

# Leadership Aspects of Hidden Curriculum Students Practice in Nigerian Universities: A Preview of Students' Union Government Contributions in University Governance

Dr Nnenna Oriema Emesini (Senior Lecturer),  
Department of Educational Foundations, Ebonyi State University, P.M.B. 053, Abakaliki – Nigeria.

## Abstract

The paper examined the leadership aspect of Hidden Curriculum that students practice in Nigerian Universities and their contributions to university governance. Four research questions guided the study and Ex-Post-Facto Method was adopted as the design. Unstructured interviews with staff/students officials cum critical analysis of Students' Union Bye-Law document were the method of data collection. The findings showed that the Students' Union Government contributes its quota in university administration; enhancing moral and academic excellence among its members; encourages oneness and cordial relationships with host communities. Implications of the study were drawn and recommendations made.

**Keywords:** Leadership; Hidden Curriculum; Nigerian Universities; Students' Union Government and Governance

## Introduction

For any meaningful development to take place in any country, education must be the bedrock of effective organization and good corporate governance. According to Tayomavwo (2009), effective organization in any set up is one that is able to achieve goals or results and is able to meet its obligation to all stakeholders. Accordingly, one of the goals of tertiary education as stipulated in the National Policy on Education (FGN, 2013:52-54) is promoting and encouraging scholarship, entrepreneurship and community service. Specifically, university education is expected to make optimum contribution to national development.

Obanya (2007) posits that the goals of higher education are in consonance with the world's declaration on higher education at the World Conference in Education, 1998. The author states that the conference re-affirmed that education is a fundamental pillar of human rights, democracy, sustainable development and peace. Obanya further emphasizes that if education is properly packaged, it empowers the youths to be productive and dynamic in a changing world like ours. Students therefore practice various roles during their training period informally, and this is referred to as "Hidden Curriculum"

Hidden Curriculum according to Ogah, Eze, Mbah and Emesini (2009) is the aspect of learned curriculum that lie outside the boundaries of the school's intentional efforts. It is unofficially planned and organized, but students as a sub-set of the society practice them. Hidden curriculum produces changes in students' values, perceptions and behaviours; hence, it serves as an agent of socialization that produces unique culture and functions. The hidden curriculum practice prepares students for various roles in the society after school by making them mature and prepared for adulthood and life in the society.

In universities in Nigeria, students practice various socio-cultural roles which they carry on later in life outside the four walls of the institutions. They include: diverse cultural, religious, social, political, town union, professional and non-governmental organization activities, which institutions encourage and supervise to ensure that they conform to societal patterns. By so doing, students unconsciously learn cooperation, team spirit, leadership roles, handwork punctuality, patience, self-control, cleanliness, among others, which is required by the larger society. The paper specifically x-rays the leadership aspect of Hidden Curriculum students practice through Students' Unionism and their contributions to university governance in Nigeria.

Student-Unionism is the political act of governance for student union bodies popularly called Students' Union Government (SUG) found in all higher institutions of learning in Nigeria. The students' government mimics/mirrors real life political administrative steps in a country in order to promote academic excellence, social discipline and the spirit of oneness among students. Specifically, the fundamental objectives of SUG in Nigeria include among others; to:

- Respect the laws of the country and rules and regulations of the university.
- Evolve an effective virile and responsible Students' Union.
- Create a veritable form for cultural, social welfare, intellectual, physical, moral development and upliftment of members (students)
- Promote cordial relationship and cooperation with the students of other institutions of higher learning and

external bodies with similar interest as the union (EBSU Students' Union Constitution, 2008:1-2) From the enlisted objectives, it can be seen that higher institutions according to Akomolafe and Ibijola (2014) has a very strong role to play in the sustainability of democracy of any nation. Adesanoye (2000) corroborating this view states that universities are made up of individuals with varying needs, interests, values, personalities, opinions and ideology that need to be respected for real sustainable development. Lending credence to these views, Lambert (2012) posits that the campus is now the most veritable training ground for future political leaders. He emphasizes that students participating in campus unionism may not be political scientists or related studies, but people inclined to politics naturally. The author further notes that most politicians played active role in campus politics and concluded thus: "That if extra-curricular studies development and students participation in union governance could serve as a training ground to instil and support democratic values and practices, then students should be allowed their rightful place in university governance" (p.73).

In line with the views of Lambert (2012), students should be given free hands to practices societal roles they would play in future. Hence Bergan in Akomolafe and Ibijola (2014) reiterates that students as members of the academic community share in the education and the provision of their education, which make them active members. This points that students' participation in governance within and outside the campus are indicators of active citizenship (Saha, 2000).

Students are active participants in democratic governance and are always eager to showcase their latent abilities to the outside world. These active roles should be encouraged in order to build solid future leaders. Reinforcing the democratic steps in Students' Unionism, Tandon (2005:2) echoes the democratic principles of global governance that emerged from the GO<sup>2</sup> Conference in 2002 which include among others, that:

- Citizen participation in decision making at the global level requires equality of opportunity for all the world,
- There are multiple spheres of governance from local to provincial, to national to regional and global
- There should be mutual support for the democratization of decision making at all levels.

What goes on in our higher institutions under the umbrella of SUG is just an outcry of the above stated principles in practice. As such, students need to be guided and supported in their quest for campus governance, even in University administration.

When students participate in university governance, the leadership skills, policy formulation and character development are built up. According to Akomolafe and Ibiyola (2014), Students' Union Government makes the process of democratic representative and participation in the universities' decision making bodies easier. The authors reiterate that representation in university governance serves as a training ground for leadership in civil society because, the skills acquired in the university could immediately be transferred to organized civil society. A study carried out by Ezekwem (2009) revealed that students' participation in university governance is necessary for easy university administration. The study further revealed that there is a significant relationship between students' participation in university governance and organized effectiveness in the university system. The author discovered that students' participation in education decision-making process would enhance high level of institutional effectiveness.

Preparing today's students for success and eventual leadership in the new global market place is the most important responsibility in education today. (Enu, 2012). Ezekwem (2009) posits that Students' Union Governments (SUGs) are very effective as they offer some ideas for good administration of universities in Nigeria in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. According to him, students as critical stakeholders in University governance cannot be ignored. This is because they can initiate moves that can be a source of hope for addressing the problems of university governance in Nigeria. These laudable roles of Students' Unionism have led to the present study on the leadership aspects of Hidden Curriculum students practice in Nigerian Universities as seen in Students' Union Government roles in University governance

### **Statement of the Problem**

Without doubt, the role of students in the success of University governance especially in this era of democracy cannot be over emphasized. The students' body constitutes the largest population in all university campuses. If universities are to become truly democratic, the roles of students must be recognized as they are the main stakeholders. University administration should be a joint task between staff and students. This is because the impact of Students' Union Government in instilling discipline among students is obvious, as they serve in committees that discipline erring students, welfare and sports, among others. When students are recognized in university governance, they have a sense of fulfillment that they belong and are respected as active partners in the university community. This has not been so, as student's involvement in University governance is low and

this is worrisome as they are the main stakeholders. This ugly trend has led to a lot of conflicts with university management and host communities; hence the need for this study that thus ask: How has the leadership aspects of Hidden Curriculum students practice through Students' Unionism contributed to effective university governance in Nigeria?

### **Purpose of the Study**

The main purpose of the study was to unravel how the leadership aspects of Hidden Curriculum students practice through Students' Unionism contribute to effective university governance in Nigeria. Specifically, the study ascertained how Students' Unionism in Nigerian Universities has:

1. Contributed to effective university administration.
2. Helped in character building of the university students;
3. Boosted learning per excellence among students in the universities, and
4. Encouraged oneness (unity) among students and the community within and outside the university.

### **Research questions**

The following research questions guided the study:

1. In what ways has students' unionism in Nigerian universities contributed to effective university administration?
2. How has students' unionism in Nigerian universities helped in character building of the students?
3. In what ways has students' unionism in Nigerian universities enhanced learning per excellence among students?
4. How has students' unionism in Nigerian universities encouraged oneness among students and the host communities?

### **Theoretical Framework of the Study**

The present study is backed up by Consensus Theory. The theory according to Quian (2012) originated in Western Europe and holds that a particular political or economic system is a fair system and that social change should take place within the social institution provided by it. The author points that the theory has two features:

- That government are made up of representatives elected by the people and
- That government activity is based on the interest and will of the people.

This democracy pattern is currently practiced in Nigeria and some other countries Liphart (2012) describe this theory as a 'Kinder Gentler' Democracy.

Consensus theory emphasizes consensus opinion which requires communication, dialogue, negotiation, mutual understanding and accommodation between the government and the citizenry. The present study fits into this theory because, it is examining students' unionism as a democratic process of building young leaders within a larger community- the university. This theory maximizes the opportunity to participate in government decision making and allows the pursuit and achievement of democratic consensus in accordance with the principle of power sharing and consultative cooperation (Quian 2012). The author concludes that any democracy based on such theory would be stable, solid and effective; hence, its suitability for the present study.

### **Method**

The study adopted a survey type that employed Ex-Post-Facto Design, involving a critical analysis of Student Union Bye-Law Document. In addition, unstructured interviews were conducted that involved the Dean, Students' Affairs, one of the Sub-Deans of the Faculties and some of the Students' Union Officials in the university at the faculty and departmental levels, who aired their views on Students' Unionism as a democratic process to breed young leaders.

The Ex-Post Facto Design was considered appropriate for the study because, it entailed mainly examining the narrative and documentary roles of Students' Union Government in Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki-Nigeria. The skeletal interviews involved the staff and students' officials of the union who explained various roles the union plays in university governance.

### **Results**

Table 1 answered research question 1

Table1: Contributions of students' union government in effective university administration

S/N	Items
1	Suggests some administrative strategies for easy governance in the university.
2	Organizes leadership training for members.
3	Suggests welfare services for its members like: electricity, water, lecture halls, security services, among others.
4	Dialogue with the administration and the government on critical areas that concerns its members like imposed fees and restrictions.

(Source: Fieldwork data, 2015)

Table 1 presents the contributions of Students' Union Government (SUG) in university management. The body helps in suggesting some favourable administrative strategies; organizes leadership training for its members; welfare services and dialogue with management and government on key pressing issues that affects students to enhance cordial relationship. The findings portray that S.U.G's leadership roles are felt in the administration of universities for peaceful co-existence.

Table 2 answered Research Question 2

Table 2: Student Unionism's impact on character building of students

S/N	Items
1	Encourages the practice and supervision of other good hidden curricular activities.
2	Plays also advisory roles on possible disciplinary actions and preventive measures of unwholesome ones in the campus.
3	Helps to fish out unruly behaviours in the campus like: cultism, drug abuse, examination malpractices and other unaccepted behaviours among its members.
4	Encourages good moral behaviours among its members
5	Helps to suggest disciplinary actions against her erring members to management.
6	Gather useful information and forward same to university management on character building of students.

(Source: Fieldwork data, 2015 and Students' Union Constitution)

Table 2 presents the findings on the roles of students' unionism in character building of its members. Interestingly, the findings showed that students' union leaders encourage good behaviours, practice of good hidden curriculum and helps to fish out the erring members and suggests disciplinary measures to university management. The union also helps to gather useful information on character building and forward same to management. On the whole, the findings showed that the students are aware that they are both trained to acquire both character and learning before graduation.

Table 3 answered Research Question 3

Table 3: Role students' unionism have played in enhancing academic excellence among students

S/N	Items
<b>Students' Union Government:</b>	
1	Reminds and encourages its members to aim at academic excellence.
2	Offers advisory services to management to award prices cum recognize excelling students in various endeavours.
3	Select and support the giving of scholarship to indigent students to encourage them.
4	Identifies academic challenges and report same to university management.

(Field work data, 2015)

Table 3 pictures the responses of the staff and students' union officials on how students' unionism enhances academic excellence among students. The items show that the leadership of the union encourages students to excel in their academics, offers advisory services on the award of prices and scholarship to deserving and indigent students to encourage them. The union also identifies academic challenges and reports same to management to make learning easier for its members. Table 3 findings show that students' unionism backs up its members to attain academic excellence.

Table 4 answered Research Question 4

Table 4: How students' unionism encourages oneness among students and the host communities

S/N	Items
<b>Students' Union Government:</b>	
1	Helps to strength cordial relationship between the university and the host community.
2	Attracts government attention to host community
3	Do sponsor minor projects within their host community for mutual relationship
4	Encourages peaceful co-habitation within the community.
5	Organizes activities like students' union week at various level to encourage interactions and oneness
6	Constructs relaxation centres and minor projects within the university campus for cordial interaction and relationship

**(Field work data, 2015)**

Finally, Table 4 presents the respondents' views on how students' unionism in Nigerian universities encourages oneness among students and the host communities. The six items in the table is a picture of how students' union government contributes to the oneness through: handling of minor protects within the campus and the community; attract government activities to the community; encourages co-habitation within the university environs and organizes co-curricular/hidden curriculum activities for oneness and interaction. The findings show that students' unionism encourages oneness among students and the host communities. On the whole, the findings of the study in Tables 1-4 portray that students' practice of leadership roles in Hidden Curriculum is beneficial to both students, the university the host community through students' unionism, thereby contributing effectively to university governance.

**Discussion**

The paper examined the leadership aspect of Hidden Curriculum practiced in Nigerian universities in relation to students' union government contributions in university governance. Table 1 show that Students' Union Government (SUG) makes giant strides in helping university administration as seen in the table. This is in line with the views of Ogah, Eze, Mbah and Emesini (2009) when they reiterated that students' practice of hidden curriculum aspects produces changes in them, making them mature and prepared for adulthood roles in the society. Corroborating this view, Lambert (2012) posited that the campus is now the most veritable training ground for future political leaders. The author reiterated further these findings when he stated: "that if extra-curricular studies and students' participation in union governance could serve as a training ground to instil and support democratic values and practices, then students should be allowed their rightful place in university governance (p.73)

Table 2 presents how students' union government impacts on the character building of students. The findings showed that SUG regulates activities that could hinder university's smooth administration. These findings are enshrined in one of the objectives of SUG (2010) which states that student are to respect the laws of the country and rules and regulations of the university. Lending credence to these findings, Akomolaye, and Ibiyola (2014) explained that when students participate in university governance, their leadership skills, policy formulation and character development are built up. According to Ezekwem (2009), students as critical stakeholders in university governance cannot be ignored because, they can initiates moves that can be a source of hope for addressing the problems of university.

Table 3 on the other hand pictured the roles students' union government plays in enhancing academic excellence among its members. The findings indicated that it encourages and support academic excellence and presents challenges to academic excellence to university management for action. Re-echoing these findings, Bergan in Akomolaye and Ibiyola (2014) reiterated that students as members of the academic community share in the education and the provision of their education, which makes them active members in the university. Buttressing further these findings, Ezekwem (2009) revealed that students' participation in education decision-making process would enhance high level of institutional effectiveness. This is what Adesanoye (2000) observed and stated that universities are made up of individuals with varying needs, interests, values, personalities, opinions and ideology that needs to be respected for real sustainable development in Nigeria.

Finally, Table 4 was based on the respondents' views on how students' unionism encourages oneness among students and the host communities. The findings as presented in the table are quite revealing. This points to the fact that students' unionism is a go-between the students and the university and between the university and the host communities. These findings mirror one of the fundamental objectives of SUG as stipulated in their Handbook (2008:2) thus: that SUG in Nigeria creates a veritable forum for cultural, social, welfare, intellectual, physical, moral development and upliftment. These findings were re-echoed in the National Policy on Education

(FGN, 2013) as one of the goals of higher education thus: to promote and encourage scholarship, entrepreneurship and community service. Furthermore, Akomolaye and Ibiyola (2014) emphasized that Students' Union Government makes the process of democratic representative and participation in university decision making a lot easier. Again, Lambert (2012) reiterated that students should be given free hands to practice societal roles they would play in future after graduation. The author concluded that the campus is now the most veritable training ground for future leaders. So far, it was observed that students practice leadership aspects of hidden curriculum which is explicitly felt as co-curricular activities to enhance university governance.

### Implications of the Study

The study findings have obvious implications thus:

- Students in the universities like to practice societal roles they would play in future and need to be encouraged.
- The university is a training ground for future leaders whose needs, interest values, opinions and ideology need to be respected for real sustainable development of the society.
- Students' union government in universities do showcase their governance impacts in promoting academic excellence, social discipline and the spirit of oneness among students and host communities.

### Conclusion

The study examined the leadership aspects of hidden curriculum that students practice under the auspices of students' unionism and their contributions to university governance. The findings showed that SUG makes their imprints in university administration; character building of its members; encourages and backs up achievement of academic excellence. Furthermore, the study findings highlighted the roles of students' union government in enhancing oneness, cordial interaction among its members and the host communities for mutual co-existence. These impacts made by students need to be supported and respected for real sustainable development in universities in Nigeria and the nation as a whole.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study and the implications drawn, the following recommendations are made:

- Policy makers and curriculum developers need to look into the leadership roles of Hidden Curriculum practiced by students in order to capture them into a planned programme of study to groom them better.
- The students' union government makes a lot of impact in university administration and as such, should be carried along in university's policy formulations and implementations.
- University administration in Nigeria need to dialogue with students' union bodies on some innovative areas of management for peaceful co-existence in the university community.
- Academic staff advisers need to be appointed for the various levels of SUG, to monitor and guide them aright in their union's deliberations

### References

- Adesanofe, A. P (2000). A study of students' participation in school management: A case study of some secondary schools in Ikafe LGA of Ondo State. *An unpublished M.Ed Thesis, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife.*
- Akomolafe, C.O. and Ibiyola, E. Y. (2014). Students' participation in university governance and organizational effectiveness in Ekiti and Ondo States of Nigeria. *American Journal of Social and Management Sciences*, 3(3), 231-236. <http://www.schub/AJSMS>. Retrieved on May,2015.
- Enu, C. (2012). Enhancing the entrepreneurship education in Nigeria. *American Journal of Social Issues and Humanities*, 2(4), 232-239.
- Ezekwem, C.C (2009). *Students' unionism and university administration in Nigeria*. Paper presented at the World University Forum held at Switzerland from January 31<sup>st</sup> to February 2<sup>nd</sup>.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria (FGN, 2013). *National policy on education*. Lagos: NERDC Press.
- Lambert, V. (2012). Deception in students' politics. *The Nation's Newspaper of Thursday*, April 19, p. 35.
- Liphart, A. (2012). *Patterns of democracy: Government forms and performances in thirty-six countries*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Obanya, P.A.I. (2007). *Thinking and talking education*. Ibadan: Evans Brothers (Nig.) Ltd.
- Ogah, M.E.U; Eze, P.I., Mbah, B.A. and Emesini, N. (2009). *Fundamentals of curriculum development*,

- implementation and instruction*. Enugu: SNAAP Press (Nig) Ltd.
- Quian, L. (2012). From democratic theory to democratic governance theory: Implications to political development of the MACAOSAR. *Academic Journal of One Country, Two Systems*, 2(2), 182-196.
- Saha, L. (2000). Education and active citizenship: prospects and issues. *Journal of Educational Practice and Theory*, 22(1), 9-20.
- Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki. (2013). *Students' Union By-law*. Abakaliki: Ebonyi State University Press.
- Tajomavwo, G.A. (2009). *Characteristics of effective organization*. A paper delivered at a workshop on enhancing organizational change and effectiveness held at Centre for Management Development, Shangisha-Lagos.
- Tandon, Q.R. (2005). *Democracy: Civil society visions and strategies*. Conference Report held at Montreal, Quebec-Canada on May 29<sup>th</sup> to June 1<sup>st</sup>, p. 63-64.