keywords

National Universities Commission (NUC).

Introduction

Universities Commission was established in 1962 as an advisory agency in the Cabinet Office. However, in 1974, it became a statutory body and the first Executive Secretary, in the person of Prof. Jibril Aminu, was then appointed. The National Universities Commission (NUC) is a parastatal under the Federal Ministry of Education (FME). The Commission has a Governing Council. Over the years, the Commission has transformed from a small office in the cabinet office to an important agent of government in the area of development and management of university education in Nigeria (NUC, 2024).

The Commission has twelve Directorates; Directorate of Academic Planning, Directorate of Inspection and Monitoring, Directorate of Human Resources, Directorate of the Establishment of Private Universities, Directorate of Students, Directorate of Research, Innovations & Information Technology, Directorate of Finance and Accounts, Directorate of Accreditation, Directorate of Open and Distance and e-Learning, Directorate of Skills Development and Entrepreneurship, Directorate of Public Affairs, Directorate of Special Projects and the Directorate of the Executive Secretary's Office. Each of the Directorates is headed by a Director (NUC, 2024).

The Commission has recorded several successes since its inception. These successes can be attributed to the quality of leadership, dedication and commitment of the staff, the quality of its Board members, cooperation received from Universities and support from the Federal Government. Muhammed and Ayeni (2018) corroborated the above development by saying that the extent of success or failure of any human society or organisation has its roots in leadership at all levels. As a coordinating body, the leadership of the Commission ensures it discharges its responsibilities by recruiting adequate and relevant manpower and appeals to the Universities for their sustained support and understanding. The Commission also relies on support from the Federal Government, State Governments and other stakeholders in its bid to improve the quality of tertiary education and graduates of the nation's university system (NUC, 2024). Ogunode (2020) described the National Universities Commission as the engine room of the universities. National Universities Commission is also conceptualized as the external supervisory agency of the federal government that ensures quality assurance in universities across the country.

The main functions of the National Universities Commission include; Granting approval for all academic programmes run in Nigerian universities; Granting approval for the establishment of all higher educational institutions offering degree programmes in Nigerian universities; Ensuring quality assurance of all academic programmes offered in Nigerian universities; and Channel for all external support to the Nigerian universities (NUC, 2024). Also, NOUN (2008) observed that the functions of the National Universities Commission include the following:

1. Co-coordinating the entire activities in all Nigeria universities,

2. Harmonizing and coordinating the development of Nigerian universities to meet the national goals,
3. Advising the government on the financial needs of the universities,
4. Distribution of funds to the Universities when made available by the government,
5. Setting the minimum, benchmark for Nigerian universities,
6. Ensuring compliance of the Universities to the minimum benchmark set,
7. Collecting, collating, analyzing and storing data collected from Nigerian Universities for use in advising the government on the need to expand the existing universities or establish new ones,
8. Setting standards to be followed in establishing universities in Nigeria,
9. Issuing operating licenses to approved Nigerian universities.
10. Accrediting courses and programmes in Nigerian universities,
11. Participating in universities' annual estimate hearings to determine the financial needs of the universities, and
12. Keeping accurate and up-to-date financial records for all local and foreign transactions relating to universities in Nigeria. Ogunode (2021) maintained that the National Universities Commission coordinates the programmes development for universities in Nigeria, and resources verification, programmes accreditation and quality assurance. The National Universities Commission handles the funding of public universities, data administration and management of the universities.

National Universities Commission is been seen as the key agency responsible for the transformation of the universities in Nigeria. National Universities Commission policies and programmes have helped Nigerian universities to attain expansion and development. The National University Commission is a government commission for promoting quality higher education in Nigeria. Adeoti, (2015), and Olaleye, and Oyewole, (2016) respectively agreed that the National Universities Commission has contributed a lot to the development of the universities in Nigeria through the introduction of policies such as; minimum academic standards for programmes being taught in Nigerian Universities; establishment of academic planning units in the universities, the introduction of new academic curricula for Nigerian Universities, carrying capacity policy, setting minimum qualification for teaching in the University to be masters' degree; installation of E-mail facilities, introduced the computer-based Management Information Service (MIS) into Nigerian; introduction of E-learning technology in Nigerian University System; introduction of the post-Jamb screening for intending entrants into Nigerian universities and introduction of resources verifications and accreditation programme for the universities.

Methods

National Universities Commission is responsible for the external supervision of the universities in Nigeria and the universities' development and sustainability depends on the effectiveness of the commission. It is pertinent to discuss the various issues that mostly hinder the effective operation of the commission. This paper aims to discuss National Universities Commission and Universities Supervision in Nigeria: The Need for Urgency..

Results and Discussion

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework is hinged on the General System Theory that was developed by David Easton in 1953. The theory was adapted from the natural sciences, especially Biology in the works of Ludwig Von Bertallanty. The basic concept of a university system can be likened to a logical rational progression towards the meeting of the objectives that are already predetermined. Using the general systems theory, the university system is comparable with a system that has inputs, processes and outputs.

The systems theory of the university system asserts that any university system is a single, unified system of interrelated parts or subsystems. In the university, the sub-units could be infrastructure facilities, academic staff, non-academic staff, funds, students, teaching materials, books, information communication technology (ITC), supervision agency (National Universities Commission) and policy. The process takes the form of teaching, learning, administration, supervision characterized by lecturer-student rapport, supervision of teaching, inspection of facilities and other formal and informal interactions between supervisor and university administrators. Each sub-unit or part of the overall system is dependent on the others and cannot function optimally without them. The performance of the role by tertiary institutions lies in the ability of individuals to work with the system (Ogunode, Ayeni & Olorundare, 2024). Therefore, if factors are present that adversely affect one subsystem within the university, it's likely these factors may adversely affect other subsystems, too. This can result in impacts on the entire system to a certain extent.

This framework is relevant to this paper because the universities are systems made up of sub-units, where each unit is interdependent. This implies that the effectiveness and development of Nigerian universities depend on the effectiveness of the National Universities Commission because various components of the university system depend on other units like the NUC and interact with each other regularly to ensure the realization of the universities' objectives.

Universities Supervision

Supervision is an organized programme meant to give direction, guidance and control to an individual, organization, or institution to improve their performance and ensure they are doing the right things. Supervision is carried out in all forms of educational institutions including higher institutions. Higher institution supervision is more advanced and complex because the institutions are advanced institutions that deal with teaching, researching and provision of community services (Ogunode & Adanna (2022).

University supervision according to Ogunode & Ahaotu (2021) is the process of improving the performance of the universities through the provision of professional guidance to school administrators and academics. University supervision is the process of helping universities realize their objectives through the formulation of policies and ensuring the implementation of such

policies. Universities supervision deals with ensuring that universities comply with the various policies and directives for the development of the universities. The objectives of university supervision include: realising the objectives of the universities, ensuring the the delivery of quality education, guiding the university administrators and managers, helping improve the university system ranking and ensuring quality assurance in the system. The supervision of the Universities in Nigeria takes two forms. The external and the internal supervision. The external is through the National Universities Commission while the internal is through the school administrators.

Issues to urgently address in National Universities Commission for Effective Universities Supervision in Nigeria

Many issues are calling for urgent actions in the operation of the National University Commission. Some of the issues include; inadequate funding, decentralization of operation, staff training, NUC collaboration with stakeholders, mobility facilities, appointment processes of NUC Executive Secretary, shortage of personnel and poor release of budget.

Issue of funding

The issue of funding in the National Universities Commission is calling for an urgent response from the federal government. The National University Commission needs a lot of funds to be able to carry out its supervisory functions and quality assurance programme in universities across the country. Adequate funding is critical for the success of the commission. Ogunode, Ukozor and Ayoko, (2023) noted that adequate funding is critical for the development of any public institution. The above is corroborated by Ayeni (2017) in this manner; money is the lifeblood of every organisation. Adequate funding is the key to the achievement of the institution's goals. Adequate funding is the life wire of any organization. No meaningful impact institutions can attain without adequate funding. Studies have shown that public institutions excel in the implementation of their mandate when they are adequately funded by the government (Ayuba, 2015). Ogunode, et al (2023) opined that poor budgetary allocation to a public institution like the National Universities Commission has impacted negatively the discharge of their constitutional functions. The poor funding of public establishments has limited their expansion in terms of service delivery. For instance, the Executive Secretary of the National Universities Commission observed that in the fiscal year of 2019, NUC's budget receipt from its capital and overhead allocations had been quite low, with the performance based on the releases put at 50 per cent for Overhead Costs and the Personnel Costs at 72 per cent up-to-date since the salaries payment comes through the Integrated Personnel Payroll Information System (IPPIIS) (NUC, 2019). Ogunode, Ukozor & Ayoko (2023) and Victor (2007) made a case for an increment in the budgetary allocation to the National Universities Commission to enable the commission to carry out its functions effectively.

Decentralization of operation

Another issue that is calling for immediate action in the commission is the decentralization of the commission's operation to each political zone. Centralization of the operation and supervision of the commission from one single head office from Abuja has not helped the effectiveness of the institutions. Presently, the commission is overseeing the supervision of over 250 public private and other tertiary degree awarding institutions across the country. The Punch Editorial Board's comment of August 16, 2013, noted that regulating more than 129 universities in

Nigeria effectively is increasingly becoming, a burden too heavy for the National Universities Commission to bear alone. This is because, the staff capacity of the commission, is still small to handle the supervision of all the universities in the country. There is a need to decentralize the operation of the commission to operate from the political zones just as examination institutions operate from zones and state levels. West African Examinations Council (WAEC), Joint Admissions and Examinations Board (JAMB), National Examinations Council (NECO) and National Business and Technical Education Board (NABTEB), all operate from the states and zonal level and this has assisted the institutions to be more effective and efficiency in carrying out their services. So, the federal government need to look at how to expand the operation of the commission to operate from the zone levels. Ogunode and Ahaotu (2021) recommended that zonal offices should be established within the six geo-political zones to handle issues of supervision and quality assurance for the universities by the commission.

Staff Training

Staff training is very critical for the success of the National University Commission due to its unique roles of supervision and quality assurance attainment in the universities. Staff training refers to the teaching and learning activities carried on for the primary purpose of helping members of an organization acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, abilities, and attitudes needed by a particular job and organization. Training deals with providing staff with specific skills or helping those correct deficiencies in their performance. It is a short-term learning process that involves acquiring knowledge, sharpening skills, concepts, and rules, or changing attitudes and behaviours to enhance the performance of employees. Training is an activity leading to skilled behaviour, teaching employees the basic skills they need to perform their jobs. The heart of a continuous effort designed to improve employee competency and institutional performance. Every staff in the National University Commission needs training and retraining to be able to support the mandate of the commission. Ogunode & Ahaotu (2021a) have observed the issue of poor capacity building problem in many establishments of the government including the National Universities Commission. They noted that the budgetary allocation for training and retraining of staff yearly is not adequate considering the large number of staff in the commissions. They concluded that only a few staff in most agencies and commissions in Nigeria are on training yearly due to a shortage of funds. There is an urgent need to address this problem in the commission. The federal government should increase the budgetary allocation of the commission to allow more staff to annually go for training in supervision, quality assurance and university management. Femi (2017) recommended that training and retraining should be given priority in the commission to equip the staff of the commission with modern skills in supervision and programme accreditation.

NUC collaboration with stakeholders

There is a need for the National Universities Commission to reform its collaboration approaches with the various stakeholders in the universities. Administrators and managers in the affairs of the National Universities Commission need to adjust their methods and strategies in terms of collaborating and getting inputs and suggestions from the various stakeholders in the universities. The management of the university system requires effective collaboration and partnership. There have been accusations and allegations by some stakeholders in the universities that the commission is not seeking their support, input and suggestions in carrying

out the supervisory functions of the commission. For instance, Ogunode and Ayeni (2023) remarked that union groups in tertiary institutions especially the universities have demanded full autonomy from the federal government. Core curriculum minimum academic standard (CCMAS) is a product of curriculum innovation in university education and it is opposed by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) because they felt they were not fully involved in the preparation and planning. The Cable (2023) reported that the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) kicked against the core curriculum minimum academic standard (CCMAS) developed by the National Universities Commission (NUC). The CCMAS – usually prepared by the NUC, universities, and relevant education stakeholders – stipulates the minimum academic requirements for the training of undergraduates in various programmes. The NUC recently designed CCMAS for 17 programmes in universities across the country. But in a statement, Emmanuel Osodeke, ASUU president, said the process leading to the curriculum threatens university autonomy. The president of (ASUU) by name Osodeke noted that the NUC had 70 per cent input in the curriculum while universities – who are statutorily responsible for academic programme development – contributed only 30 per cent. This, according to him, has made “university senates become mere spectators in their affairs”. The ASUU president added that the curriculum developed by the NUC “left out essential courses in university programmes which would make Nigerian graduates globally uncompetitive!” The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) has received several complaints about the threats posed by the Core Curriculum Minimum Academic Standards (CCMAS) to quality university education and the erosion of powers of university Senate in Nigerian universities,” the statement reads. “ASUU cannot turn deaf ears to widespread protests against CCMAS. It is inexplicable that the National Universities Commission’s (NUC) pre-packaged 70% CCMAS contents are being imposed on the Nigerian University System (NUS); leaving university Senates, who are statutorily responsible for academic programme development, to work on only 30%! “ASUU is not unaware that setting academic standards and assuring quality in the NUS is within the remit of the NUC (The Cable, 2023). Based on this allegation, it is expected that the commission look inward and come out with a more accepted collaboration model that will be more participatory and more inclusive to capture the university students, parents and various university unions in terms of policy and programme identification, formulation, design and implementation. Maximum inputs should be collected from all respective stakeholders.

Mobility facilities

There is an urgent need for the federal government to increase the budgetary allocation of the commission to allow the commission to acquire more mobility facilities. Ogunode & Adanna (2022) noted that the job of supervision, inspection, regulation and programme accreditation demands that the commissions carrying out those functions should have adequate transportation facilities. It is expected of such commissions to be fully equipped with modern transport facilities that would enable them to discharge their responsibilities. It is sad to realize that many commissions such as the National Universities Commission [NUC], the National Commission for Colleges of Education [NCCE] and the National Board for Technical Education [NBTE] do not have adequate transport facilities to carry out their functions. Many of these commissions something depend on the institutions" facilities to convey their staff for the function of programme accreditation in the respective institutions which is not good enough. Inadequate

transport facilities are a factor militating against the effective supervision of universities in Nigeria. Also, Ogunode and Ahaotu (2021) maintained that the National Universities Commission does not have enough transport facilities that ensure effective supervision of universities across the country. The inability to do what one is supposed to do is what Ayeni (2018) refers to as a lack of integrity. The inability of the commission to procure transport facilities is what is responsible for why universities send their school coaster bus to pick up NUC staff for resource verification and accreditation exercises sometimes. The provision of adequate coaster buses, and monitoring and evaluation vehicles will help the commission discharge its duties and responsibilities effectively and with integrity.

Appointment processes of NUC Executive Secretary

There is an urgent need to revisit the procedure, conditions and requirements for the selection of the executive secretary of the National Universities Commission in Nigeria. More emphasis should be placed on track record performance in the universities. The person to be appointed should be the person who has shown leadership in the administration of universities and attained greater heights in the areas of national and international ranking. The person's performance record should show that he or she has helped his or her former university to achieve more in terms of teaching, research and moving yearly in the national and international ranking. The person should have qualifications in education administration, management or leadership apart from having practical experiences in the field. According to Taiwo (1980) in Ekaette (2001), a lot of higher education managers do not possess the charisma or good human relations needed for effective and efficient leadership. The above was captured by Ayeni, Tusayi, Joseph and Obatayo (2018) by saying that public office has become cash and carry in Nigeria's political system. The above development is what Ayeni and Nwaorgu (2018) refer to as corruption, and they explain it as thus, corruption is any behaviour that contravenes the laid down rules and procedures which tend to favour an individual or group over another. The prevalence of corruption in tertiary institutions is viewed to negate the core values of education at this level (Ayeni & Andeshi, 2023). More important is the view of Amaechi, Ayeni and Madu (2019), who noted that the rules of the service have been subverted for a selected few and the service has been known with various nasty and dirty names. This has resulted in poor leadership and an ineffective style of administration; a lot of programmes or activities are not carried out in such institutions such as the provision of grants for research and publications. The solution to the above development lies in what Ayeni (2018b) explained as thus, the quality of leadership is the bedrock of development in every country of the world, whether unitary or federal system. Staff welfare is neglected, no adequate control of staff and students, and no vision for the University. Such leaders also do not have the zeal for supervision and monitoring of institutional activities. This can affect the system performance in that, workers' conduct can result in an undesirable attitude to work and hence, no sustainability or continuity of good track records of performance in the system. Nigerian Higher Educational System needs leaders who can position it to an enviable height, success and progress (Udida, Bassey, & Udofia, 2009, Ujomu (2001). The above is corroborated by Ayeni, Sani and Uzoigwe (2019), when they posited that superior officers should, first of all, build good relationships with their subordinates by acting as a team leader and not the boss servant relationship that most superior officer put up. Ogunode and Ukozor (2022) therefore advised that the government appoint persons with professional qualifications in education

administration and management with outstanding track performance in the educational institutions as head of educational institutions.

Issue of shortage of personnel

Shortage of staff in the various commissions is another problem hindering the effective supervision of higher institutions in Nigeria (Ogunode & Adanna, 2022). Staff are employed to help in the implementation of the organizational mandate. The number of staff organizations has helped to some extent in determining how fast they are carrying out their mandate. Personnel are key resources an organization needs most to actualize its goals in the organization. Majorities of supervisory commissions in Nigeria are faced with the problem of inadequate personnel which is hindering their performance. A study by Adewale (2017) on public institutions in Nigeria discovered that many commissions and agencies of the Federal Government are understaffed and have affected the implementation of their statutory functions. Ogunode and Ahaotu (2021) submitted that the shortage of professional supervisors (personnel) is a big problem preventing effective supervision of universities in Nigeria. The former Executive Secretary, Professor Abubakar Adamu Rasheed (2020) noted that “the Commission’s staff numerical strength as of 2018, was 688 and that it dropped to 642 in 2019 and 628 by the year 2020 due to retirement of some staff and movement by others”. There is a need for the federal government to approve the recruitment of staff in the commission to enable the commission to carry out its mandate without any problems.

Poor Release of Budget

Ogunode and Adanna (2022) opined that it appears that many public establishments in Nigeria are faced with the problems of non-released budgets on time. The inability of most government agencies and commissions to access their budgetary allocation on time has also affected their performance. Most such commissions cannot implement their programme because of the poor release of funds. This problem also is affecting the National Universities Commission (Ogunode & Adanna, 2022). In 2020, the former Executive Secretary of the National Universities Commission, Professor Abubakar Adamu Rasheed observed that the issue of not releasing budgets on time was worsened by the delay factors in releasing budgets while in most cases the budgets were not even released, the former NUC Boss told the joint Committee that the universities had only received 10 per cent of their entire allocation for 2019, while NUC got 19 per cent so far in 2019. There is a need for the federal government to release the budgetary allocation of the commission on time to aid the commission carry out its supervisory functions of the universities, especially the accreditation programmes.

Conclusion

This paper reviews prominent issues affecting the effective operation of the National Universities Commission in Nigeria. The paper identified some of the pressing issues including inadequate funding, decentralization of National Universities Commission (NUC) operation, staff training, National Universities Commission (NUC) collaboration approaches with stakeholders, mobility facilities, appointment processes of National Universities Commission (NUC) Executive Secretary, shortage of personnel and poor release of budget.

Based on the challenges identified so far, the paper hereby recommends an immediate increment in the budgetary allocation of the commission in the coming year's national budget.

The Executive Secretary of the commission should engage university stakeholders more on issues concerning the policy and programme development of the commission. The Executive Secretary of the commission should create a medium where private institutions and international institutions can support the commission in terms of finance and technical assistance.

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