

MANAGEMENT STYLES IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES UNDER MILITARY RULE AND THE CHALLENGES OF DEMOCRACY: HOW DEMOCRATIC CAN UNIVERSITY MANAGEMENT BE?¹

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I. INTRODUCTION

Universities in Africa in general, have been established with the lofty aims of training and supplying highly skilled manpower to manage and order change by way of technological rebirth; producing political and administrative elites to man state structures; setting standards of societal values and ethos; and championing societal renewal via cultural creativity nourished by better knowledge and understanding of the cultural heritage, higher living standards, internal and international harmony and peace based on human rights, democracy, tolerance and mutual respect (UNESCO, 1998). These universities in most instances, started as relatively small institutions (with enrolments of not more than 2,000). They were generously funded by their governments and international agencies and were equipped to the highest standards. Most of the students enrolled were mature (physically and mentally) and knew why they were there. They were equally certain that well-paid employment and new and better standards of living awaited them on graduation. Their admission into the university and graduation was published in the newspapers. Decorum and discipline therefore prevailed on campuses. University teachers in those early years were among the highest paid in the society and regularly rubbed minds with their international colleagues through conferences, researches and publications, as a matter of course. Being a Vice-Chancellor in those early days was a rare privilege. Neither students nor staff ever thought of desecrating the office or person of the Vice-Chancellor.

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Things changed from the mid-1960s onward. The most notable changes in Nigeria included the removal of the post-independence civilian government in a military coup d'état and the eruption of a three-year civil war that introduced firearms and militarization into civil society. The demand for university education skyrocketed; more universities were established by the Federal and State governments and even by private individuals and organizations; the nation's currency was massively devalued, making overseas conference attendance, purchase of textbooks, journals, teaching and research equipment almost impossible. With abandoned/uncompleted building projects littering campuses, hostel and classroom facilities were stretched to their limits and student catering was abolished as a matter of policy. Meanwhile the conditions of service for university staff stagnated or worsened, thereby driving expatriate staff and some Nigerians alike, to greener pastures in other lands. Strikes and boycotts of classes became the order of the period. Little wonder, therefore, that the Vice-Chancellors of these universities became de facto "fire fighters".

This paper is partly a report of a study conducted in 2000/2001 in 11 Nigerian universities to investigate the management styles employed by the Vice-Chancellors during the 1992-99 period to carry out their mandates in the face of the prevailing socio-political and economic conditions. In addition, the paper closely examines the usefulness of the somewhat simplistic distinction between "top-down"/authoritarian and "bottom-up"/democratic management styles in gaining a full understanding of the dynamics of effective and ineffective university governance. In other words, given the "mixed" nature of the university as a formal, complex organization, how democratic can its management or leadership style be?

The paper is divided into four sections, including the above introduction. The second part briefly presents and discusses the findings on management styles in the 11 Nigerian universities studied and their impact on relative stability, staff satisfaction, level of alienation, access to material resources and power, and staff productivity. The third section is an overview of the concept of democracy and democratic management vis-à-vis the university as a "mixed" organization. The final section examines some challenges which democratic governance of Nigerian society now poses both to the government and to the universities.

II. MANAGEMENT STYLES IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES, 1992-99

This study was informed by the need to investigate, identify and determine the contributions of varying management styles in Nigerian universities during the period 1992-99 to the spate of strikes and work stoppages by industrial unions; class boycotts and rampages by students; government closure of crisis-ridden and non-compliant universities; the concomitant loss of teaching and learning time and complete disorganization of university activities.³

Management styles in this study are simply defined as the peculiar or distinctive manner by which Vice-Chancellors organize, control or direct affairs in their institutions. The office of the Vice-Chancellor is a position of power. How have they utilized their powers in the control and allocation of resources? How have they exercised power over their colleagues? What power protection tactics have they employed in order to perpetuate themselves in office and to what consequences? These questions indicate the importance given to the concept of management styles in this study.

Earlier studies have identified two polar management styles – the authoritarian and democratic (Etzioni, 1975; Hall, 1972; Mann, 1965; Perrow, 1972; Selznick, 1975, etc.). With specific reference to university management and leadership, Guy Neave (1998) identifies what he terms “collegiality” as opposed to “hierarchy” as alternative ways of organizing what goes on in institutions of higher learning. The collegial principle of academic self-government is founded on the belief that academicians on university campuses are primarily colleagues (some senior and others junior), with the Vice-Chancellor as *primus inter pares*. This suggests a horizontal or approximately “flat hierarchy” and participatory management style that uses committees in decision making. Neave maintains that collegiality is not incompatible with entrepreneurship but actually enhances efficiency and responsiveness, which in turn enhances civility and self-government.

³ The full report, Ekong E. Ekong (2001) “*Management Styles and Working Environments in Nigerian Universities 1992-99*”, is available at the Association of African Universities, Aviation Road Extension, Airport Residential Area, P. O. Box AN 5744, Accra-North, Ghana <info@aau.org>.

The “vertical hierarchy” management style on the other hand, vests authority at the top and practically excludes those below and creates the “us” and “them” syndrome. Advocates of this management style say it makes for speedy response and managerial rationality. Peter Scott (1998) observes that universities are operating in a rapidly changing environment and the role of the Vice-Chancellor may not be as central to the process of managing change as some believe. The role of a manager in facilitating change may be different from that of a Vice-Chancellor concerned with promoting university development.

In Nigeria, Alubo (1999) has observed that prolonged military rule succeeded in militarizing erstwhile civil structures, including the universities.

To translate the concept of management style into practical terms, a list of questions was developed to probe issues like the Vice-Chancellor’s accessibility; belief in consultation; use of committees; regular meetings of the Senate, the congregation, appointments and promotions committees; following due process in the discipline of staff and students; tolerance of contrary opinions; readiness to attract and employ renowned academics without discrimination; readiness to assist staff when in need; maintenance of a clique; judicious and efficient use of university funds; the treatment of academic staff as colleagues; readiness to delegate and reasonably empower their principal officers; etc. These questions were presented to the Vice-Chancellors themselves; their Principal Officers (i.e. Deputy Vice-Chancellors, Registrars, Bursars and University Librarians) as well as to the labour union leaders on campus and to a sample of academic staff. Management style scores were obtained through a four-point Likert scaling technique. From the averages of the various stakeholders, an overall average management score was calculated for each university and was compared with the Vice-Chancellors’ self-scores.

Eleven universities were selected for the study on the basis of their known record of closures and stability during the period, 1992-99. These were the University of Uyo; University of Lagos; Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife; University of Agriculture, Abeokuta; Abia State University, Uturu; Federal University of Technology, Owerri; Rivers State University of Science & Technology, Port Harcourt; University of Abuja; Federal University of Technology, Minna; Usman Dan Fodio University, Sokoto; and Bayero University, Kano.

Within universities, a stratified sampling technique was adopted in selecting the sample of academic staff to be interviewed. In other words, the existing academic strata (Professors, Associate Professors, Senior Lecturers, Lecturer I, Lecturer II and Assistant Lecturers) were used. The very bottom stratum, “Graduate Assistant”, was not used because no one in that category would have served for seven years at the time of the study. Sample size selected varied from university to university depending on the population of academic staff. A total of 300 academic staff were finally selected and given questionnaires. In addition, separate questionnaires were prepared for executive members of the three industrial unions on each campus (viz: Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU); Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities (SSANU) and Non-Academic Staff Union (NASU)).

A third set of questionnaires was administered to principal officers (i.e. the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Registrar, Bursar and University Librarian) in each of the universities. A fourth set of questionnaires was administered to the Vice-Chancellors who served during the period 1992-99 (they were found in other professional pursuits or retirement as none of them was in office at the time of our study). Field coordinators and research assistants were engaged and trained to administer the questionnaires to the academic staff and principal officers, while the Principal Investigator interviewed the Vice-Chancellors personally. Quite a number of them were very willing to talk about their experiences. A total of 500 questionnaires were sent out and/or directly administered, and 350 (70%) were retrieved.

In addition to field data, this study also benefited from records of All African Students Union (AASU) activities stored in files at the National Universities Commission (NUC) Office, Abuja, Nigeria.

The data obtained were processed and analyzed using the Microsoft Excel Analysis ToolPak.

Findings

As defined and described above, the overall average management scores (OAMS) were calculated from average scores obtained from labour union leaders, principal officers and a sample of academic staff. For the 11 universities,

the OAMS varied from 34 to 52 out of a possible maximum of 64. It was thus possible to break the scores into three categories as follows:

	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Management Style</u>
1. 39 and below	6	Authoritarian
2. 40 to 49	3	Flexible
3. 50 to 64	2	Liberal/Democratic

Total No. of Universities = 11

Using self-scoring by the Vice-Chancellors themselves with a maximum possible self-score of 68, the scores varied from 45 to 63 and could be categorized as follows:

	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Management Style</u>
1. 49 and below	4	Authoritarian
2. 50 to 59	5	Flexible
3. 60 to 68	2	Liberal/Democratic

Total No. of Universities = 11

Thus, whether on the basis of what others said or by self-appraisal, the majority of the Vice-Chancellors in Nigerian universities between 1992-99 appear to have used a dictatorial/authoritarian management style. Further analysis indicated that principal officers in 8 out of the 11 universities studied, scored their administration as authoritarian. All the authoritarian Vice-Chancellors were people who had served more than one 4-year term.

In one university, the Vice-Chancellor had stayed for over 10 years in office (maximum statutory tenure before 1999 for the office of the Vice-Chancellor was two terms of four years each. Currently, this has been reduced to one 5-year term). This "sit tight" Vice-Chancellor at one point unilaterally *dissolved* the Senate, appointed and deposed Deans and Heads of Departments at will; operated without a Deputy Vice-Chancellor; reduced the University Council to a mere rubber stamp; banned the Academic Staff Union on campus and "generally unleashed a reign of terror, high handedness and an atmosphere of fear

antithetical to academic freedom and sound intellectual development” (NUC file, 1993, 1994; ASUU, 1994).

This Vice-Chancellor and two others with authoritarian tendencies indicated in this study that they had not applied for their positions. Rather, they had been recommended by the then Ministers of Education directly to the Military Head of State for appointment and deployment to the university. This placed their first loyalty outside their immediate operational constituencies. All the Vice-Chancellors that sought a second term (7 out of 11, or 64%) indicated that they encountered very stiff opposition during their second term of service. The authoritarian Vice-Chancellors also tended to draw more support from students and junior staff than from their academic colleagues and principal officers, in contrast to those who served only one term of four years.

When asked whether they changed their management styles during their second term in office, all who served a second term or more, indicated that their management style was consistent throughout their first and second terms. This means that they would not budge in spite of apparent opposition.

Table 1. Correlation Matrix

	(A)	(B)	(C)	(D)	(E)	(F)	(G)	(H)	(I)	(J)	
Overall Mgnt. Style Score	(A)	1.00									
Stability Score	(B)	.38	1.00								
Staff Satisfaction Score	(C)	.71	.51	1.00							
Average Alienation Score	(D)	-.26	-.01	-.54	1.00						
Productivity Score	(E)	-.54	-.30	-.24	-.31	1.00					
Equitable Access Score	(F)	.61	.10	.42	-.17	-.56	1.00				
No. of Students	(G)	-.59	-.03	-.61	.28	.47	-.63	1.00			
No. of Academic Staff	(H)	-.46	-.06	-.45	.03	.66	-.58	.93	1.00		
No. of Non-teaching Staff	(I)	-.35	.11	-.38	-.03	.64	-.55	.85	.96	1.00	
Total Population	(j)	-.57	-.01	-.59	.23	.51	-.63	.99	.95	.89	1.00

The contribution of management styles to other work environment indices was tested in a correlation analysis as shown on Table 1 above.

The analysis indicated a positive correlation between management styles and stability ($r = .38$), and staff satisfaction ($r = .71$) and equitable access ($r = .61$), while the other variables correlated negatively. In brief, the correlation indicated that Vice-Chancellors who scored high on management style (i.e. were democratic) also tended to score high on relative stability on their campuses; had more satisfied staff; offered greater access to material resources and positions of authority to their staff; and had less feeling of alienation among the academic staff. On the other hand, they recorded less productivity among academic staff and were generally presiding over smaller campuses.

From this, it would appear that the prevailing management style or paradigm reflected the manner in which the political life of a university was conducted. It determined the level of inclusion or exclusion in decision making; access to or denial of material resources; promotion or stagnation on the job; discharge or neglect of due responsibilities to community members and therefore the general atmosphere of the workplace – its level of productivity, staff commitment and the overall effectiveness of the institution in its environment.

III. DEMOCRACY AND UNIVERSITY MANAGEMENT: AN OVERVIEW

The foregoing findings tend to show that democratic governance of universities is good for staff morale but not so good for their productivity, and that it is better suited to small-sized campuses. By 1998, the 11 universities involved in this study had a population ranging from 3,360 to 20,783, with an overall average of 11,775. This obviously calls for a critical assessment of the concept of democratic university governance. In this section, therefore, we shall look briefly at the characteristic features of democracy vis-à-vis the nature of the university as a formal, complex organization.

(a) The University as a Mixed Organization

Based on the type of power exercised by higher participants (i.e Administrators) and the kinds of involvement by the rank and file or lower participants in formal organizations, Amitai Etzioni (1975) came out with three types of formal organization, namely, normative, coercive and utilitarian.

Normative organizations — as exemplified by churches, political parties and social clubs — pursue goals that members consider morally worthwhile, personally satisfying or socially prestigious but with no direct monetary reward. The higher participants rely on persuasion, exhortation and social pressure to influence lower participants but members feel strongly committed to the goals of the organization.

Coercive organizations — exemplified by prisons and mental hospitals — enroll members involuntarily and use force or coercion, punishment, threats and treatment to keep them within. The inmates resent their confinement and will escape whenever possible.

Utilitarian organizations are exemplified by large business enterprises, factories, banks, etc. The higher participants use salaries, wages, bonuses and other incentives to ensure that lower participants work to achieve the goals of the organization. The lower participants are therefore calculative in their involvement and commitment.

The university, on the other hand, is a typically mixed organization incorporating elements of the above three types. Like the normative organization, membership

is voluntary, provided certain basic educational qualifications are satisfied. A lecturer may decide to resign, a student may drop out or transfer to another university, etc. Sometimes a particular university may have to use persuasion, extensive advertisement and public relations to sell itself to the society for patronage. Those who become students also believe very strongly in the worth of a degree certificate and are willing to pay for it.

Like the coercive organization, however, the university offers courses which students may not necessarily like or enjoy but which they must pass in order to meet the requirements for certification. Nobody expects them to determine what and how they are taught. They are coerced into some rigid timetables; they swear the matriculation oath and are threatened with probation and withdrawal if they fail courses. Some students are, in fact, in school because of family pressures and would like to opt out if they had the choice. In turn, university workers must report to work on time and remain till official closing time. Lecturers must do research, and they must “publish or perish”. The university campus, like the typical prison yard, is often surrounded by high concrete walls with formidable entrance and exit gates manned by burly security men – some in mufti and some in uniform, etc.

Like the Utilitarian organization, the university pays salaries, wages, allowances and motivates its workers via promotions into higher salary brackets and professional status. Workers band themselves into industrial unions through which they constantly demand enhanced conditions of service, etc. (Ekong, 1999).

(b) Characteristic Features of Democracy

According to Edward Shils (1968), political democracy entails civilian rule, representative institutions and public liberties. Civilian rule implies the citizen’s right to seek and hold political offices; right to participate in political life through such activities as voting, belonging to political organizations and interest groups; and contacting political officials. Such rights are the privileges of everyone, not just the aristocratic elites or a professional class of civil servants. Also, political decisions have to be publicly justified, i.e. consent of the governed is sought by means other than the use of force or threats.

A typical university is not open to all citizens but to those who have the basic academic or technical qualifications to be admitted as students or employed as staff. The offices of head of department, dean, provost, or vice-chancellor are open only to very senior members of the academic community.

The consent of the governed in the university is not and cannot be sought in everything. For instance, students are not asked to suggest what the contents of a particular course should be, when teaching should commence, when and how examinations should be conducted and what class of degree they want individually. Similarly, university committees are constituted by senior academics – what Eric Ashby terms “the oligarchy of the professorate”. Thus by its very nature the University does not offer all its members equal opportunity to take part in decision-making process as influential citizens. Rather, most junior members of the university community remain as “participant subject” (Frederick Barghoorn, 1962).

The term “representative institutions” implies that the authority to govern is derived from election by citizens; that there is competitive struggle between office holders or potential office holders, each representing a constituency and their interests; and that decisions made must take account of citizens’ preferences.

While heads of departments and deans may be elected, ideally, the appointment of a Vice-Chancellor does not take the form of a popular election by the university community. The vacancy is advertised for the attention of longstanding and renowned professors with administrative experience. They may be national or international scholars. They need no membership of political parties, no campaigns and campaign managers. It is expected that the interests of the Vice-Chancellor would be coterminous with that of the university community and weld the university into a single constituency rather than into factions.

In Nigeria, the Governing Councils of Universities (Federal or State) are constituted by the Visitor (i.e. President of the Nation or Governor of the State) and then announced for the information of all and sundry. The composition of the Councils is supposed to reflect the federal character, gender representation and locational interest but is never through election by the university community concerned.

Public Liberties entail each citizen maintaining certain rights e.g. freedom of association, assembly and communication; holding opinions and freedom from violence, intimidation or fraud – at least in principle. It also entails the right of the minority to be heard even when the majority have their way.

Universities globally aspire to the maintenance of these liberties and have elaborated them to include academic freedom or autonomy which has to do with the exercise of their intellectual capacity and moral prestige to defend and actively disseminate universally accepted values including peace, justice, freedom, equality, elimination of poverty, environmental protection, etc.

Nevertheless, we cannot deny the fact that universities are seen as government property. In Nigeria, there is the (subtle) attempt to straight-jacket them into adopting the same curricula and instructional procedures, administrative patterns, the same salary structure, admission and matriculation conditionalities, tuition fees, etc. Uniformity and conformity rather than democracy are the order.

IV. CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS AND CHALLENGES TO NIGERIA'S DEMOCRACY

From the foregoing, we can conclude that there are no “pure” democratic arrangements in university governance. Meritocracy (rule by the most capable) and oligarchy (rule by a few) rather than democracy (rule by a majority of citizens) seem to be the political norm in the university setting. When asked what management style the 11 Vice-Chancellors in this study would advocate (with the benefit of hindsight) for the effective administration of universities in Nigeria, eight of them (or 73%) indicated a style that would have doses of both authoritarianism and democracy. Some of them opined that the traditional political values — over which we now hoist the values of modern western democracy — were not democratic. Even if we were to clone democracy like Dolly the sheep (Julius Nyerere, 1998), it would still require time to mature. That African universities in general and Nigerian universities in particular, may want to evolve an “appropriate democracy” (cf. appropriate technology) in order to be able to marry the elitist British colonial university traditions with the liberal, mass-oriented American education philosophy — after all, the university is a seat of innovation and the inclusion of pronounced African perspectives into the structure and functioning of the university can only be in line with the current call for “internationalization” (Ekhaguere, 1998).

The question now is, how must the new civilian democracy in Nigeria impact the university in order to facilitate the evolution and sustenance of an acceptable management paradigm that would meet the compelling demands of a “globalized” world?

Below are some challenges that might be tackled, first by the new civilian government and secondly by the university system itself:

(a) To the Government

1. For Nigeria to be a political democracy, it must also be a social democracy in that its dominant culture and social structures must directly or indirectly support democratic political processes. In other words, democracy must become a way of life rather than a mere political slogan.

2. The government has routinely under-funded the universities over the years. Our study shows that about 80% of the strikes and work stoppages in Nigerian universities in the 1990s was directly linked to confrontation between unions and the government over improved conditions of service and the need to arrest the decay in facilities and infrastructure in the universities. To forestall such agitation, more funds have to be pumped into the universities.

In addition, university administrations should be relieved of the burden of providing basic municipal services like electricity, water, telephones, staff and student accommodation, transportation, waste disposal, etc., so that they could concentrate on university development proper.

3. Policies affecting university education need not emerge as an outcome of a long-drawn out struggle for survival and dominance between industrial unions and the government, as the salary issue had been. As the Bible says, it is what we sow that we reap. If we invest sparingly in education generally and tertiary education in particular, we should expect to reap sparingly.
4. The policies – particularly financial benefits – of external bodies that will affect universities must be determined in consonance with the universities to ensure harmony and understanding in the implementation of such policies. Examples are cases of special salaries and allowances for medical personnel, admissions policies by JAMB (Joint Admission and Matriculation Board), etc. Consulting the Committee of Vice-Chancellors after the fact — as in the case of the World Bank Loan (1999/2000) — could be unfruitful.
5. In the new democracy, Vice-Chancellors of Nigerian universities as a body must be part of the national-level central planning of educational policies and development of universities.
6. The younger generation of teachers, students and workers in Nigerian universities have been born and nurtured in an atmosphere of violence, dictatorship and corruption; when lecturers could sell lecture notes as “hand-outs”, receive various forms of gratification in exchange for grades; when a small, vociferous minority group of junior staff (academic and non-

teaching) could impose itself and its will on the majority (senior colleagues) and disrupt activities on campus with impunity. This situation existed under a government that literally instituted a “with money all things are possible” policy. The present civilian democratic regime must, therefore, make conscious efforts at the sensitization and re-orientation of the citizenry at all levels. The universities cannot be islands of saints in an ocean of corruption.

(b) To the University

1. The university being a mixed formal organization as described above, conducts business differently from strictly profit-making, charitable, military, penal or rehabilitative organizations. The successful university administrator must recognize the “mixed” nature of the organization and therefore borrow from and blend the managerial techniques of the prison warder, the political party chieftain and the bank manager.
2. Vice-Chancellors in Nigeria are invariably drawn from among the academic staff. They therefore have a defined constituency. It would be reasonable to expect serving Vice-Chancellors to speak for and defend their constituency when faced with draconian governmental policies. Hitherto, Vice-Chancellors have tended to act as government agents or mere “law enforcement officers”, thereby creating an unnecessary “us” and “them” divide in their domains.
3. University staff must recognize and differentiate between problems in the system arising from the complexities of national policies, economic depression, etc., and those arising from local management of their institutions. That way, they would know how and where to direct their “missiles” (if and where necessary).
4. The use of committees in decision-making must not only be continued, but the Vice-Chancellor also must be seen to be making use of ideas and recommendations emanating from those committees. Such committees must be chaired by senior academics. Closely connected to this is the need to decentralize the presently over-centralized university administration in order to make it more responsive to problems. The decentralization

should extend to the Registry, Bursary, Works and other service Departments, backed up with appropriate budgetary autonomy.

5. Nigerian universities must disengage from straightjacket uniformity and embody differences and uniqueness, the totality of which will in the end make for organic wholeness in the society.
6. Universities must ensure minimum governmental control in their internal management and must be insulated from partisan politics. In other words, internal problems must be solved internally, to the extent possible.
7. University management must consciously remove barriers to diversity and the promotion of equality/equity, thereby eliminating strife, rebellion and uprisings within its ranks. Equity, good treatment and inclusion are factors in the sane management of any human society. We cannot afford the colossal loss of man-days that has occurred in the last seven years of the 20th century.
8. The university community must adjust to a measure of privatization in the face of Nigeria's inevitable linkage to a globalized and open economic system. In other words, no matter how much the government supports the university financially, the direct beneficiaries of university education will have to pay something realistic for it along the line. The era of N90 accommodation fee per year had long passed.
9. Finally, there must be periodic tracer studies to monitor democratization in Nigeria in general and in its university system in particular.

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