

Strategies of Enhancing Inter-Institutional Cohesion and Cooperation among Universities for Sustainable Development

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Abstract: The study examined strategies for enhancing administrative cohesion and cooperation among universities for sustainable development in the North Central region of Nigeria. Two research questions and two hypotheses guided the study. Survey design was adopted for the study. A self-constructed questionnaire titled; Strategies for Enhancing Inter-Institutional Cohesion and cooperation for sustainable Development (SEICSD) was used for the collection of data. The collected data was analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions and chi square test of goodness-of-fit was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The population of the study was 1124 top University Management Staff across the Universities in North Central Nigeria. A sample of 295 of the staff derived through Taro Yamene Computation was proportionately sampled and used for the study. The result of the study showed that inter-institutional linkages and diplomatic negotiations are great strategies for enhancement of administrative cohesiveness and cooperation amongst Universities. This no doubt results to sustainable development. It was therefore recommended that; the Visitors of the universities should encourage the Managements of their Universities to adopt inter-institutional strategies of linkages and diplomatic negotiations for the enhancement of social and economic cooperation among universities for sustainable development.

Key words: Diplomatic negotiation, inter-institutional cohesion, strategies, sustainable development

I. INTRODUCTION

There is no gain overstressing the fact that tertiary education is strategic in the development of any nation. This is because tertiary education especially university education is the platform that produces graduates in quality and quantum to serve all the sectors of any nation's economy. Higher or tertiary education typically is the education given to students upon completion of secondary education (Tyokyaa, 2017). Wals (2005) maintains that education as an institution can be seen as a reflection of the society that supports it. The university, no doubt is the institution that has structures capable of harnessing both human and material resources towards equipping the individuals with the skills, knowledge, attitudes and values for sustainable development of our nation. The university is therefore the institution that seeks to balance human and economic wellbeing with cultural tradition and respect for the earth's natural resources (Palmer, 2013). University administration refers to the coordination of the resources of the University for the achievement of the goals of

the University. Ogbogu (2013) considers university administration or management as the means by which Universities are planned, coordinated, staffed, operated, organized and managed. The Administration of Universities essentially concerns the processes involved in steering the affairs of the Universities. It encourages the coordination of all the activities of the University with a view to raising productive manpower that is effective and efficient in tackling the challenges of society. University administrators therefore need to go extra miles to adequately harness all opportunities and resources required to succeed in their responsibilities. Since University education is the highest level of education, administrators of Universities need to interrelate so as to mutually benefit.

In other that universities achieve this great obligation, there is need for the universities and their various administrations to properly have inter-institutional cooperation for them to optimize their performance so as to achieve sustainable development of the country. Inter-institutional cooperation, also used here as university cooperation is quintessential for the enhancement of academic, social and cultural cooperation amongst universities. This cooperation leads to intellectual upliftment and improved academic quality in the citadels of learning. This also leads to improved quality in the knowledge imparted and its relevance to the labour market (Okebukola, 2016). Inter-university cooperation necessarily leads to shared ideas, responsibilities and varied intellectual exchanges that no doubt serve as a preponderance for intellectual upgrading of the actors and the inherent multiplier effect on the learners. In other words, inter university or inter-institutional cooperation essentially connotes a cooperation between two or more universities with a view to sharing ideas, professional and intellectual exchanges especially in specialized areas of science and technology as well as managerial efficiency.

Where there is inter-institutional cooperation, there will be uniformity in standards and fair distribution of ideas and facilities which ultimately will reduce cost in all its ramifications (Uzoamaka, 2000). This no doubt will enable those in the management of our university system to ensure that quality is assured in the university system to satisfy clients and resolve naughty administrative and managerial encumbrances in our universities. This is why Mgbekem (2014) upholds that proactive preventive measures are the

foundation for quality assurance. This implies that inter-institutional or inter-university cooperation leads to efficient and effective management of the institutions.

Need to evolve inter-university or inter-institutional strategies

There is expansion in the demand for admission in our tertiary institutions today and this calls for expansion in the facilities of these institutions. This spiral network in the demands puts a lot of pressure on the university administrations and or managements. The operators in the university institutions, therefore, need to indulge in the development of or planning for adequate strategies especially inter-institutional strategies that would ensure professional approach in the management of the resources of the universities, both human and material with a view to enhancing performance and cohesion amongst the universities so as to achieve the required sustainable development.

Basic approaches or strategies such as inter-institutional linkages and diplomatic negotiations are particularly essential for the facilitation of the needed cooperation. Linkage is a condition of cooperation between individuals, groups, organizations or even nations. This cooperation is expected to be beneficial to the cooperating bodies (Tyokyaa, 2016). Tyokyaa further maintains that the cooperation could be on social, cultural, religious, economic, intellectual or political interests or tenets. Inter-institutional linkages could maximally benefit universities in all their administrative or managerial roles. Inter university linkages or cooperation could benefit universities especially in the exchange of programmes (academic and non academic), scholarships, social interactions, research activities among others. Inter-institutional linkages open the window of effective communication amongst universities. Communication as a process allows for free transfer of information, ideas, thoughts, and messages, it also allows for peaceful co-existence (Peretomode, 2006). Lack of communication Okotoni (2003) maintains leads to misunderstanding amongst institutions and organizations. Unnecessary conflicts, attendant stress, hostilities and other undesirable skirmishes are caused by lack of communication and interaction between organizations (Best, 2006). Nevertheless, where there is effective communication and cohesion between people or institutions, there is bound to be peacefulness and effectiveness in their relations and operations.

Diplomatic negotiation is one other strategy that is perceived to be a strategy that if properly applied, will enhance inter-institutional cooperation. Diplomatic negotiation refers to cautious approach in handling contending matters of interest between parties. In other words when matters are carefully cautiously resolved amongst contending groups. Best (2006) describes diplomacy as the instrument of achieving permanent peace and accommodation among disputing groups. Negotiation on the other hand is a process whereby contending groups dialogue on issues of differing interest with a view to coming to a compromising position (Edem, 2006). For universities to maximize their productivity for sustainable development there is need for them to adopt diplomatic

negotiation in their interactional and relational responsibilities with a view to creating mutuality of benefits. This study therefore, attempts to determine and extrapolate the influence the strategic variables of institutional linkages and diplomatic negotiations have on University administration in North Central, Nigeria with a view to enhancing cohesion and cooperation amongst Universities.

Statement of the Problem

Universities are designed to produce quality manpower that will effectively harness and process the resources of the economy. In view of the enormity of pressure on the university administrations, the university administrations and managements need to seek professional and working cooperation amongst themselves so as to optimize their productivity. To this end, there is need for properly planned strategies that if adopted and effectively utilized might cause great improvement in the inter-institutional cooperation and cohesion amongst the universities. Several measures of improving inter-university cooperation abound and some have been tried but there seem to be inadequacy in the performance output of the university managers. This therefore necessitated this study to examine the strategies that will enhance administrative cohesion and cooperation among universities for sustainable development.

II. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to ascertain the level of influence of the strategies for enhancing administrative cohesion and cooperation among universities in North Central Nigeria. Specifically the study sought to;

1. Find out the influence of institutional linkages on the administration of universities in North Central Nigeria.
2. Ascertain the influence of diplomatic negotiation on the administration of universities in North Central Nigeria.

Research Questions:

1. What is the influence of institutional linkages on university administrations in North Central Nigeria?
2. What is the influence of diplomatic negotiation on university administrations in North Central Nigeria?

Statement of Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance.

1. Institutional linkages strategy has no significant influence on university administrations in North Central Nigeria.
2. Diplomatic negotiation strategy has no significant influence on university administrations in North Central Nigeria.

III. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted survey research design. The study covered the universities in the North Central region of Nigeria. The population of the study comprised 1124 administrative staff of universities in North Central region of Nigeria. A sample of 295 respondents was derived through Taro Yamene formula and proportionately sampled for the study. The instrument for data collection was a 10-item self structured questionnaire titled: Strategies for Enhancing Inter-Institutional Cohesion and Cooperation for Sustainable Development (SEICSD). The questionnaire was structured on a four point rating scale of Very High Influence (VHI) with weight of (4), High Influence (HI) with weight of (3), Low Influence (LI) with weight of (2) and Very Low Influence (VLI) with weight of (1). This gave a benchmark for decision making of 2.50. In other words, the sum of the weights divided by the options (4). Accordingly, to answer the research questions any item of the instrument with a mean score of 2.50 and above meant that the item was accepted as having influence while an item with a mean value of below 2.50 meant that the item was not accepted as having influence. The instrument was subjected to face and content

validation by three experts, two in educational administration and planning and one from measurement and evaluation all of the Department of Educational Foundations and General Studies, University of Agriculture, Makurdi, Benue State, Nigeria. The instrument was subjected to Cronbach Alpha reliability estimation which yielded a co-efficient of 0.85 implying that the instrument was reliable. The instrument was administered on the respondents by the researcher and two assistants. The two hypotheses were tested using chi-square test of goodness-of-fit at 0.05 level of significance. The decision criterion here is, that if the P-value is less or equal to the alpha value (0.05), that is, ($P \leq 0.05$) then the null hypothesis is rejected. If however, the P-value is greater than the alpha value ($P > 0.05$) then the null hypothesis is accepted.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results are analyzed and interpreted in line with the research questions and hypotheses.

Research Question 1: What is the influence of institutional linkages strategy on university administration in North Central Nigeria?

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of influence of institutional linkages Strategy on university administration in North Central Nigeria

S/No	Items	VHI	HI	LI	VLI	X	SD	Decision
1	Regular inter-university sporting competitions have influence on university administration.	140	100	25	30	3.18	0.96	High influence
2	Inter connectivity of e-library services of the universities influence the administration of the concerned universities.	150	75	40	30	3.16	1.01	High influence
3	Intellectual exchanges among the university in terms of offer of professional services across universities influence the administration of the universities.	190	60	25	20	3.42	0.90	High influence
4	Inter-university research activities enhance cohesiveness among universities.	175	60	28	32	3.28	1.02	High influence
5	Collaborative engagements in staff and students discipline and welfare enhances cordiality amongst universities.	125	120	30	20	3.18	0.87	High influence
	Cluster mean					3.24	0.95	High influence

Table 1 showed that the mean values of items 1-5 are 3.18, 3.16, 3.42, 3.28 and 3.18 respectively with the cluster mean of 3.24 while their respective standard deviations are 0.96, 1.01, 0.90, 1.02 and 0.87 with a cluster standard deviation of 0.95. This indicates that regular inter-university sports competitions have high influence on the administration of universities. Interconnectivity of e-library services of the universities also has high influence on university cooperation. Similarly, intellectual exchanges among universities have high influence on cohesiveness and cooperation among universities. In the

same vein, collaborative engagements in discipline and welfare of staff and students highly influence cordiality among universities. Since the cluster mean is 3.24 and cluster standard deviation is 0.95, it implies that inter-institutional linkages have high influence on the administration of universities.

Research Question two: What is the influence of Diplomatic negotiation strategy on university administrations in North Central Nigeria?

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation of influence of diplomatic negotiation strategy on university administrations in North Central Nigeria

S/No	Items	VHI	HI	LI	VLI	X	SD	Decision
6.	Provision of efficient reward system for staff and students enhances effective administration.	110	120	33	30	3.04	0.95	High influence
7.	Administrators who are diplomatic in enhancing disciplinary and welfare matters succeed more in administering their universities	132	100	30	33	3.12	0.99	High influence
8.	Administrators who are democratic in negotiating issues with staff succeed better.	135	100	30	30	3.15	0.97	High influence
9.	Timely negotiating creates conducive and harmonious environment for administrative effectiveness	105	125	33	32	3.02	0.95	High influence
10.	Dialogue is a powerful instrument for the enhancement of cohesiveness and cooperation needed for efficient and effective administration.	120	110	33	30	3.04	0.95	High influence
	Cluster Mean					3.07	0.96	High influence

Table 2 showed that the means values for items 6-10 are 3.04, 3.12, 3.15, 3.02 and 3.04 and the cluster mean of 3.07 respectively with corresponding standard deviations of 0.95, 0.99, 0.97, 0.95, and 0.95 with a cluster standard deviation of 0.96. This indicates that the provision of efficient reward system for staff and students has high influence on university administration. Diplomatic administrators have high influence on disciplinary and welfare matters. Similarly, administrators who are democratic in handling issues highly influence the administration of their universities. Timely negotiation has high influence on administration as it creates conducive and harmonious environment for the administrators to be effective. And finally, dialogue has high influence on cohesiveness and cooperation needed for efficient and effective administration. The cluster mean of 3.07 with standard deviation of 0.96 was found to be above the cut-off point of 2.50. This implies that diplomatic negotiation has high influence on the administration of universities in North Central Nigeria.

Hypothesis 1: Inter-institutional linkages have no significant influence on university administration in North Central Nigeria.

Table 3: Chi-square analysis of influence of inter-institutional strategy on university administration

	Df	Mean	Standard Deviation	P	Sig. Level	Decision
Chi square	12	16.24				
			4.63	0.00	0.05	Rejected
No of valid cases		295				

P<0.05

Table 3 above shows that the p-value is 0.00 which is less than the alpha value (0.05) at the degree of freedom (Df) of 12. This implies that the null hypothesis which states that inter-institutional linkages do not significantly influence university administration is rejected. In other words, the analysis upholds that inter-institutional linkages significantly

influence university administration, meaning the strategy of inter-institutional linkages has very significant influence on university administration.

Hypothesis 2: Diplomatic negotiation strategy has no significant influence on university administration in North Central Nigeria.

Table 4: Chi-square analysis of influence of diplomatic negotiation on administration of universities

	Df	Mean	Standard Deviation	P	Sig. Level	Decision
Chi square	12	14.85				
			4.43	0.01	0.05	Rejected
No of valid cases		295				

P<0.05

Table 4 shows that the P-value (0.01) is less than alpha-value of 0.05. That is, $p(0.01 < \text{Sig } 0.05)$ at Df of 12. Therefore, the null hypothesis that states that diplomatic negotiation strategy does not significantly influence university administration is rejected. This means that diplomatic negotiation has very significant influence on the administration of universities or higher institutions. In other words, if properly applied, diplomatic negotiation would seriously influence and enhance university administration.

V. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The first finding of this study showed that inter-institutional linkages have significantly high influence on the administration of universities in North Central, Nigeria. This finding is in tandem with the position of Uzoama (2000) and Mgbekem (2014) who maintained that inter-institutional cooperation leads to uniformity in standards and improved administrative performances. None of the reviewed works disagreed with the findings of this study. To this end, it can conveniently be stated within the confines of this study that inter-institutional strategy has positive and high influence on the administration of universities. In other words, universities or all other higher institutions for that matter, are advised to

indulge in institutional strategies of linkages especially; regular inter-university sports, inter-connectivity of E-library services, intellectual exchanges through offer of professional academic and managerial services, inter-university research activities as well as collaborative engagements in staff and students discipline.

The second major finding of the study revealed that diplomatic negotiation has significantly high influence on the administration of universities in North Central, Nigeria. This finding is in agreement with the works of Peretomode (2006) and Okotoni (2003) whose works affirmed that diplomacy and negotiation allow for transfer of information, ideas and thoughts necessary for system improvement. There was no disagreement in the reviewed work or any contrary positions. Accordingly, within the confines of this finding, it could be maintained that diplomatic negotiation strategy has high influence on university administration. This implies that, higher institution administrations especially university administrations could in line with this finding; ensure regular provision of efficient reward system for staff and students, adopt diplomatic approaches in enhancing disciplinary and welfare matters, apply democratic approach in negotiating issues with staff and students, be proactive in addressing matters, and always use dialogue as these are powerful weapons for the enhancement of cohesiveness and cooperation for efficient and effective administration of institutions.

VI. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it is concluded that strategies for enhancing cohesiveness and cooperation, that is, inter-institutional linkages and diplomatic negotiation highly influence the administration of universities in North Central Nigeria.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations based on the findings were made:

1. The Visitors of the Universities should encourage the management of their universities to adopt inter-institutional strategy especially inter-institutional linkages and cooperation in administering their universities.
2. University administrations or managements should adopt diplomatic negotiation strategy in the running or administering their universities.

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