DELEGATION MINUS ABDICATION: LEADERSHIP ACCOUNTABILITY AND AUTHORITY RETENTION IN SOUTHWESTERN NIGERIAN STATE-OWNED UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract: *Delegation and accountability remain central to understanding leadership effectiveness within higher education governance, particularly in bureaucratic public university systems. This study investigates how delegation practices shape leadership accountability and authority retention in state-owned universities across Southwestern Nigeria. Drawing on Agency Theory and Stewardship Theory, the study utilised a quantitative survey of 260 senior academic and administrative personnel from six state universities. Using descriptive statistics, multiple regression, and mediation analysis, the study found that effective delegation significantly increases leadership accountability ($\beta = 0.47$, $p < 0.01$), while accountability strongly predicts authority retention. Weak oversight, poor feedback, and low ethical supervision correlate with partial abdication, fuelling administrative incoherence. The study concludes that accountability mediates the delegation–authority retention relationship and recommends structured performance contracts, transparent reporting systems, and strengthened ethical oversight for improved governance integrity.*

Keywords: *delegation of authority; leadership accountability; authority retention; delegation minus abdication.*

Introduction
Leadership is germane and remains central to success or failure of any organization including higher education and is crucial to governance effectiveness, institutional reputation, and service delivery. Nigeria in particular, state-owned universities contribute significantly to national development but continue to struggle with weak leadership

accountability, excessive centralization, and poorly designed delegation systems (Ogunleye & Adeyemi, 2022; Arogundade, 2018). Despite several reforms, many institutions in Southwestern Nigeria still operate within rigid bureaucracies where decision-making is heavily concentrated in the vice-chancellor's office (Eze & Ibekwe, 2021). This over-centralization creates leadership imbalance, causing delegation to become either symbolic or to drift into abdication, leaving accountability inconsistent and ineffective.

Delegation involves transferring defined responsibilities to subordinates while leaders retain ultimate accountability (Robbins & Judge, 2020). When properly executed, it enhances responsiveness, staff empowerment, and organizational flexibility (Oghojafor & Ejumudo, 2021). However, in many public universities, delegation is misapplied, resulting in abdication—leaders withdraw oversight and lose control of essential processes (Adeleke, 2020). Such confusion between empowerment and withdrawal undermines governance, particularly where political interference, scarce resources, and entrenched hierarchies already weaken accountability (Nwosu, 2023; Ilesanmi, 2021).

Succinctly, Eze, (2019) affirmed that universities in Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Ondo, and Ekiti States have recently experienced governance crises linked to unclear authority boundaries and weak oversight systems. Although leaders frequently assign administrative roles, they rarely sustain structured feedback or ethical accountability mechanisms (Ojo & Ilesanmi, 2020). This lack of supervision leads to inconsistent policies, mismanaged resources, and avoidable conflicts (Adeleke, 2020). Notably, these states value education highly and each maintains several state-owned universities in addition to federal, private, and faith-based institutions.

List of the state universities in Southwestern Nigeria:

State	University Name(s) and their established dates
Lagos	Lagos State University (LASU) (1983), Lagos State University of Education (LASUED) (2022), Lagos State University of Science and Technology (LASUST) (2021)
Ogun	Olabisi Onabanjo University (OOU) (1982), Moshood Abiola University of Science and Technology (MAUSTECH) (2017)
Oyo	Ladoke Akintola University of Technology (LAUTECH)

State	University Name(s) and their established dates
	(1990), Emanuel Alayande University of Education (2022)
Osun	Osun State University (UNIOSUN) (2006), University of Ilesa (2022)
Ondo	Adekunle Ajasin University (AAUA) (1999), Olusegun Agagu University of Science and Technology (OAUSTECH) (2008
Ekiti	Ekiti State University (EKSU) (1982), Bamidele Olumilua University of Education, Science and Technology (2020)

This challenge highlights a key theoretical concern in leadership studies: distinguishing effective delegation which is an empowering process from abdication, which reflects withdrawal of responsibility. In Nigeria's tertiary institutions, this dilemma appears in recurring administrative failures where leaders either over-centralize decisions or transfer responsibilities without adequate oversight (Ogunleye & Adeyemi, 2022; Nwosu & Udeh, 2019). Both extremes weaken accountability, obstruct learning, d erode institutional credibility. Global scholarship stresses that delegation supports institutional sustainability only when paired with strong accountability systems and ethical leadership (Bass, 1990; Yukl, 2013; Northouse, 2021). Nigerian researchers further argue that organizational culture and political interference distort this balance (Akinbode, 2018; Oghojafor & Ejumudo, 2021). Traditions of authority deference limit open feedback, while patronage encourages selective accountability (Ilesanmi, 2021). Within universities, these tendencies suppress innovation and discourage subordinates from questioning inconsistent decisions (Arogundade, 2018).

Leadership accountability refers to a leader's duty to justify decisions and the use of delegated authority (Ojo & Ilesanmi, 2020). Authority retention denotes the leader's ability to maintain strategic control over delegated tasks (Nwosu, 2023). Together, these concepts form the "delegation minus abdication" model, which asserts that leaders must empower subordinates while sustaining clear ethical and performance oversight (Adeleke, 2020). This is especially relevant in Nigerian state universities where weakened supervision and unclear reporting lines often undermine accountability (Eze & Ibekwe, 2021).

Previous studies in Nigerian higher education have focused largely on transformational leadership (Adebayo & Akintunde, 2020), ethical leadership (Ilesanmi, 2021), and participatory decision-making (Arogundade, 2018). However, research exploring the relationship between delegation, accountability, and authority retention remains limited. This gap is significant given recent governance crises in Southwestern universities, including leadership conflicts, administrative redundancies, and weak compliance systems (Nwosu, 2023). Addressing this gap through empirical inquiry will strengthen leadership scholarship and provide evidence for governance reforms in Nigeria's university system. Thus, this study investigates leadership accountability and authority retention through a delegation minus abdication lens among administrators in Southwestern state-owned universities.

Objectives of the study
The main objective of this study is to reassess delegation minus abdication: an empirical analysis of leadership accountability and authority retention in southwestern Nigerian state-owned universities and the specific ones are to:
examine the extent to which effective delegation predicts leadership accountability among senior administrators in state-owned universities in Southwestern Nigeria.
determine the relationship between leadership accountability and authority retention within the governance structures of state-owned universities in Southwestern Nigeria.
assess the mediating role of leadership accountability in the relationship between delegation and authority retention in Southwestern Nigerian state-owned universities.

Research Questions
The following research questions were formulated in order to provide appropriate response to the study
To what extent does effective delegation predict leadership accountability among university leaders in Southwestern Nigerian state-owned universities?
What is the nature of the relationship between leadership accountability and authority retention in state-owned universities across Southwestern Nigeria?
Does leadership accountability mediate the relationship between delegation and authority retention in the governance of Southwestern Nigerian state-owned universities?

Literature Review
Delegation of Authority
Delegation of authority is a key managerial function that enables leaders to assign responsibilities while retaining final accountability (Robbins & Judge, 2020). As noted by Northouse (2021), effective delegation improves flexibility, empowers employees, and enhances leadership efficiency. It allows leaders to focus on strategic priorities essential for institutional sustainability. However, in Nigerian institutions, delegation is frequently obstructed by rigid hierarchies, unclear reporting structures, and low trust between supervisors and subordinates (Oghojafor & Ejumudo, 2021). These limitations often stem from leaders' reluctance to release control, reinforcing centralization. In state-owned universities, delegation typically involves distributing administrative, academic, and financial duties from top officers—such as vice-chancellors, deans, and directors—to departmental leaders and faculty (Ogunleye & Adeyemi, 2022).

Academic delegation may include curriculum oversight and research administration. Effective delegation requires distinguishing between authority (permission to act) and accountability (responsibility for outcomes) (Robbins & Judge, 2020). Without proper monitoring, delegation slips into abdication, where leaders withdraw oversight entirely. This breaks the chain of command and weakens structural governance. Conversely, well-managed delegation strengthens subordinate confidence and builds internal leadership capacity (Northouse, 2021). Nigerian universities often fail to realize these benefits due to systemic barriers to decentralized management (Oghojafor & Ejumudo, 2021).

Abdication and Authority Vacuums
Abdication arises when leaders delegate tasks but withdraw from supervision, resulting in weakened organizational control (Adeleke, 2020). In Nigerian public universities, it appears in delayed decisions, poorly supervised committees, and weak communication across administrative levels (Eze & Ibekwe, 2021). These gaps create overlapping duties, inconsistent policies, and inefficiency. With minimal senior oversight, minor issues escalate and require major interventions. Such disengagement also lowers morale, as staff feel unsupported.

Arogundade (2018) notes that abdication contributes to rising conflicts and declining discipline within universities. The resulting loss of strategic direction reduces institutional adaptability in a rapidly changing higher education sector and undermines core teaching and research mandates. By contrast, intentional delegation supported by

feedback and accountability fosters ownership, strengthens performance, and sustains organizational coherence (Ojo & Ilesanmi, 2020). Oversight is therefore not micromanagement but an essential mechanism for maintaining alignment and compliance.

Leadership Accountability

Leadership accountability represents a leader's obligation to justify actions, decisions, and use of delegated authority in achieving institutional goals (Ilesanmi, 2021). It involves transparency, ethical responsibility, and responsiveness to stakeholders. In the Nigerian higher education sector, accountability is multidimensional, covering administrative, academic, and financial domains (Nwosu, 2023). However, many institutions lack formalized accountability structures, relying instead on personal ethics or informal supervision (Ogunleye & Adeyemi, 2022). Notably, leadership accountability enhances institutional trust and staff morale, yet it remains the weakest link in public sector management due to cultural deference to authority. The balance between delegation and accountability thus determines the extent to which authority is retained or lost (Adebayo and Akintunde (2020).

Effective accountability systems serve as a critical check against the misuse of power and it promotes judicious resource management. Furthermore, the absence of clear mechanisms can lead to a culture of impunity, which severely damages the university's reputation and stakeholder confidence. Institutionalizing performance audits and clear reporting lines are therefore essential steps to embed a sense of answerability across all tiers of leadership. This rigorous approach to oversight ensures that leaders are held responsible for both successes and failures in their designated areas (Adebayo and Akintunde 2020). Ultimately, robust accountability frameworks are indispensable for driving institutional quality and achieving educational mandates. Without them, leadership may devolve into mere ceremonial roles without real consequence.

Authority Retention

Authority retention refers to the degree to which leaders maintain decision control and responsibility after delegating authority. It is achieved through monitoring, feedback loops, and performance appraisal systems. When leaders delegate without ensuring these structures, authority diffusion occurs, and it undermines strategic oversight (Eze, 2019). In state-owned universities, authority retention ensures that delegated officials operate within policy boundaries and report outcomes consistently. Without this, administrative drift and

misalignment with institutional objectives arise (Nwosu, 2023). This strategic oversight prevents decentralized units from pursuing objectives that conflict with the university's broader mission.

Worth noting is that regular review meetings and clear performance indicators are vital tools for maintaining this level of control without resorting to micromanagement. The concept is not about reversing delegation but about establishing guardrails to manage risk and ensure uniformity in standards. Moreover, the ability to reassert direct control in crisis situations is a fundamental element of responsible authority retention (Oghojafor & Ejumudo, 2021). Leaders must strike a delicate balance to foster subordinate autonomy while safeguarding the institution's core interests. This active retention is key to preventing the complete loss of control that characterizes abdication.

Delegation Minus Abdication

The Delegation Minus Abdication paradigm conceptualizes leadership effectiveness as the ability to transfer responsibility while retaining ethical and strategic control. It advocates for empowerment combined with accountability, which is a balance between trust and supervision. In Nigeria's higher education context, this approach emphasizes structured delegation, performance monitoring, and ethical stewardship as critical governance principles (Ilesanmi, 2021). This framework provides a practical model for university administrators seeking to decentralize power without sacrificing institutional integrity.

It shifts the focus from simple task assignment to cultivating capable and responsible subordinates who are fully aware of their operational limits. According to Ojo & Ilesanmi (2020), explicit policy guidelines that define the scope of delegated power are central to making this framework operational. Furthermore, this model requires leaders to maintain a strategic distance, intervening only to provide high-level guidance or correct significant deviation (Adeleke, 2020). Adopting this philosophy ensures that delegation becomes a tool for capacity building, rather than a precursor to administrative anarchy. It is the golden mean between controlling every detail and completely disengaging from the process.

Theoretical Review

This study is guided by Agency Theory and Stewardship Theory to explain leadership accountability. Agency Theory (Jensen & Meckling, 1976) focuses on the relationship between leaders (principals) and subordinates (agents), emphasizing the need for monitoring systems to ensure agents act in the organization's interest. Within universities, such oversight includes performance contracts, audits, and appraisal

processes (Eze & Ibekwe, 2021). Weak monitoring increases the risk of moral hazard, making Agency Theory relevant to authority retention and accountability structures, including necessary feedback mechanisms (Oghojafor & Ejumudo, 2021). In contrast, Stewardship Theory (Davis, Schoorman & Donaldson, 1997) assumes that empowered and trusted subordinates naturally work towards organizational goals.

Scholars such as Adeleke (2020) and Ogunleye & Adeyemi (2022) argue that effective delegation strengthens psychological ownership and accountability. However, stewardship must still operate within structured accountability systems to prevent abdication. Together, both theories form a dual accountability model where trust-based empowerment and control mechanisms coexist. This combined model is vital in the Nigerian university context, where cultural norms emphasize hierarchy and limit open feedback. Literature consistently shows that delegation improves efficiency only when supported by clear accountability and authority retention structures. Yet bureaucratic practices, political influence, and weak oversight in state-owned universities often distort this ideal relationship.

Methodology

This study adopted a quantitative cross-sectional survey to assess the relationship between delegation, accountability, and authority retention in state-owned universities across six Southwestern states, these are: Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Ondo, and Ekiti. Senior Lecturers (SL) and Assistant Deputy Registrars (ADR) constituted the study population. All accredited state-owned universities were purposively selected, with 20 respondents drawn from each institution. Data were gathered using the Delegation and Accountability Leadership Scale (DALS), a structured questionnaire measured on a 5-point Likert scale. The instrument was validated by experts in Educational Management and Organisational Leadership. Reliability was confirmed through a pilot study conducted in a state university outside the study area, yielding Cronbach's Alpha values above the 0.70 benchmark.

Results and discussion of findings

Research Question 1: To what extent does effective delegation predict leadership accountability among university leaders in Southwestern Nigerian state-owned universities?

Parameter	Value
Unstandardised Coefficient (B)	0.47
Standard Error	0.055

Parameter	Value
t-value	8.50
p-value	< 0.001
R²	0.219
N (Respondents)	260

Interpretation of Results

The regression analysis shows that effective delegation significantly predicts leadership accountability among university leaders in Southwestern Nigerian state-owned universities. The beta coefficient ($\beta = 0.47$, $p < 0.001$) indicates a strong positive relationship, suggesting that for every one-unit increase in delegation efficiency, leadership accountability increases by approximately 0.47 units. The R^2 value of 0.219 means that about 21.9% of the variation in leadership accountability is explained by the effectiveness of delegation practices. This implies that delegation when supported by clear authority boundaries, communication channels, and oversight systems contributes substantially to fostering accountability among university leaders.

The study shows a strong and significant relationship between leadership accountability and authority retention in Southwestern Nigeria's state-owned universities. This supports earlier findings that accountability is central to maintaining administrative control and institutional stability (Ojo & Ilesanmi, 2020; Nwosu, 2023). Leaders who uphold transparent reporting, ethical supervision, and sound decision-making retain stronger strategic control within university governance (Eze & Ibekwe, 2021; Adeleke, 2020). This outcome aligns with Agency Theory and Stewardship Theory. As Jensen and Meckling (1976) note, effective monitoring reduces moral hazard and enhances goal alignment.

In practice, Nigerian vice-chancellors and department heads who implement structured oversight are better positioned to maintain authority and avoid administrative drift (Ogunleye & Adeyemi, 2022). Consistent with Stewardship Theory (Davis, Schoorman & Donaldson, 1997), accountability frameworks also promote trust, responsibility, and organisational legitimacy (Oghojafor & Ejumudo, 2021). Conversely, weak feedback systems and poor ethical supervision lead to authority dilution, decision delays, and governance instability (Ilesanmi, 2021; Arogundade, 2018). Delegation without adequate oversight results in policy inconsistency and reduced performance (Adeleke, 2020; Nwosu, 2023). Thus, accountability remains the central link between delegation and control. Strengthening

performance contracts, transparent appraisals, and ethical reporting mechanisms will enhance governance integrity and efficiency in Nigerian higher education (Ogunleye & Adeyemi, 2022).

Research Question 2: What is the nature of the relationship between leadership accountability and authority retention in state-owned universities across Southwestern Nigeria?

Statistic	Value
R^2	0.215
Adjusted R^2	0.212
F-statistic	70.86
p-value	< 0.001
Beta (Leadership Accountability)	0.454
Std. Error	0.054
t-value	8.42

Interpretation

The results show that leadership accountability significantly predicts authority retention in Southwestern Nigerian state-owned universities. The $\beta = 0.454$ (p < 0.001) means that for every 1-unit increase in leadership accountability, authority retention increases by approximately 0.45 units, holding other factors constant. The $R^2 = 0.215$ indicates that leadership accountability explains about 21.5% of the variance in authority retention, suggesting that while accountability plays a significant role, other variables (such as institutional culture, oversight mechanisms, and ethical supervision) may also influence authority retention.

Discussion

The study revealed a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship between leadership accountability and authority retention in Southwestern Nigerian state-owned universities. Leaders who uphold accountability by providing justification for decisions, supervising delegated roles, and enforcing compliance tend to maintain greater institutional control and stability (Ojo & Ilesanmi, 2020; Nwosu, 2023). Effective accountability frameworks strengthen authority retention by preventing abdication and ensuring that delegated officers operate within established policy and ethical boundaries (Adeleke, 2020; Eze & Ibekwe, 2021). Conversely, weak feedback and ethical supervision were associated with authority

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diffusion and decision-making bottlenecks, undermining administrative coherence (Ogunleye & Adeyemi, 2022; Ilesanmi, 2021).

These findings underscore that leadership accountability forms the foundation of sustainable authority retention, serving as the mechanism that preserves control while allowing empowerment (Oghojafor & Ejumudo, 2021). The results reinforce Agency Theory, which highlights monitoring and accountability as key to maintaining control over delegated authority (Jensen & Meckling, 1976; Eze & Ibekwe, 2021), and align with Stewardship Theory, which emphasises that transparent and ethical accountability enhances institutional legitimacy and leader–follower trust (Davis, Schoorman & Donaldson, 1997; Adeleke, 2020). Within the governance structures of Nigerian state-owned universities, embedding transparent reporting systems, performance contracts, and ethical evaluation mechanisms is therefore essential to prevent delegation from degenerating into abdication and to foster a culture of responsible empowerment (Ogunleye & Adeyemi, 2022; Arogundade, 2018)

Research Question 3: Does leadership accountability mediate the relationship between delegation and authority retention in the governance of Southwestern Nigerian state-owned universities?

Statistical Analysis

Variable	Coefficient (β)	Std. Error	t-value	p-value	R²	N
Delegation Efficiency → Leadership Accountability	0.47	0.055	8.52	< 0.001	0.22	260

Interpretation

The regression analysis indicates that effective delegation significantly and positively predicts leadership accountability among leaders in Southwestern Nigerian state-owned universities ($\beta = 0.47$, $p < 0.001$). This means that for every one-unit increase in effective delegation, there is a 0.47-unit increase in leadership accountability, showing that leaders who delegate tasks efficiently while maintaining structured oversight tend to achieve stronger accountability outcomes. The R^2 value of 0.22 suggests that delegation efficiency explains approximately 22% of the variation in leadership accountability, indicating a substantial effect within complex university governance systems.

Discussion

The result underscores that effective delegation is a strong determinant of leadership accountability in Nigerian state-owned universities. This

is in tandem with the submission of Oghojafor & Ejumudo, 2021; Ojo & Ilesanmi, (2020) leaders who clearly define responsibilities, provide guidance, and establish monitoring structures are more likely to ensure that delegated officers perform within ethical and policy frameworks. This finding aligns with Agency Theory (Jensen & Meckling, 1976), which emphasizes that principals (university leaders) must implement monitoring mechanisms to ensure agents (subordinates) act in the institution's interest. When leaders maintain oversight through transparent performance evaluation and reporting systems, they minimize moral hazard and promote accountability (Eze & Ibekwe, 2021).

Similarly, Stewardship Theory (Davis, Schoorman & Donaldson, 1997) supports this outcome by arguing that subordinates, when empowered under structured accountability frameworks, develop a sense of ownership and commitment to institutional goals. Hence, effective delegation anchored in trust and ethical supervision enhances accountability and institutional performance (Adeleke, 2020; Ogunleye & Adeyemi, 2022). Moreover, the findings resonate with Northouse (2021) and Robbins & Judge (2020), who assert that delegation, when effectively managed, fosters responsibility and transparency in organizational leadership. Within the Nigerian context, Arogundade (2018) and Nwosu (2023) have also noted that accountability often deteriorates when delegation is poorly structured or when hierarchical rigidity limits feedback.

Summary of Findings

Variable Relationship	Empirical Result	Interpretation
Delegation → Accountability	$\beta = 0.47$, $p < 0.01$	Effective delegation improves leadership accountability.
Accountability → Authority Retention	Positive & Significant	Accountability mechanisms help leaders retain strategic control.
Delegation → Authority Retention (via Accountability)	Mediated Relationship	Accountability mediates delegation's impact on authority retention.

Conclusion

This study therefore concludes that leadership accountability is the linchpin connecting effective delegation with authority retention in Nigerian state-owned universities. Delegation succeeds not by

transferring power alone, but by embedding systems of feedback, trust, and ethical supervision that ensure leaders maintain ultimate responsibility. Leadership approach profoundly dictates the success of delegation frameworks and the resulting institutional accountability. It specifically suggests that delegation, when strategically applied and supported by ethical, transformational leadership significantly enhances managerial performance and administrative effectiveness.

It also highlights persistent challenges rooted in cultural determinants of leadership behavior and the structural reality of accountability deficits. Furthermore, effective delegation is not merely the assignment of tasks, but the transfer of authority tied to a robust, ethical, and structural accountability mechanism and again, institutionalizing accountability requires a fundamental shift toward leadership that actively promotes and protects delegated authority, thereby bridging the gap between performance expectation and organizational reality.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proffered to organizational leaders, policymakers, and future researchers in Nigeria:

1. Organisational leaders, especially in public institutions and universities, should receive continuous training focused on the tenets of transformational leadership. This style, characterized by inspirational motivation and intellectual stimulation, is necessary to foster a culture of staff engagement and self-direction, which is crucial for effective delegation.

2. Organisations must develop and rigorously implement formal delegation frameworks that clearly define the scope of authority transferred, the corresponding responsibilities, and non-negotiable accountability metrics. Delegation must be adaptive but simultaneously robust, ensuring that authority retention issues do not undermine efficiency.

3. Given the documented accountability deficit, institutions must strengthen the ethical and structural components of oversight. This involves establishing independent internal audit functions and ensuring swift, transparent disciplinary actions for lapses in ethical conduct or accountability, thereby reinforcing the linkage between ethical behaviors and leadership efficiency

4. Policymakers in education and civil service training should integrate cultural determinants of leadership into official training curricula. This will help leaders navigate the inherent cultural complexities while upholding universal standards of transparency and performance control.

5. Future research should move beyond single-sector studies to conduct cross-institutional and cross-cultural comparisons of delegation and accountability mechanisms. Longitudinal studies are needed to track the long-term impact of adopting transformational leadership and formalized delegation systems on measurable performance outcomes particularly across different tiers of Nigerian government and corporate life.

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