

LEADERS STRATEGIC PLANNING TO ATTAIN UNIVERSITY AUTONOMY: A STUDY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ABUJA, ABUJA, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The paper focused on leaders' strategic planning to attain university autonomy. Two research questions were set to guide the study. The population of the study was eight (8) deans from the eight faculties in the University of Abuja. The sample of the study was eight (8) deans sampled using purposive sampling technique. The validity of the instrument was carried out by the lecturers in the Department of Educational Management. The reliability test was carried out by giving two (2) respondents the instrument to respond. Test-retest method of reliability was applied to test the stability of scores over time. Cronbach alpha statistics was used to determine the internal consistency. The reliability index score of 0.76 was obtained by applying Pearson Product Moment and Spearman Rank Order Correlation coefficient statistics. Mean statistic was used to analyze the research questions. The findings of the study revealed that the university academic leaders have acquired the knowledge of strategic planning but they did not attain university autonomy. Based on the findings of the study the researchers recommended that the university academic leaders should apply the knowledge they acquire from strategic planning to establish university autonomy.

Introduction

Educational institutions have their objectives and goal which they intend to achieve within the scope of their operations. These institutions no matter how properly codified they are may need systemic action or strategic plans to actualize the institutions' objectives.

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**Related declarations are provided in the final section of this article.

he action plan will provide focus for the leaders in the institutions for effective administrative functions and in making informed decisions to put the institutions on a path way to achieve their expected result. According to Jombo-Umeh, Okenwa and Ekeke (2018) the proper action plan to be utilized by the academic leaders to achieve the set objectives for the university autonomy is strategic plan. The researchers viewed strategic plan as step by step document with definite objectives and end products that can be implemented and evaluated. It is a process by which the planner studied the past to have an idea to what should be done in the future based on the current trends of forces influencing the factors needed to build the future.

The academic leader who wants to go autonomous in the university institution must have to consider all the encumbrances of autonomy before applying strategic plan. Akpan and Amadi (2017) designated the essential indices of university autonomy to include that: the respective universities must exercise legal right of ownership of the university assets including: lands, buildings and plants, freedom to set strategic plan and execute them independently, have the right to budget for the running of the university, right to recruit and sack university academic and non-academic staff, freedom to determine the fees and the charges students should pay, freedom to develop and run salary structure that is suitable to the university. Furthermore, the university leaders should have the right to determine students enrollment, right to independently determine and run suitable academic calendar, right to select administrative heads for the institution, right to decide administrative policy, right to determine the intake capacity in various courses and faculties, right to conduct admission and degree awarding examinations, right to enjoy full financial autonomy including the right to run institutions bank account, operating internal auditing, right to generate income and enjoy administrative autonomy void of government, political and bureaucratic interference. Universities, consequent to autonomy should operate their affairs to achieve their objectives and goals without interference from the government. The academic or university leaders should therefore set their priorities from autonomy indices and apply strategic plan to attain them. They should realize that autonomy is not abrogation of the government constitution governing the universities.

Concept Clarification

Strategic Plan, Planning

Several scholars have defined strategic plan: Meek (2016) defined it as the process of selecting the path that a discipline, field or organization will follow. Bryson, Crosby and Stone (2015)

maintained that strategic planning is a planning that is intended to achieve a particular purpose. It is a disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that will shape and guide what an organization is, what it does and how it does it with a focus on the future. Adedoyin (2018) posited that strategic plan is a living document that includes; policy direction, implementation of strategic actions and a benchmark for monitoring, evaluation and expenditure framework which allow adjustments in areas of development during implementation. A strategic plan is a roadmap for an organization which lays out where it wants to go (vision), why that matters (mission and values) and how to get the goals, strategies and actions. It is forward looking (often 3-5 years) and also flexible enough to adapt to change in the internal and external environments. It is more than just setting concrete strategies which classifies, prioritizes, allocate resources and defines how to measure success. Strategic planning is the mobilization of resources, stating the procedures and their alternatives to carryout strategic activities and actions to achieve the expected or desired goal (Mallon, 2019).

Academic autonomy

Ogunyemi and Oladipo (2024) asserted that academic autonomy is an institutional privilege which gives leverage to universities for teaching, learning and carrying out independent research to ensure high educational standard and institutional sustainability to maintain that autonomy. It is the principle which tertiary institutions operates on. It is also cardinal for the realization of educational objectives, operational stability and for actualization of goals. Tamat and Tefera (2023) defined institutional autonomy as university's privilege to decide freely on its internal academic and administration affairs. The researchers also posited that institutional freedom is a leverage that determines how effectively quality teaching and learning can be delivered (Tamrat and Teferra, 2023). Jombo-Umeh (2018) defined the concept as relative freedom of the institution to conduct its own affairs free from outside interference, whether from the state, the donors, market or other stake holders. Jombo-Umeh explained further that institutional autonomy has two dimensions which include substantive autonomy which has to do with the power of the institution to determine its own goals, programmes and procedural autonomy. It also refers to the power of the institutions to determine the means by which its own goals and programmes will be pursued, that is the knowhow of the academy.

Jumbo-Umeh reiterated that autonomy makes the institution to have: freedom to select staff and students, determine conditions under which they remain in the university, give freedom to determine the curriculum contents, the degree of standards and freedom to allocate funds across

different sectors. United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2023) posited that autonomy is the privilege and responsibility of universities to govern themselves and manage their academic affairs independently, especially in determining what is taught, how it is taught, and who teaches. According to Mukoro and Ojeje (2024) university privileges and responsibilities can be eluded when the universities are depending on the government for funding, this according to the researchers poses dangers to university autonomy in that when government finance the university she controls it. Government officials may make crucial decisions which may have adverse effect on these tertiary institutions when the government funds and controls the universities. The universities should therefore get involved in entrepreneurial engagements to gain self -sustainability for autonomy (Mukoro & Ojeje, 2024).

Leaders Strategic Plan to Attain University Autonomy

Strategic plan according to Morrison-Porter (2021) is the identifying of objectives, deciding on steps or procedures to accomplish the objectives, mobilizing the resources required to carry out the activities. In educational system strategic plan is a properly planned and thought out document that tells people what the university wants to achieve in the future and how it aims to get it done. Morrison-Porter maintained that any leaders applying strategic plan should incorporate a definite course based on strong indicators of what the institution will be like in years to come using a technique called “Strength, Weakness, Opportunity and Threat (SWOT)” analysis. Strategic planning is regarded as a practice which is future oriented, aligning the business strategies of the organization. It involves defining plans, decisions, objectives and sequence of steps to be taken (Habeeb, & Eyupoglu, 2024).

Objectives of Strategic Planning are to:

1. define a clear direction and purpose,
2. align resources and activities with organizational priorities,
3. improve adaptability and proactive response to environmental change,
4. enhance organizational performance and competitiveness,
5. foster participation, communication, and shared ownership and
6. provide a framework for evaluation and control (Dhamini, 2024, Habeeb et al, 2024, Mousa et al, 2024, Gandrita, 2023, Seidl, Splinter 2024 & Kalavan, Nitanfar, Khodayari-Larng Ghaffari 2024).

Practical steps to achieve strategic planning:

1. Establish mission, vision and core values,
2. conduct environmental scanning (internal and external analysis),
3. formulate strategic goals and objectives,
4. develop strategies and action plans,
5. implement the strategy,
6. monitor and evaluate performance,
7. review and update the plan (Dhamini, 2024, Habeeb et al., 2024, Mousa et al., 2024, Gandrita, 2023, Seidl et al., 2024 & Kalavan et al., 2024).

Academic leaders using strategic plan to attain autonomy must choose experts from within the institution to work with as a team. They should formulate the objectives drawing from the university autonomy indices. Adedoyin (2018) maintained that the academic leaders should prioritize the objectives focusing initially on the major ones that will help them achieve the choice project. The next step as stipulated by Morrison-Porter (2021) is mobilizing resources required to carry out the strategic planning activities, both human, material and financial resources will be required and the community should also be involved. The procedures or processes including their alternatives to carry out the strategic plan should be stated. Arend, Zhao, Song, and Lim (2017) averred that identification of specific desired results or goods to which all the efforts and activities of the institution will be dedicated to is the essence of strategic planning. The researcher admonished that the objectives and goals should be communicated to the various stake holders. Ben-Caleb et al (2025) asserted that financial resource is very crucial in the issue of the university autonomy. The researcher further attest that most of the African government use financial control to influence and sometimes direct the affairs of the universities. Jombo-Umeh et al. (2018) advised that to gain self-sustainability and efficiency the university academic leaders should borrow a leaf from countries such as the United States of America, Japan and the United Kingdom to utilize the entrepreneurial sector. The researcher added that universities among other financial resources should raise Internally Generated Revenue (IGR), that the faculties and departments should be involved in fund generation. Jombo-Umeh et al., maintained that when all aforementioned exigencies are put in place the academic leaders should ensure the implementation of the strategic plan and thereby evaluate the outcomes to see whether it is successful or not. The university can be controlled by the academic leaders if they will have the capacity to fund the institution. Attaining university autonomy demands that these academic

leaders should strategically plan and embark on projects that will yield finance to fund the university. Some of the sources of revenue they can embark on include:

Internal Sources: This compose institution internally generated funds such as services rendered to the students which include, revenue sources like: tuition, examination, laboratory, accommodation, medical, sports, ID cards and consultancies fees. Funds can be generated from external sources such as: business and entrepreneurial ventures like: large scale agricultural production, horticulture, animal husbandry, livestock production, plantation farming, income earned from banks through placement of surplus funds on fixed deposits Nwoye and Okeke (2017). Institutions can encourage lecturers to write, publish books to sell to students and the public with some percentage given to the institutions. They should involve in appeal fund raising by the academic leaders in the university making appeal, by writing to wealthy individuals, philanthropists, where the institution is, to assist financially for institution development. One of the sources of funds for educational development and institutional sustenance is community fundraising and student alumni, if well established and encouraged could be of financial benefit to the institutions. University leaders can also be engaged in business investments such as: building institutions hotels, plaza, shopping mall, eatery centers, canteens, computer business centers and media related services, campus shuttles, bread bakery, engage in mounting water plant for bottle and sachet water to dispense both to the public and the university community. They could source money or grants from non-governmental organizations such as: United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organizations (UNESCO), United Nations Development Programmes (UNDP), Canadian International Development Association (CIDA), etcetra. Educational funds could be from the public and private organizations and should be regarded as investment to support institutions. Leaders in higher institutions such as the universities should plough in money to build structures for different functions such as for: lectures, conferences, seminars, workshops, celebrations like wedding etc. for the institutions and the general public to rent.

Statement of the Problem

University leaders achieve sustainable autonomy by combining strategic planning expertise with a clear understanding of their boundaries and accountability. If they will have officers in the university who will work with them conscientiously to achieve the institutional objectives and goals. This will warrant them using strategic planning processes which are: to set implementable objectives, mobilize needed human, material and financial resources, state procedures, processes

needed to embark on the activities to attain the objectives and goals. They have to state the autonomy indices (the priorities) to be achieved, and implement them. Monitor and evaluate the outcomes succinctly to ensure success (or failure). Note the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, correct weaknesses, clear threats, utilize opportunities in furtherance continuity. The onus of the matter may be that the academic leaders do not know how to apply strategic planning to achieve successful university autonomy. This has therefore motivated the researchers to carry out this present research and in the final analysis proffer recommendations which will help leaders in the universities succeed in acquiring and applying strategic planning to achieve and maintain academic autonomy.

Research Purpose

The researcher focused on leaders strategic planning to achieve university autonomy. Specifically, they want to:

1. Find out whether the university leaders have the knowledge of strategic planning for university autonomy
2. Examine whether leaders have achieved university autonomy through strategic planning.

Research Questions

Two research questions were raised to guide the study:

1. Have university leaders acquire the knowledge of strategic planning for university autonomy?
2. Have leaders achieved university autonomy by applying strategic planning?

Methodology

The researchers applied survey research design for the study. The design helped them to sample respondents from the study population (Polit and Colleagues 2024). The population of the study was eight deans from the eight faculties in the University of Abuja. The sample of the study were the eight (8) deans sampled through purposive sampling technique. The questionnaire was “Leaders Strategic Plan to Attain University Autonomy (LSPAUA)”. The questionnaire was used for data collection. It was validated by experts in the Department of Educational Management, University of Abuja, Abuja, Nigeria. The researcher applied test-retest method to collect data from the instrument for analysis. Cronbach alpha statistic was used to analyze the data to

determine internal consistency. Coefficient index score of 0.75 was obtained showing that the instrument was reliable for the study. Mean statistic was used to analyze the research questions. Mean score of 2.50 and above were adjudged as agreed whereas the mean score of 2.49 and below were adjudged as disagreed. Sectional mean score of 2.50 and above were considered as accepted whereas sectional mean score of 2.49 and below were adjudged as rejected.

Data Analysis

Research Question 1: Have University leaders acquire the knowledge of strategic planning for university autonomy?

Table 1: Leaders Acquisition of Knowledge of Strategic Planning for University Autonomy.

N=8

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	\bar{x}	Decision
	You have acquired knowledge of strategic planning to attain university autonomy by:						
1	Formulating objectives drawn from the university autonomy indices	3	2	2	1	2.88	Agreed
2	Prioritizing the objectives which will help you achieve the choice project	4	2	1	1	3.13	Agreed
3	Mobilizing resources required to carry out the project	1	3	2	2	2.38	Disagreed
4	Involving experts in the university to work with you	2	3	2	1	2.75	Agreed
5	Involving the community significant persons	2	2	3	1	2.63	Agreed
6	Stating the procedures to carry out the objectives	1	1	3	3	0.20	Disagreed
7	Stating the alternative procedures in case the ones adopted do not work	2	1	2	3	2.25	Disagreed
8	Implementing the stated objectives by test running them	1	1	3	3	0.20	Disagreed
9	Embarking practically on carrying out the project	2	2	3	1	2.63	Agreed
10	Assessing the outcomes or goals of the project	2	3	2	1	2.75	Agreed
	Sectional mean					2.54	Accepted

The above table showed that the respondents with the mean scores of 2.88, 3.13, 2.75, 2.63, 2.63 and 2.75 agreed that university academic leaders have acquired knowledge of strategic plan for university autonomy by: formulating objectives drawn from the university autonomy indices,

prioritizing the objectives which will help them to achieve their choice project; mobilizing resources required to carry out the project, involving experts in the university to work with the leaders, involving the community significant persons, embarking practically on the project and assessing the outcome/goal of the project. The respondents with the mean scores of 2.00, 2.25 and 2.00 disagreed that the university academic leaders have acquired knowledge of strategic planning by: stating the alternative procedures in case the ones they adopted do not work; implemented the stated objectives by test running them and embarking practically on carrying out the project. All the respondents with the sectional mean score of 2.54 accepted that the university leaders have acquired the knowledge of strategic planning for university autonomy in the University of Abuja, Abuja, Nigeria.

Research Question Two: Have academic leaders achieved university autonomy through strategic planning?

Table 2: Academic Leaders Attainment of University Autonomy through Strategic Planning
N=8

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	\bar{x}	Decision
	You have attained university autonomy by generating money from sources such as:						
1	Tuition/Examination fees	2	3	2	1	2.75	Agreed
2	Accommodation fee	3	3	1	1	3.00	Agreed
3	Encouraging lecturers to sell their books and render some percentage to the university.	2	1	2	3	2.25	Disagreed
4	Consultancies	1	1	2	4	1.88	Disagreed
5	Medical services	2	2	2	2	2.50	Agreed
6	Sourcing for grant	2	3	2	2	2.75	Agreed
7	University Animal husbandry	1	2	3	2	2.25	Disagreed
8	Appeal fund raising from significant stakeholders	2	3	1	2	2.62	Agreed
9	Building structures for lecture, conferences, seminars, workshops, celebrations like weddings, for rent	3	2	2	1	2.87	Agreed
10	Large scale agriculture and horticulture	1	1	2	4	1.87	Disagreed
	Sectional mean					2.47	Rejected

The above table revealed that the respondents with the mean scores of 2.75, 3.00, 2.75, 2.63 and 2.88 agreed that university academic leaders have attained university autonomy by generating money from sources such as: tuition, examination, accommodation fee, fee from medical services, sourcing for grants; appeal fund raising from significant stakeholders and building structures for lectures, conferences, seminars, workshops, celebrations like weddings, and for

rent. The respondents with the mean scores of 2.25, 1.88, 2.25, 1.88 disagreed that the university academic leaders encourage lecturers to sell their books and render some percentage to the university; involved in consultancies, animal husbandry, large scale agriculture and horticulture to carry out strategic planning to attain university autonomy. All the respondents with the sectional mean score of 2.47 rejected that university leaders have attained university autonomy in the University of Abuja, Abuja, Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings

The finding of research question one revealed that the leaders have acquired knowledge for the university autonomy. The research finding of research question two proved that the university leaders did not attain university autonomy. The study of Mukoro and Ojeje (2024) revealed that in most of the African countries the government use financial control to influence and direct the affairs of the universities making them to accept their conditions hence they cannot be autonomous. This can happen even when the leaders in the universities have acquired the knowledge of strategic planning to be autonomous they can never be when they are under the government control. On this note Jombo-Umeh et al., (2018) advised that the university academic leaders should embark on and utilize effectively the entrepreneurial sector for sustainability to be autonomous.

Conclusion

The researchers concluded based on the study findings that the university leaders have acquired the knowledge of strategic planning but that they have not attained university autonomy.

Recommendations

The researchers recommended based on the findings of the study that the university academic leaders since they have acquired the knowledge of strategic planning should as in the words of Jombo-Umeh et al. (2018) and Mukoro and Ojeje (2024) borrow a leaf from countries such as: the United States of America (USA), United Kingdom (UK) and Japan to utilize the entrepreneurship sector. This will help them to acquire financial gains for self-sustainability for autonomy.

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