



## MEASURING ADMINISTRATIVE SKILLS IN PUBLIC TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN CROSS RIVER STATE: IMPLICATIONS FOR EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE AND SERVICE DELIVERY

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### Abstract

The quality of governance and the service outcome greatly depends on the administrative structure of the public tertiary institutions. This paper will discuss the measurement of administrative capabilities among the staffs in the Cross River State tertiary institutions in Nigeria and the implications they have on good governance and service delivery. The study checks the competencies of administrators, finds the lack of skills in professional teams, using a mixed research methodology and evaluates their influence on performance at the institution. The results indicate inadequacy in the strategic planning, communication, and technological expertise that weakens the efficiency of governance and quality of services. The paper brings to the fore the academic issue of inadequate frameworks of measuring administrative competencies as well as the political issue of bureaucratic opposition to skill development programs. The study will integrate these gaps; hence, offering capacity building strategies and policy reform options to improve institutional effectiveness. The implications reiterate the fact that there is a need to develop targeted training and collaboration among stakeholders in order to enhance sustainable governance in tertiary institutions.

**Keywords:** Administrative Skills, Public Tertiary Institutions, Governance, Service Delivery, Cross River State, Capacity Building

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### Introduction

The tertiary institutions of the public system are very important centres of the generation of knowledge, human capital, and development of the society. These institutions such as universities, poly-techniques and colleges of education in the Cross River State, Nigeria are critical determinants of the education, and socio-economic dimension of education. The process of governance and service delivery in these institutions can only be effective when there is an administrative competence of the personnel assigned the responsibility of managing resources, administering policies, and easing the academic processes. The competencies involved in administrative skills are varied in nature and they do not exclude strategic planning, decision-making, communication, financial, and technological proficiency that are very much needed in the accomplishment of the institutional goals. Nonetheless, preliminary observations and anecdotal evidence indicate that inefficiencies in administration of tertiary institutions in the state of Cross River negatively affect their ability to provide quality services and have strong governance systems. This research aims to quantify the administrative capabilities of the employees in the tertiary institutions of the Cross River State government and determine their role in governance and service provision.

There are two major issues that would drive the research. At the academic level, it has not established detailed structures of evaluating the administrative competencies on the grounds of the Nigerian tertiary institutions, which restricts the possibility of creating evidence-based interventions. Bureaucracy and lack of support of policy on the development of his skills make the system unfair and introduces systemic constraints on redesigning the institutions. Those issues bring gaps to knowledge about the role of administrative skills in determining the results of the



government and the opportunities of mitigating the gaps through specific interventions. This paper seeks to add to the existing body of literature on the topic of public administration in society and offer practical recommendations to the stakeholders in the tertiary education sector of the Cross River State. This research is also meaningful because it can support writing of policies, improving the performance of institutions, and sustainable development.

Proper governance within the tertiary institutions will lead to proper utilization of resources, promotion of academic excellence, and improved satisfaction among the stakeholders. The reputation and functionality of such institutions depends on service delivery, which involves student support, the welfare of the staff and their interaction with the community. This research critically examines the Cross River State, where tertiary institutions are highly diverse and the socio-political situation is distinctive, to provide location-specific findings that can be generalized to other possible locations in Nigeria and other locations.

### **Literature Review**

Administrative skills are the concept that has been widely discussed in the works of public administration and organizational management. Drucker (1954) also pointed out that managerial skills are key in the realization of organizational objectives with the abilities of planning, organizing, and controlling brought up to the fore as very fundamental in management. More recently, Mintzberg (2009) further elaborated this frame, and pinpointed the presence of interpersonal, informational, and decisional roles as being playful to the administrator in complex organizations. Administrative skills are most crucial in the context of tertiary institutions because of the complex nature of operations, which include the academic, financial, and community-based operations. Nigeria has been a topic of study and thus the issues of administrative capacity in state institutions have been highlighted. According to Ofoegbu (1985), bureaucratic inefficiencies and poor training consequence to effective governance in the Nigerian universities.

On the same note, Ajayi and Ekundayo (2008) reasoned that mismanagement of resources and the deteriorating quality of services in tertiary institutions are also caused by poor administrative skills. A study carried out by Effiom and Bassey (2018) within the Cross River State indicated that administrative incompetence affects both student satisfaction and the reputation of the institution. All these studies lead to a common conclusion that administrative skills are an important factor in determining the performance of an institution, although they do not provide a methodological approach to the measurement of administrative skills and their connection to the outcome of governance. Systems of evaluating administrative abilities all over the world have changed to accommodate both technical and soft skills. Katz (1974) developed a three skill model that includes, technical, human and conceptual skills that have been broadly applied in the field of management research. Effective communication and problem-solving are some of the measurable outcomes of competency-based approach established by Boyatzis (1982) in higher education.

More recent research, including Spendlove (2007) and Gentry et al. (2016) studies, included technological proficiency as one of the essential administrative competencies as an element of the



digitalization of the educational institutions. Nevertheless, they tend to be developed as frameworks that are applicable to Western cultures and might not be able to reflect the socio-political characteristics of the developing world such as Nigeria. Political aspect of administrative skills in Nigeria cannot be ignored. Okoli (2015) has contended that the systems of political interference and patronage in the recruitment and training of new hires in public institutions harm the merit based recruitment and training. Edet and Ekpo (2020) discovered in Cross River State that the hindrance of bureaucracy influenced by the move toward reform initiatives curtails the modern practices of administration. This political issue worsens the academic difference in that without sound assessment instruments, institutions are unable to point at areas of skills insufficiency and remedy them. These cycles of academic and political dilemmas leading to this state of disclosure suggest the necessity of a context specific study which would combine the perceptual knowledge with effective resolutions. Implications in the provision of governance and service delivery are also brought out in the literature in relation to administrative skills.

Proper governance of tertiary institutions has led to aspects such as transparency in decision making, the involvement of all stakeholders as well as accountability; these aspects can only be achieved through effective administrators. The service delivery, conversely, includes the academic support provisions, infrastructure repairing, and community outreach. According to the research conducted by Nwankwo (2014) and Asiyai (2015), the competence of the administrator is associated with high student performance and efficiency in the institution. On the other hand, other weaknesses identified include lack of financial management skills, communication and who have been attributed to mismanagement and dissatisfaction of stakeholders. Findings in this area have informed this study that aims at quantifying administrative talents and their influence on governance and service delivery in the cross river state tertiary institutions.

### **Methodology**

The present study utilised a mixed-method study in an effort to give a holistic evaluation of the administrative skills in tertiary state-owned institutions in Cross River State. The study involved six public tertiary institutions comprising of two universities, two poly institutions and two colleges of learning to represent the institution of various types. The target population was an administrative employee of different levels, that is, a registrar, a bursar, department head, and support staff. Purposive method was employed in the selection of 300 respondents with the consideration that those directly involved in administration should be included. The need to have a statistically sound sample and practical viability sampling was based on the resource limits of the research. The method used to gather data was quantitative and qualitative.

The five dimensions that a structured questionnaire was designed to measure administration skills included strategic planning, communication, financial management, technological proficiency, and decision making. The questionnaire based on the three skills model that was developed by Katz (1974) was modified and proved with conducting a pilot research with 30-admin data of a non-participating school. Measures of self-reported competencies of the participants were done using a five-point Likert scale, which had a strong agree/strongly disagree indicator on one side and



strongly disagree/strongly agree on the other. Cronbachs alpha was 0.82, which indicates that it is very high in reliability.

Semi-structured interviews with 20 senior administrative officials were used as the method of collecting qualitative data; the selection of the sample was related to the level of experience and position of leadership. The interviews touched on the views on the skill gaps, obstacles to effective governance and the ways of ensuring that service delivery is improved. Open-ended interview questions were used to enable detailed answers, and the interviews were taped so as to obtain the consent of participants. To supplement such approaches, institutional reports, policy documents, and performance evaluation were analyzed to bring contextual information on the administrative practices.

The data analysis was done in two steps. The quantitative data in the questionnaires were performed with descriptive statistics, which included standard deviation, percentages, and means, to generalize the levels of skills in the five dimensions. The comparison of the levels of skills in terms of the types of institutions and the demographics was conducted with the use of inferential statistics, namely analysis of variance (ANOVA). Thematic analysis of qualitative data based on the six-step framework of Braun and Clarke (2006) was conducted on the interview data after the transcription of the data. The themes were determined due to the iterative accumulation of the codes where skills deficiencies, governance issues, and outcomes of service delivery were considered. Results of document analysis were triangulated with the data of questionnaires and interviews in order to increase the validity of the results. The moral aspect was also given preference during the study. They have been informed and their anonymity had been guaranteed by using pseudonyms when reporting the qualitative results. The research complied with the ethics of conducting a social science study because institutional approval was received by the involved tertiary institutions.

Weaknesses of the study were that the study used self-reported data where response bias can be raised and that the study did not include a large number of tertiary institutions, thereby limiting the ability to generalize to the population. In spite of these limited features, the mixed methods approach offered a sound foundation of answering the research objectives.

Age/Gender. The mean age of the participants was 26 years and the median of 27.09 years. Summarization of the demographic features of the respondents to the questionnaire of 300 people is presented in Table 1. The sample comprised of 180 males (60 percent) and 120 females (40 percent) which is representative of the gender ratio in administrative positions in the institutions. The age of the participants was between 25 and 60 years with the highest number (45% of the respondents) being 35 to 45 years. Regarding educational level, 55% of them had bachelor degrees, 30% master degrees and 15% diplomas and other certifications. Work experience was mixed, 40% with 5-10 years experience, 35% 11- 20 years experience and 25% exceeding experience and 20 years. Its representation across the types of institutions was also equal with 100 respondents comprising universities, poly technics and colleges of education.



**Table 1**  
*Demographic Profile of Participants*

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	180	60
	Female	120	40
Age	25–34 years	90	30
	35–45 years	135	45
	46–60 years	75	25
Education	Diploma/Certificate	45	15
	Bachelor's Degree	165	55
	Master's Degree	90	30
Experience	5–10 years	120	40
	11–20 years	105	35
	Over 20 years	75	25
Institution Type	University	100	33.3
	Polytechnic	100	33.3
	College of Education	100	33.3

## Results

The results showed gross differences in the administrative skills in the five dimensions. The lowest mean score (2.8 out of 5) was strategic planning, and it shows that long-term visioning and resource allocation lack as a whole. The level of communication skills was somewhat higher (3.2), yet qualitative data point out the issues related to the interdepartmental coordination and involvement of stakeholders. The score of financial management skills was 3.0, and document analysis proved that there are often budgetary variances and delays in financial reporting. Technological skills were very poor (2.9) especially with the older respondents, as the use of digital tools to undertake administrative work was low. Skills in decision-making were ranked the highest (3.4) but the interviews indicated that the decisions were more of reactionary than proactive thus compromising their quality. The outcomes of ANOVA revealed that there were a lot of differences in the level of skills among the types of institutions ( $F(2, 297) = 4.67, p < 0.05$ ).

There was a significant difference between the mean scores of communications and the decision making in universities and polytechniques and colleges of education with the consequence that those with higher administration structure and with the access to training prospects exhibited higher mean scores in communication and decision-making. Skills were also determined by demographics. Modulo participants who had a master degree and those with diplomas had better abilities in strategic planning and finance management ( $p < 0.01$ ). The use of digital tools was being less correlated with age and experience ( $r = -0.32, p < 0.05$ ), so younger employees were superior with technological devices. The qualitative results revealed a number of impediments to



good governance and service delivery. Poor training initiatives, bureaucracy adoptive of change and lack of funding were enablers of strong limitations in many instances that interviewees cited. One of the registrars mentioned, we do not have the resources to educate employees about modern administrative practices and when there are such procedures, senior officials are opposed to new methods. These fears were supported in the analysis of documents that showed that there was old administrative manuals and less emphasis on capacity building. These conclusions establish the interrelation of the academic and political issues as in the absence of assessment systems and bureaucratic stagnation, there is still a lack of skills.

**Table 2**

*Mean Scores of Administrative Skills by Dimension*

Skill Dimension	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
Strategic Planning	2.8	0.67
Communication	3.2	0.72
Financial Management	3.0	0.69
Technological Proficiency	2.9	0.65
Decision-Making	3.4	0.71

### Discussion

The findings reveal that there are severe shortcomings in administrative proficiencies among employees in the state tertiary institutions within the Cross River State and that they will impact on the governance and service delivery. The poor scores in strategic planning coincide with the conclusions of Nwankwo (2014) that long-term visioning is a problem in Nigerian tertiary institutions because of the lack of proper training and available resources. This is a weakness that weakens governance since there is a limitation to aligning the institutional objectives with the national development priorities. Equally, the average scores of communication indicate difficulty in communication with stakeholders a barrier that Asiyai (2015) indicated as a challenge in the delivery of services in the Nigerian universities. Communication is vital in the process of organizing academic and administrative operations, and the lack of it is one of the reasons why it takes longer and students and staff are disgruntled.

The results of financial management and technological competence are especially alarming. Delays in financial reporting and budgetary differences as it reveals through documents analysis have indicated lack of accountability that leave people distrustful of these institutions. The low technological adoption levels, particularly in the older employees, signify a digital native-digital native gap in technological skills as Gentry et al. (2016) identify technological adoption as one of the transcendent issues in higher education administration. This gap in Cross River State where digital infrastructure resources are scarce worsens the lack of efficiency in record-keeping and service delivery. The increased scores in decision-making, albeit in an encouraging way, are balanced by that which is said to be in qualitative terms, decisions tend to be reactive.



This can be correlated with the argument made by Mintzberg (2009) that makes the proactive strategies to be based on the conceptual skills and which seem to be deficient among the participants in order to make the right decisions. The difference between institutional types implies that due to their more ample administrative structures, universities might be more equipped with resources and training, and consequently, perform better in some of the areas of skills that require them. Nonetheless, the general lack of skills in all the institutions is an indicator of systematic problems that need special remedies. Missing standardized tools that are specific to the Nigerian context can be interpreted as the present academic issue of scanty frameworks that may be applied to evaluate administrative skills. The available models like the three-skill framework described by Katz (1974) are beneficial as a starting point but they do not take into consideration such socio-political circumstances as bureaucratic resistance and budget restrictions. As stated by Okoli (2015), this political issue of bureaucratic inertia further complicates the process of bridging the skills gaps.

The process of resistance to reform along with insufficient backing of the policies leads to a vicious circle of inefficiency, which erodes governance and service delivery. Such findings can be used in practice by stakeholders in tertiary institutions of Cross River State. The solution to skill shortages is a complex set of responses that should involve the training, change in policies, and cooperation between stakeholders. The training should be based on strategic planning, technological competency and financial management and practical context-based skills should receive more emphasis. The policy changes must focus on recruitment and continual professional growth based on merit to decrease bureaucratic opposition. The cooperation among institutions, governmental agencies, and international partners can contribute to the sharing of resources and the transfer of knowledge and the increased administrative capacity.

### **Conclusion**

The research paper has presented a full evaluation of administrative performances in tertiary institutions operated by the government in Cross River State and has shown a lot of shortcomings, which are contributing to failures in governance and service delivery. It is found that the academic issue of inadequate evaluation frameworks and the political issue of bureaucratic inertia are connected to systemic issues of inefficiencies. The research has provided a measure of skills in five domains of strategic planning, communication, financial management, technological adequacy, and decision-making, and thus, the critical areas to improve and suggested measures to enable these areas. The implications reflect the necessity to introduce special measures to stimulate institutional performance and foster sustainable development.

### **Recommendations**

To overcome the skill shortages identified, tertiary institutions in Cross River State ought to lay emphasis on capacity-building, which considers strategic planning, technological proficiency as well as financial management. Such programs can be modified to the Nigerian setting and include some practical and hands-on training. The policymakers are advised to create uniform systems of evaluating the administrative competencies based on the best practices on the global scale and



considering the local issues. By back rewarding a culture of continuous learning and innovations, the institutional leaders should motivate their cultures to embrace these life-long learning and innovations by incentivizing professional development and lessening the bureaucracies against change. Partnership with government agencies and collaborating with other organizations based on the partnering of the private sector and international body may also offer extra means and expertise to develop skills. Lastly, the research should be extended to determine the long-term effects of administrative training in governance outcomes, as well as come up with instruments context-specific to the measurement of competencies within Nigerian tertiary institutions.

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