



APPOINTMENT OF MEMBERS OF GOVERNING COUNCILS OF TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The governance of tertiary institutions in Nigeria is significantly influenced by the composition and functioning of their governing councils. The governing council of tertiary institutions, in the context of this paper, entails the highest policy-making body responsible for providing strategic direction, overseeing institutional administration, and ensuring adherence to national education policies. The paper examined the roles of governing councils of tertiary institutions in Nigeria, including financial oversight, policy formulation, strategic planning, and monitoring institutional performance to achieve academic excellence. It also highlighted the composition of governing councils, including the Pro-Chancellor or Chairperson, Vice-Chancellor, Provost or Rector, deputy administrators, federal or state ministry representatives, academic staff representatives, alumni, and external appointees from professional and public sectors. The paper discussed the functions of governing councils, emphasizing financial oversight, policy formulation, institutional governance, and ensuring operational effectiveness. It outlined the need for transparency in the appointment of council members due to its benefits in promoting merit-based selection, institutional autonomy, stakeholder confidence, accountability, and long-term institutional stability. However, the paper observed that transparent appointment of council members has been consistently compromised in Nigeria due to political interference, weak regulatory frameworks, limited stakeholder participation, favoritism, and socio-political biases. The paper, therefore, concluded that adherence to transparent, merit-based, and accountable appointment processes is critical for effective governance and sustainable development in Nigerian tertiary institutions. It, however, recommended that governments, ministries, institutional management, academic staff, alumni associations, professional bodies, and student representatives actively participate in the selection process to ensure fairness, meritocracy, and institutional growth. Implementing these measures would enhance the credibility, autonomy, and performance of tertiary institutions, ensuring that governing councils are equipped to deliver on their mandate effectively.

Keywords: Transparency, governing council, tertiary institutions, appointment of governing council



1.0

INTRODUCTION

Tertiary education is globally recognized as a cornerstone of national development, as it plays a critical role in cultivating human capital essential for innovation, economic growth, and social progress (Ademola, 2020). In Nigeria, as in many other countries, governing councils serve as the highest policy-making bodies within universities, polytechnics, and colleges. They are responsible for providing strategic direction, overseeing financial management, and ensuring effective institutional governance (Okeke, 2019). Given the crucial roles these councils play in the management of tertiary institutions, the manner in which they are constituted, particularly how members are appointed, has significant implications for institutional autonomy, effectiveness, and credibility. Generally, the appointment of governing councils must be anchored in transparency and meritocracy rather than political expediency if educational institutions are to achieve success.

However, in Nigeria, the appointment of governing councils in public tertiary institutions continues to attract concern due to frequent irregularities and political manipulations in the selection process. Scholars lament that opaque procedures, favoritism, and political interference undermine merit-based selection, thereby weakening the administrative effectiveness of tertiary institutions (Abdullahi, 2022). Eze (2021) affirms that without a clear, open, and fair process, appointments risk compromising institutional integrity and weakening governance. Ultimately, driven by the persistent challenges and irregularities in council appointments, this study seeks to critically examine the selection process, identify factors undermining transparency, and actionable recommendations to strengthen governance and safeguard university autonomy in Nigerian public tertiary institutions.

2.0

METHODOLOGY

Literature materials were sourced from journals, conference papers, bulletins, government and University documents, they were collated, reviewed and discussed

3.0

REVIEW AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Governing Council of Tertiary Institutions

The governing council is the highest policy-making and supervisory body in tertiary institutions, tasked with providing strategic direction and ensuring institutional accountability. It



is responsible for formulating policies, approving budgets, overseeing financial management, and ensuring that the institution meets its academic and administrative objectives (Okeke, 2019). In essence, the council serves as a bridge between the institution and external stakeholders, including government agencies, professional bodies, and the public, ensuring that institutional operations align with national educational policies and societal expectations. The governing council's authority is often enshrined in legislation or the institution's enabling act, which outlines its composition, functions, and powers (Abdullahi, 2022). By providing oversight over the vice-chancellor or rector and other senior management staff, the council ensures that resources are effectively utilized, academic standards are maintained, and institutional goals are achieved. A well-functioning council is crucial for promoting transparency, accountability, and autonomy in tertiary institutions, making its composition and appointment process central to the overall effectiveness and credibility of higher education governance.

3.2 Composition of Governing Council of Tertiary Institutions

The composition of a governing council is critical for effective governance, accountability, and strategic decision-making in tertiary institutions. It combines internal academic perspectives with external expertise to ensure balanced oversight and alignment with national educational policies. According to Nigerian Law Guru (2024) the following are the main categories of council members:

1. **Pro-Chancellor/Chairperson:** The Pro-Chancellor, often appointed by the government, serves as the chairperson of the governing council. This individual provides overall leadership, presides over council meetings, and ensures that council decisions align with both institutional goals and national education policies. The chairperson plays a critical role in guiding strategic planning, resolving conflicts within the council, and representing the institution in external engagements, setting the tone for governance and accountability.
2. **Vice-Chancellor, Provost, or Rector (Ex-Officio Member):** The Vice-Chancellor (for universities), Provost (for colleges of education), or Rector (for polytechnics) serves on the council ex-officio, representing the chief executive leadership of the institution. They provide operational and administrative insights to ensure council decisions reflect institutional realities. Their role includes reporting on academic, financial, and



administrative matters, facilitating informed governance while maintaining a link between policy and daily operations.

3. **Deputy Vice-Chancellors or Deputy Heads:** These are senior administrators who support the chief executive and provide specialized insight into academic and administrative management. Their role includes contributing departmental and faculty perspectives to council decisions, monitoring implementation of council directives, and reviewing institutional performance.
4. **Federal/State Ministry Representative:** These are members representing the Federal or State Ministry of Education, ensuring institutional policies align with national education objectives. They guide compliance with regulations, communicate governmental expectations, and monitor adherence to funding and policy directives.
5. **Senate/Academic Board Representatives:** These are four members nominated from the Senate or Academic Board who represent the academic staff. They ensure that curriculum development, research initiatives, and academic priorities inform governance decisions while balancing administrative oversight with academic freedom.
6. **Congregation/Staff Representatives:** These are two members from the staff or faculty who provide internal perspectives on administration and operations. They act as a bridge between council decisions and staff welfare, ensuring that staff concerns and institutional procedures are considered.
7. **Convocation/Alumni Representative:** These are members appointed from the alumni association who bring experience, networks, and external perspectives to the council. They contribute to institutional development initiatives and help align policies with long-term sustainability and reputation.
8. **External Appointees:** These are four individuals representing the public, professional, or industry sectors, appointed by relevant authorities. They provide independent oversight, specialized expertise in areas like finance, law, and governance, and ensure council decisions are transparent, accountable, and aligned with societal expectations.
9. **Registrar (Ex-Officio Secretary):** The Registrar serves as the Secretary to the governing council. They are responsible for organizing meetings, preparing agendas, maintaining



official records, and ensuring proper documentation of council decisions. As an ex-officio member, the Registrar facilitates communication between the council and the institution, supports the implementation of decisions, and ensures compliance with statutory and institutional regulations.

3.3 Functions of Governing Councils of Tertiary Institutions

The governing councils of tertiary institutions are tasked with providing strategic leadership, ensuring accountability, and safeguarding institutional autonomy. According to the Federal Ministry of Education (2023), the council's is responsible for carrying out the following functions:

1. **Strategic Planning and Policy Formulation:** The council sets the institution's mission, vision, and long-term strategic goals, ensuring alignment with national educational policies. Transparent appointments ensure members provide informed guidance without undue political influence.
2. **Budget Approval and Financial Oversight:** The council reviews and approves budgets, monitors financial performance, and ensures proper utilization of resources. Appointing members with integrity and financial acumen guarantees accountability and prudent management.
3. **Academic Program Approval:** The council approves new programs, curriculum changes, and research initiatives, ensuring quality standards and relevance to societal needs. Competent members ensure decisions are academically sound.
4. **Infrastructure Development and Maintenance:** They oversee development projects, allocate resources for physical facilities, and ensure sustainability. Merit-based appointments reduce the risk of mismanagement.
5. **Staff Appointment, Promotion and Welfare Oversight:** The council participates in appointing senior staff, reviewing promotions and safeguarding staff welfare. Transparent appointments prevent favoritism and enhance morale.
6. **Disciplinary and Conflict Resolution:** They handle staff and student disciplinary issues and mediate conflicts within the institution. Integrity and impartiality in members are critical for fair decisions.



7. **Committee Supervision:** The council forms committees to oversee specific institutional functions, such as finance, academics, or infrastructure, and monitors their performance. Appointees with expertise strengthen committee effectiveness.
8. **Reporting and Compliance:** The council ensures the institution submits accurate reports to regulatory bodies and complies with statutory regulations. Competent members enhance transparency and adherence to legal requirements.
9. **Audit and Accountability:** The council approves audits, reviews findings, and ensures implementation of recommendations. Merit-based appointments guarantee proper scrutiny of institutional operations.
10. **Stakeholder Engagement:** They liaise with government agencies, professional bodies, alumni, and the public to strengthen support, partnerships, and institutional reputation. Skilled, experienced members ensure effective representation.
11. **Promoting Excellence:** The council fosters high standards in teaching, research, administration, and community engagement, driving institutional growth and national recognition. Members selected on merit uphold these standards consistently.

3.4 Appointment of Governing Council Members in Tertiary Institutions

The appointment of a governing council in tertiary institutions refers to the formal process through which individuals are selected and officially designated to serve as members of the council responsible for institutional governance. This process involves identifying qualified individuals who can provide strategic leadership, ensure accountability, and safeguard the autonomy of the institution (Eze, 2021). Appointments are typically guided by legislative provisions, institutional charters, or government regulations, which outline eligibility criteria, tenure, and the composition of the council (Okeke, 2019). In practice, appointments are expected to reflect transparency, meritocracy, and inclusivity, ensuring a balance between internal members, such as Vice-Chancellors, Provosts, or Rectors, and external appointees representing societal, professional, or governmental interests. The essence of these appointments lies in selecting individuals capable of contributing expertise, integrity, and oversight to advance the institution's academic,



administrative, and financial objectives (Eze, 2021). A well-conducted appointment process strengthens governance, institutional credibility, and long-term sustainability.

3.5 Factors to Consider in the Appointment of Governing Council of Tertiary Institutions

The effectiveness of governing councils depends largely on the quality and suitability of those appointed to serve. According to Udoh (2019), the following are essential considerations in appointing governing council members.

1. **Academic and Professional Competence:** Appointees should possess strong academic qualifications and relevant professional expertise. Individuals with demonstrated knowledge in education, management, finance, or law contribute to well-informed decision-making and strengthen institutional governance.
2. **Proven Integrity and Moral Standing:** Only individuals with unquestionable character and ethical credibility should be considered. The presence of people with questionable integrity undermines trust, weakens accountability mechanisms, and affects the institution's public image.
3. **Experience in Leadership and Administration:** Those with prior leadership or administrative experience bring valuable insight into governance processes. Their understanding of organizational management enhances strategic planning and oversight functions.
4. **Representation of Key Stakeholders:** Council composition should reflect a balance of internal and external stakeholders, including academic staff, alumni, government representatives, and community members. This diversity enriches deliberations and ensures broad-based support for decisions.
5. **Commitment to Institutional Autonomy:** Appointees should be individuals who respect and protect the independence of tertiary institutions. They must be free from excessive political influence that could compromise objective decision-making.
6. **Dedication and Availability to Serve:** Members must be willing and able to attend meetings regularly, participate in committees, and contribute actively to council activities. Consistent engagement enhances continuity and effective governance.



- 7. Alignment with Institutional and National Goals:** Appointees should understand and support both institutional priorities and national educational objectives. Such alignment ensures that council decisions promote quality education, development, and long-term institutional sustainability.

3.6 Factors Influencing the Appointment of Governing Councils of Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria

The appointment of governing councils is shaped by multiple interacting forces that determine who gets selected and how effectively the councils function. According to Danladi (2020), these factors broadly include the following:

- 1. Political Factors:** Political leadership often plays a major role in appointments, ensuring alignment with government policies, sustaining political loyalty, and maintaining influence over strategic institutional decisions.
- 2. Institutional Factors:** The unique needs, academic focus, internal culture, and strategic goals of an institution determine the type of expertise and representation required on the governing council.
- 3. Administrative Factors:** Considerations such as the complexity of institutional management, administrative workload, accreditation requirements, and governance structure influence who is appointed to improve administrative efficiency.
- 4. Economic Factors:** Financial realities including funding challenges, internally generated revenue potential, and development priorities shape the choice of members who can contribute to resource mobilisation and financial oversight.
- 5. Social Factors:** Social expectations such as regional representation, gender balance, stakeholder inclusion, and alignment with community needs influence the selection of council members.
- 6. Professional and Competence Factors:** Institutions consider individuals' professional backgrounds, managerial experience, academic expertise, and capacity to contribute meaningfully to institutional development.



7. **Ethical and Integrity Considerations:** To strengthen transparency and trust, attention is given to candidates' reputation, moral standing, track record, and commitment to accountability.

3.7 Transparency in the Appointment of Governing Councils of Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria

Transparency in the appointment of governing councils of tertiary institutions refers to the openness, clarity, and fairness that guide the processes through which council members are selected. It emphasizes making procedures, criteria, and decisions accessible and understandable to stakeholders to ensure accountability and build public trust (Okebukola, 2020). In Nigeria, transparency is particularly important because the selection of council members has often been criticized for political interference, favoritism, and limited stakeholder participation. A transparent appointment process requires clearly defined guidelines, open communication of eligibility criteria, and fair evaluation of candidates based on competence, experience, and institutional needs. It also involves disclosing the rationale behind appointments and ensuring that decisions follow laid-down regulatory frameworks (Musa, 2021). When transparency is upheld, it enhances the credibility of tertiary institutions, promotes meritocratic leadership, reduces conflicts of interest, and strengthens institutional autonomy. Ultimately, transparent appointments support effective governance, improve decision-making, and contribute to the overall stability and performance of tertiary education in Nigeria.

3.8 Importance of Transparent Appointment of Governing Councils of Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria

Transparent appointments of governing councils are crucial for promoting credibility, accountability, and effective governance in Nigerian tertiary institutions. According to Musa (2021), transparency in the appointment of governing council of tertiary institutions is beneficial to the Nigerian educational system in the following ways:

1. **Merit-Based Selection:** Transparency guarantees that council members are selected based on competence, experience, and professional qualifications rather than political connections or favoritism. This ensures that decisions are informed by expertise, enhancing



the council's capacity to guide the institution effectively, improve academic standards, and maintain high levels of operational and administrative efficiency.

2. **Institutional Autonomy:** Open appointment processes protect tertiary institutions from undue political interference. Members appointed transparently are more likely to act independently, ensuring that institutional decisions reflect the best interests of the university, polytechnic, or college rather than serving external political agendas. This strengthens the institution's governance framework and credibility.
3. **Strengthened Governance and Accountability:** A transparent process fosters ethical behavior and accountability among council members. When the selection criteria and procedures are clear, members are more likely to act responsibly, adhere to policies, and justify decisions. This reduces corruption, mismanagement, and arbitrary actions, contributing to robust governance structures within the institution.
4. **Building Public and Stakeholder Confidence:** Clarity in appointments enhances trust among stakeholders, including staff, students, alumni, government agencies, and the public. When people see that appointments are based on merit and fairness, they develop confidence in the council's leadership, supporting institutional policies and decisions, which in turn enhances the reputation and credibility of the tertiary institution.
5. **Reduced Conflicts and Disputes:** Transparency minimizes misunderstandings, grievances, and internal conflicts related to council membership. When the criteria, procedures, and rationale for appointments are open and well-communicated, stakeholders are less likely to challenge decisions. This creates a harmonious environment conducive to smooth administration, collaborative decision-making, and effective institutional operations.
6. **Enhanced Institutional Performance:** Council members appointed through transparent processes are more competent and committed to achieving institutional objectives. Their expertise and ethical conduct contribute to effective policy formulation, prudent resource management, and strategic planning, ultimately improving teaching, research, administration, and overall institutional outcomes.



7. **Effective Participation of Diverse Stakeholders:** Transparent processes ensure representation of different stakeholders, including academic staff, alumni, industry experts, and community leaders. Their participation broadens perspectives in decision-making, promotes inclusivity, and strengthens policies by incorporating varied experiences and knowledge, which helps the institution respond effectively to evolving educational and societal needs.
8. **Long-Term Stability:** Appointments based on transparency and merit reduce arbitrary removals or politically motivated replacements of council members. This continuity ensures consistent leadership, preserves institutional memory, and strengthens long-term planning, enabling tertiary institutions to maintain stable governance structures, implement policies effectively, and achieve sustainable development goals.

3.9 Factors Militating Against Transparent Appointment of Governing Councils in Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria

Despite the recognized importance of transparency in council appointments, several factors hinder open and fair selection in Nigerian tertiary institutions. According to Uduak (2019), these factors include the following:

1. **Political Interference:** Excessive involvement of political actors in appointments undermines transparency. Decisions are often influenced by party loyalty or government interests rather than merit. Political interference can result in the selection of members who prioritize external agendas, weakening institutional autonomy and compromising the quality and credibility of governance.
2. **Favoritism and Nepotism:** Appointments based on personal relationships, family ties, or favoritism erode fairness. When selection is not merit-based, qualified and competent individuals are overlooked, reducing the council's effectiveness and credibility. Such practices foster resentment among stakeholders and diminish trust in the institution's leadership.
3. **Weak Institutional Frameworks:** Some institutions lack clear guidelines or established procedures for council appointments. The absence of a structured framework allows arbitrary decision-making, limits accountability, and provides opportunities for



manipulation, making it difficult to ensure transparency and consistency in the selection process.

4. **Inadequate Adherence to Legal and Regulatory Guidelines:** Failure to follow statutory regulations or government directives creates ambiguity and allows selective implementation of rules. Without strict compliance, appointments may deviate from standard procedures, leading to opaque processes and undermining governance integrity.
5. **Limited Stakeholder Participation:** When staff, students, alumni, and other stakeholders are excluded from the appointment process, decisions are less transparent. Lack of engagement reduces the diversity of perspectives, diminishes legitimacy, and prevents broader ownership of council decisions.
6. **Corruption and Bribery:** Monetary inducements or corrupt practices in appointments compromise fairness. Individuals may be selected not for their competence but because of their willingness to provide personal or political favors, which undermines the credibility and effectiveness of the council.
7. **Regional and Ethnic Biases:** Appointments influenced by regionalism, ethnicity, or religion can distort the selection process. Favoring certain groups over others reduces objectivity, creates tension among stakeholders, and limits the representation of merit-based candidates across the institution.
8. **Lack of Transparency Culture:** A weak institutional culture of openness and accountability perpetuates secrecy in appointments. Where transparency is not valued, information on selection criteria, procedures, and decisions is withheld, preventing scrutiny and limiting trust in governance processes.

4.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Conclusion

The appointment of governing councils in Nigerian tertiary institutions is a critical factor in ensuring effective governance, institutional autonomy, and academic excellence. Transparent and merit-based selection processes strengthen public trust, enhance accountability, and promote stakeholder confidence in the leadership of universities, polytechnics, and colleges. Conversely, factors such as political interference, favoritism, weak institutional frameworks, and corruption



undermine transparency, weaken governance structures, and compromise institutional performance. For Nigerian tertiary institutions to achieve their developmental and academic objectives, the appointment process must prioritize competence, ethical integrity, inclusiveness, and adherence to established legal and regulatory frameworks. Ultimately, fostering transparency in council appointments is essential for sustainable institutional growth, effective decision-making, and the overall advancement of tertiary education in Nigeria.

4.2 Recommendations

In order to overcome the challenges that threaten the transparent appointment of governing council of tertiary institutions in Nigeria, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. The Federal and State Governments should ensure that appointments are merit-based, free from political interference and aligned with legal frameworks to strengthen accountability and institutional autonomy.
2. The ministry of Education should oversee compliance with statutory regulations, support capacity-building for council members, and conduct audits of appointment processes to ensure transparency.
3. University, polytechnic, or college leadership should encourage internal stakeholder participation, clearly document institutional needs, and foster a culture of accountability in governance decisions.
4. Academic staff should advocate for representation, provide input on candidates' competence and integrity, and ensure that academic priorities inform council decisions.
5. Alumni should participate in nominations, advocate for members with institutional loyalty and vision, and engage in oversight to protect long-term institutional interests.
6. Civil society and professional bodies should monitor appointments, report irregularities and provide advisory input on candidates' professional competence and ethical standards.
7. Students' should participate in consultative forums and advocate for fairness and accountability in council appointments affecting their academic and welfare interests.



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