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### **ZJER**

HRRC, Faculty of Education

University of Zimbabwe

P O Box MP 167

Mount Pleasant

Harare, **Zimbabwe**

Tel: (263-4) 303271 Ext 1893, Fax: (263-4) 302182

e-mail: nherera@zimbix.uz.zw

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# DEMOCRATISATION OF GOVERNANCE IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF PERCEIVED INVOLVEMENT OF THE STUDENT UNION IN THE ADMINISTRATION OF INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING IN NIGERIA

*M. Olakekan Arikewuyo  
Institute of Education  
Ogun State University  
Ago-iwoye, Nigeria*

## ABSTRACT

*The study investigated the perception of academic and non-academic staff, heads of tertiary institutions, students, student union executives, and parents about the participation of student unions in the administration of institutions of higher learning in Nigeria. Specifically, the study investigated the areas in which the respondents perceived that the student union should or should not be involved.*

*A Student Union Involvement Questionnaire (SUIQ) was administered to the respondents. A total of 45 academic staff, 61 nonacademic staff, 140 students, nine heads of institutions, and 52 parents returned their questionnaires. The data were analysed with the aid of the t-test statistics.*

*The study found that there was no significant difference between the perception of academic and nonacademic staff and the perception of students and their parents about the involvement of students in the administration of tertiary institutions. However, there was a significant difference in the perception of student union executives and heads of institutions.*

*The study recommends that tertiary institutions should initiate democratic reforms in the administration of the institutions. Indeed, every member of the academic community; academic and nonacademic staff and students*

*should be actively involved in every aspect of the institution's administration. This, it is hoped, will go a long way in reducing the crisis that has almost crippled teaching and research in Nigerian tertiary institutions.*

## **Introduction**

In every organisation, the involvement of members in its administration and management is very essential to the achievement of its goals and objectives. This, in effect, means that the democratisation of its administrative machinery is very crucial to effective management. Consultation among its members in decision making reduces conflict, friction, and misunderstanding.

According to Ejiogu (1987), democratisation of any administrative process implies active involvement of subordinates in the decision making process. It means that those in leadership positions will have to share their managerial authority with those over whom they superintend. Such involvement, he further argued, transcends involvement of the hand, but more importantly, the involvement of the mind, the heart and head.

Democratisation is also essential in the administrative machinery of institutions of higher learning. In other words, the students, who are the central focus of the school system, should be involved in the decision making processes of the institutions.

Treslan (1986) believes that students represent a significant human component within the microcosm society. According to him, students have been on the receiving end of the stick, that is, they have become recipients of administrative decision-making. From empirical data amassed on the issue, the following assumptions were made:

- (a) learning experience gained from participation in school control can provide students with an additional opportunity for gaining citizenship skills;
- (b) students, teachers, and administrators are genuinely interested in realising change in the existing control structure of schools in the direction of increased member participation and;

- (c) development of an approach for student participation in control is possible within the current bureaucratic school organisation.

Goldschmidt (1976) reported the major findings of the commissions set up by the Federal Republic of Germany and Sweden to investigate the problem of democratisation and participation in the educational and research systems of both countries between 1971 and 1973. Some of the findings included:

- (a) participation by teachers, students and parents is so far only very rudimentary;
- (b) participation in decision making in schools can be used as a formal procedure and may help prevent schools from becoming unfair or authoritarian towards their students;
- (c) participation is meant to provide students with the ability to act on their own in a responsible manner for common goals. It is therefore necessary to have a situation where there is free communication and social interaction between all persons concerned, that is, students, teachers, and parents.

Bekoe (1978) made a survey of students' opinion on their role in the university administration and came up with the following:

- (a) students questioned certain administrative policies and practices. Most of their complaints reflected tendencies against an impersonal mass approach to education, production-line teaching methods, etc;
- (b) they were not happy about the allocation of university funds, examination practices, residential facilities, etc;
- (c) they felt that they needed to take a stand, as students at least, if not as part of the whole community, on any national issue.

## **Statement of the Problem**

The study investigated the perception of academic and nonacademic staff, students, student union executives, heads of tertiary institutions, and parents, about the involvement of the student union in the administration of institutions of higher learning. It investigated whether or not students

should participate in taking decisions that affect all areas of institutional management.

Specifically, the study sought to find answers to the following questions:

1. In what areas should the student union be involved in taking administrative decisions?
2. In what areas should the student union not be allowed to participate?

## **Research Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses were tested in the study.

1. There is no significant difference in the perception of academic and nonacademic staff about student union involvement in the administration of tertiary institutions.
2. There is no significant difference in the perception of student union executives and heads of tertiary institutions about student union involvement in the administration of institutions of higher learning.
3. There is no significant difference in the perception of students and parents about student union involvement in the administration of institutions of higher learning.

## **Methodology**

### **Samples**

The population consisted of academic and nonacademic staff, students, student union executives, parents, and heads of the three tertiary institutions owned by the Ogun State Government. These were: Ogun State University, Ogun State Polytechnic, and Ogun State College of Education. Out of the population, 15 academic staff, 25 nonacademic staff, 50 students, 3 heads of institutions, 4 student union executives and 20 parents of students were randomly sampled from each institution. This made a total of 351 respondents.

Out of these samples, 318 respondents (comprising 45 academic staff, 61 nonacademic staff, 140 students, 9 heads of institutions, 11 student union executives and 52 parents of students) returned their questionnaires.

### **Research Instrument**

The instrument used for this study was the Student Union Involvement Questionnaire (SUIQ), which was constructed by the researcher. The instrument covered the identified areas of institutional administration, where student union involvement is desirable. These were: development of curriculum; policy formulation and modification; financial affairs; identification of goals, priorities, and needs; provision and maintenance of facilities; selection, evaluation, and promotion of staff, as well as student affairs.

The instrument was subjected to validity by experts in educational evaluation and institutional administration. The degree of responses in the instrument ranges from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree".

### **Data Analysis**

The data of the study were analysed using the t-test statistics. The test was chosen because it allowed the researcher to test a difference between the means of two independent groups.

The data were analysed as follows:

**Hypothesis 1:** There is no significant difference in the perception of academic and nonacademic staff about student union involvement in the administration of institutions of higher learning.

The results are presented in Table I:

**Table 1**

**Comparison of the Perception of Academic and Non-academic Staff About Student Union Involvement in the Administration of Institutions of Higher Learning**

Respondents	N	X	S.d	t-Calculated	t-Observed	df
Academic Staff	45	23.6	21.19	1.27	2.00	104
Non-Academic Staff	61	18.72	23.00			

Table I shows that t-calculated of 1.27 was less than t-observed, which was 2.00. Hypothesis 1 could not therefore be rejected. This implied that there was no significant difference in the perception of academic and nonacademic staff about student union involvement in the administration of institutions of higher learning.

**Hypothesis 2:** There is no significant difference in the perception of student union executives and heads of tertiary institutions of higher learning.

The results are presented in Table 2:

**Table 2**

**Comparison of the Perception of Student Union Executives and Heads of Institutions About Student Union Involvement In the Administration of Institutions of Higher Learning**

Respondents	N	X	S.d	t-Calculated	t-Observed	df
Student Union Executives	11	64.0	8.66	7.57	2.10	18
Heads of Institutions	9	43.33	13.34			



From Table 2, the t-critical of 7.57 was higher than t-observed of 2.10. At the alpha level of 0.05, hypothesis 2 was rejected. This showed that there was a significant difference in the perception of student union executives and heads of tertiary institutions about the participation of the student union in the administration of tertiary institutions.

**Hypothesis 3:** There is no significant difference in the perception of students and parents about student union involvement in the administration of institutions of higher learning.

The results of the analysis are presented in Table 3:

**Table 3**  
**Comparison Between the Perception of Students and Parents**  
**About Student Union Involvement in the Administration of**  
**Institutions of Higher Learning**

Respondents	N	X	S.d	t-Calculated	t-Observed	df
Student	140	34.12	14.30	0.18	1.96	190
Parents	52	34.26	12.30			

The analysis in Table 3 shows that there was no significant difference in the perception of students and parents about student union involvement in the administration of institutions of higher learning. This was because t-calculated of 0.18 was greater than t-observed of 1.96. The alpha level was 0.05.

## **Discussion of Results**

The study took a critical analysis of the participation of the student unions in decision making processes of Nigeria's tertiary institutions. Indeed, the student union is the rallying point of the students in an institution. It represents and protects the interests of the students within and outside the academic community. Even though some people view the student union as being too violent in its approach and should therefore not be allowed to function in Nigeria's institutions, Olaitan (1988) emphasised

that the student union does not only convey the students' aspirations and position to the authorities, but also conveys the authorities' aspirations and positions to the students. Also, instead of being saddled with a barrage of petitions by individual students, the authorities have in the student union, the articulated position of the students which, in tune with modern organisational methods, becomes more manageable.

The lifting of the ban placed on the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS), which is the umbrella for all student bodies in Nigerian educational institutions, by the government on 1st May, 1993, is an indication of the fact that the government has realised the role of the student union in the administration of institutions of higher learning.

This study discovered that while there was no significant difference in the perception of the academic and nonacademic staff and that of students and parents regarding participation of the union, there was a sharp disagreement between the perception of the student union executives and heads of institutions. The students strongly believed that they should be involved in such areas like: taking academic decisions; monitoring the conduct and performance of students in examinations; the admission of new students; auditing the institutions' accounts; the appointment of principal officers; membership of senate, Academic Board, examination committee, and the governing council of institutions. However, the heads of the institutions who took part in this study (registrars, student affairs officers and public relations officers), opposed the participation of the students in these areas. They believed, perhaps, the students should concern themselves with their primary aim of coming to the school, and learn. These findings are in line with that of Bekoe (1978).

However, Ejiogu (1987) had noted that at the University of Lagos, for example, student representatives are usually found in such bodies as: students welfare board, the academic planning committee, advisory board on the university health centre, ceremonies committee, the library and inspections committees. But Makinde (1980) contended that the student union should equally be represented in some other vital statutory bodies like the academic boards of studies, cultural studies management board, computer centre management board, development committee,

appointments and promotions committee, and even the tender board that awards contracts.

In a nutshell, it is hoped that the perennial student crisis in Nigeria's tertiary institutions could be drastically reduced, if students are adequately involved in taking vital decisions. The Proscribed Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) has always been in the forefront of democratisation of university governance.

## Conclusion

Though participation, according to Locke (1974) has costs in time and energy (both to the individual and the system) and although not all issues are equally suitable for a participatory focus, Pateman (1973) felt that the major function of participation is educative in the very widest sense, including both the psychological aspect and the gaining of practice in democratic skills and procedures.

No doubt, a wider participation of the student union in the affairs of tertiary institutions is desirable, students must also be cautioned, so that they do not misuse the opportunity which such involvement would present to them.

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