



An Exposition of Nigerian University Governance and Administrative Structure

Abstract

Universities primary responsibility is not simply to deliver services but to create knowledge, preserve it, question accepted ideas and prepare people who can contribute meaningfully to society. That responsibility has influenced the way universities are organized and governed over centuries. Since a university cannot function effectively where administrative convenience overrides academic judgment, it cannot fulfil its mandate where academic freedom exists without accountability. The challenge of Nigerian Universities then has always been to hold these competing demands together without weakening either. From this point of view, this research carried out an exposition of Nigerian universities in order to understand their organogram, roles, responsibilities and objectives. The study contended that, although statutes, regulations and other legal instruments define institutional authority, they cannot by themselves guarantee sound administration. The study therefore affirmed, that much depends on the people entrusted with implementing those provisions and the values they bring to the process. The study concluded that Nigerian Universities may be numerous, but each hold a lot of promises of impact through enduring reforms that will reposition it for greatness where sound knowledge and dedication to duty is entrenched.

Keywords: Nigeria, University, Governance Structure, Administration, Accountability, Reforms.

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Introduction

Experience has shown that two universities operating under the same legal framework can produce very different outcomes because leadership, administrative culture and professional judgment often determine how governance is translated into practice. This point is emphasized by Shattock (2010) who notes that, "good governance is about much more than organizational structures; it is about relationships, behaviors and culture" (p. 7).

It is equally important to note that universities are not governed in the same way as government ministries or private corporations. Decisions affecting teaching, research and academic standards cannot rest solely with executive authority because the legitimacy of those decisions depends on the participation of those with academic expertise. This understanding explains why shared governance has remained a defining feature of universities across different jurisdictions. Kezar and Holcombe (2017)

observe that shared governance “aligns institutional decision making with the expertise of faculty, administrators and governing boards” (p. 3).

Governance and administration are often discussed as though they perform separate functions but are closely intertwined in practice. Governance establishes direction, defines institutional priorities and protects the mission of the university. While administration gives practical effect to those decisions through planning, coordination and day to day execution. One without the other leaves the institution vulnerable just as governance that is disconnected from administration rarely moves beyond policy statement. The effectiveness of a university therefore depends less on the existence of statutory organs than on the quality of interaction among them. It majorly depends on the willingness of those who occupy positions of responsibility to act in the interest of the institution rather than personal authority. Understanding how these structures function is essential for every staff member because governance determines decision-making processes, accountability systems, administrative procedures, and academic regulation within the university.

2.0 Objectives

The objectives of this study are to

- i. Examine the governance and administrative structure of the university.
- ii. Evaluate why shared governance has remained a

defining feature of universities across different jurisdictions.

Philosophy of University Administration

Many of the administrative difficulties that surface in our universities today are not failures of procedure as much as they are failures to appreciate the nature of the institution itself. Once a university begins to see itself as another government establishment, it gradually loses the very character that distinguishes it from every other public institution. This is why Kezar and Holcombe (2017) observe that shared governance “aligns institutional decision making with the expertise of faculty, administrators and governing boards” (p. 3).

A university was never intended to be a bureaucracy that awards degrees but first and foremost, a community organized around knowledge. Everything else, whether administration, finance, infrastructure or governance, exists because that community exists. Whenever administration begins to compete with scholarship instead of serving it, the institution slowly loses its sense of purpose. Efficient administration alone has never made a great university. It is for this reason that Newman (1982) described the university simply as “a place of teaching universal knowledge” (p. xix).

Altbach, Reisberg and de Wit (2023) observe that universities now operate within a global knowledge economy in

which research, innovation and international engagement have become defining measures of institutional performance. Universities bring together individuals whose authority rests not on office but on scholarship. For example, professors cannot simply be managed in the same way one supervises employees in a conventional bureaucracy because academic life depends upon intellectual independence. Clark (1983) recognized this reality when he described universities as organizations in which authority is naturally dispersed across specialized communities of expertise. In practice, this means that influence is earned as much through intellectual credibility as through official position. A Vice Chancellor for example, may possess statutory authority, but that authority alone rarely carries an institution very far. Lasting institutional decisions are built on confidence, consultation and professional respect. Shattock (2010) captures this point clearly when he argues that “good governance is about much more than organizational structures; it is about relationships, behaviors and culture” (p. 7).

A university cannot defend academic freedom while neglecting academic integrity because the two are inseparable. Altbach (2001) observe that academic freedom is “the central value of the university” (p. 206). Academic freedom belongs primarily to scholars in the exercise of teaching and research. Institutional autonomy belongs to the university as a corporate body. It protects the institution’s ability to make academic,

administrative and strategic decisions according to established academic principles rather than external directives. Public universities derive much of their funding from government, operate under statutory frameworks and remain accountable to regulatory authorities. The more difficult question is how accountability can be maintained without reducing universities to extensions of government departments.

Kezar and Holcombe (2017) describe shared governance as a framework that aligns institutional decision making with the knowledge of governing boards, administrators and faculty members. Decisions reached through genuine consultation may take longer, but they often command greater institutional confidence because they benefit from multiple perspectives before implementation. Universities are older than most of the individuals who lead them and, if properly managed, they will outlive all of them. Every administrator therefore occupies office only temporarily and that reality should inform the exercise of authority. Positions within the university are held in trust for the institution, not owned by those who occupy them. Stewardship encourages administrators to ask a different set of questions such as what responsibility requires shifting attention from personal influence to institutional continuity? Administrators who appreciate the philosophy of the university are generally better equipped to interpret regulations wisely, manage disagreements

constructively and preserve institutional stability during periods of uncertainty.

Evolution of University Governance in Nigeria

Governance in the Nigerian university system is therefore best understood as the product of historical experience rather than legislative design alone. The structures that define authority today evolved in response to changing ideas about the purpose of the university, the relationship between the academy and the state, and the demands of national development. Appreciating that history helps to explain why certain governance practices have endured while others have been jettisoned or challenged.

Modern university governance owes much to the medieval universities of Bologna, Paris and Oxford. These institutions were not established by governments in the contemporary sense but grew from associations of scholars and students who organized themselves around learning. Authority was exercised collectively and academic decisions were made within scholarly communities. Although the administrative complexity of today's universities is far removed from those early beginnings, one principle has remained. It is that universities govern themselves most effectively when scholarship retains a central place in institutional decision making.

That tradition travelled across Europe and eventually shaped the British university system from which Nigeria inherited much of its higher education

culture. The collegiate model developed in Britain placed considerable emphasis on academic self-governance, deliberation through committees and the distribution of authority among various institutional organs. Even where governing boards exercised oversight, academic matters largely remained within the jurisdiction of academic bodies. Clark (1983) holds that universities differ from conventional organizations precisely because authority is dispersed among specialized communities of expertise rather than concentrated within a single administrative hierarchy.

Nigeria's experience with university governance cannot, however, be understood simply as a continuation of British traditions. The colonial administration introduced higher education primarily to produce skilled manpower for public administration and the professions. While this objective contributed to the establishment of tertiary institutions, it also meant that governance initially reflected colonial administrative priorities more than just the aspirations of an autonomous university system. The establishment of the University College, Ibadan in 1948 marked the formal beginning of university education in Nigeria. As an affiliate of the University of London, the institution operated within British academic regulations and governance traditions. Academic programmes, examination standards and administrative procedures were substantially influenced by the parent institution. This arrangement ensured

internationally recognized standards, but also limited the institution's capacity to define its own academic priorities.

Officially known as the *Commission on Post School Certificate and Higher Education in Nigeria*, this was established in 1959 to advise the government on the country's higher education needs in anticipation of independence. The Ashby Report advanced a vision of universities as institutions that should enjoy sufficient academic independence to pursue teaching and research while remaining responsive to national priorities. The years immediately following independence witnessed the establishment of what are now commonly described as Nigeria's first generation universities. Institutions such as the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Ahmadu Bello University, the University of Ife, now Obafemi Awolowo University, and the University of Lagos emerged during a period of immense national optimism. They were conceived not merely as centers of learning but as strategic instruments for nation building. Universities were expected to produce skilled professionals, cultivate national leadership, promote scientific advancement and strengthen Nigeria's place within the international community.

By the late twentieth century, the Nigerian university system had entered a new phase as Federal and state governments established new universities to widen access to higher education, while private universities later emerged as important participants within the

sector. One of the defining moments in the evolution of university governance in Nigeria was the establishment of the National Universities Commission. Created in 1962 as an advisory body and later strengthened through the National Universities Commission Act of 1974. The Commission assumed responsibilities that extended beyond coordination into quality assurance, programme accreditation, institutional planning and system wide policy development.

Successive amendments to the Universities (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act sought to clarify institutional authority, protect university autonomy and reduce arbitrary interference in university administration. Few legislative interventions have shaped governance in Nigerian universities as profoundly as the 2003 amendment. Among other reforms, it strengthened the statutory roles of Governing Councils in matters relating to appointments, discipline and institutional oversight while affirming the responsibilities of Senates in academic affairs. The legislation attempted to restore an important constitutional principle within university administration which are that, different organs exist because they perform different functions, not because they compete for authority.

In practice, institutional disagreements often arise not because statutes are silent but because institutional actors fail to appreciate the boundaries established by those statutes. This observation is particularly relevant within universities

such as the University of Uyo, where governance reflects both national legislation and institution specific statutes. While broad principles of governance remain consistent across Nigerian universities, each institution develops administrative traditions shaped by its history, organizational culture and statutory instruments. Experienced administrators learn to distinguish between what the law requires, what institutional practice permits and what good judgment recommends.

Governance Structure and Roles in the University

In a conventional bureaucracy, authority typically flows from the apex through successive administrative levels. Efficiency often depends upon the speed with which executive decisions are transmitted and implemented. Universities cannot function effectively on that model because many of their most important decisions require academic judgment rather than administrative instruction. Questions relating to curriculum, research standards, examinations and the award of degrees cannot be resolved solely through executive authority because they derive their legitimacy from scholarly expertise. Clark (1983) notes that higher education is characterized by “organized anarchy” in which authority is dispersed across specialized communities of knowledge rather than concentrated within a single command structure. The Universities (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, together with institutional statutes and regulations,

establishes distinct governance organs whose powers are intended to complement rather than compete with one another (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2003). Appreciating this constitutional arrangement is essential before examining the individual organs themselves.

The Visitor

Because the office is occupied by the President in federal universities and by State Governors in state universities, there is a tendency to assume that the Visitor functions as the day to day head of the institution. The Visitor exists not to administer the university but to safeguard its constitutional integrity. The Visitor therefore performs a constitutional rather than an executive function. Through powers defined by law, the Visitor receives reports on the state of the university, constitutes visitation panels where necessary and ensures that the institution remains faithful to its statutory mandate. Summarily, the Visitor’s responsibilities include: Appointment of Governing Council members, receiving visitation panels, Addressing major institutional disputes.

The Chancellor

Universities have always recognized that institutions are sustained not only by administrative systems but also by tradition, identity and public confidence. The Chancellor embodies those intangible dimensions of university life. As the ceremonial head of the university, the Chancellor presides over convocations and confers degrees on behalf of the

institution. More importantly, the office serves as a visible representation of the university's continuity beyond successive administrations. While Vice Chancellors complete their tenures, Governing Councils are reconstituted, Academic staff retire, the institution, however, continues. The Chancellor reminds the university community that it belongs to a tradition larger than any individual office holder.

The Pro Chancellor and Chairman of Council

If the Chancellor represents continuity, the Pro Chancellor represents active governance. This is one of the most important offices within the governance structure because it provides leadership to the Governing Council, the organ charged with the strategic oversight of the university. The Pro Chancellor leads the body responsible for ensuring that the university remains faithful to its mission, exercises prudent stewardship over its resources and maintains appropriate standards of accountability. There is a natural temptation for Governing Councils to involve themselves in operational matters, particularly where institutions face financial or administrative difficulties. However, governance becomes ineffective when oversight is confused with execution.

The Governing Council

The Governing Council occupies a central position within the constitutional architecture of the university because it serves as the institution's highest policy making and oversight body. Its authority

derives not from administrative convenience but from the recognition that universities require independent strategic supervision capable of protecting institutional interests beyond the tenure of individual administrators. The statutory responsibilities of Council extend to finance, property, staffing, strategic planning and the general welfare of the institution, subject always to the powers assigned by law to Senate in academic matters. These responsibilities explain why Councils are deliberately constituted to include individuals drawn from diverse professional backgrounds. Universities benefit when strategic decisions are informed not only by academic experience but also by expertise in law, finance, public administration, industry and national development.

The Governing Council should not be understood as the university's executive authority but as its strategic conscience. The Governing Council is the highest decision-making body responsible for policy and financial management of the university.

Key functions include:

- Appointment of principal officers
- Approval of university budget
- Oversight of university property and finances
- Strategic planning and policy direction.

The Vice Chancellor

If the Governing Council provides strategic oversight, the Vice Chancellor gives practical direction to the life of the university. The Vice Chancellor stands at the point where academic leadership, executive administration and public accountability meet. Every significant decision eventually passes through this office, whether it concerns academic programmes, staff welfare, finances, infrastructure, student affairs or external relations. It is therefore one of the few offices within the university where almost every institutional interest converges.

The most successful Vice Chancellors are those who understand when to lead decisively, when to consult widely and when to allow established governance processes to take their course. Universities respond far better to leadership that builds consensus than to authority that seeks unquestioning compliance. Shattock (2010) aver that, effective governance rests upon relationships and institutional culture as much as formal powers. That observation applies nowhere more clearly than to the office of the Vice Chancellor. The Universities (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act recognizes this central role by designating the Vice Chancellor as both the chief academic and chief executive officer of the university, responsible for implementing the decisions of Council and Senate while ensuring the efficient administration of the institution (Federal

Republic of Nigeria, 2003). The VCs responsibilities include:

- Academic leadership
- Administrative coordination
- Implementation of council decisions

Representation of the university nationally and internationally

The Senate

Long before modern universities developed elaborate administrative systems, academic communities understood that decisions affecting scholarship should remain in the hands of scholars. That conviction continues to justify the Senate's place as the supreme academic authority within the university. The responsibilities entrusted to Senate are extensive because they relate directly to the university's core mission. Admissions, curriculum development, examinations, research standards, academic regulations and the award of degrees all fall substantially within its jurisdiction. The Senate is the highest academic authority of the university. It is responsible for:

- Academic policies
- Curriculum development
- Approval of results and degrees
- Regulation of teaching and research

Membership typically includes:

- The Vice-Chancellor
- Deputy Vice-Chancellors

- Professors
- Faculty representatives
- Librarian

Congregation and Convocation

Congregation and Convocation belong to the latter category with their importance sometimes underestimated because they are not involved in the daily administration of the institution. Their functions however reinforce accountability, institutional continuity and collective ownership. Congregation ordinarily consists of academic staff together with specified categories of senior administrative personnel.

Convocation, by contrast, extends the university's corporate identity beyond its serving staff. It brings together graduates, senior officers and other persons recognized under the university's statutes. In doing so, it reminds the institution that its responsibilities do not end at graduation. Alumni remain part of the university's continuing story, contributing experience, professional networks and public goodwill that often prove invaluable to institutional development.

Congregation and Convocation

Congregation consists of all academic staff and senior administrative staff of the university. Its functions include:

- Participation in university governance
- Election of representatives to Senate and Council

- Discussing institutional policies
- Congregation reflects the principle of collegial governance in universities

Convocation is composed of:

- Graduates of the university
- Academic staff
- Members of the governing council

It serves mainly ceremonial purposes but may also participate in the election of representatives to the Governing Council

Faculties, Departments, Institutes and Centers

Under the leadership of Deans, faculties coordinate academic programmes, oversee quality assurance and promote interdisciplinary collaboration. Departments, led by Heads of Department, remain the primary intellectual homes of academic disciplines. It is here that curricula are implemented, research agendas are pursued and the daily interaction between staff and students takes place.

Institutes and specialised centres add another dimension to university governance by creating spaces where scholarship can respond directly to emerging national and global challenges. Whether devoted to public policy, environmental studies, entrepreneurship, health sciences or technological innovation, these units enable universities to organise knowledge around contemporary problems rather than

traditional disciplinary boundaries alone. Their growing prominence reflects an important shift in higher education as universities are increasingly expected not only to generate knowledge but also to demonstrate its relevance to society just as it is happening in the University of Uyo.

Administrative Reporting Lines in the University

Shattock (2010) observes that successful universities combine sound governance with competent professional administration. The significance of this observation lies in its recognition that academic excellence does not emerge independently of administrative effectiveness. The philosophy of university administration rests on three interrelated principles which are service, stewardship and coordination. Administrators exist to enable the university to fulfil its statutory responsibilities. Universities cannot function through isolated administrative units operating independently of one another and this is where coordination becomes important. Mintzberg (1979) holds that complex organisations succeed through the careful coordination of specialised activities rather than the mere accumulation of authority.

Principal Officers and the Administrative Machinery

The administrative life of the university revolves around its Principal Officers. While statutes differ slightly from one institution to another, Nigerian public universities generally recognise the Vice

Chancellor, the Registrar, the Bursar and the University Librarian as Principal Officers., Their effectiveness depends not only upon competence within their respective domains but also upon their capacity to work collaboratively in advancing institutional objectives.

The Registrar

Among the Principal Officers, the Registrar occupies a particularly distinctive position because the office connects virtually every aspect of university administration. Statutory provisions commonly describe the Registrar as the Chief Administrative Officer of the university and Secretary to the Governing Council, Senate, Congregation and Convocation. These descriptions, however, reveal only part of the office's significance. They identify formal responsibilities but do not fully capture the role the Registrar plays in sustaining institutional continuity.

Because the Registrar serves several governance organs simultaneously, impartiality becomes essential. The office must support the Governing Council without diminishing the authority of Senate. It must advise the Vice Chancellor while preserving institutional neutrality. It must facilitate decision making without becoming the decision maker. That delicate balance distinguishes professional university administration from personal loyalty to individual office holders. The National Universities Commission (2021) has consistently emphasised institutional governance and quality assurance as inseparable

components of effective university administration. Reporting relationships form part of that quality assurance framework because they support transparency, consistency and administrative responsibility.

The Bursar

Ambitious strategic plans, innovative research programmes and impressive academic policies fundamentally depend upon the prudent management of financial resources. This explains why the office of the Bursar occupies such a strategic place within the administrative structure of the university. The Bursar serves as the Chief Financial Officer and is responsible for the planning, management and accountability of the university's financial resources. The office provides the financial intelligence upon which institutional decisions are made. Whether Management is considering the establishment of a new faculty, embarking on capital projects, recruiting staff or introducing new academic programmes, sound financial advice from that office is indispensable.

Summary of Responsibilities of Principal Officers

The Registrar

Key responsibilities of the Registrar include:

- Custodian of university records
- Administrative coordination
- Interpretation of statutes and regulations

- Oversight of staff administration
- Organization of meetings of statutory bodies
- Ensures institutional continuity, regulatory compliance, and administrative efficiency.

The Bursar

- The Bursar is responsible for financial administration, including:
- Budget preparation,
- Financial reporting
- Revenue management
- Compliance with public financial regulations.

The University Librarian

The responsibilities of the University Librarian have expanded significantly in recent years. Modern university libraries are no longer defined simply by physical collections. They now manage electronic databases, institutional repositories, digital archives, research data services and information literacy programmes. Consequently, the University Librarian occupies a leadership role in supporting teaching, research and innovation within a digital academic environment. The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA, 2022) observes that university libraries are expected to support open scholarship, digital transformation and lifelong learning. The Librarian oversees the university library system, supporting teaching, learning, and research.

Directors, Deans and Heads of Department

The Dean provides academic and administrative leadership within the faculty. Successful Deans understand that leadership within the university depends more upon influence than command. Academic colleagues respond most positively to leaders who combine intellectual credibility with administrative competence. Heads of Department supervise curriculum implementation, staff development, student welfare, examinations, departmental finances and countless administrative responsibilities that directly affect the quality of teaching and learning. Directors of specialised units, whether responsible for academic planning, quality assurance, procurement, information technology, physical planning, student affairs, research administration or entrepreneurship, provide the specialised expertise required by a contemporary university.

Summary of Responsibilities of Heads of Department

Academic Leadership

- Provide leadership for academic programmes.
- Coordinate teaching, learning, and research activities.
- Ensure quality delivery of the curriculum.
- Promote research, innovation, and community service.

- Student Administration
- Monitor students' academic progress.
- Handle students' academic matters and disciplinary issues.
- Coordinate examinations and result processing.
- Ensure timely submission of examination results.
- Guide students on academic regulations and career development.

Administrative Responsibilities

- Chair departmental meetings.
- Implement Senate and Faculty decisions.
- Coordinate course allocation and teaching schedules.
- Supervise academic and non-academic staff.
- Recommend appointments, promotions, and staff development.
- Prepare departmental budgets and annual reports.
- Ensure proper management of departmental facilities and laboratories.

Governance

- Serve as the link between the Department, Faculty, and Central Administration.
- Ensure compliance with University regulations and accreditation requirements.

- Promote teamwork and harmonious working relationships.

The Faculty Officer

- Chief Administrative Officer of the Faculty.
- Serve as Secretary to the Faculty Board.
- Prepare notices, agendas, and minutes of Faculty Board meetings.
- Implement decisions of the Faculty Board.
- Maintain official Faculty records and confidential documents.
- Coordinate examination administration within the Faculty.
- Process students' academic records and graduation documentation.
- Coordinate correspondence between the Faculty and Registry.
- Advise the Dean on administrative procedures.
- Supervise administrative staff within the Faculty.
- Coordinate staff leave records, personnel matters, and logistics.
- Ensure compliance with University regulations and administrative procedures.
- Facilitate communication between Departments, the Dean's Office, and Central Administration.

The Role of Faculty Quality Assurance Personnel

Academic Quality

- Monitor compliance with National Universities Commission (NUC) and University quality standards.
- Ensure proper implementation of approved curricula.
- Monitor teaching effectiveness and learning outcomes.
- Review course delivery and assessment methods

Monitoring and Evaluation

- Conduct quality assurance inspections.
- Monitor lecture attendance and course coverage.
- Verify examination processes and academic integrity.
- Evaluate departmental performance using established indicators.

Accreditation Support

- Coordinate preparation for NUC accreditation exercises.
- Ensure availability of required academic documents.
- Monitor compliance with accreditation recommendations.
- Maintain quality assurance records and evidence

Reporting

- Prepare periodic quality assurance reports.
- Advise the Dean and Departments on quality improvement measures.
- Liaise with the University's Directorate of Quality Assurance.

Working with the Vice-Chancellor

- Implement approved policies faithfully.
- Provide timely and accurate reports.
- Offer professional advice when requested.
- Support the University's strategic vision.
- Execute assignments diligently.
- Maintain confidentiality.
- Demonstrate loyalty to institutional objectives rather than individuals

Working with the Deputy Vice-Chancellors

- Seek guidance on academic or administrative matters.
- Ensure proper coordination of assigned responsibilities.
- Submit reports through appropriate channels.
- Participate in institutional planning and monitoring.

Working with the Registrar

- Observe established administrative procedures.
- Ensure proper documentation.
- Comply with circulars and directives.
- Consult the Registry on matters relating to appointments, promotions, discipline, leave, and regulations.
- Maintain effective communication with the Registry.

Working with the Bursar

- Follow approved financial regulations.
- Obtain financial clearance before expenditure.
- Prepare realistic budgets.
- Ensure accountability for public funds.
- Submit retirement documents promptly.
- Comply with procurement regulations.

Working with the University Librarian

- Support acquisition of learning resources.
- Encourage research visibility.
- Collaborate on institutional repository development.
- Promote information literacy.
- Ensure departments maintain current academic materials

Coordination Rather Than Command

A Registrar preparing Council papers requires information from the Bursar, the Vice Chancellor, Directors and academic units. Accreditation exercises demand cooperation among academic departments, quality assurance units, works departments, procurement offices and the Registry. Student admissions involve academic planning, information technology, the Registry, the Bursary and faculties simultaneously. Few administrative activities belong exclusively to a single office. In this respect, Mintzberg (1979) argued that the coordination of specialised work represents one of the defining challenges of complex organisations. Universities perhaps illustrate this better than most institutions because their activities span teaching, research, administration and public service at the same time. Administrative effectiveness therefore depends not upon rigid hierarchy but upon carefully organised collaboration within recognised constitutional boundaries.

One of the easiest ways to create administrative tension is to bypass an office whose statutory responsibility is directly affected by a decision. Such actions may appear to produce quicker results, but they often weaken accountability and generate avoidable misunderstandings. Experienced university administrators do not only ask whether they possess the authority to take a decision, but whether the appropriate office has been consulted.

The Vice Chancellor occupies a unique position within this network of relationships. As the chief executive and chief academic officer, the Vice Chancellor provides strategic direction while ensuring that decisions of Council and Senate are faithfully implemented. Effective Vice Chancellors recognise that leadership is strengthened, not diminished, by drawing upon the expertise of other Principal Officers. Universities are simply too complex for any one individual to possess complete knowledge of every administrative, financial, legal and academic issue requiring executive attention.

The Registrar occupies an equally important place within these relationships because the office serves as the principal adviser on administrative procedure and institutional governance. There is a common misconception that the Registrar merely communicates decisions taken elsewhere. In practice, the office contributes long before decisions are made. Through knowledge of statutes, regulations, precedents and institutional practice, the Registrar helps ensure that proposals presented for consideration are procedurally sound and capable of lawful implementation.

The Registrar must provide objective counsel even where such advice may not coincide with the preferences of senior officers. Loyalty within university administration is owed first to the institution and its governing framework rather than to individual personalities. That distinction is essential because

administrators who compromise professional judgment for personal convenience rarely strengthen the institutions they serve.

The relationship between the Vice Chancellor and the Bursar deserves particular attention. Many institutional initiatives begin with academic or strategic aspirations, but every initiative eventually encounters financial realities. A healthy relationship between these offices therefore depends upon mutual appreciation rather than competing priorities. The Bursar should not be viewed as the officer who simply refuses expenditure, nor should financial advice be regarded as resistance to institutional progress. Sound financial management protects the long term sustainability of decisions that may appear attractive in the short term.

The University Librarian occupies a similarly strategic position within the leadership team. Universities increasingly define their competitiveness through research visibility, digital resources, scholarly communication and knowledge management. Consequently, library leadership as already noted has become an essential component of institutional planning rather than an isolated support service. Decisions relating to research development, accreditation, postgraduate education and international collaboration all benefit from the active involvement of the University Librarian. These goes to show a broader administrative principle where effective collaboration among Principal Officers depends not upon

similarity of responsibilities but upon recognition that their responsibilities are complementary.

Administrative Structure for Non-Academic Operations

The administrative arm of the university supports academic activities through several divisions such as:

- Establishment Division
- Academic Affairs Division
- Student Affairs Division
- Works and Maintenance
- Procurement
- Security Services
- Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

These units ensure the smooth functioning of the institution.

Principles of Administrative Reporting

- Respect the chain of command.
- Report to your immediate supervisor.
- Escalate issues only when necessary.
- Keep proper records of official communications.
- Obtain approvals before implementing major decisions.
- Maintain confidentiality of official information.
- Ensure accountability at every level.

- Communicate decisions promptly to subordinates.

Benefits

- Clear accountability.
- Faster decision-making.
- Effective coordination.
- Reduced conflicts.
- Improved service delivery.
- Good governance and institutional stability.

Roles of Directors

- Provide strategic leadership for their directorates.
- Develop and implement policies approved by Management, Senate, and Council.
- Coordinate activities within their units to achieve institutional goals.
- Prepare annual work plans, budgets, and performance reports.
- Supervise Deputy Directors and other staff within the directorate.
- Ensure compliance with University regulations, government policies, and statutory requirements.
- Advise the Vice-Chancellor and Management on matters relating to their areas of responsibility.
- Promote staff development, innovation, and efficient service delivery.

- Ensure prudent management of financial, human, and material resources.

- Represent the University in relevant committees, meetings, and external engagements.

Roles of Deputy Directors

- Assist Directors in planning, coordinating, and implementing departmental activities.
- Supervise designated units and staff.
- Coordinate projects, programmes, and institutional initiatives.
- Monitor implementation of policies and report progress to the Director.
- Prepare reports, memoranda, and official correspondence.
- Stand in for the Director when delegated or in the Director's absence.
- Ensure timely execution of administrative decisions.
- Mentor junior administrative staff.
- Facilitate communication between the Director and subordinate officers.
- Support continuous improvement within the Directorate.

The Committee System in the University

The committee system is the primary mechanism through which universities deliberate, formulate policies, make

recommendations, and take collective decisions. It promotes participatory governance, transparency, accountability, and shared responsibility. While Principal Officers provide leadership, committees provide the mechanism through which much of the university's business is examined, debated and refined before formal decisions are taken. To those unfamiliar with university administration, the committee system sometimes appears unnecessarily elaborate. Questions are occasionally asked about why universities require so many committees when executive decisions might appear quicker. It must be stated here that universities are not designed primarily for speed but for careful judgment. The committee system is one of the oldest traditions in university governance. It reflects the belief that institutional decisions are strengthened when they benefit from collective expertise rather than individual opinion. This tradition has endured because universities deal with matters that are often intellectually, professionally and legally complex. Curriculum development, appointments and promotions, research ethics, student/staff discipline, procurement, budgeting and quality assurance all require perspectives that no single office can reasonably provide.

Shattock (2010) argues that committees contribute to effective governance by creating opportunities for informed deliberation before institutional decisions are made. Their value therefore lies not simply in collective participation but in

improving the quality of decision making. Properly constituted committees reduce the likelihood of oversight, broaden institutional ownership of decisions and enhance transparency. At the same time, committees should never become substitutes for leadership. One weakness that occasionally emerges in university administration is the tendency to establish committees for matters that clearly fall within existing administrative responsibilities. Excessive reliance on committees can delay implementation and encourage unnecessary bureaucracy. A committee should exist because its work genuinely requires collective expertise, not because difficult decisions are being deferred.

Successful committees possess clearly defined terms of reference, with membership reflecting relevant expertise rather than mere representation. Meetings are conducted according to established procedures and deliberations properly recorded. Recommendations are expressed with sufficient clarity to guide subsequent action. Above all, committees recognize that their authority derives from the bodies that constitute them. Hence, they can recommend, advise and deliberate, but they do not ordinarily substitute themselves for the statutory organs to which they report.

The Registrar's office occupies a particularly significant position within the committee system. As Secretary to many of the university's principal organs, the Registrar ensures that meetings are convened in accordance with statutory

requirements, agenda papers are properly circulated, proceedings accurately recorded and resolutions communicated to the appropriate offices for implementation. These responsibilities may appear procedural, but are fundamental to institutional governance. Decisions that are poorly documented or improperly communicated frequently create administrative difficulties long after meetings have concluded.

Importance of the Committee System

- Encourages collective decision-making.
- Draws on diverse expertise.
- Promotes transparency.
- Enhances accountability.
- Improves institutional governance.
- Facilitates consultation.
- Reduces arbitrary decision-making.
- Strengthens institutional democracy.

Types of University Committees

- Statutory Committees
- Standing Committees
- Ad-hoc Committees

Composition of Committees

- Committees usually consist of:
- Chairman
- Secretary
- Members

- Co-opted members (where necessary)

Expectations

Appointed Directors, Deputy Directors, Heads of Department, Faculty Officers, Quality Assurance Personnel in the Faculties of the university, are expected to:

- Understand university regulations
- Uphold ethical standards
- Promote academic excellence
- Demonstrate professionalism
- Respect institutional hierarchy
- Contribute to research and innovation
- Maintain accountability and transparency

Conclusion

From the ensuing discussion, it is clear that the administrator must possess something beyond technical competence which is institutional understanding (Okorie, 2025). Understanding the governance and administrative structure of the university is essential for all staff of the university, particularly as Directors, Deputy Directors, Heads of Department, Faculty Officers, Quality Assurance Personnel in the Faculties. The effectiveness of the university system depends on the proper functioning of its governing organs, principal officers, and administrative structures, as well as the collaboration between academic and non-teaching staff. Equally important are the established decision-making processes,

committee systems, and relationships with external regulatory bodies, which help maintain academic standards and institutional credibility.

Furthermore, adherence to principles of accountability, transparency, and clearly defined reporting lines ensures responsible management of resources and promotes trust within the university community. Ultimately, when all members of the university understand these governance structures and perform their roles effectively, the institution is better positioned to achieve its core mandate of teaching, research, and community service, thereby contributing meaningfully to national development and societal progress.

The administrator must possess something beyond technical competence which is institutional understanding. A university administrator is not simply a custodian of files, processes and approvals. The administrator is a custodian of institutional trust as every decision taken, every record maintained and every interaction with staff and students either strengthens or weakens confidence in the university. This is why administrative responsibility should never be reduced to compliance alone. Compliance ensures that rules are followed, but professionalism asks a deeper question whether those rules are being applied in a manner consistent with the mission and values of the institution. In closing, Kezar and Holcombe (2017) emphasize that shared leadership strengthens higher education institutions

because it recognizes that expertise exists across different parts of the university.

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