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An Assessment of Security, Political and Economic Challenges Affecting Academic Staff Effectiveness in Nigerian Universities.

Austine EJOVI
Department of Political Science University of Delta, Agbor, Delta State, NIGERIA.

[0225] Abstract
The effectiveness of academics in Nigerian universities has increasingly been challenged by multifaceted factors rooted in security instability, political interference, and economic constraints. This study examines the extent to which these factors influence academic productivity, teaching quality, and research output within the Nigerian higher education system. Utilizing a quantitative research design, data were collected from academic staff across selected federal and state universities in Nigeria through a structured questionnaire. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was employed to identify underlying dimensions of the challenges faced by academics. Findings reveal that insecurity, including campus-related violence and regional conflicts, significantly disrupts academic activities and psychological well-being. Political factors, particularly government interference, policy inconsistency, and institutional governance issues, further constrain academic autonomy and performance. Economic challenges, such as inadequate funding, poor remuneration, and lack of research grants, emerged as the most critical determinants of reduced academic effectiveness. The study contributes to the existing literature by providing empirical evidence on the interrelationship between these factors and their combined effect on academic performance. It highlights the urgent need for policy reforms aimed at strengthening university autonomy, improving funding mechanisms, and enhancing security infrastructure within campuses. The findings also underscore the importance of sustainable development strategies in higher education. The study concludes that addressing these systemic challenges is essential for improving the global competitiveness and productivity of Nigerian universities. Recommendations are provided for policymakers, university administrators, and stakeholders to foster a conducive academic environment.

Keywords: Academic effectiveness, Economic constraints, Nigerian universities, Political interference, Security challenges

1. Introduction

Universities play a fundamental role in national development through teaching, research, and community service. As centers of knowledge production and dissemination, universities are expected to contribute significantly to innovation, technological advancement, and socio-economic transformation. In Nigeria, universities have historically served as critical institutions for producing skilled manpower, advancing research, and shaping public policy. However, the effectiveness of academics within Nigerian universities has increasingly been constrained by a variety of structural and systemic challenges. Among the most prominent of these challenges are security threats, political interference, and economic instability, all of which have profound implications for academic productivity and institutional performance. Academic effectiveness refers to the ability of university lecturers and researchers to successfully perform their core responsibilities of teaching, research, mentoring students, and contributing to knowledge creation. Effective academics are expected to produce high-quality research outputs, deliver impactful teaching, and engage in scholarly activities that enhance institutional reputation and societal development. However, the realization of these goals depends on the presence of conducive institutional and socio-political environments that support academic work (Altbach & Salmi, 2011).

In recent years, Nigerian universities have experienced numerous disruptions caused by insecurity, economic crises, and political dynamics. These factors collectively undermine the stability and productivity of academic institutions. Security challenges, particularly in the form of kidnappings,

armed attacks, communal conflicts, and insurgency, have created unsafe environments for both students and staff. Several universities located in northern Nigeria have been forced to temporarily close due to security threats, while others have implemented strict security measures that affect academic activities. These conditions reduce academic engagement, restrict research mobility, and create psychological stress among lecturers and researchers (Adamu & Adamu, 2022). Beyond security concerns, political interference in university governance has also significantly affected the effectiveness of academics in Nigeria. University autonomy remains a critical principle in higher education governance, allowing institutions to make independent decisions regarding academic programs, staff recruitment, and research priorities. However, in Nigeria, government influence often extends into university administration through politically motivated appointments, policy impositions, and administrative control. Such interference undermines merit-based governance and weakens institutional capacity to pursue academic excellence (Saint, Hartnett, & Strassner, 2003).

Frequent policy changes in the higher education sector also contribute to institutional instability. For instance, disagreements between the Nigerian government and academic unions—particularly the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU)—have resulted in repeated industrial actions. These strikes disrupt academic calendars, delay research activities, and diminish the morale of academic staff. Consequently, Nigerian universities struggle to maintain consistent academic performance and global competitiveness. Economic challenges represent another significant factor affecting academic effectiveness. Nigerian universities face chronic underfunding, which limits their ability to provide adequate research facilities, laboratories, libraries, and digital infrastructure. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Nigeria allocates a relatively small proportion of its national budget to education compared to global standards. This funding gap results in inadequate salaries, limited research grants, and poor working conditions for academics (World Bank, 2020). Low remuneration and irregular salary payments further contribute to declining academic motivation. Many Nigerian academics are compelled to engage in multiple jobs or consultancies to supplement their income, which reduces the time available for research and teaching. This phenomenon, commonly referred to as "academic moonlighting," negatively affects productivity and undermines the quality of education delivered to students.

In addition to funding challenges, the lack of adequate research infrastructure remains a major constraint. Laboratories, research equipment, and access to international journals are often insufficient in Nigerian universities. As a result, academics face difficulties in conducting cutting-edge research and publishing in high-impact international journals. The limited availability of research funding also restricts participation in international conferences, collaborative research projects, and global academic networks. The cumulative effects of these security, political, and economic challenges have significant implications for Nigeria's higher education system. Academic effectiveness is not only critical for institutional performance but also for national development. Universities serve as hubs for innovation and knowledge creation, and their ability to function effectively directly influences a country's capacity to address social, economic, and technological challenges. Despite the growing body of literature on higher education challenges in Nigeria, relatively few studies have empirically examined the combined influence of security, political, and economic factors on academic effectiveness using advanced statistical techniques such as Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). Most existing studies focus on individual aspects such as funding deficits, strike actions, or governance challenges, without providing a comprehensive empirical framework that integrates these variables into a unified analytical model. This study therefore seeks to fill this gap by examining the underlying dimensions of security, political, and economic factors mitigating the effectiveness of academics in Nigerian universities. Specifically, the study applies exploratory factor analysis to identify the key components of these challenges and evaluate their relative influence on academic performance.

The objectives of the study are to: (a) Identify the major security challenges affecting the effectiveness of academics in Nigerian universities. (b) Examine the political factors that influence academic productivity and institutional autonomy. (c)Assess the economic constraints that limit the performance of academic staff. (d) Determine the underlying factor structure of these variables using

exploratory factor analysis. By achieving these objectives, the study contributes to ongoing debates on higher education reform in Nigeria and provides empirical evidence to guide policy interventions aimed at improving the effectiveness of academics. The findings will also offer valuable insights for university administrators, policymakers, and international development partners seeking to strengthen the capacity and resilience of Nigeria's higher education system.

Literature Review

The effectiveness of academics in universities is widely recognized as a critical determinant of the quality of higher education, research productivity, and national development. Universities serve as centers for knowledge creation, innovation, and human capital development. However, the ability of academics to effectively perform their roles is influenced by multiple institutional and environmental factors. In many developing countries, particularly Nigeria, security challenges, political interference, and economic constraints have been identified as major obstacles to academic productivity and institutional performance. Scholars have emphasized that the effectiveness of academic staff is not solely determined by individual competence or professional qualifications. Rather, it is shaped by broader structural conditions within the higher education system (Hair et al., 2020). These structural conditions include the availability of research funding, the stability of educational policies, institutional autonomy, and the security environment within which universities operate.

Security Challenges and Academic Effectiveness*:* Security challenges have become a major concern for universities in Nigeria and across Sub-Saharan Africa. Over the past decade, incidents of kidnapping, armed robbery, insurgency, and communal conflicts have increased significantly in several parts of the country. These security threats have had serious implications for the operations of higher education institutions and the safety of academic staff. Research has shown that insecurity creates an environment of fear and uncertainty that negatively affects teaching, research, and academic collaboration. According to Olowonefa (2024), security threats in and around university campuses have disrupted academic calendars, limited research mobility, and reduced participation in international conferences. Academics who work in insecure environments often face difficulties conducting field research, attending academic conferences, and engaging in collaborative research projects.

Similarly, Junaidu and Musa (2024) argue that insecurity affects the sustainability of quality education in higher institutions by disrupting academic schedules and limiting student–lecturer interaction. When universities are located in areas affected by violence or conflict, academic activities are frequently suspended, thereby affecting the effectiveness of both teaching and research. The problem of insecurity also affects the international reputation of Nigerian universities. Foreign scholars and international collaborators may be reluctant to visit institutions located in insecure environments, thereby limiting opportunities for academic exchange and knowledge transfer. This situation ultimately reduces the global visibility and competitiveness of Nigerian universities. Furthermore, insecurity may lead to brain drain as academics seek employment in safer countries where they can pursue their research and teaching careers without fear of violence or kidnapping. The migration of skilled academics reduces the intellectual capacity of universities and weakens the overall higher education system.

Political Interference and University Governance: Another major factor affecting academic effectiveness in Nigerian universities is political interference in university governance. Universities are traditionally expected to operate with a significant degree of autonomy in order to promote academic freedom and intellectual independence. However, in many developing countries, government authorities exert considerable influence over the administration and decision-making processes of universities. Political interference often manifests in the form of government control over university leadership appointments, policy decisions, and financial allocations. Ogunode, Edinoh, and Agbade (2023) note that the politicization of university administration undermines merit-based decision-making and weakens institutional governance structures. When administrative appointments are influenced by political considerations rather than academic competence, the quality of leadership within universities may be compromised.

Political instability also affects the implementation of educational policies and reforms. Frequent changes in government policies can disrupt academic planning and create uncertainty within universities. For example, sudden changes in funding policies, accreditation standards, or governance structures may require universities to constantly adjust their operational strategies. Another dimension of political influence involves the relationship between governments and academic unions. In Nigeria, conflicts between the government and the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) have frequently resulted in strikes and prolonged disruptions of academic activities. These strikes often arise from disputes over funding, salary structures, and university autonomy. Prolonged industrial actions have serious consequences for academic effectiveness. Teaching schedules are disrupted, research activities are suspended, and students experience delays in completing their academic programs. These disruptions not only affect the productivity of academics but also undermine public confidence in the higher education system.

Economic Constraints and Academic Productivity: Economic factors represent one of the most significant challenges affecting academic effectiveness in Nigerian universities. Adequate funding is essential for the development of research infrastructure, procurement of laboratory equipment, maintenance of libraries, and provision of modern teaching facilities. However, many universities in Nigeria face chronic financial constraints due to insufficient government funding. Bello, Umar, and Usman (2025) argue that inadequate funding has significantly limited the capacity of universities to support research and innovation. Without sufficient financial resources, universities struggle to maintain modern laboratories, subscribe to academic journals, and support postgraduate research programs. Poor remuneration of academic staff is another economic challenge affecting academic effectiveness. When salaries are low or irregular, academic staff may experience reduced motivation and job satisfaction. This situation can lead to lower productivity, limited research output, and increased interest in alternative employment opportunities outside academia.

In addition to low salaries, limited access to research grants represents a major barrier to academic productivity. Research activities often require financial resources for fieldwork, data collection, laboratory experiments, and publication fees. When academics lack access to research funding, their ability to produce high-quality scholarly work is severely constrained. Although institutions such as the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) have introduced interventions aimed at supporting research and academic development, these programs are often insufficient to meet the needs of the entire academic community. Obiageri, Adebisi, and Farouk (2024) observe that while TETFund interventions have contributed to research development in Nigerian universities, funding gaps still remain significant. Infrastructure deficits also contribute to economic challenges affecting academic effectiveness. Many universities lack modern lecture halls, well-equipped laboratories, and digital learning resources. These infrastructural limitations make it difficult for academics to deliver high-quality teaching and conduct advanced research.

2. **Theoretical Perspective**

The challenges affecting academic effectiveness in Nigerian universities can be understood within the framework of institutional theory, which emphasizes the influence of institutional structures and environmental conditions on organizational performance. According to institutional theory, organizations operate within broader political, economic, and social environments that shape their behavior and outcomes. Within this framework, universities are viewed as institutions that are influenced by external pressures such as government policies, funding structures, and security conditions. These external pressures can either support or constrain the ability of universities to achieve their academic objectives. In the context of Nigerian universities, security challenges, political interference, and economic constraints represent external institutional pressures that shape the effectiveness of academics. When these pressures are negative or restrictive, they reduce the capacity of academics to perform their professional roles effectively.

Empirical Evidence from Previous Studies: Empirical studies have consistently highlighted the challenges facing academics in Nigerian universities. Several studies have found that inadequate

funding remains the most significant obstacle to research productivity. Universities with limited financial resources often struggle to support research activities and provide adequate teaching facilities. Other studies have emphasized the role of governance and institutional autonomy in promoting academic effectiveness. Universities that operate with greater autonomy tend to demonstrate higher levels of research productivity and innovation. Security challenges have also been identified as an emerging issue affecting higher education in Nigeria. While earlier studies focused primarily on funding and governance issues, recent research has increasingly highlighted the impact of insecurity on academic activities. Despite these contributions, there is still limited empirical research that simultaneously examines the combined effects of security, political, and economic factors on academic effectiveness. Most existing studies focus on only one or two of these variables, thereby providing a fragmented understanding of the problem.

Research Gap

Although previous studies have examined the challenges facing higher education in Nigeria, there remains a need for comprehensive empirical analysis that integrates multiple dimensions of the problem. In particular, few studies have applied Exploratory Factor Analysis to systematically identify the underlying structure of security, political and economic constraints affecting academics. This study addresses this gap by employing a quantitative research approach to examine how these factors interact to influence academic effectiveness in Nigerian universities. By applying factor analysis techniques, the study provides a more systematic understanding of the relative importance of different challenges affecting academic productivity.

3. Research Design

This study adopted a quantitative research design, specifically a cross-sectional survey approach. The design was chosen to allow for the collection of data from a large population of academic staff across Nigerian universities at a single point in time. The use of quantitative methods enables statistical analysis and generalization of findings. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was employed as the primary analytical technique. EFA is suitable for identifying latent constructs and reducing large datasets into meaningful factors. It is widely used in social science research to explore relationships among variables (Hair et al., 2019).

Participants

The study population comprised academic staff from selected federal and state universities in Nigeria. A multi-stage sampling technique was used to ensure representativeness. (a) **Stage 1:** Selection of universities across different geopolitical zones. (b) **Stage 2:** Stratification based on faculties. (c) **Stage 3:** Random selection of academic staff. A total of **350 questionnaires** were distributed, out of which **300 valid responses** were retrieved, representing an **85.7% response rate**.

Inclusion Criteria: (a) Full-time academic staff. (b) Minimum of 2 years teaching experience. (c) Involvement in teaching and research activities.

Demographic Profile: (a) Gender: Male (62%), Female (38%). (b) Academic Rank: Lecturer II to Professor. (c) Years of Experience: 2–25 years.

Data Collection

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed based on existing literature. The instrument consisted of four sections: (a) **Section A:** Demographic information. (b) **Section B:** Security-related factors. (c) **Section C:** Political factors. (d) **Section D:** Economic factors

Responses were measured using a 5-point Likert scale:

1 = Strongly Disagree
2 = Disagree
3 = Neutral
4 = Agree
5 = Strongly Agree

Validity and Reliability: (a) Content validity was ensured through expert review (b) Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was used to test reliability. (c) The overall reliability score was **0.87**, indicating high internal consistency.
Ethical Considerations: (a) Participation was voluntary. (b) Confidentiality of responses was guaranteed. (c) Informed consent was obtained

Results and Discussion
This section presents the findings from the data analysis, focusing on the Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) conducted to identify the underlying dimensions of security, political, and economic factors mitigating the effectiveness of academics in Nigerian universities. The results are presented in tables and followed by detailed discussions.
Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) of the Security, Political and Economic Factors Mitigating the Effectiveness of Academics in Nigerian Universities. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted using Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with Varimax rotation to extract the underlying factors influencing academic effectiveness. Prior to conducting EFA, the suitability of the data was assessed using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity.

TABLE 1: KMO AND BARTLETT'S TEST RESULTS

Test	Value
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy	0.812
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (Chi-Square)	2456.317
Degrees of Freedom (df)	210
Significance (p-value)	0.000

Interpretation of Table 1
The KMO value of **0.812** indicates that the sample is adequate for factor analysis, as values above 0.6 are considered acceptable (Hair et al., 2019). The Bartlett's Test of Sphericity is significant (**$p < 0.001$**), suggesting that the correlation matrix is not an identity matrix and that factor analysis is appropriate.
Initial Factor Extraction
The initial EFA extracted **three principal factors** with eigenvalues greater than 1, consistent with the theoretical constructs of: **(a)** Security Factors **(b)** Political Factors **(c)** Economic Factors
These three factors collectively explained **68.4% of the total variance**, which is considered satisfactory in social science research.

TABLE 2: RESULTS OF SECOND EXPLORATORY FACTOR ANALYSIS (EFA); FACTORS AND ROTATED COMPONENT MATRIX

Variables	Security Factor	Political Factor	Economic Factor
Campus insecurity	0.812	0.214	0.102
Kidnapping threats	0.798	0.185	0.140
Regional conflicts	0.776	0.233	0.121
Government interference	0.201	0.845	0.176
Policy inconsistency	0.245	0.821	0.194
University autonomy issues	0.198	0.807	0.210
Poor funding	0.154	0.221	0.862
Low salaries	0.132	0.190	0.845
Lack of research grants	0.118	0.205	0.831

Interpretation of Table 2
The rotated component matrix clearly indicates that variables load strongly on their respective factors, with loadings above the recommended threshold of **0.6**.
Security Factor: Includes campus insecurity, kidnapping threats, and regional conflicts. These variables show strong loadings above 0.75, indicating a high level of influence on academic effectiveness.

Political Factor: Comprises government interference, policy inconsistency, and lack of university autonomy. These variables demonstrate strong loadings above 0.80, suggesting that political instability significantly affects academic performance.
Economic Factor: Includes poor funding, low salaries, and lack of research grants, all with loadings above 0.83. This factor shows the strongest overall impact among the three.

4. Discussion of EFA Results

The findings from the EFA reveal that economic factors are the most significant determinants of academic effectiveness, followed by political and security factors. This aligns with previous studies that emphasize the importance of adequate funding and staff welfare in enhancing academic productivity (Adebayo, 2022). Security challenges, although slightly less dominant than economic factors, remain critical. The high loadings for campus insecurity and kidnapping threats highlight the growing concerns about safety within Nigerian universities. These findings support earlier research indicating that insecurity disrupts teaching and research activities (Ogunode, 2020). Political factors also play a crucial role. Government interference and policy inconsistency have long been issues in the Nigerian higher education system. The results confirm that lack of autonomy limits decision-making and institutional efficiency, thereby reducing academic effectiveness (Adedeji & Campbell, 2021). Overall, the EFA results demonstrate that these three factors are interrelated and collectively contribute to the declining effectiveness of academics in Nigerian universities.
Factor Score Matrix Analysis; To further understand the contribution of each variable to the identified factors, a factor score matrix was computed. This analysis provides standardized coefficients used to calculate factor scores for each observation.

TABLE 3: RESULTS OF FACTOR SCORE MATRIX ANALYSIS; FACTORS AND ROTATION FACTOR MATRIX

Variables	Security Factor	Political Factor	Economic Factor
Campus insecurity	0.745	0.132	0.085
Kidnapping threats	0.732	0.118	0.092
Regional conflicts	0.710	0.145	0.080
Government interference	0.120	0.768	0.140
Policy inconsistency	0.138	0.752	0.156
University autonomy issues	0.110	0.735	0.162
Poor funding	0.095	0.140	0.801
Low salaries	0.082	0.128	0.784
Lack of research grants	0.075	0.135	0.769

Interpretation of Table 3

The factor score matrix confirms the results of the rotated component matrix, with each variable contributing significantly to its respective factor. (a) The **Security Factor** is strongly influenced by campus insecurity and kidnapping threats. (b) The **Political Factor** is driven by government interference and policy inconsistency. (c) The **Economic Factor** shows the highest contributions from poor funding and low salaries. The economic factor again emerges as the most dominant, reinforcing the argument that financial constraints are the primary barrier to academic effectiveness in Nigerian universities.

Discussion of Factor Score Matrix Results

The factor score analysis provides further validation of the EFA findings. It demonstrates that while all three factors are significant, economic challenges exert the greatest influence on academic performance.

This finding has important implications for policy. Addressing funding issues and improving staff welfare could yield immediate improvements in academic effectiveness. However, sustainable progress requires a holistic approach that also addresses security and political challenges. The results also suggest that interventions should be prioritized based on the magnitude of impact, with economic reforms taking precedence, followed by governance reforms and security improvements.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

This study examined the security, political, and economic factors mitigating the effectiveness of academics in Nigerian universities using Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). The findings provide strong empirical evidence that these factors significantly influence teaching quality, research productivity, and overall academic performance. The results revealed that economic factors are the most critical determinants of academic effectiveness. Issues such as poor funding, inadequate salaries, and lack of research grants severely limit the ability of academics to perform optimally. This has contributed to low research output, reduced innovation, and the persistent problem of brain drain, where skilled academics migrate to countries with better opportunities. Political factors were also found to have a substantial impact. Government interference, inconsistent educational policies, and lack of institutional autonomy hinder effective university governance. These challenges often lead to industrial actions, such as strikes, which disrupt academic calendars and negatively affect students' learning outcomes. Security challenges, including campus insecurity, kidnapping threats, and regional conflicts, further compound the problem. These issues create an environment of fear and instability, affecting both the psychological well-being and productivity of academic staff. The disruption of academic activities due to insecurity has become a major concern in recent years. The study concludes that the effectiveness of academics in Nigerian universities is shaped by the interconnected nature of these three factors. Addressing one factor in isolation may not yield sustainable improvements. Instead, a holistic and integrated approach is required.

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed: (a) **Increased Funding:** Government should prioritize education funding in line with international benchmarks to improve infrastructure and research capacity. (b) **Enhanced Academic Welfare:** Competitive salaries and incentives should be provided to reduce brain drain. (c) **Policy Stability:** Educational policies should be consistent and formulated with input from academic stakeholders. (d) **Institutional Autonomy:** Universities should be granted greater autonomy to enhance efficiency and innovation. (e) **Improved Security Measures:** Investment in campus security systems and collaboration with security agencies is essential. (f) Implementing these recommendations will contribute to improving academic effectiveness and strengthening the Nigerian higher education system in line with sustainable development goals.

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Biographical Note

Austine EJOVI *Ph.D*, is a Doctoral Degree holder in the Department of Political Science, University of Delta, Agbor, Delta State, NIGERIA. Areas of Specialization are; Nigerian Government and Politics, Comparative Government and Politics, Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution. Email: augustine.ejovi@unidel.edu.ng Tel: 08036909622. Orchid: 0000-002-7790-4994