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EXPLORING PUSH FACTORS AFFECTING DEVELOPMENT OF FEDERAL UNIVERSITIES IN SOUTH EAST NIGERIA: A MIXED METHOD APPROACH

Kenneth Ekene Ugwuanyi
Department of Public Administration, Faculty of Management Sciences, Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria.
Email: ke.ugwuanyi@unizik.edu.ng, https://orcid.org/0009-0007-2752-5682/

Prof Basil Chukwuemeka Nwankwo
Department of Public Administration, Faculty of Management Sciences, Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria.
Email: bc.nwankwo@unizik.edu.ng

Abstract

The study explored the push factors inhibiting the development of federal universities in south east Nigeria. Two specific objectives were examined namely; effect of work-life balance and the roles of modern infrastructure on the development of federal universities in South east Nigeria. Accordingly, two hypotheses were tested. The study was anchored on the Resource Dependence Theory as a framework for analysis. A mixed research design was adopted. While the Pearson Product Moment Correlation was utilized for data analysis of research question one, the content analysis was used for research question two. A sample size of 390 gotten with Taro Yamane Technique from 23,414 population of the study. The results showed a significant positive relationship between work-life balance and University development in South-East Nigeria $r = .06$, $P<.05$. Also, Lack of modern infrastructure in the federal universities in south east caused by deliberate political exclusion of the region, affects development of federal universities in south east Nigeria. The findings confirmed that inability of the federal universities in south east to promulgate policies to support staff growth inhibit federal university development in south east Nigeria because of the peculiar economic hub of eastern Nigeria. It is recommended that systematic inclusion of the region's university development should be fast tracked.

Keywords: Push Factor, Work-life Balance, Modern Infrastructure, Federal Universities, South East Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

From time immemorial, man have always encountered some hurdles in every facet of life, resistance to such hurdle advances the situation often to a better version. University being an institution of higher education and research created to improve intellectual development and award degrees in different fields of learning is not exempted from its own hurdles. According to Ukeje et al (2025), one of the major pathways to sustainable development is a sound higher education system, which is essential to any country's progress. Several push back factors affect university development. Recent challenges faced by universities are massive rises in student enrolment, lack of adequate and competent academic staff, poor and obsolete equipment and increasing requirements to see concrete returns on their investment of public fund (Goetze, 2019). Due to aged sensitization on the need to have a literate society and some developed countries even capturing that as fundamental human right, there is a geometric increase of student enrolment in most recent time. In the 19th century for-instance, Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) in 1999/2000 academic session offered approximately 78,550 candidates admission into universities, leaving 383,378 without admission out of 461,928 applicants. In 2019/2020 academic session JAMB admitted 444,947 out of 1.8million applicants (jamb.gov.ng) which indicates a reasonable increase without corresponding improvement in the supporting facilities. The above data shows that as at 1999/2000 academic session, universities have capacity to admit 17% of applicants, 2 decades leta (2019/2020) its capacity to admit increased to 24% admission rate of its universities applicants. This showed an increase of 7% despite the high marginal rate of applicants from 444,947 in 1999 to 1.8million applicants in 2019. Developed federal universities are jostling for students choices for academic enrollment. An empirical research on the factors impacting the development scale of Chinese Higher Education, Chinese study on higher education system found that student's enrollment expansion is influenced by economic growth, government policy and demand for education (Bin and Liang, 2012) however rapid expansion without planning may create risks such as declining quality and resource strain. Some factors plays great role in influencing students' choices of federal universities to

study in Nigeria like in other parts of the world. Adeyanju, Mogaji, Olusola, and Olaniyi (2020) posited that personal interest greatly influenced students' decisions, followed by parental influence, university reputation, university ranking and fees.

University Development requires a multi faceted approach accordingly it is a deliberate action taken towards improving the entire system of a university. This encompasses the physical infrastructures, E-infrastructure, human resources segment which involves staff and students, other materials that will aid learning and character molding. University developments concern majorly the strategic evolution of higher education institutions to enhance their capacity for teaching, research and community engagement acting as engines for social, economic and technological progress. (Google, 2026). University perform several functions but the most outstanding is to inculcate sound and practicable knowledge, undertake research and involve in community development (Kayode, 2023).

Statement of the Problem

Federal university plays critical roles in promoting higher education, research, and community service for overall development. That notwithstanding, they are faced with a number of constraints which have continually undermined their performance. According to Nnaji, Ojiako, Ukeje & Nwangbo (2022), several factors are largely responsible for the non-performance of most public sector organizations in Nigeria. In south east Nigeria, these institutions roles are lagging behind due to inadequate funding, poor modern infrastructure, poor conducive learning environment, migration of academic staff, politicization of issues of south east, weak research support amongst others have been widely observed. These conditions not only limit the capacity of universities to deliver quality education but also hinder their ability to compete globally and contribute meaningfully to regional and national development. Supporting the above assertion, Nnaji and Ojiako (2022) added that most government-owned enterprises have grossly underperformed, as such, unable to justify the high hopes and expectations reposed on them by the well-meaning and patriotic Nigerians.

South East region of Nigeria has unique socio-economic and political challenges that may intensify these push factors. These challenges could affect institutional stability, staff retention, student enrollment patterns,

and the overall development trajectory of federal universities in the region. Therefore, this study seeks to explore and analyze the push factors affecting the development of federal universities in South-East Nigeria, with the aim of identifying key challenges and providing insights that could inform policy decisions, institutional reforms, and strategic interventions to improve the development and performance of these universities.

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of this study is to ascertain the effect of push factors affecting the development of federal universities in south east, Nigeria. Specifically, this study seeks to:

1. evaluate the effect of work-life balance on development of federal universities in south east, Nigeria.
2. investigate the role of modern infrastructure on the development of federal universities in south east, Nigeria.

Research Questions

1. How does work-life balance affect development of Federal Universities in south east, Nigeria?
2. What role does modern infrastructure play in development of Federal universities in South east, Nigeria?

Hypotheses

1. H_0 Work-life balance has no effect on development of federal universities in south east, Nigeria.
2. H_o Modern infrastructure does not play any role in the development of federal universities in south east, Nigeria.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Conceptual Review

Push Factors

Push factors is simply referred to as those hindrances attacking the development or growth of system from achieving its expected goals. It could also be referred to the negative conditions or constraints that discourage growth, participation, or development within a system. In educational development studies, push factors are conditions that drive away resources, talent, investment, or opportunities, thereby limiting institutional progress. In the context of federal universities, push factors are challenges or pressures that hinder the effective growth, performance, and

sustainability of higher education institutions. These factors may originate from economic, political, administrative, social, or environmental conditions within the country or region.

Ogunode and Abubakar (2020) asserted that there are several problems hindering smooth administration of Nigeria Public universities. The authors mentioned some of the problems like inadequate funding, inadequate academic staff, political interference in the university administration, indiscriminate issuance of licenses for new universities amongst others. The authors position has confirmed that for a federal university to be stabilized and embrace right policies for development, qualified human capital presence and modern infrastructure ought to be in place. Ajeeb (2021) posited that the status of a university environment, lack of research policy and intellectual freedom led Sudanese high education institutions to lose a growing number of highly qualified professors. In Federal Universities in South east, financial challenges affects development of staff housing, poor staff welfare affects staff retention, and university development at large (Nnametu, Egolum, Emoh and Obinwa, 2024) Therefore, understanding push factors is important in identifying barriers that prevent universities from achieving their goals in teaching, research, and community development.

University Development

University development refers to the many-sided growth of university system, surrounding institutional improvements, societal engagement, curriculum advancement, and the nurturing of individual student and staff success. It involves transforming universities into agile, student-centric, and socially embedded institutions that drive innovation, contribute to regional economic growth, and serve as partners in global development through knowledge creation and talent development. According to Balazs and Carmel (2025) in their research titled “the role of the university of Pecs in turning the learning city concept into reality: Bridging university lifelong learning to learning cities through innovation, cooperation and development” affirmed that learning cities depends on better participation, performance and partnerships in learning surrounded by collective actions for a better future for education. This implies that university

development is encompassing which requires relevant stakeholders to play their roles efficiently.

University development, which is very crucial in this study, is an important form of investment in human capital. It can be viewed as a high level or a specialized form of human capital, contribution of which is very significant to economic growth in any society (Agbovu and Inegbu 2022). University development ensures that higher institutions are able to produce skilled graduates, conduct innovative research, and contribute to national development.

In Nigeria, federal universities are expected to drive national development by training human capital, generating knowledge, and promoting technological advancement. However, the presence of various push factors has slowed the pace of development in many institutions, particularly in the South-East region. Ibukun (2017) asserted that the main purpose and relevance of university education in Nigeria is the provision of much needed manpower to accelerate the socio-economic development of the nation

Work-Life Balance in Federal Universities in South East Nigeria

Work-life Balance (WLB) in this context could be viewed as the ability of employees of university to effectively manage work responsibility alongside personal and family life without conflict. This condition is measured by flexible schedules, workload management, institutional support system and leave policies. South Eastern Nigeria people are known for their higher enterprising skill which invariable affects conditions of living in the region, younger population are into business that fetches higher economic return. This scenario not only affects the standard of living of federal university but increases societal economic expectation on her citizen. Don-Solomon and Amakiri (2023) asserted that achieving success in career is a major accomplishment an average employee looks forward to and academics of Nigerian public universities are not exceptional. WLB significantly affects job satisfaction, motivation and performance. Temitope, (2024) asserted that executive summary evidence from literature has established the impact of work-life balance on several aspects of employee attributes including occupational health and well being, job satisfaction, work engagement, motivation and morale. To achieve WLB is instrument to development of

man scholars shifted attention from viewing development from physical infrastructure to man with strong argument that for real development to take place, man must be seen as epicenter for development (Ugwuanyi, Nwobi and Chukwurah 2022)

Modern Infrastructure in the Federal Universities in South East Nigeria.

Baskekova and Malafeev (2017) define infrastructure as a core driver of economic growth and societal functioning, consisting of both hard and soft component. Modern Infrastructure refers to advance physical, digital, and support systems that enhance teaching, learning, research and administration. This plays critical role speeding up development of federal universities, its absents create huge gap. It goes beyond traditional buildings and includes digital, smart and integrated systems.

Bunmi (2024) saw modern infrastructure as the harmonization of tangible physical assets and digital evolution. Omodan (2024) enumerated modern infrastructure in universities to include lecture halls, laboratories, libraries, e-learning systems, databases, and AI tools

Theoretical Framework

This study adopted Resource Dependence Theory (RDT) by Pfeffer and Salancik (1978). organizations are not self-sufficient, they rely on external actors like government, donors, suppliers and other stakeholders for crucial resources like funding, information amongst others. According to the RDT, firms are dependent on resources provided by others in order to sustain growth, as well as other organizations that may be dependent on them.

One important assumption of the RDT is that firms cannot be fully self-sufficient with regards to strategic critical resources for survival. They need to depend on resources from outside parties to compete (Heide, 1994) and carefully manage this dependency with other firms to strive for sustainable development (Ulrich and Barney, 1984). Using this resource dependence theory (RTD), scholar can easily agree that federal institution development is evolving and requires stakeholders' collective engagement to speed up the process.

Empirical Studies

Some scholars have carried out research within the related scope of this study. Ezema

and Eze (2024) did research on status and challenges of institutional repositories in university libraries in South-East Nigeria: Implications for visibility ranking of Nigeria universities, it adopted a survey research design. 23 universities were studied findings showed that among others that the universities were at different levels of implementation. Nnametu, Egolum, Emoh and Obinwa, (2024), Analysis of financing challenges facing the provision of staff housing for federal universities in south east Nigeria. Survey design was adopted. The data were analysed with mean analysis. Result from the study showed that the financing challenges facing effective development of staff housing in institutions, studied include poor housing finance system, high volatility of housing cost, imposition of the IPPIS payment system, neglect of staff welfare, high interest on loans and stringent loan conditions. In a related study Ajeeb (2021) researched on the power of push factors on academic's brain drain in higher education system in sudan. Convergent mixed research approach was used, 380 participants were taken through simple random sampling technique. Additionally, vice chancellors, faculty Deans and Department head were interviewed. The study found that addressing push factors by improving the work environment to meet employers expectations going through career development barriers, stabilizing the political environment, restructuring wages and remunerations could control the brain drain. Don-Solomon and Amakiri (2023) researched on Work-life balance and Career Success of Academic Staff in Nigerian Public Universities: The Moderating Role of Digital technology, Descriptive survey design was used with 378 sample size. The finding showed flexi-time and job sharing have low but positive significant relationship with job security and promotion and promotion. Digital technology positively and significantly influences the relationship between work-life balance and career success.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A mixed research design was adopted. Survey research design was applied for specific objective one which is to evaluate the effect of work-life balance on development of federal universities in south east Nigeria. Specific objective number two used content analysis which is to investigate the role of

modern infrastructure on the development of federal universities in south east Nigeria.

Area of Study

Five Federal universities in southeast Nigeria make up the study area: the University of Nigeria Nsukka Enugu State UNN; Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka Anambra State NAU; Michael Okpara University of Agriculture Umudike, Abia State MOUAU; Federal University of Technology Owerri Imo State FUTO; and Alex Ekwueme Federal University, Ndufu-alike Ebonyi State.

Sources of Data/Data Collection

For this study, 390 questionnaires were created and sent to the five federal universities in the southeast as primary sources of data. Journals and the internet were used for the secondary data. Strongly agree (SA), agree (A), undecided (UD), strongly disagree (SD) and disagree (D) are the five categories of the five liket scale model that was used to collect data for the particular objective 1. 3.0 was either a high or agreed upon theoretical mean value.

Population of the Study

The population of the study is 23,414. See the population distribution below

	University	Population		Grand Total
		Non-academic staff	**Academic staff**	
1	University of Nigeria, Nsukka	4602	4004	8606
2	Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka	4841	2682	7523
3.	Michael Okpara University of Agriculture Umudike	1324	869	2193
4	Federal University of Technology Owerri	2072	1002	3074
5	Alex Ekwueme Federal University Ndufu-Alike Ikwo	1201	817	2018
	Total	**14,040**	**9,374**	**23,414**

Field work 2026

Data Presentation and Analysis

Three hundred and ninety (390) respondents were the sample size of the study gotten using Taro Yameni sampling technique. Consequently, 390 questionnaires were produced and shared, 378 were retrieved while 372 were properly filled and analyzed for the study.

Gender Distribution of the Respondents

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Male	171	46
Female	201	54
Total	**372**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Age of the respondents

Age	Frequency	Percentage
20 – 29	93	25
30 – 39	127	34
40 – 49	74	20
50 years and above	78	21
Total	**372**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Job classification of the respondents

Job classification	Frequency	Percentage
Academic Staff	223	60
Non-Academic Staff	149	40
Total	**372**	**100**

Educational qualifications of the respondents

Education	Frequency	Percentage
SSCE / NECO	-	-
OND/NCE	19	5
First Degree	193	52
Above First Degree	160	43
Total	**372**	**100**

Core Issues of Research

The information gathered from the survey was examined in accordance with the research questions and objectives, and the results for question one is shown in the table below. To evaluate the mean for items in the corresponding sections, a mean value of 3.0 was used. As a result, items in the instrument with a mean of 3.0 or higher will be considered agreed, and those with a mean of less than 3.0 will be considered disagreed.

Test of Hypothesis One

H_0: Work-life balance has no effect on development of federal universities in south east Nigeria

H_1: Work-life balance has effect on development of federal universities in south east Nigeria.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.520[a]	.270	.072	.38056

a. Predictors: (Constant), Development

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	.011	1	.011	.057	.023[b]
	Residual	.783	4	.196		
	Total	.794	5			

a. Dependent Variable: work-life Balance
b. Predictors: (Constant), Federal University Development

Source: Field Survey, 2026

The ANOVA output for test of hypothesis one which states that Work-life balance has no effect on development of federal universities in south east Nigeria. With significance level of 5% (0.05), and comparing it with the probability value (p-value) as represented by sig in the Table, the null hypothesis is rejected in favour of the alternate hypothesis and it is, therefore, stated that work-life Balance does affect development of federal universities in south east Nigeria.

Decision: Accept the alternate hypothesis.

Summary of the Findings

The findings confirmed that inability of the federal universities in south east to promulgate policies to support staff growth inhibit federal university development in south east Nigeria because of the peculiar economic hub of eastern Nigeria. Work life balance is very essential to ensure staff retention.

Lack of modern infrastructure in the federal universities in south east caused by deliberate political exclusion of the region, affects development of federal universities in south east Nigeria.

Recommendation

It was recommended that systematic inclusion of the regions federal university development should be fast tracked to avert further depletion in the ivory tower of the region.

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