

# Prospects of University Autonomy in Nigeria

Douglas O. Nwaokugha

Department of Educational Foundations, Faculty of Education, University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria

## ABSTRACT

A popular reform and change mantra in the university which stakeholders hold in high esteem, that through it, the university can maximally achieve its vision and mission is university autonomy. Among the numerous meanings associated with university autonomy is self-governance, self-determination, independence or the ability of a university to decide for itself what policies, programmes or lines of actions to take so as to enhance the achievement of the vision and mission of the university. Any university whose guiding and operational principles are hinged on the principles of autonomy can be easily transformed for the better. Using the philosophical approach, this paper discusses the prospects of university autonomy in Nigerian universities. The paper establishes that universities where autonomy is the norm can record astronomical and phenomenal improvements in teaching learning, research, prudent generation and management of resources, promotion of accountability and reduction in externally imposed bureaucratic bottlenecks that retrogress smooth administration of a university. Above all university autonomy establishes a culture of good governance, corporate and entrepreneurial innovations among others. The paper makes case that changes in the behaviour of the practitioners of university autonomy especially adoption of behaviours where the people can see autonomy as a practice that is continuously in motion, a dynamic and evolutionary process that changes over time and consequently makes new demands from its practitioners. Upon this the paper recommends making knowledge of autonomy a priority in educational provision.

**Key word:** Autonomy, Prospects, University, Nigeria.

## INTRODUCTION

A fact that cannot be disputed is that education especially university education is the fulcrum or pillar upon which the development, empowerment, liberation and emancipation of members of any society depend. These inherent progressive roles are cardinal in the numerous functions and responsibilities which universities render to members of the society upon which the stability, growth and sustainable development of the society and by extension the flourishing of humanity is hinged. Universities are centres of learning and consequently teach members of the society and through teaching members of the society instill in them behaviours that make them responsive and receptive to the trend of things in the society. Scholars in universities conduct researches and the results of such researches guide, predict and direct societies and their institutions on the next possible lines of actions to take that can result in maximum advantage to man and the environment or help in minimizing the occurrence of threats or dangers to man and his institutions. Studies or researches carried out by scholars in universities serve as catalyst, springboards, radicalizing and revolutionizing agents for the development of innovations for responding to the various problems of man and his institutions. At both the macro and micro levels, university education contributes to the moral, cultural, socio-political, environmental, scientific, technological and intellectual growth of a society.

A critical perusal of teaching, research and community service, which the university undertakes can lead one to strongly assert that the university is an

institution of the state that is specially structures, designed and carefully positioned to be ever ready at all times for responding to or proffering solutions to the various challenges that man and his institutions face in the society. What may have been systematically implicated in the above is that university education holds the keys for triggering, radicalizing and revolutionizing all sectors of life that have potentials for the liberation, empowerment and emancipation of members of the society. This accounts for why those who maintain that university education is the cornerstone for the growth, prosperity and sustainable development of a people, region or state can be said to be one hundred percent correct. The capacity of university education to bring about the expected transformations in the society starts with providing its products with the right metaphysical, epistemological and axiological foundations and these realistically produce the necessary changes in the products of university education through their ability to demonstrate higher and all round sound moral developments as proof that they have attended a university. In fact, what are expected of such products of the university system are reformed and polished behaviours in the forms of demonstrating logical sequence or orderliness in abstract thoughts, creative, logical and critical thinking as this is the level of education upon which all that is expected of education is to be theoretically and practically achieved. This accounts for the surveillance on university education and why this level is held in high esteem and is a centre of interest and a flashpoint where academic, managerial and administrative reforms are constant variables and norms.

In fact, the surveillance on the university is targeted at strengthening it to become more responsive and receptive to the complex and multidimensional challenges that contemporarily face man and his institutions across the world. Because change occurs very frequently in the world, the university reflects such changes in phases ranging from focus on

domestic, regional, national and to the present phase where internationalization has become the focus. In each of the phase, rigorous efforts have been mounted to ensure that products of the university put the seal of creativity, logicity and analytic mindedness and criticalness in all their actions and activities. Whereas this is the dream and aspiration which stakeholders want the university to achieve, constant change in the system and society has consistently posed threats in the line of achieving all that is expected of the university. Because change occurs in the society and by extension in the university in unpredictable split second order, academic, administrative and management challenges reflect such changes and are so common that an academic, administrative and management decision reached in the morning almost become obsolete and suspect before the close of work on the same day.

True, it is right and correct to say that the university has come of age in serving humanity and humanity has equally developed a reciprocal and insightful relationship with it in the forms of superlative surveillance on what goes on at the level of university education. The university has become a constant flashpoint and a rally point for the introduction of innovations that can keep pace with changes in the society. Systematically, the various insightful thoughts on the university are most visible in the introduction of cutting edge innovations in the academic, administrative and management dynamics or apparatus of the university. All such overhaul and insightful thoughts which stakeholders in the university subject the university to are targeted at arriving at higher destinations or taking the university to the next level, principal among which is greater productivity and greater service delivery to humanity.

Despite numerous innovations to cushion the effect of change in the university system, there are persistent monumental challenges in the university

systems that are traceable to split second changes in the university system and this has persistently given rise to further agitations for further reforms in the university system. The recognition of this challenge has fertilized and pulped up new directions for change and reform mantra in the way the university should be run so that the university can still be relevant in the face of contemporary new changes, challenges and competitions that dot the face of the earth. There is in recent times a direction that most stakeholders in education point in unison as a necessary antidote for addressing all the academic, staffing, financial, administrative and management challenges confronting the university system globally. It is asserted that all the challenges facing the university system will disappear the moment the university system becomes self-governing or autonomous.

Autonomy as a reform mantra has gained currency and popularity in recent years among academics, researchers and other stakeholders in the university system and part of why this is so is that flexibility and the attainment of the vision, mission and objectives upon which a university is set up can become norms in any university that embraces autonomy and such university is no longer restricted by the multidimensional, complex and cumbersome bureaucratic bottlenecks and their concomitant externally imposed standards that impede academic decisions and effective administration of the university. What this suggests is that there are many prospects the society and by extension mankind stands to gain in a regime of self governance and autonomy of the university which can add value to the traditional functions of the university as well as navigate new directions for new roles in the contemporary times on one hand as well as improve the quality of lives of citizens globally. In detail, this paper is specifically focused on highlighting the prospects of university autonomy in Nigeria. The methodology to be adopted is purely

philosophical and a methodology in an academic discourse according to Nwaokugha and Danladi (2016:421) is said to be philosophical when an author or researcher adopts speculation, analysis and prescription as methods for in any intellectual undertaking he or she is to embark on.

Speculation as a method of philosophical research revolves around conscious and systematic efforts to find logical coherence in an entire realm of thought. By this frame of reference, speculation in philosophical research works out along the premise which upholds that the authenticity, rightness or correctness of an assertion or proposition is squarely and heavily dependent on the orderly arrangement or sequence of the connecting ideas in a proposition. What this points hand to is that the truth of a proposition can be established based on the extent in which one idea in a piece of writing or presentation is logically connected to the other. Nwaokugha and Danladi (2016:421) highlight the *modus operandi* of speculation as a method of philosophical research when they write that “the foundation of this method of enquiry is that the soundness or reasonableness of any proposition can be established through its rootedness in the science of logic or the various orderly sequences that lead to a conclusion”. In fact, logic and language are fundamental tools in any successful speculation and a combination of logic and language helps the scholar or researcher who is favourably disposed to speculation in his philosophical enquiry to build up his ideas and systematically link up one idea to the other.

Analysis as a method of carrying out philosophical research focuses on meaning and proper use of words. A scholar who uses analysis in his philosophical enquiry starts by critically examining concepts, terms and propositions with the intention of establishing meanings that may be associated or contained in such concepts, terms, and propositions. Nwaokugha and Danladi (2016) write that the analyst starts

his business of analysis by breaking down his subject matter into the smallest and remotest forms that constitute it and at the same time show how a segment is related to the whole. Where analysis is done to its logical conclusion, it helps according to Nwaokugha and Ihuoma (2019:277) “in resolving conflicts that result in mankind’s attempt to understand his environment or world”. This is so because analysis is key to clarifying and decoding the inconsistencies and ambiguities that are ever-present in man’s daily social, political, religious, scientific, economic, technological and environmental activities. By making meaning explicit in the above areas, analysis helps to bring to the barest minimum conditions in human affairs that have potentials to trigger misunderstanding, crises, conflicts, violence, disagreements, confrontation and other instability, disorder and confusion inducing behaviours in the society. Logic and language are also fundamental in analysis and specifically help, according to Hirst and White (2000) in establishing the relationship between language and reality or relationship between word and the world.

Prescription as a method of philosophical research or enquiry stimulates and involves a meaning that revolves around establishing criteria, standards and principles for making prescriptive value judgement or judging values by a researcher or writer. This is achieved in a research in the form of a researcher making autonomous value statements on how an issue that has been the focus or subject matter of a philosophical discussion can be resolved so that all wrong noticed in the course of the discussion can be harmoniously addressed. In a way, suggestions and recommendations in researches and other forms of writing fall within the frame of reference of prescription.

In recent times, there is a heightened awareness on the benefits of the philosophical research methods in the pursuit and acquisition of knowledge. At

least the philosophical research method affords researchers deep and penetrating insights into the cardinal and fundamental issues that surround any subject matter of attention. As a methodology with high potentials to be applied across a wide range of disciplines, the philosophical research method provides vibrant and robust spaces for retrospection and introspection and these enhance understanding and interpretation of both human experiences and natural phenomena. No wonder Nwaokugha and Ihuoma (2019) write that philosophical research methods enrich the knowledge industry across disciplines, sharpen the investigative skills of researchers, in addition to:

Boosting the confidence level of researchers as researchers see every challenge in any academic discipline as solvable and resolvable. In fact, philosophical method of enquiry stimulates in scholars the desire to critically and continuously try out new academic option that can result in phenomenal improvements of scholars and the breaking of new frontiers of knowledge (P.277).

Further benefits of the philosophical research method are provided by Nwaokugha and Danladi (2016:421) when they write that the philosophical research method:

Is not restrictive and consequently does not in any way impoverish researchers and disciplines that are favourably disposed to using it. It rather contributes in ground breaking breakthroughs in the knowledge industry. All these by implication mean that the knowledge industry and mankind can be better off in terms of opportunities associated with research, its contributions to improving human condition and acquisition of knowledge.

Studies that employ the philosophical research method are principally noted for clarifying concepts, which are the subject matter of investigations, so to the concept of university autonomy we now turn.

### **The Concept of University Autonomy**

Governments in responsible states, value university education and this accounts for why it is one of the most critical and sensitive areas in which governments invest heavily. Such heavy investments in university education are justified because issues bordering on the social, political, economic, scientific, technological and general advancements of the state receive priority attention among the topmost quality researches and educational provisions and services provided by the university. Outside specific researches in the universities, universities also focus on training high caliber personnel who specialize in the formulation of policies and programmes for the advancement of the goals and objectives of the state upon which, the state can attain her dreams and aspirations of national development. Equally, university education provides opportunities for actualizing the intellectual aspirations of the teeming population that graduate from secondary schools who aspire to acquire further knowledge, skills and competencies for continuous lifelong learning.

In a way, university education is the surest way any state can build sustainable capacity for developing critical manpower or human resources for public and private institutions. It is an open secret that the university contributes to the advancement and development of humanity and these numerous roles of the university help to critically shape the society for the better. No wonder the quality of university education in a state serves as a litmus test for judging the social, economic, cultural, political, religious, scientific and technological standing of that state including the amount of respect that state enjoys in comity of states. In fact, a state that is desirous of

moving to the next level especially initiating moves for migrating to knowledge-based economy must make substantial investments in her university education including embracing changes when it is inevitable there must be change.

In recent times, things have not been rosy in the university system and the sources of the challenges in the university have been phenomenal and multidimensional. The university serves virtually all the segments of the society so much that all the segments of the society have interests in what goes on in the university. These plethora of interests in what goes on in the university most time result in clash of interests and these clash of interests quickly snowball into complex and multiple challenges for the university at the levels of academic, management, staffing, administration and general issues in the university. The presence of all these affect the smooth functioning of the university both as “critic and conscience of the society” (Jones, Galvin and Woodhouse, 2000:10) and in the capacity of the university to be the hub for the production of human capital upon which the development of the state and the continuous flourishing of mankind depends. These challenges the university faces inherently make change and reform inevitable and constant variable and phenomenon in the university system and in the midst of all these, the university must exist and flourish for the continued existence and survival of man and his institutions. That this is the case makes the seal of change and reform constant variables in the affairs of the university.

As an institution where the best brains and think tanks of any society can be found, stakeholders in the university system and stakeholders outside the university speak in one voice that university autonomy is a new visionary direction, the university must take in order to remain sustainably meaningful to itself and to the society. The concept of autonomy is one in which much ink has been spilled in efforts to understand

and grasp its meaning. These efforts have produced scholars who maintain different positions about the concept. Following the different positions of scholars on the concept, it is worthwhile any serious discussion of the concept may well start with its etymological roots, followed by a thorough analysis of the concept.

Scholars such as Danurejo (1977), cited in Yulianto (2017), Manda-Taylor, Masiye and Mfutso-Bengo (2015) write that autonomy is derived from two Greek root words “auto” and “nomos” but the scholars differ slightly in their interpretations of the root words from which autonomy is derived. Whereas Danurejo (1977) cited in Yulianto (2017), hints that “auto” means ‘itself’ and ‘nomos’ means ‘punishment’ or ‘rule’. Manda-Taylor et al (2015) are of the view that ‘auto’ means ‘self’ while ‘nomos’ means ‘rule’ or ‘law’. What stands out as an uncontestable fact is that ‘auto’ and ‘nomos’ pair together to translate into one word-autonomy, which in contemporary usage means self-regulation, self rule or independence.

Generally speaking, an aura of interpretation and understanding that people commonly associate autonomy with is the idea of self rule, independence and self determination. When viewed critically and analytically, autonomy in real live situation can be invoked or said to exist in situations involving individuals, communities or institutions when such individuals, communities or institutions participate and contribute in determining their fate in matters of decisions and policies that concern them or put slightly different, the capacity of a state or its agencies to seek the informed consent of her citizens, entities or federating units and institutions in the state in formulating policies and programmes that concerns them. What has been said above is illuminated by the remark or observation made by Yulianto (2017:41) as he acknowledges that an “autonomous person is fundamentally one who is able to act according to his or her own direction, the prerequisite for rational human action”. This

meaning that has been established for autonomy of the individual can be extended to communities and institutions in the state.

Autonomy as a concept manifests some unique features and these features are sources of its popularity as a concept that is constantly focused at. Highlighting one of such features, Gray (2017:8) writes that autonomy is a slippery concept and to Kai and Li (2013:1) autonomy is a sensitive, complicated and multidimensional concept. That autonomy is multidimensional locates the concept within the frame of reference of concepts that are deep rooted in interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary discourse whose implications and application can be found in many disciplines. That autonomy is multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary may account for why Manda-Taylor et al (2015:1) write that autonomy is a central principle in bioethics and research ethics whose roots are deep rooted in moral and philosophical foundations. In furtherance to the acknowledgement of the multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary nature of autonomy, Kai and Li (2013) write that autonomy as a concept has become a central value in higher education such that it has become an increasing focus of attention since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century hence they maintain that it needs to be discussed in the context of recent changes taking place in higher education and the distinctive epistemologies that undergird higher education in different regions.

That autonomy appears in different academic disciplines and contexts means that autonomy is a contested concept and consequently needs adequate analysis and clarification on the context in which it is to be used. In other words, autonomy is a concept that is contested as well as a concept that is contextual. The contestability of autonomy is that it has potentials to be associated with more than one meaning or interpretation and its contextuality or context dependence is that the way and manner it is applied and interpreted in one discipline or one state can be different from

how it can be applied and interpreted in another discipline or state.

Now that it has been established that autonomy is multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary, it is appropriate that one looks at what autonomy means in each of the disciplines where it is a focus of attention. Autonomy in moral, political and bioethics philosophy, according to Manda-Taylor et al (2015:1), means the capacity of a rational individual to make an informed and uncoerced decision. In the field of medicine, autonomy according to Singh and Hytton (2015) revolves around the concept of respect for persons, which is a fundamental ethical principle that guides clinical practice and research of mental health professionals that makes case for the provision of space or opportunity for a health professional to grant his or her patient some measure of freedom to make some choices or input after due considerations of the potential advantages and disadvantages of such option by the health professional. Phenomenal success in the forms of manifestation of positive emotions, receptivity to treatment and cooperation with health professionals have been recorded among health professionals who respect the rights of their patient in the course of their treatment and the reverse has been the case in the cases of health professionals who compromise by ignoring the rights of their patients in the course of the patient's medical treatments.

In institutions such as university, which is the scope of this paper, university autonomy or institutional autonomy has a plethora of definitions from individuals and institutions. According to Yulianto (2017:4), university autonomy "means the university has its own right to govern itself without being influenced by others". According to the Lima Declaration on Academic freedom and Autonomy of Higher Education (1988), university autonomy is defined as "the independence from the state and other pressures of the society to make decisions regarding its self-governance, finance, administration and establish its policies of

education, research, extension work and their related activities" (WUS, 1988). In his own contribution on the subject matter of university autonomy, Estermann (2015:29) writes that institutional (university) autonomy refers to the "constantly changing relation between the state and the universities and the differing degree of control exerted by public authorities which are dependent on particular national context and circumstance". Noorda (2013:3) writes that academic autonomy "is an umbrella concept, denoting the autonomy or self-governance of a university by virtue of its academic role and status."

No matter the angle from which university autonomy is defined, a common denominator that unites them all is the idea of self-governance of the university by those who are entrusted with the responsibility of looking after the university and thus by implication means that there should be no interference from the state or its agencies in the governance of the university. It has to be stressed that the move or drive for autonomy in the affairs of the university is a change mantra that is targeted at overcoming challenges that the universities face at the academic, administrative and managerial levels. In fact, university autonomy is a modern direction with rays of optimism that are capable of repositioning the university system in directions that can spur stakeholders into actions that can lead to the development of innovations whose exploration the university can capitalize upon to meet up its vision and mission. It is strongly believed that a regime of university autonomy can make all stakeholders in the university system answerable and accountable to the state or their principals and under the regime of university autonomy, citizens can maximally benefit from the existence of a university in their vicinity or locality.

Basically, university autonomy varies significantly in philosophy and operational details across states but despite such differences in philosophy and varieties in operational details, a practice that is

common is that majority of the states limit their operation of university autonomy to the following areas:

- i. Organizational autonomy
- ii. Financial autonomy
- iii. Staffing autonomy
- iv. Academic autonomy

Organizational autonomy of the university focuses on the governance and administrative structure or leadership model that exists in a university. Every university has a governance or leadership structure that prescribes the order in which the governance of a university is to take place and in this structure, the order of authority is established, including who should be accountable to whom. A robust framework is usually established by law concerning how decisions are to be reached in the university and depending on what the laws that established a university prescribes, a university can have a dual (bicameral) or unitary governance structure. Not minding that the governance structure of a university can be dual or unitary, what is more common in university in Nigeria is the dual (bicameral) governance structure that consists of a Council or board and a Senate. The council or board has a limited size while the senate has a more inclusive membership that cuts across all layers of the university community. According to Estermann and Nokkala (2009:12),

In a dual structure, the board/council is often responsible for more long term strategic decisions such as deciding on statutes, strategic plan, selection of rector or vice rectors and budget allocation. The senate is often responsible for academic issues such as curriculum, degrees and staff promotions. The senate in these cases consists mainly of internal members of the university community sometimes only professors, but in most cases also representatives of the other categories of teaching staff, administrative staff and students.

Gray (2017:9) list additional responsibilities of the council when he writes that “in most universities, councils are responsible for appointments, setting fees, admission criteria, offering, qualification mixes, developing budget, implementing strategic plan and so on without too much interference or direction from the state”. The Council or board usually has external members who are appointees or representatives of the government and their services are most needed in the most important issues and decisions concerning their respective universities. It has to be noted that the appointment of external members into the council makes universities accountable to their stakeholders, constituencies and society.

#### **Financial autonomy**

Financing autonomy of the university focuses on ways of raising fund and ways of funding the university. According to Estermann and Nokkala (2009:18) financial autonomy of the university revolves round the following:

1. The extent to which they (universities) can accumulate reserve and keep surplus on state funding
2. The ability of universities to set tuition fees
3. Their ability to borrow money on the financial market
4. Their ability to invest in financial products
5. Their ability to issues shares and bonds
6. Their ability to own the land and building they occupy.

One has to note that the above listed points upon which financial autonomy of the university revolves may not apply equally across universities in the world due to the model of autonomy allowed by law in the particular state. Considered in its entirety, financial autonomy of the university can be said to revolve around the ability and capacity of a university to venture into activities that can generate



income for the university. In any meaningful discussion of university autonomy, financial autonomy takes a centre stage because the ability of the other dimensions of autonomy, for instance, staffing and academic autonomy to be meaningful, depends on the vibrancy and robustness of financial autonomy.

A common source of funding for the universities comes from the students and this is in the form of tuition fees and administrative charges. Tuition fees are fees that students pay annually while such fees as entrance fees, matriculation/convocation fees and certification fees qualify as administrative fees. The fact that autonomy varies in operational details shows in the way and manner universities have different payment schedules for students in a state and in the same university. In some states, provisions are made where the state sponsors the education of some students in some disciplines and in the same state, payment of tuition fees may be graded so much that students in some faculties and disciplines pay higher than the others. A glaring example of a case of difference in payment of tuition fees is what obtains in state owned universities where what is paid by indigenes of the state is different from what non-indigenes pay. In addition to tuition and administrative charges, public universities also get their funding from grants and subvention from the state.

**Staffing autonomy:** Staffing autonomy is the capacity of a university to recruit the right calibre of staff into its work force. Staff recruitment issues in most universities are integrally related to two dimensions of autonomy namely financial and academic autonomy. This is so because the ability of a university to recruit staff is dependent on how financially buoyant the university is and how financially buoyant a university brings in the state or the funder of a particular university into focus. What this reveals is that staffing and staff recruitment in some state follows a line where approval must be obtained from the appropriate

quarters notably the government or the financiers of the university in question. In fact, in staffing and staff recruitment issues, states are at liberty to operate within the space provided them by the model of autonomy they operate. For instance, universities in Nigeria recruit their staff after securing approval to do so from the appropriate quarters but there are countries where universities simply inform the government of staff vacancies to be filled up or recruited, and the actual recruitment is undertaken for the universities by a national body that is charged with such responsibility.

**Academic autonomy:** An idea upon which academic autonomy revolves is the ability of universities to determine for themselves their curriculum, syllabus, what to teach, how to teach and what to research on, and how to evaluate the students. A critical scrutiny of this shows that academic autonomy makes case for individual universities and individual lecturers to define what they want to do within the framework of teaching, learning, research, community service etc. that can lead to their achieving their individual mission and vision. This translates into given universities and their lecturers free hands in formulating their academic policies, programmes and academic profile without any interference or interruption from the state or any of its agencies.

Any insightful observer who keeps tract with the foregoing discussion on university autonomy can quickly come to the conclusion that university autonomy has potentials which when appropriately tapped can make the university accountable in addition to refocusing the university for the better. That autonomy as a reform mantra has potentials to make the university become accountable is responsible for the encomium and accolade that scholars associate it with such as a precondition that enable universities to achieve their mission in the best possible ways (Estermann, 2015), a basic quality of modern universities

(Noorda, 2013) and a success factor for universities in the next decade (Rapp, 2009). The implications of these remarks are that university autonomy is associated with a lot of benefits that promise repositioning the university for greater productivity and efficiency. The next section of the paper focuses on the prospects of university autonomy in Nigeria.

### **Prospects of University Autonomy**

There are many prospects which states that have made university autonomy a norm stand to gain. Autonomy transforms the university system so much that individual universities can re-strategize so as to address local, regional and national needs of the people and this re-strategizing comes with enhanced improvement in research, management of resources, improved teaching and learning that can result in improved production of human capital. A feature which systematically becomes a norm in a regime of university autonomy is accountability and in a university where accountability prevails, such university can meaningfully generate and successfully manage its resources including initiating programmes and policies that can make it relevant to the society. What this suggests is that universities in a regime of university autonomy are better placed to initiate strategic programmes and policies that can encourage and promote moves towards corporate and entrepreneurial innovations. The embrace of corporate and entrepreneurial principles in the affairs of a university promises bringing about increase in the profile and reputation of the university and this pragmatically means that the university can become more attractive and consequently can enjoy the patronage of members of the society. Becoming more attractive to members of the society has an aura that suggests that the autonomous university can be higher in generating resources and in achieving those mission and vision upon which the university was up.

Universities where autonomy has become norms are more likely to be flexible and this has potentials and capacity to relax heavy bureaucratic bottlenecks and externally imposed standards that may impede the smooth operations of the university. By this development, universities that are autonomous or that operate on autonomous principles or paradigms can better manage their resources and quickly perform the functions of a university in a fast changing world. More importantly, vibrant and robust environments that support innovations and creativity in universities can flourish maximally in higher education institutions where autonomy has come to stay.

University autonomy is said to promote good governance in the university system in addition to aligning or identifying the university with criteria and conditions for achieving world class university status. A university attaining world class university status through university autonomy suggests that performance and productivity may be higher in such university and what this exposes is that such autonomy makes universities to find their rhythm in term of cutting edge innovations and quality researches that can make them hold their heads in the face of competition from other universities. To be added is that autonomous universities entrench a sense of hardwork, curiosity, creative and critical thinking skills in their stakeholders, implying that autonomous universities systematically add quality to their staff, students and other critical stakeholders.

University autonomy challenges universities to reposition in readiness for addressing the core mandate upon which they are established, which is identifying the genuine needs of their immediate environment or region and developing them. This is possible because university autonomy boosts the desire of higher education institutions to achieve their organizational and general objectives. Put slightly different, universities that are autonomous are more likely to achieve their

mission and vision than universities that are not autonomous.

Universities that are autonomous can quickly reach decisions during emergencies and ability to reach decisions during emergencies means that such universities can successfully and judiciously manage their finances, manage their internal crises and can better develop mechanisms for responding to the demands of a fast growing world. Reaching decisions quickly, prudent management of the finances of an institution and the development of mechanisms for responding to the demands of a fast changing world suggest that universities that are autonomous can be more receptive and responsive to producing candidates who can qualitatively respond to the challenges of a contemporary world.

The ability of individual universities to reach their own decisions without external interferences has potentials to introduce a culture of healthy competition among stakeholders in the universities that can promote unrestrained objective enquiry, creative and innovative thinking in those saddled with the responsibilities of running the universities on one hand and enhance a sense of genuine commitment and hope in every other stakeholder in the university system. Pragmatically, individuals in universities where their intellectual contributions are part of the ideas for the advancement of their university become more responsive and receptive to the point of being more challenged and encouraged to do more and this results in such individuals volunteering more ideas and showing more commitments in the success of their university. As positive actions of personnel in autonomous universities bring about rise in the profile of their universities, such rise in profile of their university repositions their university for the better and this is most visible in the attraction of students from across the world to the university – a development that also helps to improve the revenue earnings, entrepreneurial and industrial partnerships of the university.

## **CONCLUSION**

One area of increasing attention since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is the need to address academic, administrative and management challenges in the university. These challenges have made reforms and innovations re-occurring decimals in the affairs of the university. One reform and innovation that has become so popular in meeting the yearnings and aspirations of the stakeholders in the university system is university autonomy. Generally autonomy is a sensitive and multidimensional concept whose multidimensionality locates or situates it at the centre of concepts that are multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary and whose epistemological applications and implications can be found in many disciplines. In this paper, the focus is on autonomy in the education industry and detailed attention has been on its prospects in the university system.

An understanding that people commonly associate university autonomy with is a practice where the university decides or determines for itself what policies, programmes or lines of action to take so as to enhance the achievements of the mission and vision of the university. Any university that make autonomy its operational and guiding principle can be quickly transformed to address the mission and vision of the university and among areas of accelerated improvements in the university can be quality teaching, learning and research, prudent generation and management of resource, accountability, a move towards corporate and entrepreneurial innovations. Corporate and entrepreneurial innovations can be sure platforms for enhancing the profile, recognition and reputation of a university, developments that can make the university more attractive, in addition to exposing a university to better industrial and corporate partnerships with sister institutions in the state. It is instructive to note that a regime of university autonomy has potentials to challenge stakeholders in the university into demonstrating extra

professional obligation and zeal in engineering critical and insightful revolutions that can commit individual stakeholders into generating the best ideas for the progress and development of their university.

These positive developments and initiatives develop tap roots in a regime of university autonomy simply because university autonomy makes the university system more flexible by relaxing externally imposed bureaucratic bottlenecks that impede the smooth administration of the university. What this translates into is that university autonomy facilitates decision making process of the university and this by implication suggests that university autonomy promotes good governance in the university.

Reforms and innovations in the university are constant variables and consequently should be considered as processes that are continuously in motion and a people who are desirous of sustaining university autonomy must be made to understand that it is a dynamic and evolutionary process that changes over time and in its ability to change over time, it continuously and consistently makes new demands from its practitioners. This is where stakeholders need continuous education on the operational details of the concept so that certain critical behavioural dispositions such as flexibility, being receptive to change, insightful, critical and analytic mindedness etc can become visible daily behaviours in a people who aspire and desire to make university autonomy a norm. Where stakeholders realize the fact that university autonomy is always under way or is an on-going process that can never be finished in the affairs of the university system, then the foundations and genes that can make it flourish have been laid and planted for the sustainable growth and development of the university and by extension the sustainable growth and development of humanity.

## REFERENCES

1. Estermann, T. & Nokkala, T. (2009). University autonomy in Europe 1 exploratory study. Belgium: European University Association, E UA Publications.
2. Estermann, T. (2015). University autonomy in Europe. Online Available at: <https://croe.ca.uk/reader/197252400>.
3. Gray, B. L. (2017). Despite these many Challenges: the textual construction of autonomy of a corporatized South African University. In *Education as change* . 21 (3) pp 1-21.
4. Hirst, P. H. & White, P (2000). The analytic tradition and philosophy of education: an historical perspective. In P.H. Hirst and P White (eds). *Philosophy of education: major themes in the analytic tradition, volume 1, philosophy of education*; London; Routledge.
5. Jones, D.G, Galvin, K. & Woodhouse, A. (2000). *Universities as critic and conscience of society: The role of academic freedom*; New Zealand, New Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit, AAU Series on Quality, November 6.
6. Kai, R. & Li, J. (2013). Academic freedom and institutional autonomy: a higher education policy perspective. In *higher Education policy*,26 (4) pp 507-522.
7. Lima Declaration on Academic freedom and Autonomy institution of higher Education, (1988). Geneva, Switzaland World University Service Retrieved from:<https://www.wusgermany.de/sites/wusgermany.de/files/userfiles/WUS.internationales/wus-lima-englisch.pdf>.
8. Manda, Taylor, L, Masiye, F & Mfutso-Bengo J (2015) *Autonomy*, on line, Retrieved from <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/276144606>
9. Noorda, S (2013).Academic autonomy as a lifelong learning process. In *leadership and Governance in Higher Education Volume No 4* pp 1-16.
10. Nwaokugha, D.O. & Danladi, S.A.(2016). Language and adopting Africa's Worldviews on education in Nigeria's educational practices. In *Educational Journal of Multidisciplinary studies (EJMUDIS)* 78, (4). pp 272-286.
11. Rapp, J. (2009). Foreword in *university autonomy in Europe 1: exploratory study* by T. Esterman and T. Nokkala. Belgium,

- European University Association, EUA Publications.
12. Singh, J. P. and Hylton, T. (2015). Autonomy/respect for person. Online available at: <https://www.reseachgate.net/publication/313966728>
13. Yulianto, S.E (2017). The implementation of higher education autonomy in Indonesia: Problems and Challenges. In *European Journal of Research and Reflection in Management Sciences*, 5 (3), pp 39-50.
- How to cite this article: Nwaokugha DO. Prospects of University Autonomy in Nigeria. *International Journal of Research and Review*. 2021; 8(1): 99-111.

\*\*\*\*\*