

# Administrators' Perception of Leadership Tenure on Goal Attainment at Nigerian Federal Universities

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## ABSTRACT

University goal attainment (GA) is the extent to which universities achieve their vision through teaching, research, and community services (CSs). However, the literature shows that the GA is diminishing in Federal Universities (FUs) in Nigeria, particularly in the southwest. Previous studies on GA have emphasized leadership and participatory management practices more than the leadership tenure (LT) factor. Therefore, this study was designed to examine administrators' perceptions of the influence of LTs on GAs in FUs in southwestern Nigeria. The survey research design of the ex-post-facto type was adopted for this study. Qualitative data were collected through the Key Informant Interview (KII). The sample size for this study comprised three deans and 37 Heads of Departments (HoDs) from the University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, and the University of Lagos, Akoka. Content analysis was used to analyze information obtained from heads of departments and deans across three FUs selected for the study. The HoDs and Deans exhibited a democratic leadership style, whereas the LT factor varied from two to four years across the universities. The LTs, though sacrosanct, varied across the universities. The leadership time frame, experience, and style were potent variables in the GA of FUs in southwestern Nigeria. Leadership experience, style, and LT should be improved for effective university service delivery.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Nigerian universities aspire to be elite, highly regarded centres of academic excellence that align with these universities' missions and visions. The majority of Nigerian universities have similar visions despite having different missions. According to Okebukola and Saliu [1], there are four common missions shared by global universities: fostering opportunities for personal growth, disseminating cultural heritage, expanding

knowledge via research and creative endeavours, and serving the public interest. Nigerian universities have also articulated these shared visions and missions, albeit in distinct ways. Nigerian universities actively work to achieve their declared objectives through instruction, research and development, knowledge creation and dissemination, international collaboration, and community-focused services [2].

Goal attainment is the degree to which academic institutions fulfil their missions. All universities must clearly state their vision and mission statements, which should act as a catalyst for achieving their objectives and a catchy, inspiring element. In separate studies by Abiodun-Oyebanji and Oyedeji [3] and Oyedeji [4], goal attainment is how universities achieve their vision and missions through teaching, research, and community services. Thus, teaching, research, and community services are the three main ways universities can achieve their objectives on local and global scales. A university is considered world-class if it can achieve these objectives. As a result, it is important to assess how much the Nigerian university system pursues these three essential strategies for achieving its objectives. The achievement of university goals has been frequently questioned in recent years because of its low levels of teaching, research, and community services. According to Oyedeji [4] and Raji and Oyedeji [5], problems in many Nigerian universities with the calibre of research output, community service, and teaching must be investigated and appropriately addressed.

According to Abiodun-Oyebanji and Oyedeji [3], interruptions in university academic programs frequently impede effective instruction and students' learning outcomes, which can inevitably affect institutions' ability to meet their objectives. It might be challenging for many lecturers to finish their course outlines because of the disruption caused by the strike. Due to frequent strikes and disagreements among academic staff, students do not have enough time to finish their practicals and coursework. Course outlines and objectives are typically hurried through to compensate for lost time due to strikes. This kind of academic madness may seriously threaten attaining objectives in Nigerian universities. Zafar and Akhtar [6] also reported that those involved in education have moaned that Nigerian university students learn very little because of disruptions in the academic calendar caused by frequent strikes by teaching and non-teaching staff. Similarly, Abiodun-Oyebanji [7] claimed that strike actions are becoming too familiar in many Nigerian universities, which seems to impact students' ability to meet academic objectives.

For example, the 2019 edition of the World Ranking of Nigerian Universities verified that, aside from the University of Ibadan, which was ranked between 801 and 1000 positions, no other federal university in Nigeria met the requirements to be among the top 1,000 in the world. Although the University of Ibadan and the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, were ranked second and third in Nigeria, sixth and twenty-third in Africa, and 801st to 1000th and 1001st in the world, respectively, Covenant University, Ota, was ranked first in Nigeria, fifth in Africa, and between 601st and 800th in the world. Based on the aforementioned data, goal attainment in Nigerian federal universities is low. On the other hand, Lagos State University and the University of Lagos were ranked second and third in Nigeria, 501st to 600th, and 601st to 800th in the world, respectively, in the 2020

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edition of Times Higher Education's world university ranking, with the University of Ibadan ranking first in Nigeria and 440th globally [8]. However, it seems that goal attainment is low in federal universities in Nigeria.

Leadership tenure is when a member of the academic staff holds an administrative position [9], [10], [11], [12]. As a result, it is regarded as one of the factors in the Nigerian university system that might affect goal attainment. It consists of a leader's leadership style, professional and educational experiences, and other factors that increase their worth at work and career success [13]. The duration of academic staff members' employment at the university is also anticipated to be considered in leadership tenure [14]. In this study, "leadership tenure" refers to the time a leader has held an office and their leadership style and experience. This study's primary focus is all of these.

One significant factor that will probably impact goal achievement is the length of time a leader must remain in office. This is because as leaders accumulate years of experience within the system, they typically exhibit higher performance levels [15]. In this sense, professors are appointed as department heads at many Nigerian universities, for example, and their terms are for four years. Readers and senior lecturers are designated as acting heads of departments for a two-year term. For one year, coordinators are assigned to lecturer grade 1 cadre members. The faculty dean will assume this role in situations with no formal department heads, adding needless stress to the already overworked deans. For example, heads of departments at some universities have a one-year term that can be renewed for an additional year. This means that HOD can hold a role for a maximum of two years. However, there appears to be too little time to carry out a candidate's aspirational goals and objectives for such a position, which should be reviewed [16].

However, without exemplary leadership philosophies, objectives might not be met. Leadership continues to be essential to achieving educational goals at all educational levels. In the university system, leaders shape behaviour and inspire their followers to conduct high-calibre research, deliver effective instruction, and perform community service. Leadership style is one of the key elements that improves goal attainment in educational institutions, particularly universities. Common leadership styles were identified by Abiodun-Oyebanji [17] and Oyedeji [4]; many can be found in most universities worldwide. According to scholars, these include transactional, laissez-faire, democratic, autocratic, and pseudo-democratic leadership philosophies. Each leadership style has both immediate and long-term effects on achieving objectives. For example, the autocratic leadership style may produce excellent results in the short term, whereas the democratic leadership style may be unproductive in the short term. The longer the democratic leadership style of leading, the more productive a university is likely to become. These researchers concluded that university leaders should not limit themselves strictly to one particular leadership style; instead, they should adopt leadership styles that align with the dictate of the situation confronting their universities.

Abiodun-Oyebanji and Oyedeji [18] concluded that universities in Nigeria could adopt both democratic and transformational leadership styles in their management if they were to achieve the goals of providing high-level relevant manpower training, and general performance of its tasks in the areas of effective teaching, high research output, and

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impactful community services that would meaningfully contribute to sustainable national development. The poor leadership practices of certain Nigerian university administrators have hampered the achievement of their university objectives. Nigerian universities exist because they have objectives to meet, and these objectives can be successfully met when exemplary leadership philosophies are implemented throughout the university system. According to Zirra and Ezie [13] and others, ineffective leadership practices play a significant role in the demise and closure of universities. A university needs to be able to draw in, choose, and keep talented academic leaders if it hopes to meet its objectives.

Therefore, having top academic leaders with more excellent experience would be preferable to those with less experience when dealing with particular issues [19], [20], [21], [22]. Furthermore, the greater an academic leader's experience is, the more likely he or she will have advanced knowledge of teaching, research, and multifaceted skills to envision and implement solutions for particular issues about goal attainment in the university system. The importance of leadership experience in achieving university objectives cannot be overstated. A recent graduate, for example, cannot become a vice chancellor right away because it lacks the experience and skills required to be in such a role. They also cannot be appointed as HoDs or deans of faculty.

### **Rationale**

The attainment of goals at federal universities in Nigeria seems to be low regarding teaching, research, and community services. There seems to be a lack of interest in teaching academic staff due to the disruption of the academic calendar and the closure of academic institutions due to student protests or industrial actions by staff unions. Concerning the quality of research output, most of the published research works in Nigerian universities do not have international visibility, as only a few research works seem to have been cited more in international journals than in local journals. There are wide gaps between universities in Nigeria and worldwide regarding goal attainment. Therefore, many universities in Nigeria still have much to do to meet up with world-class universities. Hence, several factors could influence goal attainment, especially leadership tenure (time frame, leadership style, and experience). There appears to be a dearth of literature on leadership tenure as it influences goal attainment. In contrast, this study investigated the influence of leadership tenure on goal attainment at federal universities in southwestern Nigeria.

### **Objective of the Study**

The main objective of this study was to investigate administrators' perceptions of the influence of leadership tenure on goal attainment at federal universities in southwestern Nigeria.

### **Research question**

What is administrators' perception of the influence of leadership tenure on goal attainment at federal universities in southwestern Nigeria?

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## 2. METHOD

The survey research design of the ex-post-facto type, which involves qualitative data, was adopted for this study. The design was considered appropriate for the study because data were collected from members of the population to determine the status of that population concerning one or more variables. Qualitative data were collected through the Key Informant Interview (KII) [23].

This study's sample size comprised three deans and 37 heads of departments from the University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, and the University of Lagos, Akoka. These universities were chosen because they were first-generation universities, and it was observed that they have been having challenges in attaining their goals lately.

A simple random sampling technique that was proportionate to size was used to select the departments from the selected universities. The technique was appropriate for this study because it enhanced the selection of the target population's valid representation (sample). The researcher developed the Leadership Tenure and Goal Attainment Interview Guide. Experts in the field of educational management corrected the interview guide. This instrument obtained qualitative information from academic leaders (HODs and Deans of Faculties). Data gathered were analyzed using inferential statistics. Content analysis was used to analyze information obtained from heads of departments and deans across three federal universities selected for the study.

### **Ethical considerations**

The researcher focused on some ethical issues considered during the data collection period. The ethical issues considered in this study were personal information collected from respondents. Data collected through this study were confidential. In the area of informed consent, the respondents were duly briefed and informed of the purpose of the study before the research instruments were administered. Letters seeking permission to collect data were taken to sampled universities. During the study, no ethical and logical consideration issues were violated.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1. Results

Table 1 shows the leadership tenure in terms of the time frame an academic leader spends in an office in the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria. For the office of the acting director, 47.7% of the academic staff thought that the acting director spent a two-year term in office; 17.5% of the sampled academic staff reported that the acting director spent three or four-year term in office, while the minor proportion of academic staff viewed that acting director used five or six-year term.

The table also presents the years a director can spend in an academic leadership position. The study found that 23.9% of the academics reported a two-year term in office; 33.9% and 9.2% of the academic staff sampled reported that directors spent three and four years there, respectively. However, less than 2% of the academic staff stated that the director spent a maximum of five or six-year term in office.

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The result in the table also shows that 53.2% of the academic staff confirmed that acting heads of departments spent two-year terms, while 29.4% and 6.4% of the academic staff surveyed for this study reported that acting heads of departments have three or four-year terms to spend in office, respectively. However, none of the respondents reported the case of five and six-year terms for the position of acting heads of departments.

Table 1. Leadership Tenure in Terms of Time Frame in the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria

		Time Frame (Yrs.)					$(\bar{x})$	SD
	Leadership	2	3	4	5	6		
1	Acting Director	52 (47.7)	15 (13.8)	4 (3.7)	1 (0.9)	--- (0)	0.90	.84
2	Director	26 (23.9)	37 (33.9)	10 (9.2)	1 (0.9)	1 (0.9)	1.28	1.09
3	Acting Head of Department	58 (53.2)	32 (29.4)	7 (6.4)	---- (0)	---- (0)	1.31	.75
4	Head of Department	15 (13.8)	39 (35.8)	35 (32.1)	7 (6.4)	3 (2.8)	2.21	1.14
5	Dean	21 (19.3)	48 (44.0)	22 (20.2)	8 (7.3)	---- (0)	1.97	1.03
6	Deputy Vice-Chancellor	8 (7.3)	20 (18.3)	39 (35.8)	25 (22.9)	--- (0)	2.61	1.53
7	Vice-Chancellor	---- (0)	1 (0.9)	8 (7.3)	91 (83.6)	---- (0)	3.95	1.47

Note: Figures in parentheses are percentages.

Table 2 shows the leadership tenure in terms of the time frame an academic leader spends in an office at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. For the office of acting director, 35% of the academic staff confirmed that the acting director spent a two-year term in office; 16.9% and 5.4% of the academic staff thought that the acting director spent three or four-year term in office, while less than 4.0% of sampled academic staff viewed that acting director spend between five and six-year term.

The table also shows the number of years a director can stay in the academic leadership position. The study found that 23.0% of the academics reported a three-year term in office; 14.9% and 15.5% of the academic staff surveyed for this study confirmed that directors spend either two or four-year terms in office, respectively. However, less than 3% of the academic staff reported that directors spend a maximum of five or six-year terms in office.

Table 2. Leadership Tenure in Terms of Time Frame in the University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria

		Time Frame (Yrs.)					$(\bar{x})$	SD
	Leadership	2	3	4	5	6		
1	Acting Director	53 (35.8)	25 (16.9)	8 (5.4)	3 (2.0)	2 (1.4)	1.52	.82
2	Director	22 (14.9)	34 (23.0)	23 (15.5)	14 (9.5)	1 (0.7)	1.91	.96
3	Acting Head of Department	67 (45.3)	35 (23.6)	7 (4.7)	3 (2.0)	---- (0)	1.59	.74
4	Head of Department	30 (20.3)	32 (21.6)	43 (29.1)	15 (10.1)	--- (0)	2.59	.90
5	Dean	55 (37.2)	46 (31.1)	15 (10.1)	4 (2.7)	----- (0)	2.23	.84
6	Deputy Vice-Chancellor	28 (18.9)	25 (16.9)	30 (20.3)	26 (17.6)	--- (0)	2.95	1.02
7	Vice-Chancellor	---- (0)	----- (0)	25 (16.0)	90 (60.8)	--- (0)	3.83	.85

Note: Figures in parentheses are percentages.

The result in the table likewise presents that 45.3% of the academic staff reported that acting heads of departments spent a two-year term in office, while 23.6% of the academic staff sampled for this study reported that acting heads of departments had a three-year term to spend in office. The result equally reported that acting heads of departments can spend either four- a four-year term or a five-year term with 4.7% and 2.0%. However, none of the respondents reported the case of a six-year term for acting department heads.

It is noted from the table that the highest proportion, 29.1% of the academic staff, reported that heads of departments spent four-year terms; 20.3% and 21.6% of the participating academic staff thought that heads of departments used two or three-year terms in office while 10.1% of academic staff reported that heads of departments spend a five-year term in attaining University of Ibadan, Ibadan. However, none of the academic staff reported the case of a six-year term for the position of heads of departments.

The leadership tenure in terms of the time frame an academic leader spends in an office, as shown in Table 3, considered acting director for 63.5%; 19.0% of the academic staff thought that acting director spent two-year term in office; 11.7% of the sampled academic staff reported that acting director spent three-year term in office while none of the respondents reported that case of five or six-year term in the office of acting director.

Table 3. Leadership Tenure in Terms of Time Frame in the University of Lagos, Akoka, Nigeria

		Time Frame (Yrs.)					$(\bar{x})$	SD
	Leadership	2	3	4	5	6		
1	Acting Director	87 (63.5)	16 (11.7)	26 (19.0)	--- (0)	-- (0)	1.52	.82
2	Director	80 (58.4)	19 (13.9)	28 (20.4)	2 (1.5)	-- (0.7)	1.91	.96
3	Acting Head of Department	62 (45.3)	39 (28.5)	28 (20.4)	--- (0)	---- (0)	1.59	.74
4	Head of Department	2 (1.5)	26 (19.0)	82 (59.9)	19 (13.9)	--- (0)	2.59	.90
5	Dean	1 (0.7)	35 (25.5)	89 (65.5)	3 (2.2)	----- (0)	2.23	.84
6	Deputy Vice-Chancellor	1 (0.7)	3 (2.2)	92 (67.2)	32 (23.4)	--- (0)	2.95	1.02
7	Vice-Chancellor	--- (0)	0 (0)	2 (1.5)	124 (90.5)	2 (1.5)	3.83	.85

Note: Figures in parentheses are percentages.

The table also presents the years a director can spend in an academic leadership position. The study found that 58.4% of the academics reported a two-year term in office; 13.9% and 20.4% of the academic staff sampled for this study reported that directors can either spend three- or four-year terms in office. However, less than 2% of the academic staff confirmed that the director spent a maximum of the five-year term in office, while the academic staff of the University of Lagos, Akoka, Nigeria, did not report the case of a six-year term in the director's office.

The result in the table also shows that 45.3% of the academic staff thought that acting heads of departments spent two-year terms, while 28.5% and 20.4% of the academic staff sampled for this study reported that acting heads of departments have three or four-year terms to spend in office. However, none of the respondents reported cases of five-year and six-year terms for acting department heads.

Heads of departments and deans at the three federal universities in southwestern Nigeria were interviewed. The findings of the work concerning the administrators' perception of the influence of leadership tenure on goal attainment revealed that leadership tenure (leadership time frame, leadership styles, and leadership experience) influences goal attainment at federal universities. The respondents reported that a democratic leadership style enables a university to attain its goal. According to them, this leadership style would improve university goal attainment. Some of the professors added that a higher level of

goal attainment depends on the issue to be addressed (Respondents A2, B2, and B3, structured interview). The participants submitted the following:

*The democratic leadership style enables a university to attain its goal. According to them, this leadership style would improve university goal attainment (Respondents A2, B2, and B3). However, 15 respondents preferred an autocratic leadership style for goal attainment (Respondent B3). A Head of the Department of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, suggested that no single leadership style takes care of all the challenges of university goal attainment. The professor added that it depends on the issue to be addressed (Respondent B1). However, 28 heads of departments at three federal universities argued that the transformational leadership style would be the best for any university that wants to attain its goal (Respondents B1 to B3, structured interviews). Additionally, 10 respondents stated that a transactional leadership style should be adopted for university goal attainment (Respondent B3, structured interview).*

A structured interview conducted among HODs indicated the following:

*If it was at the departmental level, they suggested a maximum of two years to attain the stated goal (Respondents B1 to B3). The Heads of Departments and Deans from Obafemi Awolowo University Ile-Ife and the University of Ibadan, Ibadan, submitted that the tenure of an academic leader should follow university laws and statutes if its goal is to be attained (Respondents B1 and B2). A head of department from Obafemi Awolowo University Ile, explained that the tenure of an academic leader depends on the individual's office. In contrast, most heads of departments from the University of Lagos Akoka Lagos agreed that academic leaders should spend 3--12 years in office to attain the set goals (Respondent B3, structured interview).*

The outcome of the interview confirmed the following:

*They had been experiencing stress from overwork, lack of cooperation to attain university goals since they assumed the position of the head of departments, lack of collective decision-making in management and administration, lack of funds to run their departments and execute the university goal of providing world-class students as well as good support from the students and colleagues (Respondents B1 to B3, structured interview).*

In confirmation of this, one of the deans from the University of Ibadan said:

*"I have experienced love, warmth, support, and cooperation since I assumed the position of the dean in the faculty" (Respondent A2).*

This implies that administrators' perceived leadership tenure (leadership timeframe, style, and experience) positively influences goal attainment at federal universities in southwestern Nigeria.

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### 3.2. Discussion

The results of this study show that administrators' perceptions of leadership tenure (timeframe, leadership style, and experience) positively affect the achievement of goals in federal universities in southwestern Nigeria. These findings are consistent with the Abiodun-Oyebanji report [17], which states that democratic leadership styles significantly contribute to managerial effectiveness. In addition, these results support Katozai's study [24], which confirms that leaders' knowledge and experience are key elements in improving their effectiveness. This is also in line with the research of Muthoka et al. [25], which revealed that the administrative experience of school principals affects their effectiveness in providing instructional supervision.

However, these findings provide new insights into the role of leadership tenure in the context of federal universities in Nigeria. Administrators stated that too short a term of office can hinder the implementation of long-term strategic plans, while too long a term can lead to stagnation in leadership. This shows the need for policies that balance stability and flexibility in leadership tenure, as expressed by Siambi [11], who stated that effective succession planning and leadership transition planning are essential for the organization's sustainability.

The study also underscores the importance of democratic leadership styles in driving the achievement of university goals, as previously reported by Abiodun-Oyebanji [13]. However, the interview findings suggest that transformational leadership styles are considered more suited to face the unique challenges of Nigerian universities, such as funding constraints, internal conflicts, and low collaboration. Studies by Abiodun-Oyebanji and Oyedeji [14] confirm that transformational leadership styles can promote relevant workforce training and increase research output and community services.

The limitations of this study also need to be noted. The study sample included only three federal universities in the southwestern region of Nigeria, so the results cannot be generalized to all universities in Nigeria. In addition, qualitative data from interviews risk containing perceptual biases from respondents, as acknowledged by Creswell [15], which emphasizes the need for data triangulation to increase validity. Therefore, future research may use quantitative survey methods to complement these findings and expand the scope of the study.

These findings have important implications for the management of universities in Nigeria. First, leadership training that focuses on democratic and transformational styles needs to be prioritized to improve the performance of academic leaders. Second, policies related to the duration of tenure need to be adjusted to enable the implementation of long-term strategies, as recommended by Olayinka [12]. Third, universities should create an environment that supports collaboration between leaders, academic staff, and students to improve the achievement of university goals, according to the findings of Zafar and Akhtar [6].

Thus, this study makes an important contribution to the existing literature by underlining the role of leadership tenure as a key variable in achieving university goals. These findings can be the basis for management policies and strategies in higher education to improve leadership effectiveness and the achievement of institutional goals.

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#### 4. CONCLUSION

The study concluded that the administrators perceived that all the leadership styles were in use at all the universities covered in this study, but the style most commonly exhibited by academic leaders is the democratic style. It was also concluded that no academic leaders had spent six years in office. Both heads of departments and deans were experienced before they took over the position of academic leaders.

It can also be concluded that the administrators perceived that leadership tenure influences goal attainment in federal universities in southwestern Nigeria. This finding showed that leadership tenure was responsible for goal attainment. This implies that federal universities' goal attainment in teaching, research, and community differs when the mean value of each university analysis is considered.

It is therefore believed that the goal attainment of federal universities could be high when international publications are increased quantitatively and qualitatively. Another implication is that if a democratic leadership style is typical among directors, heads of departments, and deans of faculties in federal universities, the feeling of responsibility could be developed within the academic staff members of the university so that they can work together as a team to increase goal attainment.

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