



International Journal Pedagogy of Social Studies



Journal homepage: <http://ejournal.upi.edu/index.php/pips/index>

Autonomy Management and Development of Universities in the 21st Century

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of university autonomy on institutional growth in the 21st century, focusing on staffing autonomy, financial autonomy, and academic freedom as critical determinants of development. A quantitative descriptive research design was employed, collecting data from 120 participants in Kwara State, Nigeria. Pearson correlation and linear regression analyses were used to assess the relationship between university autonomy and institutional development. The findings reveal a strong, positive relationship between university autonomy and institutional growth. Universities with greater control over staffing, finances, and academic decisions demonstrate improved administrative efficiency, innovation, and overall development. The study recommends that policymakers and university administrators adopt policies that grant institutions greater autonomy in staffing, financial management, and academic governance. Strengthening university independence can lead to improved educational quality, research output, and institutional sustainability.

ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Submitted/Received 1 May 2025

First Revised 15 May 2025

Accepted 20 May 2025

First Available online 10 Jun 2025

Publication Date 15 Jun 2025

Keyword:

Academic freedom;

Development;

Financial autonomy;

Staffing.

1. INTRODUCTION

The widespread call for university autonomy is clear evidence that the government and other outside parties are heavily interfering with university management and operations. The interference is seen to violate the tenets upon which the academic institution was built. Although the laws establishing these universities are well-established, the university system in Nigeria is heterogeneous to the extent that what should be done and how should be done depends on the environment. Due to the lack of autonomy, it looks like the entire university system has been politicized. Today, Nigeria is home to a large number of universities, some of which are governed by the federal government, some by the states, and still others by private citizens and business entities. The government, its agencies, and the owners of these colleges have repeatedly imposed bureaucratic regulations and conditions of service on how the administrative activities of the universities should be run, notwithstanding the autonomy ingrained in the statutes establishing these institutions. The absence of academic autonomy in the nation's ivory tower appears to be preventing the university's objectives from being fully attained.

Autonomy is a fundamental tenet upon which the higher education system is typically based and through which operational stability and the accomplishment of higher educational institutions' objectives are ensured, autonomy in higher institutions of learning is crucial for the realization of educational objectives. Therefore, a university is autonomous when it makes decisions that determine its own actions, either collectively or individually. Collective and individual decisions inside an organization result in guidelines for how the organization should behave. The organization is autonomous when these directions are made by the organization itself, either collectively or individually, and the activities adhere to these directives.

Government restrictions on internal decision-making, employment, financial management, and academic freedom have an impact on university decisions. Additionally, by restricting student enrolment to specific degree programs, implementing Treasury Single Account (TSA), the quota system syndrome admission procedure, appointing a pro-chancellor in violation of the constitution, and the usage of Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System (IPPIS) to pay university employees' salaries. Additionally, a recent government directive ordering the four-week closure of all universities nationwide due to the 2023 general election was a violation of university autonomy that appeared to usurp the authority of the senate of each of the nation's universities and interfered with their academic schedules. Furthermore, the National Universities Commission (NUC)'s Core Curriculum Minimum Academic Standards (CCMAS) are a danger to the standard of university education. The Nigerian University System was required to use NUC pre-packaged 70% CCMAS contents. As a result, just 30% of the academic program creation was left to the University Senates, who are legally in charge of it. The global demand for university autonomy is a flagrant symptom that the government and other external parties are meddling significantly in university administration and operations. The meddling is thought to run counter to the academic system's founding principles. However, bad planning insufficient finance, and lack of academic freedom provide significant obstacles to the effective development of

universities. To promote universities, efforts must be made in the area of teacher empowerment, proper funding, and academic freedom to support strong learning environments, excellent research, and the production of qualified graduates.

In Nigeria, the issue of university autonomy has grown to be a bottleneck that affects everyone. The development of universities and autonomy have been the subject of numerous studies. (Steiner, Appius and Nageli, 2025) carried out a study on the activity of academic council and university autonomy. (Anual et al, 2023) investigated the impact of autonomy on the job satisfaction of academic staff in Sri Lanka. The study made use of a structured questionnaire and regression analysis. The findings revealed that autonomy had a significant impact on the overall job satisfaction of academic staff. (Agasisti and Shibanova, 2022) treatise a focus on Russian Universities' autonomy, performance, and efficiency. The study adopted the use of regression and instrumental variable approaches for data analysis. The findings showed that autonomy is positively associated with efficiency and advanced practices. (Hou et al., 2022) shed his research light on autonomy and funding practices in England and Taiwan. (Matekenya, 2023) carried out a study on the governance autonomy for private and public universities in Malawi. The study data was collected from 130 academicians and higher education administrators. ANOVA was used for data analysis. The findings of the study revealed that academic, administrative, and financial autonomy is not significantly different. However, none of the authors cited in this study, specifically addressed the autonomy management and development of university. Additionally, the prior studies did not emphasize staffing autonomy, financial autonomy and academic freedom as important factors to measure autonomous management. The fact that the aforementioned existing studies' area and region differed greatly from this study is another glaring gap that inspired this analysis. This study aims to fill in the gaps that prior researchers left. As a result, the following objectives have been set to steer the study's progress. Thus, the study seeks to:

- a) Examine the relationship between staffing autonomy and development of universities in Nigeria.
- b) Examine the relationship between financial autonomy and development of universities in Nigeria.
- c) Examine the relationship between academic autonomy and development of universities in Nigeria.
- d) Examine the relationship among staffing, financial autonomy, academic freedom, and development of universities in Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following are some of the questions that were raised and answered:

- 1) Does staffing autonomy improve development of universities in Nigeria?
- 2) Does financial autonomy bring about development of universities in Nigeria?
- 3) Does academic freedom enhance development of universities in Nigeria?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Autonomy Management

Autonomy is the ability of an organization to operate by decisions made by that organization alone as opposed to those made by other organizations or individuals. This suggests that the organization sets its own rules and doesn't follow anyone else's directions (Utile, 2021). According to (Idris et al., 2024), "university autonomy" refers to the relative freedom of the university to manage its affairs without intervention from the outside, including the State, funders, or other stakeholders. According to (Kovács, 2025), university autonomy safeguards academic institutions against interference from the government in how they conduct business daily, particularly when it comes to matters involving student admittance and the hiring and firing of personnel.

Management is a social activity that entails organizing, planning, leading, directing, and coordinating human efforts toward the accomplishment of organizational goals and objectives (Idris et al., 2024). Management, according to (Abdullahi, 2022), is the efficient organization and use of material and human resources at hand to fulfill the organization's stated goals and objectives. This suggests that managing educational institutions' human, financial, and physical resources to attain the goals efficiently and effectively entails planning, organizing, directing, regulating, and directing those resources. Autonomy management in this study refers to appropriate staffing and financial and academic freedom toward the effective development of universities.

Staffing is known as the practice of creating a pool of qualified candidates for a specific job. One facet of workers' welfare that should not be taken for granted is their pay and remuneration. A university staff expects to be paid for the work they perform at a specific time and promptly as well. Excellent university peace would guarantee a high standard of discipline and enhance production for the advancement of universities (Abdullahi, 2020).

Any nation's degree and level of growth are greatly influenced by the number of skilled and qualified workers that it has on hand to manage and produce its resources in an efficient manner. A trained workforce is also necessary for the day-to-day operations of the educational organization. Every educational institution, regardless of level, would be in danger if the personnel (teachers in particular) were hired carelessly, paid badly, not recognized for unintended contributions, and not given opportunities for ongoing self-improvement.

Financial autonomy refers to the flexibility to raise and use money for the advancement of universities (Kovács, 2025). Financial autonomy also refers to the ability to make independent decisions using one's own resources. In the context of this study, financial autonomy can be seen as the capacity of a university to handle its finances and distribute its budget on its own (Matekenya, 2023; Thoa and Nhi, 2022).

According to (Nwaokugha, 2021), academic freedom means that teachers are free to engage in independent thought, invention, research, and knowledge creation within the parameters of academic practice in the classroom without worrying about being intimidated by the administration or government forces. Academic autonomy includes the freedom to seek out and amass knowledge as the researcher sees fit (Bernasconi, 2025). It is predicated on the notion that academics, researchers, and teachers all possess the individual freedom to freely speak and share their opinions (Wight, 2021).

This implies that academic staff members are free to conduct independent study, talk, and write according to their notions of facts and truths, all without interference from higher authority.

The term "management" describes the availability and usage of both people and physical resources through the performance function, organizing, directing, coordinating, staffing, and controlling for the accomplishment of the established organizational goals and objectives (Abdullahi, 2022). Instead of having work details regulated by senior management or company shareholders, autonomous management gives individual employees and work groups the freedom to run their procedures. In some circumstances, autonomous management can increase productivity and encourage creativity, but to make this sort of management structure effective, certain components including employee autonomy, financial autonomy, and academic independence are required (Matthews, Pineault and Hong, 2022).

According to Kantian ethics theory, people must be free to make decisions, human life must be given particular value and there must be particular rules to follow. The fact that Kant's philosophy upholds all equality and justice is another aspect of it that is beneficial for moral judgment. In other words, the foundation for human rights is provided by Kant's theory. Thus, a pure and a priori Moral Law, in Kant's view, serves as the foundation for all other moral laws. It is a priori in the sense that it is necessarily true always and for everyone, and it is pure in the sense that it does not contain conceptions drawn from the experience of the world and based on natural inclinations. Kant's theory is a good moral theory because it enables you to make moral decisions and realize your full potential. Any government who is logical and capable of realizing where their duty lays can be a decent person by giving room for university autonomy to achieve effective development of universities (Elizondo, 2022).

2.2. University Development

The university is an organization with a role or roles to play in the social system in which it finds itself, and the efficiency of officials performing the function of hiring staff members is vitally important to the university's overall performance as an organization. The efforts of people enable social institutions like the school to fulfill their objectives. A school's direction and efficacy are greatly influenced by the individuals that make up its personnel. An institution's level of excellence is only as good as the level of service provided by its employees. The staff's expertise as professionals determines how well the school accomplishes its goals in major part. University development in this study refers to the availability of a good learning environment, quality research as well as graduate competency.

2.3. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation of this study is based on Kantianism theory, which (Idrus et al., 2023) cites and claims that some absolute rules must be adhered to out of respect, such as the rule to respect people's privacy or the rule to respect other people's right to make decisions about their own lives. According to Kant, categorical imperatives serve as the moral obligations of individuals. The laws are categorical because they are always relevant to every individual in every circumstance, regardless of their objectives and

restraints. They are necessary since it is only natural for a human to want to enjoy themselves and avoid suffering, therefore they may be less likely to follow moral rules of action. He believed that people should be viewed as ends in and of themselves rather than as mere means. More details on the focus of the research frame work can be seen in the following **Figure 1**.

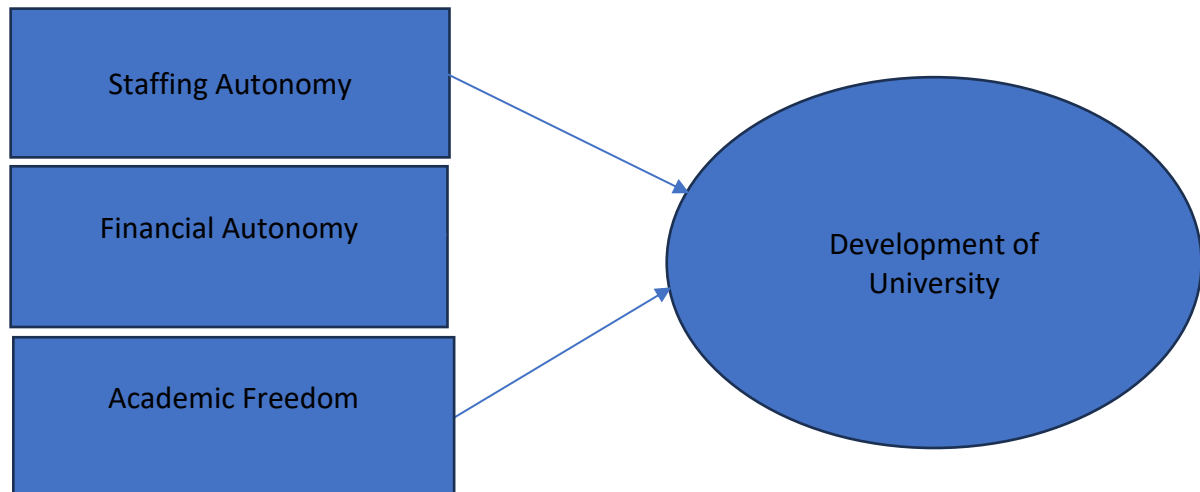


Figure 1. Theoretical Framework

This theory is applicable in the university settings in that, the government can act morally to freely conform their will to the moral law, which it views as the categorical imperative, by allowing the university autonomy in terms of employment, funding, and academic freedom. Actions that are congruent with reason are required by the imperative. Although the government may not be delighted if it behaves in this manner, it will be morally right and have fulfilled its obligation to support the growth of universities. It is anticipated that the performance and growth of universities will be enhanced by their strengthening as strategic organizational actors with the ability to exercise managerial self-regulation. This hypothesis served as the foundation for the study since any being with autonomy and reason should regard the autonomy and reason of others as its ultimate goal.

3. METHOD

This study employed a quantitative research strategy (descriptive) to investigate the connection between autonomy management and university development. It was selected because, using a single source of data to categorize qualities and build a statistical model to interpret the data collection that is measurable, objective, and statistically valid, facilitates the discovery of social facts (Alfatiha, 2022).

All academic staff from the two chosen universities in Kwara State, Nigeria, made up the study's population. 120 lecturers from the chosen universities are the study's target population. Kwara State University and the University of Ilorin were the institutions chosen. The two universities were purposefully chosen by the researcher to increase the study's viability. To give all types of lecturers an equal probability of selection, the

stratified random sampling technique was employed to choose lecturers from the sample universities (Cevikbas, Kaiser, Schukajlow, 2022).

The research tool for this study was a self-designed questionnaire called the "Autonomy Management Questionnaire (AMQ)" and an adapted questionnaire called the "Development of University Questionnaire" (DUQ). The sub-constructs of staffing autonomy (6 items), financial autonomy (6 items), and academic freedom (6 items) were all included in the total of 18 items used to measure autonomy management. Abdullahi (2022) on a good learning environment with (5 items), (Matekenya, 2023) on graduate competency with (5 items), and Abdullahi (2023) on quality research with (5 items) concluded the questionnaire items about the development of universities. The four-point Likert scale was used by participants to express their opinions, with 1 denoting "Strongly Disagree" and 4 denoting "Strongly Agree". Any things that fall below the criterion mean value are shown to be disagreed by the criterion. According to (Castro et al. 2023), responding on a 4-point Likert scale was quicker and simpler than responding on a 5- to 7-point scale.

Drafts of the instrument were sent to two test and measurement professionals, and two experts in educational management, and their feedback on their relevance and applicability was used to determine the validity of the instrument. The questionnaire was revised and adjusted based on the advice and opinions of professionals. Additionally, 20 copies were distributed to sample members to gauge their understanding of the questions' instructions, phrasing, and scale and determine whether they had any trouble answering them. As a result, before sending the final copies, several of the comments made were fixed. Cronbach's alpha was used to evaluate the instrument's dependability, as indicated in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Reliability Test of AMQ and DUQ

Variable	Sub-construct	N	Cronbach's Alpha	Decision
Autonomy management	Staffing autonomy	6	0.920	All items are appropriate and dependable
	Financial autonomy	6	0.905	All items are appropriate and dependable
	Academic Freedom	6	0.886	All items are appropriate and dependable
Development of university	Quality learning environment	5	0.868	All items are appropriate and dependable
	Quality research	5	0.882	All items are appropriate and dependable
	Graduate competency	5	0.922	All items are appropriate and dependable

To determine the reliability of any items on the Likert scale survey, Cronbach's alpha, a measure of internal consistency, will be utilized. Cronbach alpha considers the following when evaluating alpha is $\alpha \geq 0.9$ (Outstanding), $0.9 > \alpha \geq 0.8$ (Good), $0.8 > \alpha \geq 0.7$ (Acceptable), $0.7 > \alpha \geq 0.6$ (Questionable), $0.6 > \alpha \geq$ (Poor), and $0.5 > \alpha$ (Unacceptable) as a general rule. The academic freedom, financial autonomy, and staff autonomy reliability tests for AMQ are shown in Table 2 for the growth of universities.

The sub-constructs Cronbach's alpha values for staffing autonomy with six things, financial autonomy with six items, and academic freedom with six items are each 0.920, 0.905, and 0.886, respectively. Furthermore, the Cronbach's alpha values for the sub-constructs on the development of university variables are 0.868 for a quality learning environment, 0.882 for a quality research environment, and 0.922 for graduate competency. According to (Matthews, Pineault and Hong, 2022), values above 0.70 are regarded as appropriate and dependable.

Data was gathered through the distribution of an electronic questionnaire. The informed consent component of the questionnaire was designed with the understanding that each participant would have the option of participating or not in the study. Participants in this study opted to participate voluntarily, and they always had the option to stop at any time without suffering any repercussions. 140 completed questionnaires were also received. However, 120 questionnaires that were filed appropriately were used in this study. The participants' identities remained anonymous because their data was kept secret and confidential. This ensured the participants' safety and privacy according to (Jalolov, 2024).

To establish the purpose of the study, the data were analysed using the mean and standard deviation. Inferential statistics, such as Pearson product-moment correlation and linear multiple regression analysis, were used to assess the hypotheses and determine whether they were accepted or rejected at the (0.5) significant level (Kalpokas and Radivojevic, 2021).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Staffing Autonomy

RQ 1: Does staffing autonomy improve development of universities in Nigeria?

The mean and standard deviation responses of participants on Staffing Autonomy are shown in **Table 2**.

Table 2. Mean and Standard Deviation of Items on Staffing Autonomy

S/N	Staffing Autonomy	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	Staffing autonomy aids universities in figuring out the number of students they can accept into various faculties and courses.	2.86	0.962
2	gives the university the authority to choose its admissions criteria.	2.92	0.954
3	gives the institution the discretion to choose which students to accept.	2.94	0.944
4	gives the institution the authority to hire the staff members they require.	2.95	0.962
5	allows for independence in choosing the institution's administrative leaders.	2.96	0.951
6	promotes administrative independence free from political and administrative interference from the government.	3.14	0.968
	overall mean	2.97	0.957

The participants' general impression of staffing autonomy is "Agreed" (M = 2.97, SD = 0.957), according to Table 2. This demonstrates that participants thought staffing

autonomy promoted efficient university development in Nigeria. Additionally, every response had a mean value greater than 2.50, which was the required value. Furthermore, participants concur that staffing autonomy is i) aids universities in figuring out the number of students they can accept into various faculties and courses. (M = 2.86, SD = 0.962), ii) gives the university the authority to choose its admissions criteria (M = 2.92, SD = 0,954), iii) gives the institution the discretion to choose which students to accept (M = 2.94, SD = 0.944), iv) gives the institution the authority to hire the staff members they require (M = 2.95, SD = 0.962), v) allows for independence in choosing the institution's administrative leaders (M = 2.96, SD = 0.951)., vi) promotes administrative independence free from political and administrative interference from the government (M = 3.14, SD = 0.968).

4.2. Financial Autonomy

RQ 2: Does financial autonomy bring about development of universities in Nigeria?

The mean and standard deviation responses of participants on financial autonomy are shown in **Table 3**.

Table 3. Mean and Standard Deviation of Items on Financial Autonomy

S/N	Financial Autonomy	Mean	Standard Deviation
7	Financial independence allows the university to set its operating budget.	3.36	0.961
8	Allows the university to choose the fees students will be required to pay.	2.86	0.948
9	Allows for the ability to design and manage a wage system that is appropriate for the university.	2.92	0.968
10	Ensures effective procurement of university tools and resources to carry out its purpose and is properly maintained.	2.88	0.977
11	Aids in reducing the incessant strike actions.	2.64	0.978
12	Gives universities the freedom to investigate unusual opportunities and use unique solutions to address their problems.	2.26	0.956
	Overall mean	2.82	0.964

According to Table 3 (M = 2.82, SD = 0.964), the participants' overall impression of financial independence is "Agreed.". This demonstrates the consensus among participants that Nigeria's universities will develop effectively when they have financial independence. All of the responses also had mean values that were higher than 2.50, which was the required value. This shows that participants believed financial autonomy is i) allows the university to set its operating budget (M = 3.36, SD = 0.961), ii) allows university to choose the fees students will be required to pay (M = 2.86, SD = 0.948), iii) allows for the ability to design and manage a wage system that is appropriate for the university (M = 2.92, SD = 0.968), iv) ensures effective procurement of university tools and resources needs to carry out its purpose and is properly maintained (M = 2.88, SD = 0.977), v) aids in reducing the incessant strike actions (M = 2.64, SD = 0.978)., vi) gives

universities the freedom to investigate unusual opportunities and use unique solutions to address their problems ($M = 2.26$, $SD = 0.956$).

4.3. Academic Freedom

RQ 2: Does academic freedom enhance development of universities in Nigeria?

The mean and standard deviation responses of participants on academic freedom are shown in **Table 4**.

Table 4. Mean and Standard Deviation of Items on Academic Freedom

S/N	Academic Freedom	Mean	Standard Deviation
13	Academic freedom assists in developing curricula that are deemed appropriate for universities.	2.92	0.954
14	Academic freedom assists in developing curricula that are deemed appropriate for universities	2.86	0.922
15	Allows people to speak or hold their opinions without interference	2.84	0.966
16	Strengthens the dedication to excellence and quality in the roles of teaching, scholarship, and research	2.24	0.918
17	Guarantees a high standard of instruction for the advancement of higher education.	2.82	0.978
18	Gives flexibility in deciding on course topics and graduation requirements.	2.84	0.966
	Overall Mean	2.75	0.951

The participants' general view of academic freedom is "Agreed" ($M = 2.75$, $SD = 0.951$), according to Table 4. This demonstrates that participants were in agreement that academic freedom aided the growth of universities in Nigeria. Additionally, every response had a mean value greater than 2.50, which was the required value. This shows that participants felt academic freedom i) assists in developing curricula that are deemed appropriate for universities ($M = 2.92$, $SD = 0.954$), ii) assists in developing curricula that are deemed appropriate for universities ($M = 2.86$, $SD = 0.922$), iii) allows people to speak or hold their opinions without interference ($M = 2.84$, $SD = 0.966$), iv) strengthens the dedication to excellence and quality in the roles of teaching, scholarship, and research ($M = 3.24$, $SD = 0.918$), v) guarantees a high standard of instruction for the advancement of higher education ($M = 2.82$, $SD = 0.978$), vi) Gives flexibility in deciding on course topics and graduation requirements ($M = 2.84$, $SD = 0.966$).

4.4. Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were developed and tested:

- 1) There is no significant relationship between staffing autonomy and the development of universities in Nigeria.

- 2) There is no significant relationship between financial autonomy and the development of universities in Nigeria.
- 3) There is no significant relationship between academic freedom and the development of universities in Nigeria.
- 4) There is no significant relationship between autonomy management and the development of the university in Nigeria.

4.5. Pearson Correlation

According to (Agistiannur and Hermina, 2025), Pearson's R can range from -1 to +1. Positive Pearson correlation denotes that two variables rise at the same time, while negative Pearson correlation implies that one variable rises while the other declines. More details on the results of the Pearson Correlation can be seen in the following **Table 5, Table 6 and Table 7.**

H01: There is no significant relationship between staffing autonomy and the development of universities in Nigeria.

Table 5. Pearson Correlation of Staffing Autonomy and Development of University

		Staffing autonomy	Development of university
Staffing autonomy	Pearson correlation	1	.920**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	120	120
Development of university	Pearson Correlation	.920**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	120	120

According to the Pearson correlation (Table 5), staffing autonomy and university development have a strong positive link ($r = 0.920$, $n = 120$, $p = .000$). According to (Mulisa, 2022; Creswell, 2024), the Extremely significant $p < 0.01$ correlation indicates a high level of linkage and support, which shows a high level of confidence in the association.

H02: There is no significant relationship between financial autonomy and the development of the university in Nigeria.

Table 6. Pearson Correlation of Financial Autonomy and Development of University

		Financial autonomy	Development of university
Financial autonomy	Pearson Correlation	1	.910
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	120	120
Development of university	Pearson Correlation	.910	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	120	120

Financial autonomy and the development of the university have a strong positive link, according to the Pearson correlation (Table 6) ($r = 0.910$, $n = 120$, $p = .000$). As shown by the Extremely significant $p < 0.01$ correlation, there is a strong relationship and evidence for the association between financial autonomy and development of university (Mwita, 2022; Nyimbili and Nyimbili, 2024; Ahmadin, 2022).

H03: There is no significant relationship between academic freedom and the development of university in Nigeria

Table 7. Pearson Correlation of Academic Freedom and Development of University

		Academic freedom	Development of university
Academic freedom	Pearson Correlation	1	.880**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	120	120
Development of university	Pearson Correlation	.880**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	120	120

Academic freedom and university development have a strong positive link, according to the Pearson correlation (Table 7) ($r = 0.880$, $n = 120$, $p = .000$). A high level of link and support are indicated by the Extremely significant $p < 0.01$ correlation, which suggests a high level of confidence in the association (Hall et al., 2023; Ghafar, 2024; Hendrayadi, Kustati and Sepriyanti, 2023; Creswell, 2024).

4.6. Linear Regression Analysis

Objective 4: Examine the relationship among staffing, financial autonomy, academic freedom, and development of universities in Nigeria

This section displays the results of a linear regression study on the autonomy management and development of universities in Nigeria. Table 8 reveals that autonomy management has a significant impact on the effective development of the university with 0.783 of R square value. More details on the results of the Linear Regression Analysis can be seen in the following **Table 8 and Table 9**.

Table 8. Linear Regression of Autonomy Management and Development of University

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.885	.783	.733	.372

a. Predictors: (constants), staffing autonomy, financial autonomy, and academic freedom.

Table 9. Linear Regression Coefficient for Autonomy Management and Development of University

Model	Unstandardized coefficient	Standardized coefficient	T	Sig.
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	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	.482	.106		4.211	.000
Staffing autonomy	0.327	.036	.0373	5.822	.000
Financial autonomy	0.319	.038	.0361	2.632	.000
Academic freedom	0.302	.054	.321	2.657	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Development of University

The effectiveness of the development of the university was examined using linear regression to see if staffing autonomy, financial autonomy, and academic freedom could be significantly predicted. According to Table 9 explanation of the running linear regression model's results, the beta coefficients for autonomy management had a standard regression weight of .482, which indicates that autonomy management promotes the efficient growth of universities. has demonstrated the undeniable correlation between university development and autonomy management. With a corresponding p-value of .000, the T-test result of 4.211 was satisfactory. Consequently, in this relationship, staffing autonomy has the greatest impact (Beta = 0.327), followed by financial autonomy (Beta = 0.319), and academic independence (Beta = 0.302). In conclusion, the results of this study using multiple linear regression show that academic freedom, financial freedom, and staff autonomy are positively related to the effective development of universities in Nigeria.

The findings in Table 2 show that staffing autonomy enhances the effective development of universities in Nigeria, consequently, aids universities in figuring out the number of students they can accept into various faculties and courses, gives the university the authority to choose its admissions criteria, gives the institution the discretion to choose which students to accept, gives the institution the authority to hire the staff members they require, allows for independence in choosing the institution's administrative leaders as well as promotes administrative independence free from political and administrative interference from the government. Results from hypothesis one reveal that there is a significant and close relationship between staffing autonomy and the development of the university. The finding agreed with (Bernasconi, 2025; Kolawole et al., 2024) that universities must be able to employ the most suitable and qualified academic staff without external prescription or interference. The finding concurred with (Steiner, Appius and Nageli, 2025) that staffing autonomy will enhance the effectiveness and development of universities. The finding agreed with (Belgaroui and Hamad, 2021) that staffing autonomy serves as a mechanism of good governance and improves the performance of higher education institutions.

Table 3 findings reveal that financial autonomy brings about the effective development of universities in Nigeria. As a result, it allows the university to set its operating budget, allows the university to choose the fees students will be required to pay, allows for the ability to design and manage a wage system that is appropriate for the university, ensure effective procurement of university tools and resources needs to carry out its purpose and is properly maintained, aids in reducing the incessant strike actions as well as universities the freedom to investigate unusual opportunities and use unique solutions to address their problems. The result from hypothesis two reveals that

there is a positive and close relationship between financial autonomy and the development of universities in Nigeria. The finding is in line with (Thoa and Nhi, 2022); Atibuni 2020), that any institution that raises its funds can decide to use it according to its internal rules, process, and system.

Table 4 reveals that academic freedom improves the development of universities in Nigeria. As a result, it assists in developing curricula that are deemed appropriate for universities, allows people to speak or hold their opinions without interference, strengthens the dedication to excellence and quality in the roles of teaching, scholarship, and research, guarantees a high standard of instruction for the advancement of higher education as well as gives flexibility in deciding on course topics and graduation requirements. Results from hypothesis three reveal that there is a significant and positive relationship between academic freedom and the development of universities in Nigeria. The finding concurred with (Wight, 2021; Pringle and Woodman, 2022) that academic freedom is at the very core of higher education and the mission of the university. Also, the finding agreed with (Belgaroui and Hamad, 2021) that good practices of academic freedom allow academia to work freely and enhance the performance of higher education institutions.

Regression analysis shows that there is a positive and strong relationship between autonomy management and the development of universities in Nigeria. The finding agreed with (Matekenya, 2023) and (Eyo and Afen, 2024) that having effective policies that improve the autonomy of universities will enhance empowerment management, effectiveness, and create a conducive atmosphere for academic activities. The finding also is in line with (Nguyen et al, 2022; Annual et al, 2023; Nwaokugha, 2021; Agasisti and Shibanova, 2022) that all factors that embrace degrees of governance autonomy must be considered to have effective institutions of higher education.

Furthermore, the results supported Kant's assertion that autonomy allows for the respect of other people's right to make decisions about their own lives as well as a set of unbreakable laws that must be adhered to for the growth of an organization.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the results, the current study has conceptualized the relationship between independent variables such as staffing autonomy, financial autonomy, and academic freedom, all of which are promising variables for stimulating the successful development of universities. While analysing the results, all of the research's goals and questions were validated.

Even though this study clarified the role autonomy management plays in the growth and performance of universities, it also revealed several research shortcomings that need to be addressed in follow-up investigations. Other criteria can be utilized to evaluate autonomy management in addition to those included in this study. A similar study may also be conducted at other higher education institutions outside universities. These findings will help the government and educational authorities show concern for the development of universities while maintaining their complete autonomy.

Additionally, this discovery can serve as a starting point for upcoming studies in education.

The government should permit university autonomy in terms of freedom to choose personnel and students to aid universities in figuring out the number of students they can accept into various faculties and courses, give the university the authority to choose its admissions criteria, give the institution the discretion to choose which students to accept, gives the institution the authority to hire the staff members they require, allows for independence in choosing the institution's administrative leaders as well as promotes administrative independence free from political and administrative interference from the government. Also, gives room for financial independence of the universities to design payment platforms and manage a wage system that is appropriate for the university, it allows the university to set its operating budget, allows university to choose the fees students will be required to pay, allows for the ability to design and manage a wage system that is appropriate for the university, ensures effective procurement of university tools and resources needs to carry out its purpose and is properly maintained, aids in reducing the incessant strike actions as well as universities the freedom to investigate unusual opportunities and use unique solutions to address their problems. Additionally, the government should allow academic freedom to encourage teachers to freely engage in independent thought, invention, research, and knowledge creation within the parameters of academic practice in the classroom without worrying about being intimidated by the administration or government forces, assists in developing curricula that are deemed appropriate for universities, allows people to speak or hold their opinions without interference, strengthens the dedication to excellence and quality in the roles of teaching, scholarship, and research, guarantees a high standard of instruction for the advancement of higher education as well as gives flexibility in deciding on course topics and graduation requirements.

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