MANAGEMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION: A PATHWAY TO HOLISTIC EMPOWERMENT IN EDO STATE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

This study examined the critical role of effective management in higher education institutions within Edo State and its impact on holistic empowerment and sustainable development. By exploring management practices, the study identifies strategies that foster academic excellence, personal development, and societal contribution. The research, guided by key questions on the impact of higher education management and challenges faced to achieve sustainable development, adopts a mixed-methods approach. Quantitative and qualitative data from stakeholders—students, educators, and administrators—reveal that effective management significantly enhances holistic empowerment. However, challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and limited funding persist. It was suggested that to address funding deficiencies, it is essential to increase investment in higher education and **that** institutions should adopt policies promoting participatory governance and stakeholder engagement to ensure that resources are used effectively and that the institutions can adapt to changing educational demands.

Keywords: Education Management, Higher Education, Holistic Empowerment, Sustainable Development

Introduction

Higher education management involves the strategic administration and governance of tertiary institutions to achieve educational excellence and institutional effectiveness. This encompasses various functions, including planning, resource allocation, curriculum development, and performance evaluation. Effective management ensures that higher education institutions can adapt to changing academic and societal demands while maintaining high standards of teaching and research (Adegbesan, 2011). In the Nigerian context, higher education management faces unique challenges, such as funding constraints, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and the need for capacity building among administrative staff (Okebukola, 2012). Addressing these challenges requires innovative leadership and robust policy frameworks that can drive sustainable improvements in the sector (Ogunu, 2000).

Importance of Higher Education in Societal Development

Higher education is a cornerstone of societal development, contributing significantly to economic growth, social progress, and the cultivation of an informed citizenry. It provides the advanced skills and knowledge necessary for the development of a skilled workforce, fostering innovation and technological advancement (Aina, 2010). Furthermore, higher education institutions serve as hubs for research and development, addressing local and global challenges through scholarly inquiry and applied research (Nwadiani, 1999). In Nigeria, higher education is instrumental in promoting social mobility and reducing inequality by providing opportunities for individuals from diverse backgrounds to improve their socio-economic status (Kayii, Akpomi, Koko & Ikpesu, 2023; Obanya, 2004). Additionally, the sector plays a crucial role in cultural development and nation-building by fostering critical thinking, civic engagement, and national identity (Okojie, 2013).

Edo State's Educational Landscape

Edo State, located in southern Nigeria, has a diverse and dynamic educational landscape. It is home to several notable higher education institutions, including the University of Benin, Ambrose Alli University, and various colleges

of education and polytechnics. Despite these assets, the state's higher education sector faces several challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, insufficient funding, and a lack of access to quality education for all segments of the population (Aleru &Kayii, 2024; Agbonlahor, 2006). The state government has initiated various reforms to address these issues, such as the Edo Basic Education Sector Transformation (EdoBEST) program, which aims to improve educational outcomes through enhanced teacher training, curriculum updates, and the integration of technology in education (World Bank, 2020). The management of higher education in Edo State also contends with the brain drain of qualified personnel, limited research funding, and the need for greater industry-academia collaboration. To overcome these challenges, it is essential to adopt best practices in governance, increase investment in the educational sector, and forge strategic partnerships with private and international stakeholders (Egwu, 2009). Enhancing the quality of higher education management in Edo State is vital for achieving sustainable development and empowering the state's youth with the skills and knowledge necessary for a competitive global economy (Nwagwu, 2007).

The management of higher education in Edo State is beset by a range of issues that impede the effective functioning and development of its institutions. A primary concern is the chronic underfunding of higher education, which affects the ability of universities and colleges to provide quality education and maintain infrastructure. According to Agbonlahor (2006), many institutions in Edo State struggle with dilapidated facilities, inadequate laboratories, and insufficient classroom spaces, which hinder the teaching and learning process. Additionally, the recruitment and retention of qualified academic staff remain significant challenges. The allure of better-paying opportunities abroad or in other sectors has led to a brain drain, depleting the state's educational institutions of experienced and skilled educators (Edozien, 2013). Furthermore, bureaucratic inefficiencies and governance issues exacerbate these challenges. The

centralized control by government agencies often leads to delays in decision-making and implementation of educational policies. This bureaucratic bottleneck stifles innovation and responsiveness within higher education institutions, making it difficult to adapt to emerging educational needs and trends (Ogunu, 2000). Corruption and mismanagement of funds are also prevalent, leading to the misallocation of scarce resources and undermining the effectiveness of educational programs (Osakue & Irabor, 2012). Another significant issue is the limited industry-academia collaboration, which is crucial for aligning educational outcomes with labor market needs. There is a disconnection between the skills being taught in higher education institutions and the demands of the job market, resulting in graduates who are often ill-prepared for employment (Okojie, 2015). This gap highlights the need for curriculum reforms and stronger partnerships with the private sector to ensure that education is relevant and responsive to economic and technological advancements.

The current practices in the management of higher education in Edo State fall short of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 4, which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. The underfunding and infrastructural deficits in higher education institutions are significant barriers to providing quality education (Agbonlahor, 2006). Without adequate resources, it is challenging to maintain high academic standards, conduct meaningful research, and support student learning and development. Moreover, the lack of emphasis on research and innovation undermines the role of higher education in fostering sustainable development. Research is a critical component of higher education that drives technological advancements, informs policy, and addresses societal challenges. However, the limited funding for research activities and the insufficient support for researchers in Edo State hinder the capacity of higher education institutions to contribute to sustainable development (Okojie, 2015). This gap is

further widened by the lack of effective governance structures and accountability mechanisms, which are essential for ensuring that educational resources are utilized efficiently and equitably (Osakue & Irabor, 2012).

The mismatch between educational outcomes and labour market needs also poses a significant challenge to achieving the SDGs. To bridge this gap, there is a need for comprehensive curriculum reforms that incorporate practical skills, critical thinking, and technological literacy. Engaging with industry stakeholders to co-develop curricula and provide internship and apprenticeship opportunities can enhance the employability of graduates and ensure that education contributes to economic growth and job creation (Edozien, 2013). In addressing the aforementioned issues in the management of higher education in Edo State requires a multifaceted approach that includes increasing funding, improving governance, fostering industry-academia collaboration, and aligning educational practices with sustainable development goals. By doing so, higher education institutions can become more effective in providing quality education, conducting impactful research, and contributing to the overall development of the state and the country.

Focus of the Study

The focus of this study is to examine the critical role of effective management in the higher education sector within Edo State, and how it impacts institutional performance and societal outcomes. By exploring management practices, the study aims to identify strategies that can foster holistic empowerment through education, ensuring that students and educators are well-equipped to contribute to societal development. Additionally, the study seeks to propose a robust framework that aligns higher education management with sustainable development goals, addressing existing gaps and promoting long-term growth and innovation in the sector.

Research has shown that effective higher education management significantly impacts holistic empowerment by fostering an environment conducive to academic excellence, personal development, and societal contribution. Adegbesan (2011) emphasized that well-managed institutions provide the necessary infrastructure, resources, and support systems that enable students to acquire not only academic knowledge but also critical thinking and problem-solving skills. In the African context, Ajayi, Goma, and Johnson (1996) highlighted the role of higher education management in promoting social mobility and economic empowerment, arguing that effective management practices ensure equitable access to educational opportunities, thus reducing inequality and fostering inclusive development. Furthermore, Mbah and Salau (2014) noted that higher education management that prioritizes staff development and participatory governance contributes to the empowerment of both faculty and students. Such management practices encourage a culture of continuous learning, innovation, and engagement, which are essential for holistic empowerment. The integration of technology and modern pedagogical methods, as managed by institutional leaders, also plays a crucial role in equipping students with the skills required for the 21st-century job market (Ogunleye, 2014).

The management of higher education in Edo State faces numerous challenges that hinder the effectiveness and development of its institutions. Agbonlahor (2006) identified chronic underfunding as a primary issue, leading to inadequate infrastructure, poor maintenance of facilities, and limited access to educational resources. These financial constraints affect the quality of education and the ability of institutions to attract and retain qualified academic staff, contributing to a brain drain where talented educators seek better opportunities elsewhere (Okojie, 2015). Another significant challenge is the bureaucratic inefficiencies and governance issues within the higher education system. Ogunu (2000) pointed out that centralized control and rigid administrative structures often result in delays and inflexibility in decision-making, stifling innovation and responsiveness. Corruption and mismanagement of funds further exacerbate

these problems, leading to the misallocation of scarce resources and undermining trust in educational institutions (Osakue & Irabor, 2012). Additionally, there is a notable disconnect between the educational outcomes and the needs of the labor market. Nwagwu (2007) highlighted the mismatch between the skills taught in higher education institutions and the demands of employers, resulting in graduates who are not adequately prepared for employment. This gap necessitates curriculum reforms and stronger collaborations between academia and industry to ensure that education remains relevant and effective in preparing students for the workforce. To achieve sustainable development in higher education, several strategies have been proposed by researchers and practitioners. One key strategy is increasing investment in higher education to address funding deficiencies and improve infrastructure and resources (Aina, 2010). Adequate funding would enable institutions to enhance their facilities, support research activities, and attract and retain talented educators. Improving governance and accountability is another crucial strategy. Osakue and Irabor (2012) emphasized the need for transparent and efficient administrative practices to ensure that resources are used effectively and that institutions can adapt to changing educational demands. Implementing policies that promote participatory governance and stakeholder engagement can also enhance the management of higher education institutions (Ajayi, 2001). Strengthening industry-academia collaboration is essential for aligning educational outcomes with labour market needs. Okojie (2015) suggested that partnerships with the private sector can provide valuable insights into the skills required by employers and offer practical training opportunities for students. Such collaborations can also drive innovation and research, contributing to sustainable development.

Finally, adopting modern pedagogical approaches and integrating technology in education are vital for enhancing the quality and relevance of higher education. Ogunleye (2014) highlighted the importance of leveraging digital tools and innovative teaching methods to provide students with a holistic and future-oriented education. These strategies, combined with a focus on equitable access and inclusivity, can ensure that higher education in Edo State contributes to sustainable development and holistic empowerment.

Research Questions

The following research questions guide the study.

i. How does higher education management impact holistic empowerment?
ii. What are the current challenges in managing higher education in Edo State?

Methodology

This study adopted a mixed-methods research design, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches to gain a comprehensive understanding of the management of higher education in Edo State and its impact on holistic empowerment and sustainable development. The mixed-methods approach is chosen because it allows for a holistic analysis of the research problem. Quantitative data provide measurable and generalizable information about the current state of higher education management, while qualitative data will offer contextual and nuanced descriptions of the experiences and perspectives of different stakeholders. The study population consist of key stakeholders in higher education in Edo State, including students, educators, and administrators from public higher education institutions (University of Benin, Ambrose Alli University, Edo University Iyamho (EUI), Auchi Polytechnic, Edo State Polytechnic Usen, College of Education, Ekiadolor, and College of Education, Igueben. These groups are selected because they have direct experience and involvement in the management and operation of higher education institutions. The population was divided into strata based on their roles (students, educators, administrators) and institutions. From each stratum, a random sample was selected to participate in the study. The sample size was determined using Cochran's formula to ensure statistical validity, with an estimated total of 300 participants: approximately 150 students, 100

educators, and 50 administrators. The primary instruments for data collection were the "Higher Education Management Survey (HEMS)" and "Stakeholder Perspectives on Higher Education Management (SPHEM)" are the structured questionnaire and semi-structured interview used for the study. The questionnaire was analysed using means and standard deviations and Qualitative data from interviews and focus group discussions were analysed using thematic analysis.

4. Results

Research Question 1: How does higher education management impact holistic empowerment?

Table 1: Descriptive Analysis of higher education management impact holistic empowerment

Institution	Role	Statement	Mean	SD
UniBen	Students	Higher education management in my institution provides the necessary support for my personal and academic growth	4.5	0.7
	Educators	The management of my institution supports my professional development and teaching effectiveness.	4.2	0.6
	Administrators	The management strategies in place enable me to perform my administrative duties efficiently and effectively	4.0	0.8
AAU	Students	The administration effectively addresses student concerns and needs, contributing to my overall empowerment	4.3	0.6
	Educators	I believe that the administration values and implements feedback from educators, fostering a supportive work environment.	4.1	0.5
	Administrators	I feel empowered to make decisions and take initiatives due to the supportive management practices in my institution.	3.8	0.7
Iyamho (EUI)	Students	The administration effectively addresses student concerns and needs, contributing to my overall empowerment	4.4	0.8
	Educators	Effective higher education management in my institution promotes a culture of continuous learning and innovation.	4.0	0.6
	Administrators	The higher education management in my institution fosters a collaborative and empowering work environment for administrators	3.9	0.7
Auchi Poly	Students	The resources and facilities provided by my institution's management enhance my holistic development	4.2	0.7
	Educators	The management provides adequate resources and opportunities for research and development, contributing to my holistic empowerment.	3.9	0.5
	Administrators	Management practices in my institution	3.7	0.6

		contribute to my professional growth and holistic development as an administrator		
Edo State Poly Usen	Students	I feel empowered to participate in decision-making processes within my institution due to effective management	4.0	0.6
	Educators	The management provides adequate resources and opportunities for research and development, contributing to my holistic empowerment.	3.8	0.5
	Administrators	Management practices in my institution contribute to my professional growth and holistic development as an administrator	3.5	0.7
CoE,Ekiadolor	Students	The resources and facilities provided by my institution's management enhance my holistic development.	4.1	0.6
	Educators	Effective higher education management in my institution promotes a culture of continuous learning and innovation	3.9	0.6
	Administrators	The management strategies in place enable me to perform my administrative duties efficiently and effectively.	3.6	0.8
CoE, Igueben	Students	Higher education management in my institution provides the necessary support for my personal and academic growth	4.3	0.7
	Educators	I believe that the administration values and implements feedback from educators,	4.0	0.5
	Administrators	The higher education management in my institution fosters a collaborative and empowering work environment for administrators.	3.8	0.6
Grand mean	Students		4.26	
	Educators		4.13	
	Administrators		3.76	

Table 1 show the finding across most institutions, students generally perceive a high level of holistic empowerment, with mean scores typically ranging from 4.0 to 4.5, indicating a positive impact on their overall development and empowerment, while educators also report positive impacts, although there is slightly more variability in their perceptions compared to students, with mean scores typically ranging from 3.9 to 4.2 and administrators generally perceive a positive impact on holistic empowerment, but there is more variability in their perceptions across institutions, with mean scores ranging from 3.5 to 4.0. This variability may reflect differing administrative contexts and challenges faced at each institution. The descriptive analysis indicates that higher education management generally has a positive impact on holistic empowerment across the specified institutions in Edo State, with students consistently perceiving the highest levels of empowerment. Educators and administrators also report positive impacts, albeit with some variability in perceptions. These findings suggest strengths in current management practices that contribute to holistic empowerment, while also highlighting areas where improvements or targeted interventions may be beneficial to enhance overall effectiveness and impact.

Theme 1
The thematic analysis of findings from Table 1 indicates that higher education management in Edo State generally fosters holistic empowerment, with students perceiving the highest levels of empowerment (mean scores 4.0 to 4.5). Educators also report positive impacts, though with more variability (mean scores 3.9 to 4.2), while administrators' perceptions show the most variability (mean scores 3.5 to 4.0), likely reflecting different administrative challenges across institutions. These results highlight strengths in current management practices that contribute positively to empowerment, but also point to the

need for targeted interventions to address specific areas for improvement and enhance overall effectiveness.

Research Question 2: What are the current challenges in managing higher education in Edo State?
Table 2: Descriptive Analysis of challenges in managing higher education in Edo State

Institution	Role	Statement	Mean	SD
UniBen	Students	The management of my institution struggles to provide adequate resources and facilities for students	3.5	0.9
	Educators	The institution's management does not provide sufficient support for professional development and research	3.14	0.96
	Administrators	Limited funding and budget constraints significantly affect the effectiveness of higher education management	3.09	1.12
AAU	Students	Communication between students and the administration is often ineffective and slow	2.76	0.96
	Educators	There are significant challenges in the allocation and utilization of educational resources	2.5	0.7
	Administrators	There are frequent issues with maintaining up-to-date infrastructure and technology.	2.5	0.8
Iyamho (EUI)	Students	There are frequent delays in addressing student concerns and issues	2.32	0.75
	Educators	Administrative processes are often bureaucratic and hinder efficient academic work	4	0.6
	Administrators	Managing and addressing the diverse needs of students and staff is a major challenge.	3.9	0.7
Auchi Poly	Students	The management has difficulty maintaining a safe and conducive learning environment	4.2	0.7
	Educators	The management is slow to implement necessary changes and improvements based on educator feedback	3.9	0.5
	Administrators	The current management structure does not adequately support innovation and proactive problem-solving	3.7	0.6
Edo State Poly Usen	Students	The management of my institution struggles to provide adequate resources and facilities for students	4	0.6
	Educators	The institution's management does not provide sufficient support for professional development and research	3.8	0.5
	Administrators	Limited funding and budget constraints significantly affect the effectiveness of higher education management	3.5	0.7
CoE,Ekiadolor	Students	Communication between students and the administration is often ineffective and slow	4.1	0.6
	Educators	There are significant challenges in the allocation and utilization of educational resources	3.4	0.6
Grand mean	Students		3.48	
	Educators		3.46	
	Administrators		3.34	

Table 2 show the mean scores for students across the institutions indicate a moderate level of challenges, with a grand mean of 3.48. The highest concern is reported at Auchi Polytechnic (4.2) regarding maintaining a safe and conducive learning environment, while the lowest is at Iyamho (2.32) about delays in addressing student concerns. This suggests that while there are significant challenges, students generally perceive these issues as moderate but impactful on their educational experience, educators' perceptions reflect considerable variability, with a grand mean of 3.46. The highest mean score is observed at Iyamho (4.0) concerning bureaucratic administrative processes, indicating a substantial challenge in efficient academic work. The lowest is at AAU (2.5) related to resource allocation and utilization. This variability highlights the distinct challenges educators' face, which could affect their professional development and teaching effectiveness and while, administrators report the lowest grand mean score (3.34), suggesting they perceive the challenges as slightly less severe compared to students and educators. However, the variability in their responses, with scores ranging from 2.5 (AAU) to 3.9 (Iyamho), indicates that administrative contexts and challenges differ significantly across institutions. Key challenges include limited funding and budget constraints, maintaining infrastructure, and managing diverse needs. The descriptive analysis reveals that managing higher education in Edo State involves various challenges perceived differently by students, educators, and administrators. While students consistently report moderate to high challenges, educators and administrators show more variability in their perceptions. These findings underscore the importance of targeted interventions to address specific issues within each institution, ensuring the effective management and holistic empowerment of all stakeholders in the higher education system.

Theme 2
Table 2 reveals several key challenges in managing higher education in Edo State, as perceived by students, educators, and administrators. Students report a moderate level of challenges (grand mean of 3.48), with the most significant concern at Auchi Polytechnic (4.2) regarding maintaining a safe learning environment. Educators' perceptions show considerable variability (grand mean of 3.46), with the highest challenges at Iyamho (4.0) related to bureaucratic administrative processes, indicating substantial hindrances to efficient academic work. Administrators perceive slightly less severe challenges (grand mean of 3.34), but their responses also vary significantly, reflecting differing administrative contexts and challenges, such as limited funding and infrastructure maintenance. These findings highlight distinct issues faced by each group and underscore the need for targeted interventions to address specific problems within each institution, thereby ensuring effective management and holistic empowerment of all stakeholders in the higher education system.

Discussion of Findings
Research has shown that effective higher education management significantly impacts holistic empowerment by fostering an environment conducive to academic excellence, personal development, and societal contribution. Adegbesan (2011) emphasized that well-managed institutions provide the necessary infrastructure, resources, and support systems that enable students to acquire not only academic knowledge but also critical thinking and problem-solving skills. In the African context, Ajayi, Goma, and Johnson (1996) highlighted the role of higher education management in promoting social mobility and economic empowerment, arguing that effective management practices ensure equitable access to educational opportunities, thus reducing inequality and fostering inclusive development.

In light of these perspectives, the findings of this study underscore the importance of effective management in higher education institutions in Edo State. The thematic analysis of Table 1 indicates that higher education management in Edo State generally fosters holistic empowerment, with students perceiving the highest levels of empowerment (mean scores 4.0 to 4.5). Educators also report positive impacts, though with more variability (mean scores 3.9 to 4.2), while administrators' perceptions show the most variability (mean scores 3.5 to 4.0), likely reflecting different administrative challenges across institutions. These results highlight strengths in current management practices that contribute positively to empowerment, but also point to the need for targeted

interventions to address specific areas for improvement and enhance overall effectiveness.

Table 2 further reveals several key challenges in managing higher education in Edo State. Students report a moderate level of challenges (grand mean of 3.48), with the most significant concern at Auchi Polytechnic (4.2) regarding maintaining a safe learning environment, and the least concern at Iyamho (2.32) related to delays in addressing student concerns. This suggests that while there are significant challenges, students generally perceive these issues as moderate but impactful on their educational experience. Educators' perceptions reflect considerable variability (grand mean of 3.46), with the highest challenges at Iyamho (4.0) related to bureaucratic administrative processes, indicating substantial hindrances to efficient academic work. The lowest is at AAU (2.5) concerning resource allocation and utilization. This variability highlights the distinct challenges educators face, which could affect their professional development and teaching effectiveness. Administrators perceive slightly less severe challenges (grand mean of 3.34), but their responses also vary significantly, reflecting differing administrative contexts and challenges, such as limited funding and infrastructure maintenance. These findings align with previous research by Agbonlahor (2006) and Okojie (2015), who identified chronic underfunding, inadequate infrastructure, and bureaucratic inefficiencies as significant obstacles in the Nigerian higher education system. Ogunu (2000) and Osakue & Irabor (2012) further pointed out the detrimental effects of centralized control, rigid administrative structures, and corruption on educational management.

The study's findings underscore the need for targeted interventions to address specific issues within each institution, ensuring the effective management and holistic empowerment of all stakeholders

in the higher education system. Strategies such as increasing investment in higher education (Aina, 2010), improving governance and accountability (Osakue & Irabor, 2012), and strengthening industry-academia collaboration (Okojie, 2015) are essential. Additionally, adopting modern pedagogical approaches and integrating technology in education (Ogunleye, 2014) can enhance the quality and relevance of higher education, contributing to sustainable development and holistic empowerment. These approaches, combined with a focus on equitable access and inclusivity, can ensure that higher education in Edo State effectively contributes to the overall development of its students, educators, and administrators.

Conclusion

The study highlights the significant impact of effective higher education management on holistic empowerment in Edo State. While students generally perceive a high level of empowerment, educators and administrators also report positive impacts, albeit with greater variability. Key challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and limited funding were identified, underscoring the need for targeted interventions. These findings emphasize the importance of strategic management practices to enhance academic excellence, personal development, and societal contribution within higher education institutions. The following suggestions were proffered, that to address funding deficiencies, it is essential to increase investment in higher education and **that** institutions should adopt policies promoting participatory governance and stakeholder engagement to ensure that resources are used effectively and that the institutions can adapt to changing educational demands.

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