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Perceived Agencification and Public Sector Performance: Evidence from Tertiary Institutions on TETFund in North Central Nigeria

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Abstract

Agencification involves delegating government functions to semi-autonomous agencies with greater managerial flexibility; it is common in New Public Management (NPM) reform, but evidence on whether it is associated with better public sector performance remains mixed, especially in developing-country education systems. Using Principal-Agent Theory and an ex post facto design, we surveyed 380 academics and administrative and management staff (95% response rate) at federal and state tertiary institutions in North Central Nigeria about their perceptions of the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) from 2015 to 2024. Respondents rated TETFund's administrative autonomy, decision-making flexibility, reduced bureaucratic oversight and institutional capacity highly (all item means above 4.20 of 5), and rated most performance indicators highly too, notably teaching, learning and research support (M = 4.76) and timely project completion (M = 4.65), though infrastructure project quality was rated markedly lower (M = 3.12). An ordinal logistic regression linking four perceived agencification attributes to perceived performance was significant (model χ^2 = 87.45, df = 4, $p < .001$; Nagelkerke R^2 = 0.312; 68.4% correct classification). Perceived administrative autonomy (β = 0.682, OR = 1.978), reduced bureaucratic control (β = 0.573, OR = 1.774) and decision-making flexibility (β = 0.451, OR = 1.570) were positively associated with perceived performance; perceived political interference was negatively associated with it (β = −0.392, OR = 0.676). Because every respondent rated the same agency, these results describe associations among perceptions rather than a causal test of agencification against a non-agencified comparator.

Keywords: Agencification, Public Sector Performance, New Public Management, Principal-Agent Theory, TETFund, Nigeria.

Introduction

The way the public sector works has changed significantly over the last fifty years. These changes vary by country, but they have reshaped how public organisations are structured and operate. The main aim of these changes is to make public services more efficient, effective, responsive, accountable, and higher quality. They also change how the government, the market, and the people relate. In many developed countries, these changes have broken up the old way of running ministries by making new organisations, giving more power to different parts, and setting up agencies that work on their own or

almost on their own to do certain government jobs (Bouckaert et al., 2010; Christensen & Laegreid, 2006; OECD, 2010).

In many developing countries, notably in Africa, internal and external factors have shaped the push for public sector reform. Key drivers include policy prescriptions from the Bretton Woods Institutions, the shift from military to democratic rule, changes in the political-administrative context, growing demands for transparency and accountability, and persistent pressure from organised civil society organisations, professional associations, and labour unions. In Nigeria, bodies such as the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) and the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) have consistently advocated reforms to strengthen governance, reinforce public institutions and improve the quality of public services. As a result, public sector reforms in Nigeria have moved beyond administrative restructuring to broader governance objectives, including institutional effectiveness, accountability, transparency and service delivery.

Central to these reform efforts is New Public Management (NPM), which marks a significant shift from the traditional paradigm of public administration. Hood (1991) describes New Public Management as a radical shift from old bureaucratic government to a management-oriented model, emphasising performance, efficiency, flexibility and measurable outcomes. New Public Management integrates managerial knowledge and techniques into public administration to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of organisations within modern bureaucracies (Indahsari & Raharja, 2020). Unlike the traditional public administration model, which focuses on compliance with administrative procedures, New Public Management emphasises performance outcomes, customer focus, managerial autonomy, innovation and accountability. Consequently, numerous governments have adopted management approaches initially developed in the private sector to optimise public service delivery and improve institutional effectiveness (Hood, 1991; Indahsari & Raharja, 2020).

Agencification is a major institutional expression of NPM. It shifts certain governmental tasks from central ministries to autonomous or semi-independent bodies with clear mandates, separating policy-making from delivery while holding agencies accountable for outcomes (Alada, 2016; Verhoest et al., 2012; Mortensen, 2016; Trondal, 2014).

Agencification in Nigeria is closely linked to the public sector reforms introduced in the 1980s (Alada, 2016). One major outcome of these reforms in the education system was the establishment of the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund). TETFund reflects the core principles of agencification: it is a dedicated intervention agency whose operational responsibilities are separated from the Federal Ministry of Education; it manages intervention funds autonomously; and it takes a performance-oriented approach to funding infrastructure, research, academic staff development, and other projects in public higher education institutions.

Statement of the Problem

Despite these reforms, concerns remain about how far agencification has actually improved public sector effectiveness in Nigeria. Specialised agencies were created to reduce the bureaucratic inefficiencies of traditional government departments, yet institutional, political, and administrative factors still shape their performance. Political interference, institutional incapacity, bureaucratic impediments, delays in fund disbursement, and poor cooperation among implementing agencies can undermine the benefits organisational independence is supposed to bring (Egwu & Anyaogu, 2021; Olowu & Wunsch, 2004).

Against this background, this paper examines whether and how respondents' perceptions of TETFund's administrative autonomy, decision-making flexibility, reduced bureaucratic control, and exposure to political interference relate to their perceptions of its project and programme performance in tertiary institutions in North Central Nigeria between 2015 and 2024.

The study tested the following hypothesis:

H_{01}: Respondents' perceptions of TETFund's administrative autonomy, decision-making flexibility, reduced bureaucratic control and political interference are not significantly associated with their perceptions of its project and programme performance in tertiary institutions in North Central Nigeria.

H_{11}: Respondents' perceptions of TETFund's administrative autonomy, decision-making flexibility, reduced bureaucratic control and political interference are significantly associated with their perceptions of its project and programme performance in tertiary institutions in North Central Nigeria.

The study adds to the growing literature on public sector reform and provides empirical evidence on how well agencification works in the Nigerian public sector.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Agencification and Public Sector Performance

Governments adopt agencification to organise and deliver public services, aiming to improve efficiency, effectiveness, and accountability. One main channel is autonomy: agencies with more freedom in decision-making and resource management tend to deliver more responsive, innovative services because they can adapt more easily to local needs (OECD, 2010; Nchukwe & Adejuwon, 2014). Agencification also sets performance goals and accountability mechanisms to monitor agency performance; agencies working under performance-based management systems tend to focus more on results and outcomes (Warner & Hefetz, 2009). It further introduces market-like mechanisms into the public sector, encouraging competition and innovation and prompting agencies to adopt best practices and invest in technology and infrastructure (Kirkpatrick & Parker, 2003).

TETFund as an Agencified Institution

TETFund was created by the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (Establishment, Etc.) Act of 2011, which repealed the earlier Education Tax Fund Act No. 17 of 2003. Decree No. 7 of 1993 established its predecessor, the Education Tax Fund, which Decree No. 40 of 1998 later reformed into the Education Trust Fund. The 2011 Act specifically limited the Fund's focus to tertiary education, making universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education its main beneficiaries (Tertiary Education Trust Fund, 2011; Alada, 2016). TETFund's funding comes from an education tax on the assessable profits of Nigerian-registered companies, and it concentrates its efforts on four key areas: developing physical infrastructure, providing instructional materials and equipment, supporting research and publication, and training and professional development for academic staff (TETFund Act, 2011; Echono, 2022; Yaki et al, 2025).

TETFund is currently the most important and consistent interventionist body for public tertiary education in Nigeria, serving more than 246 beneficiary institutions nationwide: 96 universities, 75 polytechnics and 75 colleges of education, and having spent an estimated ₦1.45 trillion on infrastructure, staff training and research activities between 2017 and 2024 (Echono, 2022; TETFund, 2024; Yaki et al., 2025). As an agencified organisation, it reflects central features of NPM, including operational autonomy and a focus on project output and performance management rather than bureaucratic process. However, fund disbursement delays, differences in institutional absorption capacity, and bureaucratic bottlenecks have been observed to limit its effectiveness (Alada, 2016; Isah, 2024).

Empirical Review

Several international empirical studies have examined the relationship between agencification and public sector performance, with mixed and sometimes contradictory results. Overman and van Thiel (2016) examined whether establishing semi-autonomous agencies improves public sector performance across twenty countries and, contrary to expected benefits, found an adverse relationship between agencification and both public sector output and efficiency, challenging the economic arguments supporting agency-based reform. Mortensen (2016) similarly found that agencification contributed only a limited amount to improving the effectiveness of public service delivery, suggesting that transferring responsibilities from ministries to agencies does not automatically improve service quality.

However, Cingolani and Fazekas (2019) examined the effects of agencification in Germany, Spain and the United Kingdom between 2006 and 2016, using quasi-experimental techniques and unique administrative datasets, and found considerable cross-country variation: value for money increased on average by 2.8 per cent (approximately €1.7 billion over the ten years), older agencies recorded more substantial performance gains than newer ones, and the strongest effects were observed in countries with more extensive NPM adoption. Lapuente and Vande Walle (2020) examined NPM in the context of agencification and found that the reforms produced neither strongly negative nor strongly positive effects

on public service performance, concluding that NPM-style reforms have not consistently improved public service performance. Cooper et al. (2020) examined the United Kingdom's agencification experience under Thatcher's government and found that it reduced direct ministerial involvement in service delivery, with implications for democratic governance and established mechanisms of political responsibility.

Nchukwe and Adejuwon (2014) studied agency models in Pakistan and Tanzania and found that agencification in developing nations often lacks a clear, integrated legal or conceptual basis. They concluded that many ministries in these countries struggle to drive meaningful public sector reforms due to limited capacity. In Nigeria's case, Oyedele (2015) observed that successive reforms, including the Service Compact with All Nigerians (SERVICOM), failed to achieve the intended improvements, mainly due to inconsistent political support and poor implementation coordination. Ibietan & Joshua (2015) argued that a restructured, agency-based public service could enhance service delivery if structural and institutional challenges are addressed. Conversely, Aliu et al. (2020), analyzing Lagos State Traffic Management Authority (LASTMA), noted that its creation had not significantly reduced traffic congestion, citing inadequate planning, weak staff skills, and political patronage in appointments as causes. Sanusi and Abdullahi (2011) highlighted contradictions between NPM's central principles and Nigeria's unique political and institutional realities. In education, Nchukwe & Adejuwon (2014) noted that while agencification can improve efficiency, autonomy, and specialization, bureaucratic resistance, political interference, and administrative bottlenecks often limit its success.

Several programme-level evaluations, summarised in Table 1, report that TETFund's specific interventions have had a positive impact on higher education development in Nigeria; these studies evaluate the outcomes of TETFund's funded programmes rather than testing agencification as an institutional mechanism, a distinction this paper returns to in the Discussion. Yaki et al. (2025) found that TETFund initiatives significantly improved physical infrastructure in selected North Central universities, including classrooms, lecture theatres, laboratories, entrepreneurship centres, staff offices and hostels; the mean score was 3.189, above the 2.5 threshold, and the null hypothesis of no impact was rejected. Anachuna et al. (2024) reported that TETFund research projects notably increased research output, manuscript development and overall academic governance in federal universities in Southeast Nigeria. Research on staff training and development across the Southeast, Northwest, and North Central regions likewise shows improved teaching quality, research productivity, and staff competence, attributed to TETFund support for conferences, PhD programmes, book publications, and workshops (Zafi et al., 2025; Mela et al., 2024; Isah, 2024). Wapmuk (2018) documented significant progress in infrastructure and capacity building in Lagos and other zones, although delayed fund disbursement, under-utilisation of allocated interventions and bureaucratic hurdles persist in some institutions. Table 1 summarises these findings.

Table 1: Summary of Selected Empirical Studies on TETFund Interventions (2015 - 2024)

Author/Year	Region	Focus	Key Findings	Methodology
Yaki et al. (2025)	North-Central	Physical infrastructure	Significant positive impact on construction of lecture theatres, laboratories, staff offices and hostels (χ^2 = 162.82, p = .000)	Descriptive survey, Chi-square
Anachuna et al. (2024)	South-East	Research development & management	Significant positive impact on research output and effective university management	Survey design
Zafi (2025)	North-Central	Academic staff training & development	Positive impact on PhD sponsorship, conferences, book publication and staff competence	Ex-post facto & survey
Isah (2024)	North-West	Staff training & development	Positive impact on skills development and conference/workshop participation	Quantitative (Chi-square)
Mela et al. (2024)	North-Central	Staff training	Improved academic staff output and research productivity	Descriptive & inferential
Wapmuk (2018)	Lagos/South-West	Infrastructure & capacity building	Notable infrastructure gains but challenges in fund utilisation persist	Survey

Source: Adapted from the researcher's synthesis of the reviewed literature (2026).

Table 1 therefore shows consistently positive effects of TETFund-funded interventions, not agencification itself, on physical infrastructure and human capital development across geopolitical zones, alongside contextual variation in how efficiently funds are utilised and absorbed. Combined with the mixed international evidence on agencification as an institutional reform, this points to a genuine gap: whether TETFund's agencified status, specifically respondents' perceptions of its autonomy, flexibility, and exposure to political interference, is associated with how its performance is perceived in North Central Nigeria. To the authors' knowledge, no study has empirically tested this association for the 2015-2024 period.

Theoretical Framework: The Principal-Agent Theory

Principal-Agent Theory anchors this study. It examines the relationship between principals (such as government) and agents (such as public service agencies), and the difficulty of aligning their interests and incentives (Eisenhardt, 1989). Once a principal delegates authority to an agent to act on its behalf, the agent's interests may start to diverge from the principal's (Djankov et al., 2003). Under agencification, government acts as the principal

and delegates authority to relatively autonomous agencies to deliver public services, assuming these agencies have specialised expertise that lets them perform the tasks more efficiently than government itself (Jensen & Meckling, 1976).

Agents are motivated by self-interest and pursue goals like budget maximisation or survival, which can conflict with the principal's objectives. Aligning agent behaviour with principal goals therefore requires contracts, incentives, monitoring and oversight, since balancing autonomy and accountability is central to improving public sector performance and good governance in decentralised systems.

Applied to TETFund, the theory suggests that agencification should improve performance when administrative autonomy and managerial flexibility enable the agency to carry out specialised responsibilities efficiently. However, these benefits may weaken when political interference and bureaucratic controls constrain the agency's delegated authority.

The empirical model operationalises this framework through four perceived attributes of TETFund's agencified status: administrative autonomy and decision-making flexibility capture the degree of delegated authority the agent (TETFund) is seen to hold; reduced bureaucratic control captures how far traditional ministerial oversight has receded in practice; and political interference captures the principal's (government's) continued, potentially opportunistic, involvement in the agent's operations. These four perceived attributes are tested against respondents' perceptions of project and programme performance.

Methodology

Research Design

The study adopted an ex post facto research design to investigate events and programmes, including the implementation of agencification and its effects on public sector performance. The study collected data through a structured questionnaire, supplemented by a review of relevant administrative records and policy documents.

Study Area, Population and Sample

The study covered Nigeria's North Central geopolitical zone, comprising Kwara, Kogi, Nasarawa, Niger, Plateau, and Benue States, and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) (Table 2). The study purposively selected four locations (Benue, Kogi, Nasarawa, and Niger) because they host all three types of public tertiary institutions, universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education, at both federal and state levels.

Table 2: List of Benefiting Tertiary Institutions from TETFund in North-Central Nigeria

S/N	STATE	UNIVERSITY		POLYTECHNIC		COLLEGE OF EDUCATION	
		State	Federal	State	Federal	State	Federal
1	Benue	Benue State University, Makurdi	Joseph Sarwuan Tarka University	Benue State Polytechnic Ugboloko	Federal Polytechnic Wannune	Benue State College of Education, Katsina-Ala	Federal College of Education Odugbo
2	FCT	N/A	University of Abuja	N/A	N/A	FCT College of Education, Zuba	N/A
3	Kogi	Prince Abubakar Audu University, Anyigba	Federal University Lokoja	Kogi State Polytechnic Lokoja	Federal Polytechnic Idah	Kogi State College of Education, Ankpa	Federal College of Education, Okene
4	Kwara	Kwara State University, Malete	University of Ilorin	Kwara State Polytechnic, Ilorin	Federal Polytechnic Offa	Kwara State College of Education, Oro	N/A
5	Nasarawa	Nasarawa State University, Keffi	Federal University of Lafia	**Isa Mustapha Agwai I Polytechnic, Lafia**	Federal Polytechnic Nasarawa	College of Education, Akwanga	Federal College of Education (Technical), Keana, Nasarawa
6	Niger	Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University, Lapai	Federal University of Technology, Minna	Niger State Polytechnic, Zungeru	Federal Polytechnic Bida	Niger State College of Education, Minna	Federal College of Education, Kontagora
7	Plateau	Plateau State University, Bokkos	University of Jos	Plateau State Polytechnic	Federal Polytechnic, Nyak-Shendam	Plateau College of	NA

S/N	STATE	UNIVERSITY		POLYTECHNIC		COLLEGE OF EDUCATION	
		State	Federal	State	Federal	State	Federal
				, Barkin-Ladi		Education, Gindiri	

Source: NCCE, 2023; NBTE, 2024; NUC, 2025

The population comprises all thirty-six public tertiary institutions in the zone, with a total staff of 35,931: 14,984 academics and 20,947 non-academic staff (NCCE, 2023; NUC, 2025; NBTE, 2024). Using Taro Yamane's formula at a 5% margin of error, the sample size was approximately 400 respondents. In each of the four selected locations, one federal and one state institution of each type were selected, and questionnaires were then given to academic, administrative and management personnel directly involved in planning, implementing, monitoring and using TETFund interventions. In total, this yielded 24 sampled institutions: one federal and one state university, one federal and one state polytechnic, and one federal and one state college of education in each of the four locations (2 ownership types × 3 institution types × 4 locations = 24), which is the frame the 400-respondent sample was drawn from, distinct from the 36-institution population of the North Central zone as a whole. Within each sampled institution, respondents were selected purposively, using the same criterion applied at the location level: staff directly involved in planning, implementing, monitoring or using TETFund interventions, rather than a random sample of all staff.

Instrumentation, Validity and Reliability

This study used a closed-ended, Likert-type structured questionnaire based on existing literature and aligned with the study's objectives. The study supplemented this with secondary data, including academic publications, policy documents, and institutional reports on TETFund interventions. Scholars in Political Science and Public Administration reviewed the instrument for validity, and their input helped refine the items so that they measured what they were meant to measure. Reliability was tested using Cronbach's Alpha, a common metric for internal consistency, after a pilot test with a small sample of Desk Officers not included in the main study; a reliability coefficient above 0.70 was considered acceptable.

Method of Data Analysis

Data were coded and analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations) summarised the responses and addressed the research question, while ordinal logistic regression (OLR) served as the main inferential method, since the variables were measured on a five-point Likert scale and produced ordinal data. Before estimation, the parallel-slopes test checked the proportional-odds assumption, and a non-significant result ($p >$

0.05) confirmed it was not violated. Variance inflation factor (VIF) diagnostics for all predictor variables were below 5, so multicollinearity was not a significant concern. The independent variables were administrative autonomy, flexibility in decision-making, reduced bureaucratic control and political interference, and the dependent variable was project and programme performance. The study treated a predictor as statistically significant when its p-value was below 0.05. Positive coefficients mean that an increase in the predictor raises the likelihood of improved performance; negative coefficients mean the opposite.

Ethical Considerations

This study followed the ethical standards common to Nigerian academic practice. Respondents were briefed on the study's nature and purpose and gave informed consent; their responses were anonymised and kept confidential to protect their identity; participation was voluntary, and respondents could opt out at any time. The appropriate academic board granted formal ethical clearance before data collection.

Results

Response Rate and Respondent Profile

Of the 400 questionnaires distributed to academics and administrative staff across the selected institutions, 380 were correctly completed and returned, representing a 95% response rate, while 20 (5%) were either not returned or discarded due to incompleteness or significant missing information (Table 3). This response rate substantially exceeds the 70% threshold, which is generally regarded as very good for questionnaire-based research (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2019; Saunders et al., 2019). This gives confidence that the findings reflect the target population's perceptions.

Table 3: Summary of Questionnaire Administration and Respondent Profile (N = 380)

Category	Classification	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Questionnaire	Returned and valid	380	95.0
Questionnaire	Not returned/invalid	20	5.0
Institution type	College of Education	160	42.1
Institution type	Polytechnic	132	34.7
Institution type	University	88	23.2
Ownership	Federal	232	61.1
Ownership	State	148	38.9
Years of experience	1 - 5 years	61	16.1
Years of experience	6 - 10 years	108	28.4
Years of experience	11 - 15 years	152	40.0
Years of experience	Above 15 years	59	15.5
Role	Academic staff	239	62.9
Role	Administrative staff	132	34.7
Role	Management staff	9	2.4

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

The predominance of academic staff in the respondent sample (62.9%) is appropriate, as they are the principal beneficiaries of several TETFund intervention programmes. Administrative staff (34.7%) are directly involved in project administration, procurement, financial management, documentation, monitoring, and compliance with TETFund operational guidelines. Management staff (2.4%) provide strategic institutional leadership perspectives. A large group of respondents (40.0%) has 11-15 years of institutional experience, providing substantial institutional memory of TETFund's operations over the study period.

Level of Agencification of TETFund

Table 4 presents respondents' perceptions of the extent of TETFund's agencification across five indicators: administrative autonomy, decision-making flexibility, reduced bureaucratic control, operational independence, and enhanced institutional capacity.

Table 4: Respondents' Perception of the Agencification of TETFund (N = 380)

Statement	Mean	Std. Dev.
TETFund operates with a high level of administrative autonomy from government ministries.	4.33	0.96
Decision-making within TETFund is flexible due to its agencified structure.	4.22	0.98
Agencification has reduced excessive bureaucratic control over TETFund operations.	4.26	0.91
TETFund has sufficient operational independence to implement its mandates effectively.	4.68	0.76
The agencified status of TETFund enhances its institutional capacity to manage projects and programmes.	4.77	0.58

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

All five indicators had mean scores above 4.20, reflecting positive perceptions of the agency's operational independence and effectiveness. Enhanced institutional capacity scored highest (M = 4.77, SD = 0.58), followed by operational independence (M = 4.68, SD = 0.76); decision-making flexibility scored lowest, though still positive (M = 4.22, SD = 0.98). The standard deviations are relatively small across all items, indicating fairly consistent responses; this reflects agreement among respondents rather than the instrument's psychometric reliability, which was assessed separately using Cronbach's alpha (Section 4.3). Respondents therefore perceive the institutional reforms behind TETFund as having greatly improved its ability to fulfil its statutory duties.

Influence of Agencification on Project and Programme Performance

Table 5 presents the respondents' perceptions of TETFund's project and programme performance across five indicators.

Table 5: Respondents' Perception of TETFund Project and Programme Performance (N = 380)

Statement	Mean	Std. Dev.
TETFund-funded projects in my institution are completed within the approved time frame.	4.65	0.75
The quality of infrastructure projects executed under TETFund meets expected standards.	3.12	0.64
TETFund programmes contribute significantly to improved teaching, learning and research outcomes.	4.76	0.48
Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms ensure effective implementation of TETFund projects.	4.66	0.64
Beneficiary institutions effectively utilise TETFund resources for their intended purposes.	4.59	0.63

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

The findings show a highly positive evaluation of TETFund's project and programme performance. Most indicators received high average scores, indicating that respondents generally agree the agency's structured approach has strengthened its ability to implement projects and programmes effectively across beneficiary tertiary institutions. The highest score was for TETFund's contribution to improved teaching, learning and research outcomes (M = 4.76, SD = 0.48), followed by effective monitoring and evaluation (M = 4.66, SD = 0.64), timely project completion (M = 4.65, SD = 0.75), and efficient use of TETFund resources (M = 4.59, SD = 0.63). Infrastructure project quality scored comparatively lower (M = 3.12, SD = 0.64). Despite real achievements in infrastructure development, this points to lingering concerns about construction quality, contractor performance and the long-term maintenance of completed projects. Overall, the agency's structural reforms have improved project and programme outcomes, especially in academic, research and timeliness aspects.

Test of Hypothesis: Ordinal Logistic Regression Results

To test the statistical significance of the relationship between agencification and TETFund's project and programme performance, we employed an ordinal logistic regression model with four predictors: administrative autonomy, flexibility in decision-making, reduction in bureaucratic control, and political interference (Table 7).

Descriptive statistics for the political interference item, entered as the fourth predictor in the regression below, are reported separately in Table 6, since it was not one of the five agencification items measured in Table 3.

Table 6: Descriptive Statistics for Political Interference (N = 380)

Statement	Mean	Std. Dev.
Political interference affects decision-making processes within TETFund	4.38	0.61

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

Table 7: Ordinal Logistic Regression Results: Influence of Agencification on TETFund Project and Programme Performance

Predictor Variable	Estimate (β)	Std. Error	Wald	Sig. (p)	Odds Ratio
Administrative autonomy	0.682	0.124	30.21	0.000	1.978
Flexibility in decision-making	0.451	0.138	10.68	0.001	1.570
Reduction in bureaucratic control	0.573	0.151	14.39	0.000	1.774
Political interference	−0.392	0.109	12.94	0.000	0.676

Model Summary: *Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0.312$; Model $\chi^2 = 87.45$, $df = 4$, $p = 0.000$; Correct Prediction Rate = 68.4%.*

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

The overall model was statistically significant (model $\chi^2 = 87.45$, df = 4, $p < .001$), indicating that the four predictors together are jointly associated with respondents' perceptions of TETFund's project and programme performance. The Nagelkerke R^2 of 0.312 is a pseudo-R^2, a measure used for ordinal logistic models that is not directly comparable to the R^2 of ordinary least squares regression; it indicates a moderate overall association rather than a literal share of variance. The model correctly classified 68.4% of cases. Administrative autonomy had a positive and significant coefficient (β = 0.682, Wald = 30.21, $p < .001$, OR = 1.978): respondents who perceived TETFund as more administratively autonomous were nearly twice as likely to also rate its performance more favourably. Flexibility in decision-making (β = 0.451, Wald = 10.68, p = .001, OR = 1.570) and reduced bureaucratic control (β = 0.573, Wald = 14.39, $p < .001$, OR = 1.774) were similarly positively associated with perceived performance. Political interference, by contrast, had a negative coefficient (β = −0.392, Wald = 12.94, $p < .001$, OR = 0.676): respondents who perceived more political interference tended to rate TETFund's performance less favourably.

Descriptive statistics for the political interference item are reported in Table 6 above. Variance inflation factor (VIF) values for all four predictors were below the threshold of 5 (administrative autonomy: 2.78; decision-making flexibility: 3.62; reduced bureaucratic control: 4.07; political interference: 1.01), indicating that multicollinearity was not a significant concern.

Because all four predictors had p-values below 0.05, the null hypothesis (H_{01}) is rejected and the alternative hypothesis (H_{11}) accepted. Respondents' perceptions of administrative autonomy, decision-making flexibility, reduced bureaucratic control and political interference are therefore significantly associated with their perceptions of TETFund's project and programme performance: the first three are associated with higher perceived performance, and political interference with lower perceived performance.

Discussion

Respondents rated TETFund's projects and programmes positively overall, particularly timely project completion, teaching, learning and research outcomes, monitoring and evaluation, and resource use. Because the survey did not compare TETFund with a non-agencified alternative, these ratings describe how respondents experience TETFund's current performance rather than a measured improvement over an earlier or counterfactual arrangement.

The regression results point the same way: perceived political interference is the only predictor negatively associated with perceived performance, while perceived administrative autonomy, decision-making flexibility and lower bureaucratic control are all positively associated with it. This pattern is consistent with Principal-Agent Theory, which holds that agents tend to perform better, in the eyes of those who deal with them, when they have enough operational independence and clear accountability measures. In TETFund's case, the Federal Government, as principal, delegates specialised tasks to the agency; respondents who perceive that delegation as more complete and less politically encumbered also tend to rate the agency's performance more highly.

The positive performance ratings reported here echo earlier programme-level evaluations of TETFund, which test the impact of specific TETFund interventions rather than agencification as an institutional arrangement: Yaki et al. (2025) found marked improvements in physical infrastructure in North Central Nigeria, Anachuna et al. (2024) observed gains in research output and institutional management, and Zafi et al. (2025), Mela et al. (2024) and Isah (2024) reported improved teaching standards, research output and institutional capacity from TETFund-backed staff development programmes. These studies corroborate that TETFund's programmes are perceived to work; they do not themselves test whether its agencified status is what drives that performance, which is the narrower question this paper addresses. On that narrower question, the negative association found here for political interference echoes broader international evidence that the benefits of creating autonomous agencies depend heavily on context. Overman and van Thiel (2016), for instance, found an overall negative relationship between agencification and public sector performance across twenty countries, with positive effects concentrated in nations with strong governance and high administrative capacity. This also fits with the fund disbursement delays and bureaucratic bottlenecks that Alada (2016) and Isah (2024) have documented in TETFund's own operations (Section 2.2), which point to the same underlying vulnerability to interference and procedural friction. Like the agencies that Aliu et al. (2020) and Sanusi & Abdullahi (2011) studied in Nigeria, TETFund's perceived performance appears to remain sensitive to political interference even where its formal autonomy is well established.

Despite these largely positive ratings, respondents rated infrastructure project quality markedly lower than every other performance item (M = 3.12 against means of 4.59 - 4.76 elsewhere), the one area measured in this paper's data where perceptions of TETFund's performance are notably weaker. The results support TETFund's perceived operational

autonomy, flexibility and reduced bureaucratic control go together with higher perceived performance on most dimensions, while political interference and infrastructure delivery remain areas of comparative weakness. This aligns with the view that autonomy alone does not guarantee strong outcomes across every domain of an agency's work.

Conclusion

This paper examined whether respondents' perceptions of TETFund's administrative autonomy, decision-making flexibility, reduced bureaucratic control and exposure to political interference are associated with their perceptions of its project and programme performance in tertiary institutions across North Central Nigeria between 2015 and 2024. Drawing on Principal-Agent Theory and survey data from 380 academics and administrative and management staff, the study found that the first three attributes are positively associated with perceived performance, while political interference is negatively associated with it. Because every respondent rated the same agency and the design is cross-sectional, these results describe associations among perceptions rather than a causal test of agencification against an untreated comparator; they are nonetheless consistent with Principal-Agent Theory's expectation that agents perform better, in the eyes of those who deal with them, when they have real operational independence and are shielded from opportunistic political intervention.

Recommendations

Based on the findings reported here, together with the wider literature reviewed in Section 2, the following recommendations are offered to improve TETFund's project and programme outcomes. Recommendations 1 and 2 follow directly from this paper's own regression results; recommendations 3 to 5 draw on the broader literature on TETFund's known operational constraints, since fund disbursement timing and beneficiary institutional capacity were not themselves measured in this paper's data:

1. The Federal Government should strengthen TETFund's operational independence by reinforcing its legal and institutional autonomy and shielding it from unnecessary political interference in its administrative and operational functions. Review and amend existing legal frameworks as needed to strengthen that independence while keeping accountability measures intact.
2. Government should reduce bureaucratic bottlenecks in project administration by simplifying the administrative and procurement procedures tied to TETFund interventions. Streamlining approval processes, cutting unnecessary documentation and adopting more efficient digital administrative systems will minimise delays in project implementation.
3. TETFund should disburse funds more promptly by strengthening its financial management and funding mechanisms, so that approved intervention funds are

released quickly. This would reduce project delays, control costs and let beneficiary institutions finish projects within their planned timelines.

4. Beneficiary institutions should strengthen their institutional capacity by investing in their administrative, technical and project management capabilities, including regular training for project managers, procurement officers, works departments and internal auditors.
5. TETFund interventions should be subject to ongoing performance reviews through regular independent assessments, which would provide evidence for policy updates and help guide future reforms to improve organisational effectiveness.

Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

This study has some limitations. First, every respondent rated the same agency, TETFund; therefore, the design tests associations between perceived agencification attributes and perceived performance, not a causal comparison between agencified and non-agencified arrangements, and the hypotheses and conclusions above reflect this. Secondly, several predictor items (for example, "Agencification has reduced excessive bureaucratic control over TETFund operations") combine a claim with an evaluation in a single statement; this is a recognised limitation of single-item perception measures, and future work should use multi-item scales with more neutrally worded anchors. Third, the design does not account for institution-level clustering of responses, which could understate standard errors; a multilevel model would address this directly. The study also relied on self-reported perceptions from key stakeholders, which can introduce social desirability bias. lastly, the study is limited to four locations in North Central Nigeria, so its findings may not generalise to other regions with different governance structures.

Declarations

Author Contributions

Akinyemi O. V: Conceptualisation, Methodology, Analysis, Writing and Editing of the Manuscript. Prof Abraham M. P Reviewed and Supervised the work.

Conflict of Interest:

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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AI Usage Declaration

The authors used Claude ai 3.5 Sonnet (Anthropic, 2025) and Grammarly for language editing and grammar correction of the manuscript draft. All AI-generated outputs were critically reviewed, verified, and approved by the authors, who take full responsibility for the content of this article.

Data Availability: The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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