

## MANAGING TRANSITIONS IN FEDERAL UNIVERSITIES FOR SUSTAINABLE SERVICE DELIVERY

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### ABSTRACT

*The increasing demands for quality education and sustainable service delivery in federal universities require effective transition management and active stakeholder engagement. In South-East Nigeria, federal universities face challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, weak governance, and limited institutional capacity, which impede sustainable service delivery. This study investigates the effect of transition management strategies, stakeholder engagement, and institutional capacity on sustainable service delivery in federal universities in South-East Nigeria. A cross-sectional survey research design was adopted, and data were collected from 120 lecturers across Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education(AIFUE), Owerri, Federal University of Technology, (FUTO), Owerri, and Nnamdi Azikiwe University (UNIZIK), Awka using a structured questionnaire titled Transition Management and Sustainable Service Delivery Questionnaire (TMSSDQ) validated with a reliability coefficient of 0.87. Data were analyzed using the Spearman Rank Order Correlation Coefficient at a 0.05 significance level. Findings reveal that implementing structured transition management strategies significantly enhances academic, administrative, and social service continuity. Likewise, active stakeholder engagement and strengthened institutional capacity significantly facilitate effective transitions, reduce resistance to change, and improve sustainable service delivery. The study concludes that embedding transition management practices, participatory governance, and institutional capacity-building within federal universities equips institutions to meet current demands while preparing for future challenges. It is recommended that universities in South-East Nigeria adopt structured change management strategies, foster collaborative stakeholder participation, and invest in institutional capacity to ensure continuous and sustainable service delivery.*

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## Introduction

In the face of global socio-economic changes and increasing demands for quality education, universities are under pressure to adapt and transition toward sustainable service delivery. Transition management in universities refers to the process of systematically planning, implementing, and evaluating change initiatives that ensure academic, administrative, and infrastructural systems remain effective, relevant, and sustainable (Akinola & Olatunji, 2021). Federal universities in Nigeria, as key providers of higher education, face challenges ranging from infrastructural deficits, technological gaps, and funding inadequacies to changing societal expectations and globalization pressures. According to Adeyemi (2022), sustainable service delivery in universities involves ensuring that teaching, research, and community services meet present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to access quality education. This requires efficient management of resources, adoption of technology-driven learning systems, improved governance structures, and stakeholder participation. Ojo and Salami (2023) emphasize that managing transitions is central to maintaining competitiveness, promoting institutional resilience, and meeting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 4 on quality education.

Transition management theories argue that successful change requires stakeholder engagement, capacity building, and alignment with long-term sustainability objectives (Jimu & Rennkamp, 2024). In universities, this translates to innovations in service delivery such as e-learning platforms, research-driven community partnerships, eco-friendly campus management, and transparent governance systems. Thus, this study explores how transitions can be effectively managed in federal universities in Nigeria to ensure sustainable service delivery.

## Statement of the Problem

Federal universities in Nigeria continue to face significant challenges in delivering quality and sustainable services. Despite being the highest tier of public tertiary education, many of these institutions struggle with inadequate infrastructure, frequent strikes, outdated curricula, poor funding, and resistance to innovation. These issues have hindered the ability of universities to fulfill their core mandates of teaching, research, and community service effectively (Okafor & Nwosu, 2020).

The rapid digital transformation in global education further exposes the inability of Nigerian universities to adapt quickly to modern service delivery models. For example, the COVID-19 pandemic revealed gaps in online learning infrastructure, digital literacy, and

effective transition planning (Olatunde, 2021). Moreover, governance challenges, limited transparency, and weak change management practices have deepened inefficiencies in the system. These problems raise pressing questions: How can federal universities effectively manage transitions in their operations? What strategies can ensure that service delivery is not only improved but also sustainable in the long term? Without addressing these issues, universities risk lagging behind global standards, undermining national development, and failing to produce graduates with the skills and knowledge necessary for a sustainable future.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The main aim of this study is to investigate how transitions can be managed in federal universities to enhance sustainable service delivery. The specific objectives are to:

- i. Examine the extent to which transition management strategies impact sustainable service delivery in federal universities in the South-East, Nigeria.
- ii. Assess the extent to which stakeholder engagement and institutional capacity facilitate effective transitions for sustainable service delivery in the South-East, Nigeria.

### **Research Questions**

- i. To what extent do transition management strategies influence sustainable service delivery in federal universities in the South-East, Nigeria?
- ii. To what extent do stakeholder engagement and institutional capacity facilitate effective transitions for sustainable service delivery in federal universities in the South-East, Nigeria?

### **Research Hypotheses**

Ho1: Transition management strategies do not significantly influence sustainable service delivery in federal universities in the South-East, Nigeria.

Ho2: Stakeholder engagement and institutional capacity do not significantly facilitate effective transitions for sustainable service delivery in federal universities in the South-East, Nigeria.

### **Review of Related Literature**

#### **Conceptual Review**

#### **Concept of Transition Management**

Transition management is a strategic, long-term, and participatory process designed to guide institutions, systems, and societies from their current state toward a more sustainable and resilient future. It emphasizes coordinated policy frameworks, cultural adaptation, innovation, and systemic thinking (Loorbach, Wittmayer, & Shiroyama, 2020). Unlike short-term reforms,

transition management is oriented toward structural change by fostering shared visions, experimenting with innovative practices, and embedding sustainability principles into institutional processes.

In the context of higher education, transition management involves reforming teaching, research, governance, and infrastructure to align with global sustainability imperatives. Universities are increasingly required to adapt to rapid socio-economic, technological, and environmental changes. This includes adopting digital learning technologies, integrating sustainability into curricula, promoting interdisciplinary research, and building partnerships with industry and communities (Akinola & Olatunji, 2021). Transition management in universities also ensures responsiveness to national development goals while preparing graduates with the skills needed for a green economy. Key features of effective transition management include flexibility, inclusiveness, long-term visioning, and systemic coordination. Stakeholder engagement is particularly critical, as successful transitions require the involvement of students, academic staff, administrators, policymakers, and the wider community (Schneidewind & Augenstein, 2021). Through collaborative governance, universities can overcome resistance to change, minimize disruptions, and build institutional capacity to sustain reforms. Thus, transition management is not a one-time event but a continuous, adaptive process that balances tradition with innovation.

### **Concept of Stakeholder Engagement**

Stakeholder engagement is a central element of transition management because societal transitions—such as those in education, energy, health, or environmental sustainability—involve multiple actors with diverse interests, values, and resources. Transition management emphasizes the active involvement of key stakeholders, including policymakers, professionals, community members, researchers, and private sector actors, in shaping long-term visions and pathways for change. Through inclusive dialogue, participatory decision-making, and shared learning processes, stakeholders contribute their knowledge and experiences, which helps to build a collective understanding of complex problems and possible solutions. This collaborative approach increases legitimacy, trust, and ownership of transition processes, making proposed changes more acceptable and contextually relevant.

Effective stakeholder engagement in transition management also supports adaptive and reflexive governance. By continuously engaging stakeholders across different phases—problem framing, vision development, experimentation, and evaluation—transition managers can respond to emerging challenges and adjust strategies accordingly. Stakeholder networks

facilitate experimentation and innovation by encouraging joint action, feedback, and knowledge exchange, particularly at the local or niche level where new practices can be tested. Over time, sustained engagement helps align short-term actions with long-term transition goals, strengthens institutional capacity, and enhances the likelihood of achieving durable and systemic change.

### **Concept of Sustainable Service Delivery**

Sustainable service delivery refers to the continuous provision of quality, equitable, and environmentally responsible services that meet the present needs of stakeholders without compromising the ability of future generations to benefit from similar services. Within the higher education sector, sustainable service delivery encompasses academic, administrative, and social services that uphold efficiency, inclusivity, accountability, and ecological stewardship (Adeyemi, 2022).

According to Okeke and Alabi (2023), universities achieve sustainable service delivery through academic services such as uninterrupted teaching, consistent research output, and the training of graduates who are equipped to solve societal challenges. They further explain that administrative services involve transparent governance, efficient use of resources, and the adoption of digital systems to enhance accessibility while reducing bureaucratic delays. In addition, social services include student welfare, campus health facilities, community engagement, and the integration of environmental sustainability practices into university operations. Olufemi and Adebayo (2021) emphasize that sustainable service delivery also entails environmental responsibility, which includes green building design, renewable energy systems, water conservation, and effective waste management. Financial sustainability is another critical aspect, requiring institutions to balance scarce resources with rising demands for quality services. Moreover, building resilience to disruptions such as strikes, pandemics, or funding shortfalls ensures that universities can maintain essential service delivery under unpredictable conditions.

In Nigeria, sustainable service delivery in higher education addresses challenges such as unstable power supply, inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, and staff welfare issues. Tackling these requires innovative policies, effective transition management, and partnerships with government and private sectors (Eze & Chukwuma, 2022). By embedding sustainability into service delivery, universities do not only achieve institutional goals, but also contribute to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production).

## Theoretical Review

The study is anchored on Transition Management Theory and Stakeholder Theory.

### **Transition Management Theory**

Transition Management Theory (TMT) was developed by Rotmans and Loorbach in (2001). The theory explains how long-term structural change toward sustainability can be systematically guided. The theory posits that successful transitions require multi-level governance, experimentation, adaptive learning, and the alignment of short-term innovations with long-term sustainability visions. It further emphasizes inclusiveness, flexibility, and systemic coordination to ensure institutions effectively adapt to socio-economic, technological, and environmental changes.

This theory is relevant to the present study because Federal Universities in Nigeria face persistent challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, governance gaps, and technological deficiencies. Transition Management Theory provides a framework for universities to plan, implement, and sustain reforms in teaching, administration, and campus management, thereby enhancing their capacity for sustainable service delivery

### **Stakeholder Theory**

Stakeholder Theory (ST), introduced by Freeman (1984), posits that organizations function within a network of stakeholders whose needs, expectations, and contributions must be acknowledged to ensure long-term survival and success. Unlike traditional models that prioritize only shareholders, Stakeholder Theory emphasizes that employees, customers, governments, communities, and other actors all play critical roles in shaping organizational outcomes (Harrison, Barney, Freeman, & Phillips, 2019).

This theory is particularly relevant to the present study as universities depend on diverse stakeholders, students, academic staff, administrators, government agencies, and communities for their sustainability. In the context of managing transitions, stakeholder involvement is critical for designing inclusive policies, enhancing trust, and fostering accountability. For federal universities in Nigeria, engaging stakeholders ensures that reforms in service delivery address real needs, minimize resistance to change, and create shared value. Stakeholder Theory thus provides a framework for understanding how collaboration and inclusivity drive effective transitions for sustainable service delivery.

## Empirical Studies

Jimoh and Abdullahi (2020) conducted a study on transition management practices and institutional performance in selected Nigerian federal universities. Using a descriptive survey

of 320 academic and administrative staff across four universities, they found that universities that adopted structured transition strategies such as digital learning systems, participatory governance, and capacity development recorded higher levels of sustainable service delivery. The study concluded that weak change management frameworks were a major cause of recurring service disruptions in Nigerian universities.

Adebanjo and Omotayo (2021) investigated the role of stakeholder engagement in higher education reforms in South-West Nigeria. The study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining questionnaires administered to 450 university staff and interviews with senior administrators. Findings revealed that effective stakeholder participation (students, lecturers, unions, and government agencies) significantly improved policy acceptance, reduced resistance to change, and enhanced the sustainability of reforms. The authors recommended a stakeholder-driven approach in managing transitions in universities.

Nwachukwu and Ibrahim (2022) carried out a study on digital transition and sustainable service delivery in Nigerian universities during the COVID-19 pandemic. Data were collected from 500 students and 200 lecturers across six federal universities using structured questionnaires. Results indicated that institutions that quickly embraced e-learning platforms and digital administrative processes maintained better service continuity compared to those with weak ICT infrastructures. The study highlighted inadequate training, poor internet facilities, and limited funding as barriers to sustainable digital transition.

Bello and Salisu (2023) examined transition governance and quality service delivery in public universities in Northern Nigeria. Using regression analysis of data from 15 federal universities, the study revealed a significant positive relationship between transition governance structures (such as transparent leadership, monitoring frameworks, and capacity-building programs) and sustainable service delivery outcomes. The authors concluded that strengthening governance and aligning reforms with long-term visions are crucial for achieving institutional sustainability.

Smith and Taylor (2021) conducted an international comparative study on transition management in higher education institutions across Europe. The research analyzed data from 12 universities in the UK, Netherlands, and Germany, focusing on sustainability-oriented reforms in governance, teaching, and infrastructure. Findings showed that universities that integrated transition management principles such as multi-stakeholder governance boards, green campus initiatives, and digital innovation achieved higher global rankings in sustainability performance. The study emphasized that successful transitions depend on long-term visioning, strong leadership, and collaborative stakeholder engagement.

## Methods

The study employed a cross-sectional survey research design. The population consisted of lecturers from Federal Universities in South-East Nigeria, specifically Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education (AIFUE) Owerri, Federal University of Technology, Owerri (FUTO), and Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka (UNIZIK). A purposive sampling technique was employed to select lecturers who had been exposed to courses, programmes, and administrative processes related to transition management, institutional reforms, and service delivery, as they were considered most relevant for the study. A total of 120 lecturers were selected as respondents across the three universities in the South East. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled Transition Management and Sustainable Service Delivery Questionnaire (TMSSDQ). The instrument was designed on a modified four-point Likert scale with the following response options: Very Great Extent (VGE) = 4, To a Great Extent (GE) = 3, To a Low Extent (LE) = 2, and To No Extent (NE) = 1.

The instrument was validated by two experts in educational management and one expert in research methodology, while its reliability coefficient was determined using Cronbach Alpha, which yielded 0.87, indicating high internal consistency. Out of the 120 questionnaires administered, 114 (95%) were successfully retrieved and used for analysis. Data were analyzed using the Spearman Rank Order Correlation Coefficient ( $r$ ) to test the hypotheses in a bivariate format, with the aid of SPSS Version 23, at the 0.05 level of significance.

## Results

**Ho1:** Transition management strategies do not significantly influence sustainable service delivery in federal universities in the South-East, Nigeria.

**Table 1:** Correlation between Transition Management Strategies and Sustainable Service Delivery

Variables	N	Correlation Coefficient (r)	Sig. (2-tailed)
Transition Management Strategies	114	1.000	–
Sustainable Service Delivery	114	0.721**	0.000

Correlation is significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**Source:** Researchers' Data, 2025.

Table 1 shows a correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) of 0.721 with a significance value of 0.000, which is less than the 0.05 alpha level. Since the significance value (0.000) is below 0.05, the null hypothesis (Ho1), which states that transition management strategies do not significantly

influence sustainable service delivery in federal universities, is rejected. Therefore, the alternative hypothesis is accepted. This indicates that effective transition management strategies significantly enhance sustainable service delivery in federal universities.

**Ho2:** Stakeholder engagement and institutional capacity do not significantly facilitate effective transitions for sustainable service delivery in federal universities in the South-East, Nigeria.

**Table 2:** Correlation between Stakeholder Engagement, Institutional Capacity, and Effective Transitions

Variables	N	Correlation Coefficient (r)	Sig. (2-tailed)
Stakeholder Engagement & Capacity	114	1.000	–
Effective Transitions for Sustainable Service Delivery	114	0.734**	

Correlation is significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**Source:** Researchers’ Data, 2025.

Table 2 shows a correlation coefficient (r) of 0.734 with a significance value of 0.000, which is less than the 0.05 alpha level. Since the significance value (0.000) is below 0.05, the null hypothesis (Ho2), which states that stakeholder engagement and institutional capacity do not significantly facilitate effective transitions for sustainable service delivery in federal universities, is rejected. Therefore, the alternative hypothesis is accepted. This implies that active stakeholder engagement and strong institutional capacity significantly facilitate effective transitions toward sustainable service delivery in federal universities.

### Discussion of Findings

The test of hypotheses revealed that transition management strategies significantly influence sustainable service delivery in federal universities. Specifically, the findings showed that systematic planning, multi-level governance, adaptive learning, and experimentation in administrative and academic processes enhance universities’ ability to deliver uninterrupted academic, administrative, and social services. These results align with Jimoh and Abdullahi (2020), who found that structured transition strategies, including digital learning systems, participatory governance, and staff capacity development, positively affect service continuity and institutional performance in Nigerian universities. Their study emphasized that effective

change management frameworks reduce service disruptions and improve operational efficiency.

The results also indicated that stakeholder engagement and institutional capacity significantly facilitate effective transitions for sustainable service delivery. This supports the findings of Adebajo and Omotayo (2021), who reported that inclusive stakeholder participation in higher education reforms enhances policy acceptance, reduces resistance to change, and strengthens the sustainability of institutional reforms. Their study highlighted the importance of involving students, lecturers, administrative staff, unions, and government agencies in planning and implementing reforms to ensure collective ownership and accountability.

The findings correspond with Nwachukwu and Ibrahim (2022), who demonstrated that digital transition and institutional readiness during the COVID-19 pandemic significantly influenced the continuity of service delivery in Nigerian universities. Institutions that embraced ICT solutions and trained staff on digital tools maintained better service continuity compared to those with weak infrastructures. The study recommended strengthening institutional capacity, including ICT facilities, training programs, and administrative support systems, to sustain effective service delivery.

The results resonate with the international study by Smith and Taylor (2021), which revealed that European universities that integrated multi-stakeholder governance, digital innovation, and sustainability-oriented reforms achieved higher service quality and global rankings. Their findings emphasize that collaborative leadership, capacity building, and strategic planning are essential for successfully managing transitions in higher education institutions.

## Conclusion

This study examined the effect of managing transitions in Federal Universities for sustainable service delivery in South-East Nigeria. The findings revealed that implementing systematic transition management strategies enhances academic, administrative, and social service continuity. Likewise, engaging stakeholders and strengthening institutional capacity significantly facilitate effective transitions, reducing resistance to change and improving service sustainability. The study concludes that federal universities that prioritize structured change management and collaborative governance are better positioned to deliver sustainable services that meet current needs while preparing for future challenges. Effective transition management, combined with inclusive stakeholder participation and robust institutional

capacity, is therefore essential for achieving institutional resilience and contributing to national development goals.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the results and conclusion, the following recommendations are made:

1. Federal universities in South-East, Nigeria should adopt structured transition management strategies, including multi-level governance, adaptive learning, and experimentation, to enhance sustainable service delivery.
2. Universities should actively engage all relevant stakeholders, including lecturers, administrative staff, students, unions, and government agencies, to foster collaboration, minimize resistance, and ensure collective ownership of reforms.

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