

## APPRAISAL OF AUTONOMY STATUS ON PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN SOUTH EAST NIGERIA

**Denchukwu, Nkeoma Anthonia**

Department of Educational Management,  
Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT), Enugu, Enugu State

### **Abstract**

*The main purpose of this study was to appraise the Autonomy Status of Public Universities in South East Nigeria. Design adopted for the study was descriptive survey design. Two research questions and two hypotheses guided the study. This study was carried out in South East geo-political zone of Nigeria. The population for the study consisted of all the 39,385 university staff in public universities in South East Nigeria as at the time of the study. The sample for the study consisted of 1,970 university staff drawn from four public universities in two states of South East Nigeria. Stratified, proportionate and simple random sampling techniques were applied in drawing the sample. The instrument used for data collection was a questionnaire on Appraisal of Autonomy Status of Public Universities in South East Nigeria (QAAPUSEN). It is a 82-item structured questionnaire. The instrument was constructed by the researcher and validated by three research experts. The questionnaire yielded an overall reliability coefficient of .78 obtained through Cronbach's alpha method. Copies of the questionnaire were administered to the respondents by the researcher and three briefed research assistants. Direct delivery and retrieval system was used. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while ANOVA was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 significant level. Major findings of the study revealed that the level of administrative autonomy existing in public universities in South East Nigeria is low. Consequently, it was recommended among other things, that the strict implementation of existing laws/policies on public universities autonomy by National Universities Commission, Federal and State ministries of education and other relevant authorities. Also, National Universities Commission and other relevant authorities should enforce adequate sanctions against individuals or agencies hampering the autonomy of public universities.*

## **Introduction**

Development generally refers to the process of both economic and social transformation based on complex, cultural and environmental factors and their interaction. Ituma (2010) highlighted some indices that determine a developed nation. These, include what Ituma described as increased capacity of people to have control over material assets, intellectual resource and ideology, physical necessities of life (food, clothing and shelters), Employment, and equity, participation in government, political and economic independence, adequate education, gender equality, sustainable development and peace. The above indicators no doubt, show how people are at the center of all development processes. According to the United Nations Human Development Report (UNHDR) (2009), human development is all about putting people at the center of development. It is all about realizing their potential, increasing their choices and enjoying their freedom to live the lives they value.

This new approach to development focuses more attention to measures and strategies to reduce poverty and inequality and to the realization of the potentials of human personality. Thus, human development agenda have become a development paradigm which focus on empowering the individual with the knowledge and skill to face the social challenges that may hinder his/her productivity. Undoubtedly, human resource is the most essential and vital of the major resources for development because with it in place, financial, physical, information and other resources can be substantially harnessed. As Rahji (2010) puts it, the human resources of a nation are considered to be the engine of growth of the country.

Harrison (2011) defined human resource development as the process of increasing the knowledge, the skills and the capacity of all the people in the society for promoting its economic, political and social growth. Evidently, the greatest tool for human development is education. The role of education in bringing about human development cannot be over-emphasized. This is because education embraces all processes by which a person acquires knowledge and skills to live well in his society. Education is a tool with which people, using the human ability to respond to, and interact with the environment, pass on from generation to generation, those aspects of their -culture and values which they consider to be worthwhile. It remains an undisputable fact that no society or nation can rise above its educational level. Okeke (2013) averred that, education is the aggregate of all the processes by which a child or young adult develops the abilities, attitudes and other forms of behavior which are of positive value to the society in which he lives, in other words, it is a process for transmitting culture in terms of continuity and growth and for disseminating knowledge either to ensure social control or to guarantee rational direction of the society or both. Uchendu, (2013) defined education as a social process designed to induct the rising generation into the membership of their society. The Federal Republic of Nigeria recognizes the importance of education generally and

university education in particular in attaining her national goals. The five main national goals of Nigeria are to build; a free and democratic society, a just and egalitarian society; a united, strong and self reliant nation; a great and dynamic economy and a land full of bright opportunities for all citizens (Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN), 2013).

Consequently, the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013) in the National Policy on Education seeks to inculcate national consciousness and national unity; the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the Nigerian society; the training of the mind in understanding of the world around; and the acquisition of appropriate skills, abilities and competence both mental and physical as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of his society. To achieve these laudable objectives, the nation cannot underrate the indispensable role of university education. University education is the education given after secondary education in universities. According to Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN) (2013) the goals of university education include;

- a. contribute to national development through high level relevant manpower training
- b. develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of the individual and society
- c. develop the intellectual capability of individuals to understand and appreciate their local and external environment
- d. acquire both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to be self-reliant and useful members of the society
- e. promote and encourage scholarship and community service
- f. forge and cement national unity and promote national and international understanding and interaction.

University is expected to pursue these goals through; teaching, research, staff development programmes, generation and dissemination of knowledge, a variety of modes of programmes including full-time, part-time, block-release, day-release, sandwich, access to training funds such as those provided by the Industrial Training Fund (ITF), Students Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES), maintenance of minimum educational standards through appropriate agencies, inter-institutional cooperation and dedicated services to the community through extra-mural and extension services. In pursuant of these laudable objectives no doubt, the university deserves reasonable level of autonomy.

Alexander (2018) submitted that in administration or management, autonomy refers to the freedom and capacity of a head (leader) to operate and take decisions without the interference of other (usually unwanted) persons or organs. Alexander, hence, described autonomy as a situation where the leader has freedom to bring together people, material, money and machines and intentionally dividing tasks to be performed so as to achieve the objectives of the organization. The terms University Autonomy was explained by Hung (2019) as the freedom of university administrators to independently control, direct, plan and coordinate the human and material resources of the university.

Yong (2017) gave other areas the university administrator can exercise independence as budgeting for expenses, inspection of records, monitoring of labor hours lost, verifying that everything occurs in accordance with plans, instructions and established principles and expressed command, ensuring that the university is achieving what it set out to accomplish, comparing performance with desired results and providing the feedback necessary for management to evaluate results and take corrective actions as needed. Williams (2020) asserted that a good appraisal of the autonomy status of public universities must take into account six fundamental indices. Williams enumerated these indices as administrative autonomy, financial autonomy, academic autonomy, internal and external interferences as well as strategies for enhancing public university's autonomy.

Zeph (2019) explained that administrative autonomy in universities refers to the freedom enjoyed by University administrators in carrying out their managerial functions other than financial and academic functions. Zeph argued that though the university administrator is in charge of the whole institution, his autonomy cannot be properly and precisely appraised if distinctions are not made with regard to areas where he (the administrator) is given free land to operate. Thus, his financial and academic autonomy should be separated from his administrative autonomy. Specific areas Zeph enumerated as administrative functions include; employment of staff, selection of management staff, staff discipline, staff promotions, staff training, staff welfare and staff postings. Financial autonomy of universities refers to the freedom of university administrators to carry out financial managerial functions without undue interferences. For proper appraisal of the financial autonomy of a university, Yong (2017) recommended that indices to consider include, the university administrator's freedom with regards to Access to statutory subventions, Use of statutory subventions as desired by the university management, Generation of Internal Revenue, Use of Internally Generated Revenue as desired by the university management, Preparation of the university annual budget, Payment of staff salaries and payment of staff entitlements other than salaries.

Staff status in universities can be broadly categorized into academic and non-academic staff. The academic staff are usually the teachers (lectures) while the non-academic staff comprise all other staff other than the teaching staff, (Nwosu, 2018). In Nigerian peculiar instance, Ajomiwe (2018) hinted that in most public universities, non-academic staff view the academic staff as enemies, claiming that governments (both federal and state) are always concerned about meeting the demands of the academic staff only. This feeling, according to Ajomiwe is capable of causing significant difference in the responses of the academic and non-academic staff on university autonomy. Ajomiwe feared that the non-academic staff may see autonomy as a way of lifting the academic staff above them as the vice chancellor is usually an academic staff. But Guppeh (2020) argued that since the registrar (a non-academic staff) is statutorily, the chief

administrative officer of the university, autonomy will eventually benefit non-academic staff more than their academic counterparts. Pandre (2020) supported Guppeh's argument, stating that both the university Bursar and Librarian (all non-academic staff) are part of the university management team. The above highlighted controversies constitute one of the major gaps the researcher wishes to fill through this study.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to Appraise the Autonomy Status of Public Universities in South East Nigeria. Specifically, the study will;

1. investigate the level of administrative autonomy existing in public universities in South East Nigeria
2. determine the level of financial autonomy existing in public universities in South East Nigeria

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the study;

1. What is the level of administrative autonomy existing in public universities in South East Nigeria?
2. What is the level of financial autonomy existing in public universities in South East Nigeria?

### **Hypotheses**

The following null hypotheses were tested at .05 level of significance

1. Public universities' staff in South East Nigeria do not differ significantly in their ratings on the level of administrative autonomy existing in their universities based on their gender (male/female) and status (academic/ non-academic).
2. Public universities' staff in South East Nigeria do not differ significantly in their ratings on the level of financial autonomy existing in their universities based on their gender (male/female) and status (academic/ non-academic).

### **Methodology**

Design adopted for the study was descriptive survey design. Two research questions and two hypotheses guided the study. This study was carried out in South East geo-political zone of Nigeria. The population for the study consisted of all the 39,385 university staff in public universities in South East Nigeria as at the time of the study. The sample for the study consisted of 1,970 university staff drawn from four public universities in two states of South East Nigeria. Stratified, proportionate and simple random sampling techniques were applied in drawing the sample. The instrument used for data collection was a questionnaire on Appraisal of Autonomy Status of Public Universities in South East Nigeria (QAAPUSEN). It is a 82-item structured questionnaire. The instrument was constructed by the researcher and validated by three research experts. The questionnaire

yielded an overall reliability coefficient of .78 obtained through Cronbach’s alpha method. Copies of the questionnaire were administered to the respondents by the researcher and three briefed research assistants. Direct delivery and retrieval system were used. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while ANOVA was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 significant level.

**Results**

**Research Question 1**

What is the level of administrative autonomy existing in public universities in South East Nigeria?

**Table 1:**mean and standard deviation on research question 1 items

S/ N	What is the level to which your university exercise autonomy in the following administrative functions;	Male			Female			Academic			Non-Academic			Aggregate		
		Mean	SD	Rank	Mean	SD	Rank	Mean	SD	Rank	Mean	SD	Rank	Mean	SD	Rank
1	Employments of staff	1.50	0.13	L	2.60	0.91	H	1.60	0.13	LL	2.50	0.15	H	2.05	0.15	L
2	Selection of management staff	1.90	0.25	L	2.55	0.04	H	1.95	0.21	LL	2.50	0.05	H	2.23	0.98	L
3	Staff discipline	1.95	0.11	L	2.50	0.43	H	1.90	0.05	LL	2.55	0.11	H	2.23	0.75	L
4	Staff promotions	1.20	0.19	V	2.80	0.25	H	1.25	0.21	VL	2.75	0.19	H	2.00	0.13	L
5	Staff training	1.35	0.25	V	2.70	0.35	H	1.20	0.11	VL	2.85	0.21	H	2.03	0.26	L
6	Staff welfare	1.05	0.05	V	2.65	0.14	H	1.20	0.12	VL	2.50	0.25	H	1.85	0.95	L
7	Staff postings	1.85	0.29	L	2.75	0.09	H	1.65	0.20	LL	2.95	0.05	H	2.30	0.14	L
8	Appointments of Directors	1.95	0.11	L	2.50	0.43	H	1.90	0.05	LL	2.55	0.11	H	2.23	0.75	L
9	Appointments of Heads of departments	1.80	0.21	L	2.30	0.13	L	1.60	0.29	LL	2.50	0.21	H	2.05	0.35	L
10	Selection of Deans of faculties	1.25	0.04	V	2.75	0.95	H	1.20	0.11	VL	2.80	0.11	H	2.00	0.14	L
11	Constituting of committees	1.45	0.15	L	2.65	0.04	H	1.40	0.12	VL	2.70	0.21	H	2.05	0.95	L
12	Prioritization of projects in the university	1.50	0.13	L	2.60	0.91	H	1.60	0.13	LL	2.50	0.15	H	2.05	0.15	L

13	Award of contracts for projects in the university	1.90	0.25	L	2.55	0.04	H	1.95	0.21	LL	2.50	0.05	H	2.23	0.08	L
14	Supervision/monitoring of on-going projects in the university	1.80	0.23	L	2.40	0.44	L	1.85	0.10	LL	2.35	0.09	L	2.10	0.05	L
<b>GRAND</b>		<b>1.60</b>	<b>0.17</b>	<b>L</b>	<b>2.59</b>	<b>0.36</b>	<b>H</b>	<b>1.58</b>	<b>0.14</b>	<b>LL</b>	<b>2.60</b>	<b>0.16</b>	<b>L</b>	<b>2.10</b>	<b>0.03</b>	<b>L</b>

From table 1 the grand mean values for male and female respondents were 1.60 and 2.59 respectively. This shows that male university staff (with grand mean of 1.60) opined that the level of administrative autonomy existing in public universities in South East Nigeria is low. On the other hand, female university staff (with grand mean of 2.59) opined that the level of administrative autonomy existing in public universities in South East Nigeria is High. Similarly, the sampled university academic staff (with grand mean of 1.58) opined that the level of administrative autonomy existing in public universities in South East Nigeria is low while the non-academic university staff (with grand mean of 2.60) opined that the level of administrative autonomy existing in public universities in South East Nigeria is High. When treated jointly, the overall grand mean value was 2.10, indicating that, the university staff opined that the level of administrative autonomy existing in public universities in South East Nigeria is low. Also, the standard deviation value for the overall (0.53) is small, indicating that there were little or no extreme values. Hence, the mean values so obtained represent the actual opinions of the respondents.

**Research Question 2**

What is the level of financial autonomy existing in public universities in South East Nigeria?

**Table 2:**mean and standard deviation on research question 2 items

S/N	What is the level to which your university exercise autonomy in the following academic issues;	Male			Female			Academic			Non-Academic			Aggregate		
		Mean	SD	Rank	Mean	SD	Rank	Mean	SD	Rank	Mean	SD	Rank	Mean	SD	Rank
15	Access to statutory subventions	1.80	0.23	L	2.40	0.44	L	1.85	0.10	LL	2.35	0.09	L	2.10	0.05	LL
16	Use of statutory subventions as desired by the university management	1.40	0.11	V	2.05	0.35	L	1.40	0.11	V	2.05	0.05	L	1.70	0.09	LL

17	Generation of Internal Revenue	1.20	0.19	VLL	2.80	0.25	HLL	1.25	0.19	VLL	2.75	0.21	HLL	2.00	0.13	LL
18	Use of Internally Generated Revenue as desired by the university management	1.20	0.19	VLL	2.80	0.11	HLL	1.25	0.28	VLL	2.75	0.13	HLL	2.00	0.22	LL
19	Preparation of the university annual budget	1.40	0.15	VLL	2.70	0.21	HLL	1.45	0.25	VLL	2.65	0.14	HLL	2.05	0.05	LL
20	Payment of staff salaries	1.40	0.13	VLL	2.00	0.01	L	1.40	0.13	VLL	2.00	0.22	L	1.70	0.25	LL
21	payment of staff entitlements other than salaries	1.20	0.14	VLL	2.85	0.31	HLL	1.35	0.13	VLL	2.70	0.05	HLL	2.03	0.21	LL
22	Funding of staff training	1.20	0.19	VLL	2.50	0.28	HLL	1.05	0.12	VLL	2.65	0.13	HLL	1.85	0.22	LL
23	Funding of staff welfare programmes	1.65	0.15	L	2.95	0.25	HLL	1.85	0.25	LL	2.75	0.14	HLL	2.30	0.22	LL
24	Control of projects' funds in the university	1.90	0.13	L	2.55	0.13	HLL	1.95	0.28	LL	2.50	0.19	HLL	2.23	0.05	LL
25	Access to credit facilities	1.50	0.13	L	2.60	0.91	HLL	1.60	0.15	LL	2.50	0.13	HLL	2.05	0.15	LL
26	Regular audit of the university accounts	1.90	0.25	L	2.55	0.04	HLL	1.95	0.05	LL	2.50	0.21	HLL	2.23	0.98	LL
27	Determination of school fees payable in the university	1.80	0.23	L	2.40	0.44	L	1.85	0.29	LL	2.35	0.10	L	2.10	0.85	LL
28	Determination of sundry fees payable in the university	1.85	0.29	L	2.75	0.09	HLL	1.65	0.05	LL	2.95	0.20	HLL	2.30	0.14	LL
29	Remittance of check-off dues to university- based unions as due	1.95	0.11	L	2.50	0.43	HLL	1.90	0.11	LL	2.55	0.05	HLL	2.23	0.75	LL
30	Remittance of check-off dues to university- based	1.80	0.21	L	2.30	0.13	L	1.60	0.21	LL	2.50	0.29	HLL	2.05	0.35	LL



unions when due																
<b>GRAND</b>	<b>1.57</b>	<b>0.17</b>	<b>L</b>	<b>2.54</b>	<b>0.27</b>	<b>H</b>	<b>1.58</b>	<b>0.18</b>	<b>L</b>	<b>2.52</b>	<b>0.14</b>	<b>H</b>	<b>2.05</b>	<b>0.40</b>	<b>LL</b>	

From table 2 the grand mean values for male and female respondents were 1.57 and 2.54 respectively. Hence, male university staff (with grand mean of 1.57) were of the view that the level of financial autonomy existing in public universities in South East Nigeria is low. Contrarily, female university staff (with grand mean of 2.54) were of the view that the level of financial autonomy existing in public universities in South East Nigeria is High. Similarly, the sampled university academic staff (with grand mean of 1.58) were of the view that the level of financial autonomy existing in public universities in South East Nigeria is low while the non-academic university staff (with grand mean of 2.52) were of the view that the level of financial autonomy existing in public universities in South East Nigeria is High. When treated jointly, the overall grand mean value was 2.05, indicating that, the university staff were of the view that the level of financial autonomy existing in public universities in South East Nigeria is low. Also, the standard deviation value for the overall (0.40) is small, indicating that there were little or no extreme values. Hence, the mean values so obtained represent the actual opinions of the respondents.

**Hypothesis 1**

Public universities’ staff in South East Nigeria do not differ significantly in their ratings on the level of administrative autonomy existing in their universities based on their gender (male/female) and status (academic/ non-academic).

**Table 3:** ANOVA analyses for hypothesis 1

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Squares	F-ratio	Sig (.05)	Remark
Between staff status	182.11	1	182.11	1.1189	.000	Significant (Reject Hypothesis)
Between Gender	121.08	1	121.08	.7439	.001	
Interaction (staff status *Gender)	201.32	1	201.32	1.2369	.001	
Within samples (Error)	320131.30	1967	162.75			Significant
<b>Total</b>	<b>320635.81</b>	<b>1970</b>				(Reject Hypothesis)

From table 3 above, staff status (academic/non-academic) as main effect yielded an f-value of 1.1189. This is significant at .000 level. Since .000 is less than .05 level set for this study, it can be concluded that the f-ratio (1.1189) is significant at .05 level of significance. Similarly, gender (male/female) as main effect gave an f-value of .7439. This is significant at .001 level. Since .001 is less than .05 level set for this study, it can be concluded that the f-ratio (.7439) is significant at .05 level of significance. The interaction effect (staff status \*Gender) yielded an f-value of 1.2369. This is significant at .001 level. Since .001 is less than .05 level set for this study, it can be concluded that the f-ratio (1.2369) is significant at .05 level of significance. As a result of these, hypothesis one is rejected as stated indicating that public universities’ staff in South East Nigeria differed significantly in their ratings on the level of administrative autonomy existing in their universities based on their gender (male/female) and status (academic/non-academic). Precisely, male staff and academic staff opined that the level of administrative autonomy existing in public universities in South East Nigeria is low while female staff and non-academic staff opined that the level of administrative autonomy existing in public universities in South East Nigeria is high.

**Hypothesis 2**

Public universities’ staff in South East Nigeria do not differ significantly in their ratings on the level of financial autonomy existing in their universities based on their gender (male/female) and status (academic/ non-academic).

**Table 4:** ANOVA analyses for hypothesis 2

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Squares	F-ratio	Sig (.05)	Remark
Between staff status	106.90	1	106.90	.7505	.011	Significant (Reject Hypothesis)
Between Gender	122.16	1	122.16	.8573	.000	Significant (Reject Hypothesis)
Interaction (staff status *Gender)	118.38	1	118.38	.8311	.010	Significant (Reject Hypothesis)
Within samples (Error)	280171.00	1967	142.435			
<b>Total</b>	<b>280518.44</b>	<b>1970</b>				

From table 4 above, staff status (academic/non-academic) as main effect yielded an f-value of .7505. This is significant at .011 level. Since .011 is less than .05 level set for this study, it can be concluded that the f-ratio (.7505) is significant at .05 level of significance. Gender (male/female) as main effect gave an f-value of .8573. This is significant at .000 level. Since .000 is less than .05 level set for this study, it can be

conclude that the f-ratio (.8573) is significant at .05 level of significance. The interaction effect (staff status\*Gender) yielded an f-value of .8311 This is significant at .010 level. Since .010 is less than .05 level set for this study, it can be concluded that the f-ratio (.8311) is significant at .05 level of significance. Therefore, hypothesis two is rejected as stated showing that public universities' staff in South East Nigeria differed significantly in their ratings on the level of financial autonomy existing in their universities based on their gender (male/female) and status (academic/non-academic). Precisely, male staff and academic staff opined that the level of financial autonomy existing in public universities in South East Nigeria is low while female staff and non-academic staff opined that the level of financial autonomy existing in public universities in South East Nigeria is high.

### **Summary of Findings**

Findings made in this study can be summarized thus;

1. The university staff sampled in this study opined that the level of administrative autonomy existing in public universities in South East Nigeria is low.
2. The university staff sampled in this study were of the view that the level of financial autonomy existing in public universities in South East Nigeria is low.
3. Public universities' staff in South East Nigeria differed significantly in their ratings on the level of administrative autonomy existing in their universities based on their gender (male/female) and status (academic/non-academic), male staff and academic staff rated the level of administrative autonomy low while female staff and non-academic staff rated it high.
4. Public universities' staff in South East Nigeria differed significantly in their ratings on the level of financial autonomy existing in their universities based on their gender (male/female) and status (academic/non-academic), male staff and academic staff rated the level of financial autonomy low while female staff and non-academic staff rated it high.

### **Discussion of Findings**

On the level of administrative autonomy existing in public universities in South East Nigeria, the university staff sampled in this study opined that the level of administrative autonomy existing in public universities in South East Nigeria is low. This finding is in agreement with the findings of Udida (2017), Usman (2018), Nwosu (2018) and Obeten (2020) who found their separate studies that public universities had low level of administrative autonomy. Contrarily, the finding made in this study with regard to level of administrative autonomy existing in public universities in South East Nigeria, disagrees with those of Zeph (2019) and Guppeh (2020) who reported separately that public universities had high level of administrative autonomy. This study further investigated whether or not public universities' staff in South East Nigeria will differ significantly in their ratings on the level of administrative autonomy existing in their

universities based on their gender (male/female) and status (academic/non-academic). In this regard, it was found that public universities' staff in South East Nigeria differed significantly in their ratings on the level of administrative autonomy existing in their universities based on their gender (male/female) and status (academic/non-academic), male staff and academic staff rated the level of administrative autonomy low while female staff and non-academic staff rated it high. Zeph (2019) made similar finding where male and female as well as academic and non-academic staff differ significantly in their ratings. But Udida (2017), Usman (2018), Nwosu (2018), Obeten (2020) and Guppeh (2020) all found no significant difference between the ratings of male and female as well as academic and non-academic staff in their universities sampled in their separate studies.

The finding made in this study showing low level of administrative autonomy of public universities is very worrisome. This is because in the university, administrative autonomy, describes the administrator's freedom to act in his official capacity without undue interference from a set of actors within or outside the university, (Udida, 2017). According to Udida, university administrative autonomy can be visible in the extent to which the university administrator exercises freedom in appointments of directors, appointments of heads of departments, deans of faculties, constituting of committees, prioritization of projects in the university, award of contracts for projects in the university and supervision/monitoring of on-going projects in the university. Consequently, when public universities administrators are denied autonomy, they are bound to be influenced rightly or wrongly in carrying out their functions. Of course, this practice will spell doom for the Ivory Towers.

On the level of financial autonomy existing in public universities in South East Nigeria, the university staff sampled in this study opined that the level of financial autonomy existing in public universities in South East Nigeria is low. This finding is in agreement with the findings of Yong (2017), Adekunle (2019) and Gidado (2019) who found their separate studies that public universities had low level of financial autonomy. But the finding disagrees with that of Williams (2020) who reported that public universities had high level of financial autonomy. This study further investigated whether or not public universities' staff in South East Nigeria will differ significantly in their ratings on the level of financial autonomy existing in their universities based on their gender (male/female) and status (academic/ non-academic). In this regard, it was found that public universities' staff in South East Nigeria differed significantly in their ratings on the level of financial autonomy existing in their universities based on their gender (male/female) and status (academic/non-academic), male staff and academic staff rated the level of financial autonomy low while female staff and non-academic staff rated it high. Williams (2020) made similar finding where male and female as well as academic and non-academic staff differ significantly in their ratings. In contrast, Yong (2017), Adekunle (2019) and Gidado (2019) all found no significant difference between the

ratings of male and female as well as academic and non-academic staff in their universities sampled in their separate studies.

Financial autonomy encompasses vital issues such as; the university administrator's freedom with regards to access to statutory subventions, use of statutory subventions as desired by the university management, generation of internal revenue, use of internally generated revenue as desired by the university management, preparation of the university annual budget, payment of staff salaries and payment of staff entitlements other than salaries. In the Nigerian setting, Gidado (2019) alleged that most federal and state universities' administrators do not freely access their statutory subvention. Even when the subventions are released, the administrators are sometimes, forced to appropriate such funds as desired by those exercising influences on them. Adekunle (2018) hinted that some public university administrators cannot decide how and when to pay staff salaries and other entitlement without recourse to agents and agencies of federal or state government as the case may be. Also endangered include; the university administrator's freedom to fund staff training, fund staff welfare programmes, control projects' funds in the university and access credit facilities, (Williams, 2020). According to Williams, a financially autonomous university administrator should freely audit the university accounts, determine school fees payable in the university, determine sundry fees payable in the university, remit check-off dues to university- based unions as and when due, among other financial functions. Until these happen in public universities, the future of university education remains threatened in Nigeria.

### **Recommendations**

Consequent upon the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made;

1. Strict implementation of existing laws/policies on public universities autonomy by National Universities Commission, Federal and State ministries of education and other relevant authorities.
2. The National Universities Commission and other relevant authorities should enforce adequate sanctions against individuals or agencies hampering the autonomy of public universities.
3. National Universities Commission and Federal/State ministries of education should ensure that public universities access their due statutory subventions directly from federation/state accounts as applicable.

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