Demographic Strategies of Managing Nigerian University Education During the Period of Economic Recession

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ABSTRACT
This study examined the demographic strategies of managing Nigerian university education during the period of economic recession. Four research questions and hypotheses were put forward to guide this study. The upper echelons theory which was developed by Donald C. Hambrick and P. Mason in 1984 was utilized as the theoretical framework of analysis. The study adopted the descriptive survey research design. The study population comprised of administrative staff in the three universities in Rivers State. A sample of 213 administrative staff was drawn from the universities. A structured questionnaire was used to elicit data from the respondents. The data collected from the respondents were analyzed using Mean, Standard Deviation and Z-test statistics. The empirical results revealed that age has a high influence on the capacity of university administrators to sustain the standard of university education during the period of economic recession. The study also reported that experience greatly influence the capacity of university administrators to sustain the standard of university education during the period of economic recession. Based on the findings, it was concluded that demographic strategies greatly influence the ability of university administrators to manage the standard of university education during the period of economic recession. It was recommended that the federal and state governments in Nigeria should consider the demographic profile of candidates considering for appointment into vice-chancellor position in their universities as this would enhance effective and efficient management of the university resources during the period of recession.

Keywords: Demographic strategies, age, experience, university education, university management and economic recession.

INTRODUCTION
In the past two years, Nigeria has been battling with economic recession occasioned by the increasing rate of unemployment, inflation, decline in the GDP, poverty, hunger and the retrenchment of workers across various industries. The entire economy was shaking as people can no longer do business and expect the usual results. Inflationary rate rise to 18.3% the highest in the history of the country (Okebukola, 2016). Crude oil prices drop drastically in the international market from about N150 per barrel to N34 resulting in the inability of government to delivery its campaign promises to the people. Worst still is the vandalization of oil pipelines in the Niger Delta region by the so-called Niger Delta Avengers which resulted in the drastic drop in crude oil production in the country. Some private oil companies operating in the country could no longer sustain their workforce base due to the poor state of the economy and therefore resulted to workers retrenchment.

The various universities were also affected by the state of the economy as their allocations drop drastically following the dwindling revenue of the Federal Government which occurs as a result of the drop in the prices of crude oil in the international market. Managing university education during this period becomes a challenging task for university administrators as the resources allocated to the various universities in the country dropped drastically and could not match the increasing number of students’ enrolment. Many universities administrators find it difficult to maintain standard during the period of
economic recession. Ekundayo and Ajayi (2009) posit that while some universities administrators could not maintain the minimum standard set by the National Universities Commission, others were able to sustain their standard irrespective of the economy downturns. The difference in ability of university administrators to sustain their standard during this period of crisis could be traced to their demographic profile. Thus, a university administrator with vast managerial experience is more capable to managing university education effectively during the period of economic recession than those no managerial experience. Bashiri, Khan, Qureshi, Qureshi and Khan (2015) opine that age is closely tied to experience and as such university administrators who is older is believed to have the much required experience to pilot the affairs of the university during the period of economic recession than those who are younger in age. When a country faces a state of economic downturns, its educational institutions will be greatly affected and it takes only a mature administrator with vast managerial experience to manage the institution to sustain its standard. This paper examines the demographic strategies of managing Nigerian university education during the period of economic recession.

Statement of the Problem
Managing university education to sustain its standard during the period of economic recession is not an easy task for university administrators. Some university administrators in Nigeria were able to sustain the standard set by the National Universities Commission (NUC) despite the economic downturns while others were not able to sustain the standard set by the commission due to dwindling resources. The difference in ability could be linked to the demographic profile of the administrators. Some universities administrators are older while others are younger; some have more managerial experience than the others. The thinking faculty of these administrators also differs in relation to their demographic profile. Some scholars believe that university education will be effectively managed by older and more experienced administrators during the period of economic recession than a younger and less experience administrator (Duong, Nguyen & Nguyen, 2017). However, there is no substantial empirical evidence within the Nigerian context that justify these claims; hence this study empirically investigates the demographic strategies of managing Nigerian university education during the period of economic recession.

Purpose of the Study
The purpose of this study is to investigate the demographic strategies of managing Nigerian university education during the period of economic recession. The specific objectives of the study are:
1. To examine the influence of age on the capacity of university administrators to sustain the standard of university education during the period of economic recession.
2. To ascertain the influence of experience on the capacity of university administrators to sustain the standard of university education during the period of economic recession.

Research Questions
The following questions are put forward to address the objectives of this study:
1. To what extent does age influence the capacity of university administrators to sustain the standard university education during the period of economic recession?
2. To what extent does experience influence the capacity of university administrators to sustain the standard of university education during the period of economic recession?

Hypotheses
The following hypotheses are formulated to guide this study:
1. There is no significant difference in the perception of male and female administrative staff on the influence of age on the capacity of university administrators to sustain the standard of university education during the period of economic recession.
2. There is no significant difference in the perception of male and female administrative staff on the influence of experience on the capacity of university administrators to sustain the standard of university education during the period of economic recession.
Literature Review
Concept of Demographic Strategies
Demographic strategies are those characteristics that define a person. They include the age, sex, marital status, educational qualification and work experience (Gbadamosi, 2013). Okonedo, Popoola, Emmanuel and Bamigboye (2015) posit that demographic variables are varying characteristics that defines an individual and his capacity to get things done. These characteristics are important in assessing a person’s ability to accomplish a given task with a specified period of time. The demographic characteristics of people differ significantly and it is this difference that shows the ability of one person to do better than the other when both of them are given the same task (Oluwunmi, Emeghe, Oni and Ajayi, 2016). For instance, a person with vast managerial experience is expected to manage an institution effectively towards the realization of its goals than a person with little or no managerial experience. Here, the difference in ability to succeed is based on experience.

Employers of labour usually assess the suitability of an applicant for a job based on their demographic profile. They usually sought information on their age, sex, marital status, educational qualification and work experience. Duong, Nguyen and Nguyen (2017) posit that demographic information is used by employers to assess the suitability of an applicant for the job. In the case of a university vice-chancellor position which is usually based on a four year appointment, the Federal Government (in the case of a Federal University) or State Government (in the case of a state owned university) usually sought information on the age, sex, marital status, educational qualification and work experience of those individuals considering for appointment into the VC position. These demographic data are used to assess the suitability and capacity of the individuals considering for such a highly ranked position in the university. Bashiri, Khan, Qureshi, Qureshi and Khan (2015) posit that the demographic information is what every government use to pick a suitable and qualified candidate for the post of a vice chancellor in their university.

Influence of Age on the Capacity of University Administrators to Sustain the Standard of University Education during the Period of Economic Recession
Age refers to a person’s number of years in existence. It is a significant demographic factor that influences one’s ability to succeed in any given task. Oluwunmi et al (2016) posit that a person’s age is closely tied to his or her experience and is expected to influence his or her knowledge and ability to deliver or accomplish a given task. An individual’s age determine his or her flexibility or resistance to change. The approach adopted by an older executive to solve problems may not be adopted by a younger executive because their level of experience and confidence differ in relation to their age. For instance, an older executive may considered security as a key priority and intends to avoid risky decisions which could change the strategic direction of the organization. A younger executive on the other hand, tends to be a more risk oriented and are willing to embrace change to ensure organizational growth (Child, in Wiersema and Bantel, 2010).

Within the context of university management, age plays a key role in determining the ability of a vice-chancellor and his team to succeed in period of economic recession. Gbadamosi (2013) opines that age influences the approach adopted by university administrators to work especially during the period of economic crisis. Duong, Nguyen and Nguyen (2017) posit that age influences the confidence of university administrators in sustaining the standard of university education in times of economic crisis. Taylor in Wiersema and Bantel (2010) observes that older university administrators tend to have less confidence in their decisions and are willing to change their views if they become aware of a negative consequence. Such administrators are said to be lacking the confidence in piloting the affairs of the university during the period of economic recession. On the other hand, a younger administrator has more confidence in their decisions and they are more likely to maintain their stand in period of recession even when they are aware of the risk involved in their decisions.
Influence of Experience on the Capacity of University Administrators to Sustain the Standard of University Education during the Period of Economic Recession

Experience has a major role to play in the management of university education during the period of recession. Experience refers to the number of years a person has worked in a similar organization or position before (Oluwunmi et al., 2016). Experience is often described as the best teacher in the sense that a person who has worked in a similar organization or position before is believed to have a better chance to succeed on his current job. This is based on the fact that such a person is more acquainted with the job and has adequate knowledge on the circumstances surrounding the job. Duong, Nguyen and Nguyen (2017) posit that experience is a crucial element in one’s professional career, without it, there can be no element of trust that such a person will be able to deliver. Bashiri et al. (2015) argue that a highly experienced person on a job is more likely to do well on that job than a person with no job experience. Gbadamosi (2013) believes that an experienced person is more likely to excel in managerial duties. This is because a highly experienced person is likely to show expertise and capacity to deliver the desired promise. The experience possessed by university administrators is a key factor that determines their ability to manage and sustain the standard of university education during the period of recession. Adetunji (2015) posits that considering the present economic challenges facing the country and their resultant effect on universities, government needs to consider the number of years a candidate has spent in managerial position before appointing them as vice chancellor in our universities. This according to him will enable them succeed in maintaining the standard of university education in the country despite the dwindling resources allocated to the institutions. Alumode and Onuma (2016) stated that many university administrators in Nigeria give excuses on the state of the economy as reason why they have not be able to sustain the standard of education set by the National Universities Commission (NUC). He argues that although the issue of economic downturns and dwindling resources has been there for years, the main reason for the under-performance of university administrators is lack of managerial experience.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of analysis adopted in this study is the upper echelons theory which was propounded by Donald C. Hambrick and P. Mason in 1984. This theory maintains that organizational outcomes are a reflection of the characteristics of a firm's top managers and that these managers make decisions based on their own characteristics (e.g., demographics, beliefs, values, attitudes, professional competencies, functional experiences, and educational background) (Jose, 2017). The theory tries to explain the relationship between organizational outcome and top management characteristics. It explains that organizational outcomes are partially predicted by managerial background characteristics of the top level management team (Hambrick and Mason, 1984). The upper echelons theory emphasizes a number of demographic indicators to estimate the psychological constructs of a manager’s personality, which are difficult to access and reliably measure (Pfeffer, in Wikipedia, 2017). These demographic indicators include age, tenure, functional background, education, socioeconomic roots and financial position, among others. Sincerely, university administrators are faced with huge information overloads which are sometime complex and they will rely on their experience and education to address these overloads.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted the descriptive survey research design. The population of the study consisted of administrative staff in the universities in Rivers State. A sample size of 213 administrative staff was used for the study. The sample was selected using stratified random sampling technique. A structured questionnaire was used to elicit data from the respondents. The questionnaire was structured on four (4) points Likert-type scale which range from Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree to Strongly Disagree. The questionnaire was validated through a face and content analysis while its reliability was determined using the test-retest method which produces a reliability index of 0.91. A total of 213 questionnaires were administered to the respondents and 187 copies were retrieved. The data collected were analyzed using mean, standard deviation and Z-test. The research questions were answered with mean and standard
deviation. A criterion mean of 2.50 was set for any item to be accepted. The hypotheses were tested with the Z-test at 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
The results of this study are presented in tables in accordance to the research questions.

**Research Question 1:** To what extent does age influence the capacity of university administrators to sustain the standard university education during the period of economic recession?

**Table 1: Analysis of mean responses of male and female administrative staff on the extent to which age influence the capacity of university administrators to sustain the standard university education during the period of economic recession**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Male Administrative Staff</th>
<th>Female Administrative Staff</th>
<th>Mean Set</th>
<th>SD Set</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>The approach adopted by an older university vice chancellor to solve problems during the period of recession may differ from the approach adopted by a younger university vice chancellor.</td>
<td>2.93, 1.02</td>
<td>2.74, 0.96</td>
<td>2.84, 0.99</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>An older university vice chancellor is more likely to avoid risky decisions during the period of recession than a younger vice chancellor.</td>
<td>2.81, 0.92</td>
<td>2.63, 0.73</td>
<td>2.72, 0.83</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>An older university vice chancellor is more likely to be prudent and efficient in utilizing the available resources during the period of economic recession than a younger university vice-chancellor.</td>
<td>2.84, 0.97</td>
<td>2.59, 0.68</td>
<td>2.71, 0.82</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>An older vice chancellor is more likely to capitalize on his wealth of experience to readjust and restructure the university spending pattern to fit into the present economic situation without compromising quality than a younger university vice chancellor.</td>
<td>2.71, 0.86</td>
<td>2.85, 0.91</td>
<td>2.78, 0.89</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>An older vice chancellor is more likely to use his wealth of knowledge and experience to determine other sources of revenue to fund projects that will sustain the standard of their institution during the period of recession than a younger vice chancellor.</td>
<td>2.63, 0.82</td>
<td>2.79, 0.87</td>
<td>2.71, 0.85</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Grand Mean/SD**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Male Administrative Staff</th>
<th>Female Administrative Staff</th>
<th>Mean Set</th>
<th>SD Set</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.78, 0.92</td>
<td>2.72, 0.83</td>
<td>2.75, 0.88</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 shows the mean responses of male and female administrative staff on the extent to which age influence the capacity of university administrators to sustain the standard university education during the period of economic recession. From the table, it is observed that both male and female administrative staff agreed to all the items listed in the table since their mean responses are greater than the criterion mean of 2.50. Therefore, it is concluded that the extent to which age influence the capacity of university administrators to sustain the standard university education during the period of economic recession is high.
Research Question 2
To what extent does experience influence the capacity of university administrators to sustain the standard university education during the period of economic recession?

Table 2: Analysis of mean responses of male and female administrative staff on the extent to which experience influence the capacity of university administrators to sustain the standard university education during the period of economic recession

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Male Administrative Staff</th>
<th>Female Administrative Staff</th>
<th>Mean Set</th>
<th>SD Set</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$\bar{X}_1$</td>
<td>SD$_1$</td>
<td>$\bar{X}_2$</td>
<td>SD$_2$</td>
<td>$\bar{X}_1$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>The approach adopted by a more experienced vice chancellor to solve problems during the period of recession may differ from the approach adopted by a university vice chancellor with no managerial experience.</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>2.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>A vice chancellor with a vast managerial experience is more likely to make risky decisions that will help to sustain the standard of the university during the period of recession than a vice chancellor with no managerial experience.</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>2.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>A university vice chancellor with a vast managerial experience is more likely to be prudent and efficient in utilizing the available resources during the period of economic recession than a vice-chancellor with no managerial experience.</td>
<td>2.98</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>2.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>A university vice chancellor with a vast managerial experience is more likely to capitalize on his wealth of experience to readjust and restructure the university spending pattern to fit in the present economic situation without compromising quality than a university vice chancellor with no managerial experience.</td>
<td>2.84</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>2.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>A university vice chancellor with adequate managerial experience is more likely to use his wealth of knowledge and experience to determine other sources of revenue to fund projects that will sustain the standard of their institution during the period of recession than a vice chancellor with no management experience.</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>2.80</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>2.84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Grand Mean/SD | 2.78 | 1.02 | 2.86 | 0.88 | 2.89 | 0.95 |

Table 2 shows the mean responses of male and female administrative staff on the extent to which experience influence the capacity of university administrators to sustain the standard university education during the period of economic recession. From the table, it is observed that both male and female administrative staff agreed to the items listed in the table since their mean responses are greater than the criterion mean of 2.50. Hence, it is accepted that experience influence the capacity of university administrators to sustain the standard university education during the period of economic recession to a high extent.

Hypothesis 1
There is no significant difference in the perception of male and female administrative staff on the influence of age on the capacity of university administrators to sustain the standard of university education during the period of economic recession.
Table 3: Z-test analysis on the mean responses of male and female administrative staff on the extent
to which age influence the capacity of university administrators to sustain the standard of
university education during the period of economic recession

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subjects</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. Level</th>
<th>Z-test Cal.</th>
<th>Z-test Crit.</th>
<th>Decision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male Administrative</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>±1.96</td>
<td>Ho₁</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Administrative</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>1.82</td>
<td>±1.96</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 shows that the calculated value of Z-test (1.02) is less than the critical value of Z-test is (±1.96) at
0.05 level of significance. As a result of this we then accept the null hypothesis which states that “there is
no significant difference in the perceptions of male and female administrative staff on the influence of age
on the capacity of university administrators to sustain the standard of university education during the
period of economic recession.”

Hypothesis 2
There is no significant difference in the perception of male and female administrative staff on the
influence of experience on the capacity of university administrators to sustain the standard of university
education during the period of economic recession.

Table 4: Z-test analysis on the mean responses of male and female administrative staff on the extent
to which experience influence the capacity of university administrators to sustain the standard of university education during the period of economic recession

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subjects</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. Level</th>
<th>Z-test Cal.</th>
<th>Z-test Crit.</th>
<th>Decision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male Administrative</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>1.82</td>
<td>±1.96</td>
<td>Ho₂</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Administrative</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>±1.96</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 shows that the calculated Z-value of 1.82 is less than the critical Z-value of ±1.96 at 0.05 level of
significance. Consequently, the null hypothesis is retained. This means that there is no significant
difference in the perceptions of male and female administrative staff on the influence of experience on the
capacity of university administrators to sustain the standard of university education during the period of
economic recession.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS
From the result of the analysis carried out, it was discovered that age highly influence the capacity of
university administrators to sustain the standard of university education during the period of economic
recession. This finding was derived from the result of the analysis carried out on the responses received to
research question one which was presented in table 1. This result implies that age influence the capacity of
university administrators to sustain the standard of university education during the period of economic
recession to a high extent. This finding is consistent with the research conducted by Gbadamosi (2013)
which reported that age significantly influence the capacity of university administrators to manage and
sustain the standard of university education in period of economic crisis. The study conducted by
Oluwunmi et al (2016) also supported this finding as they reported that age is the most significant
demographic factor that influences the ability of university administrators to succeed in their managerial
position.

The study also revealed that experience influence the capacity of university administrators to sustain the
standard of university education during the period of economic recession. This finding was derived from
the result of the analysis carried out in table 2 above. This result revealed that the respondents agreed with
the items listed in the table, with their mean responses greater than the criterion mean. This implies that experience influence the capacity of university administrators to sustain the standard of university education during the period of economic recession to a high extent. This finding is supported by Adetunji (2014), Akinyemi and Abiddin (2013) and Adetunji (2015) as they believed that university administrators with vast managerial experience are more capable of managing and sustaining the standard of university education during the period of economic downturns than less experienced administrators. The implication of this finding is that when experience is taken into consideration when appointing vice chancellors in Nigerian universities, it will boost the chances of the universities to sustain the standard set by NUC during the period of recession.

CONCLUSION
This study examines the demographic strategies for managing university education during the period of economic recession. The empirical results succinctly demonstrated that with the Nigerian context, age was found to have a high influence on the capacity of university administrators to sustain the standard of university education during the period of economic recession. The study also revealed that experience greatly influence the capacity of university administrators to sustain the standard of university education during the period of economic recession. Based on the findings, it was concluded that demographic strategies (age and experience) greatly influence the ability of university administrators to manage the standard of university education during the period of economic recession.

RECOMMENDATIONS
This study hereby recommends the following:
1. The Federal and State Governments in Nigeria should consider the demographic profile of candidates considering for appointment into vice-chancellor position in their universities as this would enhance effective and efficient management of the university resources during the period of recession.
2. The Federal and State Governments should attach more importance to managerial experience when considering candidates for appointment into vice-chancellor position as this would greatly influence the ability of suitable candidates to succeed in their administrative duties especially during the period of recession.
3. The Federal and State Governments in Nigeria should equally consider the age of candidates considering for appointment into vice-chancellor position since age is closely tied to experience which contributes to one’s ability to succeed in a given position.

REFERENCES


