

## INTERESTED PARTIES AND SELECTION OF VICE CHANCELLOR IN SELECTED SOUTH WEST UNIVERSITIES IN NIGERIA

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### Abstract

*Selection of leadership roles in university system has to do with the ability to get things done with the support and cooperation of other people within the institution. Leadership in the universities in Nigeria is handled by Vice-Chancellors and they are regarded as critical academic leaders because of the executive powers and roles attached to their offices. In choosing Vice-Chancellors of these higher institutions of learning, various actors are at play, both internal i.e. the Visitor, governing council and the university senate, as well as external interest parties such as politicians, businessmen, religious leaders, among others. This study examined the roles and influences of these various interest parties in the selection of Vice-chancellors in selected public universities in Southwest Nigeria. The theory adopted for the research is stakeholder theory. Primary and secondary sources of data served as the sources of information gathering. Interviews were conducted with various stakeholders in the university environments. The study found out that the major stakeholders (the Visitor, governing council and university senate) are backed up by law to appoint vice-chancellors based on laid down principles and merits. However, especially in the contemporary times, external interest parties (politicians, traditional rulers, religious leaders, etc.) have been influencing the process. Also, the interference of these stakeholders has caused many crises that resulted in loss of merit and quality in the governance of these institutions. Some of the interest parties have descend so low as to engage in dubious activities due to the interference. The research recommends harmonization of genuine concerns of interested parties in ways that meritocracy and integrity can be prioritized to ensure the appointment of competent and qualified individuals.*

**Keywords:** Interest Parties, Selection, Southwest University, Stakeholder, Vice-chancellor

## **1.0 Introduction**

Leadership in the University system has to do with the ability to get things done with the support and cooperation of other people within the institution, organisation or system. Leadership in the Universities in Nigeria is handled by Vice-Chancellors. In Nigeria, the Vice-Chancellors are regarded as critical academic leaders because of their executive powers and roles that are attached to their offices. Vice-Chancellors are the head of the Universities in Nigeria. Their roles and functions are very crucial to the development of the university system in Nigeria (Ogunode, et al, 2022). The Vice-Chancellor is the principal academic and administrative officer of the University. He/she chairs the Council of the University, the General Board of the Faculties and the Finance Committee of the Council. Among the main tasks of the Vice-Chancellor are to provide academic and administrative leadership to the whole University; represent the University externally; secure a financial base sufficient to allow the delivery of the University's mission, aims and objectives; carry out certain important ceremonial and civic duties (Ogunode, 2023).

Vice-Chancellors are entrusted with the duty of overseeing the daily operations of their respective universities, guaranteeing the successful attainment of educational objectives. As leaders, they hold a crucial role in guiding their teams of lecturers, students, non-teaching staff, parents, and the communities towards achieving educational objectives. The success of these goals largely relies on effective school management overseen by the Vice-Chancellor. Hence, it is imperative to designate capable and effective individuals as the Vice-chancellors, as they bear the primary responsibility for the school's atmosphere, productivity levels, and the satisfaction of both students and staff. Researchers have noted that the Vice-Chancellor plays a crucial role in the administration of the university, as the school's overall effectiveness and efficiency substantially rely on their abilities, skills, personality, and professional competence (Visigah, 2019). Vice-Chancellors play crucial roles in developing high-quality education system and generating sufficient human resources to support and promote the socioeconomic and political progress of the nation. To achieve this purpose, it is imperative for the Government, at both the Federal and State levels, as well as Promoters, to ensure that only individuals who possess the utmost integrity and fitness are hired.

Therefore, it is essential to have rigorous, clear, and well-defined selection processes in order to establish and maintain successful universities. Typically, the Vice Chancellor is chosen from a pool of professors within the university, although in rare instances, they may be selected from outside the institution. Consequently, it is contended that the selection of a Vice Chancellor is always a challenging endeavour. The selection for the position of Vice-Chancellor should be based exclusively on merit. In theory, this task should be challenging in an environment consisting of highly skilled instructors with extensive expertise. Given that the Vice-Chancellor will have a position of leadership as a 'first among equals', researchers have put forth certain elements that should be taken into account during the appointment process (Folabit, et al, 2023).

The potential venture capitalist should exhibit the ability to establish a collective vision, articulate and obtain agreement on educational objectives, establish and convey standards for achieving optimal performance, exhibit proficiency in overseeing the standard of instruction and fostering a constructive atmosphere of ambition, assistance, and

cooperation. A candidate in this role is also expected to have the ability to create and execute clear improvement plans and policies based on evidence, as well as to drive innovation and facilitate change, have the ability to effectively allocate and manage the university's people, physical, and financial resources. Furthermore, he/she must be academically qualified, that is, in the rank of a professor, among other qualifications and skills.

Undoubtedly, it is evident that the Government, at both the Federal and State levels, together with Promoters and Governing Councils involved in the nomination of Vice-Chancellors of institutions, no longer adhere to the established decorum or correct method. According to Visigah, (2019), the process of selecting and appointing the Vice-Chancellor is being influenced by the political affiliation and ethnicity of the candidates. The process is now primarily influenced by personal connections rather than qualifications or abilities. Candidates are granted preferential treatment due to the practice of god-fatherism and their connections with influential leaders in the state. In addition, nepotism has been prevalent in the selection and appointment process and this occurs due to the prevalence of ethnocentrism, as well as bribery and corruption in our society. The individuals in leadership positions in the specified ministry and parastatals show a preference for candidates who come from their hometown, speak the same dialect, or have the same religious affiliations. Tribalism exists due to the presence of numerous tribes inside the state (ibid).

Therefore, this study aims to ascertain the interested parties and their roles in the selection of Vice Chancellor in selected South-West universities in Nigeria.

## 2.0 Literature Review

The appointment of a vice chancellor in Nigeria, particularly in publicly funded universities, is frequently as contentious as it is turbulent, sending the parties involved to court. In fact, the selection of VC could be compared to a tug of war. Ahaotu & Ogunode (2021) opined that, in an effort to select the most qualified individuals to serve as leaders, many universities across the nation are still treating wounds. This process has created issues in places like Ibadan, Lagos, Oye Ekiti, and Dutse. Despite the fact that other places like Lokoja and Ndufe alike have had their issues fixed, there were still additional concerns. In both federal and state universities, the appointment of pioneer Vice-Chancellors by the Visitor is the customary practice for making administrative appointments. The President of Nigeria or the Governor of a State is typically invited to serve as the Visitor at Public Universities in Nigeria. It is the owner for private educational institutions. In the case of successive appointments, a vacancy is announced in a newspaper advertising six months before the end of the term of the person currently occupying the position.

A number of years of post-professorial qualification, academic and administrative credentials, and experience in a variety of other roles are some of the conditions that are listed in the advertising. Candidates are eliminated one by one when the submission period has ended and the deadline has passed. It is customary for interviews to take place in a variety of settings, although the Visitor, board of trustees, or governing council may express a preference for one person over another. In past years, this system operated without a hitch, but in more recent times, it has been subjected to increased strain. The concern is that tainted hands on the part of operators may make any system unreliable. As a result of this,

chairmen and powerful members of a university's governing council may favour a certain applicant, and it may not always be the best candidate, either as a form of patronage (as prescribed by the authorities that appointed them) or as a reward for the highest bidder (Dirrler, 2022).

There is also the more overt kind of corruption, in which it is believed that certain vice-chancellors bought their positions with significant quantities of money. Additionally, playing a part are the staff unions. They support political candidates in the pretence that doing so will promote the cause of the staff. However, in the vast majority of instances, there are also other disruptive forces at play. These include political intervention in addition to other concerns, such as calls for a "son of the soil" (a member of the host state or community) or a member of a religious organisation. The most obvious factor is the concentration of power and access to rich opportunities within the work. They have access to the patronage power that comes with interacting with powerful people, such as politicians, traditional rulers, and religious leaders, and are courted by these individuals. Vice-chancellors interact with powerful people, such as politicians, traditional rulers, and religious leaders. It is probable that a large number of individuals worked behind the scenes to ensure that they were elected in the first place (Ogunode, et al, 2022).

Additionally, vice-chancellors are awarded considerable salary for the duties they play. The sum amount of the pay, perks, and allowances earned by the vice chancellor of a public university is noticeably larger than that of the top earning professor. This is because the vice chancellor is in charge of the institution. Moreover, throughout the tenure of the bearer of the office, the office is showered with patronage as well as gifts throughout the year, notably on religious and commemorative occasions. One last thing to think about is how power is going to be utilised. Vice-chancellors have the ability to significantly enhance the careers of allies or competitors, or to severely impede their careers. They are also complicit in the doling out of favouritism within the system due to the fact that they endorse or appoint the chair and members of influential boards or committees; they chair the appointments and promotions committee, which gives them the authority to determine who will serve as external assessors of professorial candidates.

In addition to this, it is under their purview to select the members of the committee that will be serving. To put it another way, they are the ones who determine the extent to which their non-professorial colleagues will grow in their careers. Last but not least, in many cases, they are also in a position to exercise some level of control over the selection of those who will succeed them in office because they are the ones who make the nominations for the people who will serve as their deputies. This is the case because they are the ones who choose who will serve as their deputies (Jacob, 2020).

## **2.1 Theoretical Framework**

The following theory explains this study:

### **Stakeholder Theory**

Any one or group interested in a particular institution, project or business is called a stakeholder. People in different kinds of circumstances evaluate the status quo of others on any given issue, so as to make them measure the level of backing or hostility from others, and also to envisage how they will act if changes occur. Stakeholder theory is used to

understand a system by recognising the major stakeholders or actors in the structure, and to be able to assess their corresponding interests in, or power on that structure. Stakeholders are the people that matter to the system, those with the interests or rights in a system (Lovric, 2019).

Grimble and Wellard (1997) described stakeholders as any group of individuals, structured or unstructured, who have a mutual concern or stake in a precise subject or system, they can be at any level or placement in a society, from universal, nationwide and provincial concerns down to the level of domestic or intra-domestic and be groups of any magnitude or accretion. They identified stakeholders to include policy makers, commercial bodies, subsistence farmers, planners and administrators, other small-scale resource users, and additional imprecise groupings such as “future generations,” the “national interest,” and “wider society”. Stakeholders are collections, communities, social actors, or associations of all kinds of sizes or aggregation that act at different stages (local, domestic, regional, private, public, national and international), have an important and particular share in a particular set of resources, and can influence or be influenced by resource administration complications or interferences (Grimble & Man-Kwun, 2009). Stakeholders are generally composed of shareholders and other financiers, suppliers, employees, clients, communities, and the government. Stakeholders are groups or people who are able to influence or be influenced by the operation of business (Freeman, 1984), or simply put as anyone meaningfully influencing or influenced by some other person’s decision-making activity. From the definition above, the list of possible stakeholders can be virtually limitless (Azapagic, 2004). The theory defines the collaboration and interrelation of the numerous stakeholders.

According to Figar and Figar (2011), stakeholders are of two (2) concepts, and they are:

- (i) The stakeholders as personalities or parties who influence the corporation (system) or rest on the corporation (system),
- (ii) The other one is the model of stakeholders to create the burden or convey benefits to the corporation (system).

Stakeholder theory endeavours to address the “principle of who or what really counts” (Freeman, 1984). The theory defines the interactive and interconnectivity of different stakeholders, thus it is inviting examination of the power connection between parties and persons and their separate interests in a resource or circumstance. It further identifies major disparities within parties and aspects of possible unifying ground and practicable interventions purposed at having an improved management of natural resources and issues associated with them (ibid). Stakeholder theory has its focus on the affiliation among business or institutions and the parties and people who can influence or be influenced by it (Smudde & Coutright, 2011).

Furthermore, Freeman et al (2007), divided stakeholders into two (2) segments, and they are the primary stakeholders and the secondary stakeholders. Primary stakeholders are the ones precisely connected to the company (system) like clients, financiers, workforces, merchants or communities, while secondary stakeholders, who are not precisely related to the company (system) such as media, government, opponents, customer organisations, or other similar groups. Thus, the stakeholders under these two phases in this study are categorised into primary stakeholders who are people directly connected to the issue of

study, and they are the Visitor, the governing council and the university senate, while secondary stakeholders are those who are not directly connected to the issue of study, and they are the politicians, businessmen, traditional rulers, religious leaders, and the members of staff within the university community.

### **3.0 Methodology**

The study adopts the descriptive research design. Three (3) federal universities were selected (University of Ibadan, University of Lagos and Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife). The data was collected from key stakeholders in the selected universities such as Vice-Chancellors, Deputy Vice Chancellors, principal officers, senior staff of these higher institutions, and others considered relevant to this study. Purposive sampling method was adopted in selecting the respondents used for the study due to availability and readiness. Ten (10) respondents (principal officers based on availability and willingness) were chosen from each of the selected universities. The research relies on both Primary and Secondary sources of data. Hence, the research instrument used are Interview sessions, that is, In-depth Interviews (IDI), and Key-Informant Interviews (KII). Secondary source of data on conceptual clarifications, theoretical framework, and related review to the topic of study includes, journals, books, newspapers, library (both physical and online) materials, articles, reports, and magazines was also used. Content analysis and descriptive procedure were used to analyse the collected data.

### **4.0 Results and Discussion of Findings**

The appointment of VCs involves certain stakeholders. The main stakeholders in the selection of VCs are as follows;

The Visitor

The Governing Council

The University Senate

In Nigerian universities, governance is structured around several key bodies, each playing a significant role in decision-making, oversight, and the maintenance of academic standards. Among these, the Visitor holds a position of paramount importance. Typically representing the President of Nigeria or a state governor, depending on the university's ownership (federal or state), the Visitor wields ultimate authority and oversight over the institution. While often ceremonial in nature, the Visitor possesses the power to appoint key officials, approve budgets, and intervene in matters of governance when deemed necessary. As such, the Visitor's influence is profound, particularly in the appointment of top university officials like the Vice-Chancellor. One of the respondents stated that;

“Different interest parties influence the selection process of VCs. The Visitor; who wheels so much power in the appointment of major officers, making major governance decisions; the senate, which upholds academic standards and the governing council which is the highest decision-making structure in universities. They all have great influence in the selection process” (Interview, 2023).

The Governing Council stands as another vital component of the university's governance structure. As the highest decision-making body, the Council is tasked with setting strategic direction, overseeing financial management, and ensuring adherence to regulations.

Comprising eminent individuals from various sectors, including government representatives, alumni, and experts from academia and industry, the Council holds authority over critical matters such as the appointment of the Vice-Chancellor, approval of budgets and major policies, and oversight of academic standards and infrastructure development. In essence, the Council plays a pivotal role in steering the university's course and ensuring its continued growth and development.

Within the academic realm, the University Senate holds sway. As the academic authority within the institution, the Senate is entrusted with upholding and enhancing academic standards, curriculum development, and the conferral of degrees. Composed of senior academic staff, including professors and department heads, the Senate bears responsibility for overseeing academic programs, reviewing and endorsing academic policies, and evaluating faculty performance. By maintaining a focus on academic excellence, the Senate ensures the integrity of the university's educational offerings, conducts examinations, and makes recommendations for the award of degrees. In this manner, the Senate serves as a cornerstone of the university's academic mission, safeguarding the quality and rigor of its educational programs.

Together, these bodies form the backbone of governance in Nigerian universities, working in concert to uphold the institution's values, promote accountability, and foster an environment conducive to teaching, learning, and research. Through their collective efforts, they navigate the complexities of university administration, steer the institution towards its goals, and uphold its commitment to excellence in education and scholarship.

Appointment and selection of leaders in Nigerian universities system is so competitive and complex. In the ideal situation, the choice made by the Visitor is acceptable to all due to the rigorous process that went into the selection of the candidates. However, the reality is different.

Another respondent, stated that;

“The process of selecting VC in Nigerian universities is often fraught with several anomalies with various interest groups jostling to gain the upper hand. Many elites in the country are interested in the positions of leadership in the universities because of their interest” (Interview, 2023).

92% of the respondents interviewed in this study corroborated with the above statement. The politicians, businessmen, traditional rulers and host communities are so interested on who is appointed or selected to occupy positions of leaderships in the universities.

This aligned with some studies that Vice-Chancellors have the power of patronage as they interface with – and are courted by – powerful people such as politicians, traditional rulers and religious leaders. Many might have helped them into office in the first instance (Olukoju, 2021).

The recruitment and selection of Vice-Chancellors in the Nigerian university system have been significantly impacted by political interference and vested interests. Both federal ministers and state Governors often try to influence the appointment of vice chancellors of universities at both federal and state levels. Punch newspaper article in 2021, observed, that, despite the position of the law and laid down procedures, the selection of vice-chancellors in public universities is frequently influenced by the primordial emotions and power dynamics of influential individuals. This is backed by one of the interview responses. Another respondent revealed that;

“The selection of individuals for VC positions is heavily influenced by politics and nepotism, rather than their merit. This has led to the exploitation of divisions among staff and management, with little regard for their academic and administrative abilities. Conflict, legal action, and triviality have displaced the emphasis on high-quality research, teaching, and training, which are the defining characteristics of university education” (Interview, 2023).

The interference and influence of interested parties especially in the recent times have been overwhelming, as all the stakeholders have different interests to achieve with the appointment of their candidates. However, this has been generating various issues which are detrimental to the progress of the institutions.

## **5.0 Conclusion**

This study examined the roles and various influences of the interested parties on the appointment Vice-Chancellors in South-West Nigerian universities. These have generated different issues by the internal and external interests. While the law recognizes key stakeholders such as the Visitor, governing council, and university senate in the appointment process, the other stakeholders such as the politicians, businessmen, traditional rulers, religious leaders and host communities also have their various influences in one way or the other. The interests of these stakeholders can be harmonised in ways that can produce good candidates with the major consideration for merits and progress of the institutions.

## **5.1 Recommendations**

Based on the conclusion, the following recommendations are made:

- (i) **Mitigation of External Influences:** Measures should be put in place to mitigate external influences, such as parochial interests and tribalism, in the selection process of Vice-Chancellors. The genuine concerns of interested parties can be harmonised in such ways that meritocracy and integrity can be prioritized to ensure the appointment of competent and qualified individuals.
- (ii) **Inclusive Stakeholder Engagement:** While the law may not mandate the consultation of other stakeholders in the Vice-Chancellor appointment process, universities should adopt inclusive practices by soliciting their input and feedback. This will foster a sense of ownership and involvement among stakeholders, thereby reducing conflicts.

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