



Emerging Challenges in the Implementation of Staff Social Welfare Policies in Nigerian Tertiary Education: Strategic Approaches to Mitigation

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Abstract

The effective implementation of staff social welfare policies is essential for sustaining productivity, motivation, and institutional stability in Nigerian tertiary education. Rooted in social work principles such as equity, care, justice, and support, these policies cover provisions including medical care, health insurance, occupational safety, sick leave, wellness programs, housing, transportation, maternity/paternity leave, study leave, childcare support, and opportunities for professional growth. When effectively implemented, they enhance staff morale and strengthen institutional performance. However, the implementation of these policies in Nigerian tertiary institutions faces several challenges, including corruption and mismanagement of resources, inadequate funding, inconsistent policy directions, infrastructural decay, and insecurity. These issues often result in low staff morale, high attrition rates, frequent industrial actions, and a decline in the quality of teaching, research, and service delivery. The study emphasizes that welfare packages should extend beyond basic remuneration to include health allowances, housing and transportation support, professional development opportunities, and recognition of outstanding performance. To mitigate these challenges, strategic measures are recommended, such as increasing and diversifying funding sources, strengthening monitoring and accountability systems, implementing fair and inclusive motivational practices, adapting policies to local institutional contexts, and fostering stronger stakeholder collaboration. Social work, as a discipline, is concerned with promoting human well-being and improving the quality of life. Its principles provide a vital framework for effective welfare policy implementation. Therefore, integrating social work principles such as human dignity, advocacy, empowerment, and justice into staff welfare initiatives will not only improve the quality of work life but also promote staff commitment, build trust in governance, and enhance institutional productivity. The study recommends that institutional management, in collaboration with social workers, should design welfare policies that consider staff's personal and family needs, thereby promoting well-being and improving institutional effectiveness.

Keywords: Tertiary Education, Social Work, Policy Implementation, Challenges, Mitigation

Introduction

Education is a fundamental driver of individual, societal, and national development. In recent years, however, one of the pressing challenges for many developing nations, including Nigeria, has been how to address rising unemployment, achieve significant progress in poverty reduction, create wealth, and foster sustainable socioeconomic development (Obona et al., 2023) ^[22]. In discussing education as a tool for development, it is important to note that the Nigerian education system is organized into several

Levels: Early Childhood Education (pre-primary), Primary Education, Secondary Education, Tertiary Education, and Adult and Non-formal Education (Iyaji et al., 2024) ^[15]. Tertiary education, which follows secondary education, is expected to equip graduates with the knowledge and skills required for empowerment and self-reliance (Obona et al., 2023) ^[22]. This aligns with the view of Etor et al. (2019) ^[9], that, by the time students complete this stage of learning, they should have acquired sufficient competencies to become either employable or self-reliant.

The goals of education cannot be fully achieved without adequate attention to staff welfare policies, as staff represent vital human resources for the effective functioning of Nigeria's educational system (Egbo et al., 2025). In tertiary institutions, staff welfare policies constitute a fundamental aspect of management because they play a key role in boosting morale, which is essential for optimal job performance. The formulation and implementation of these policies are anchored on social work principles. Social work, as a discipline, is concerned with promoting human well-being and improving the quality of life. Its principles provide a vital framework for effective welfare policy implementation. Social work upholds values like human dignity, social justice, care, advocacy, empowerment, and well-being—all of which align with the objectives of welfare provisions for both academic and non-academic staff. When these principles are integrated into institutional welfare policies, they enhance the quality of work life, strengthen staff commitment, build trust in governance, and improve overall productivity. High staff morale, in turn, promotes quality education delivery and supports the attainment of institutional objectives (Egbo et al., 2025; Difoni et al., in Egbo et al., 2025). Thus, effective welfare policies are not merely morale boosters but also a necessity for sustaining educational quality and performance. In this sense, staff welfare policies in tertiary institutions can be regarded as a practical expression of institutional social work.

This paper explores the emerging challenges associated with implementing staff welfare policies in Nigerian tertiary education, with the objective of providing critical insights and practical strategies for addressing them. The discussion is organized under the following subheadings: the concept of tertiary education, staff welfare policies, social work, challenges in implementing welfare policies in tertiary institutions, strategies for mitigating these challenges, and the implications of social work principles in staff welfare policies for effective policy implementation in Nigerian tertiary education.

Concept of Tertiary Education

Tertiary education constitutes the highest level of formal learning within Nigeria's educational system and is defined by the National Policy on Education (2013) as "the education given after secondary education." It includes universities, polytechnics, colleges of education, and other specialized institutions regulated by bodies such as the National Universities Commission (NUC, 2025). As of March 2025, Nigeria had 283 universities—69 federal, 66 state, and 148 private reflecting the system's rapid expansion, particularly in the private sector, to address growing demand (NUC, 2025).

This level of education is established, funded, and regulated to provide affordable and accessible opportunities for learning, while also offering social services to students, staff,

and surrounding communities. Its purposes extend beyond academics to include meeting national manpower needs, maintaining quality assurance, fostering innovation, advancing intellectual growth, and promoting social responsibility for sustainable development (Obona et al., 2024; Odoh et al., 2025; Madukwe et al., 2024; Obona, 2024) ^[23, 26, 16, 23].

Tertiary education is delivered through various institutions such as universities, inter-university centres (e.g., the Nigerian French Language Village), innovation enterprise institutions, monotechnics, polytechnics, colleges of agriculture, schools of health technology, and the National Teachers' Institute (Idowu & Iyabode, 2024) ^[12]. It is widely recognized as a critical platform for equipping young people with the knowledge and skills necessary for socio-political, economic, and technological advancement (Omorobi & Obona, 2018) ^[30].

According to the National Policy on Education (2013), tertiary institutions are mandated to contribute to national development by producing skilled manpower aligned with labour market demands, promoting scholarship and entrepreneurship, enhancing community service, fostering national unity, and encouraging both national and international collaboration (Idowu & Iyabode, 2024; Ekpoh et al., 2024) ^[12, 8]. In this regard, Obona et al. (2020) ^[21] highlight its strategic role in combating social vices and economic challenges such as corruption, unemployment, and economic stagnation.

Staff social welfare policies

Policy is designed to achieve goals that serve the best interests of members of a society or organization. Policies consist of acts, laws, and rules provided by the government or an organization to guide decision-makers in improving the quality of life for citizens, workers, or staff. According to the Cambridge English Dictionary (5th Edition) cited in Ukaegbu and Otu (2017) ^[34], implementation is the act of putting a plan into action. It involves executing a plan, idea, model, specification, standard, or policy—transforming preliminary intentions into concrete actions. Without effective implementation, the objectives of welfare policies remain unfulfilled.

Welfare policy is an essential ingredient of management in any organization. A well-structured staff welfare system is vital for promoting employee satisfaction, improving productivity, and sustaining organizational effectiveness. In Nigeria's tertiary education system, both academic and non-academic staff play distinct yet complementary roles. Academic staff, such as lecturers, professors, and researchers, are responsible for teaching, research, and community service, contributing to knowledge creation and dissemination (Obona et al., 2024; Odoh et al., 2025) ^[23, 26]. Non-academic staff, while not directly involved in teaching or research, perform essential functions including administration, finance, library services, ICT support, infrastructure maintenance, security, health, and student welfare. These contributions create a conducive learning environment, ensure regulatory compliance, and enhance institutional efficiency and sustainability.

Staff Social Welfare Policies refer to the formal measures, guidelines, and programs established by an organization (such as a government agency, educational institution, or private employer) to promote the well-being, security, and overall quality of life of its employees. Social welfare

policies in the context of the study constitute structured frameworks of benefits, services, and support systems that aim to promote the well-being and productivity of employees in tertiary institutions. These policies go beyond basic salaries and ensure that workers' social, health, and economic needs are addressed, thereby improving job satisfaction, productivity, and organizational commitment. They are essentially part of human resource management strategies designed to protect staff welfare and create a supportive work environment. These policies typically include provisions for remuneration, healthcare, housing, career development, leave entitlements, recreational facilities, and safety measures (Gbarage & Ololube, 2022) ^[11].

Staff productivity, a crucial element in every organizational success, is dependent on many factors one of which is the implementation of social welfare policy. Sullivan, as cited in Uguru and Oti (2023) ^[33], defines workers' welfare as non-wage benefits provided to employees, including education fee assistance, transport benefits, childcare programs, annual leave, family leave, and sick days. Similarly, Manju and Mishra (2021) ^[17], describe employee welfare as a broad term encompassing various benefits, services, and facilities offered by employers to improve workers' lives and promote satisfaction at work. According to Lonah et al., cited in Uguru and Oti (2024), employee welfare refers to diverse non-monetary or monetary provisions made available by organizations to benefit employees in any form. This suggests that prioritizing staff welfare is crucial for enhancing productivity. In tertiary institutions where according to Okorie (2024) ^[28], intellectual capital is paramount, the welfare of employees directly influences their ability to perform, innovate, and contribute to the academic community. For instance, trade unionism plays a vital role in staff welfare dynamics. At Akwa Ibom State University, unionized staff benefited from improved working conditions, better remuneration, and enhanced career development opportunities, thanks to effective lobbying and collaboration between unions and management (Tom & Etukudoh, 2024) ^[32]. Olajuwon and Yaqoob (2025) ^[29], indicated that staff welfare is directly linked to effectiveness. Effective welfare programs involves investments in human capital that pay dividends in the form of higher productivity, and improved job satisfaction.

Types of staff social welfare policies

Good staff welfare policies in tertiary institutions are essential because they directly enhance staff well-being, motivation, and job satisfaction. The following are key welfare provisions that should be made available to staff in tertiary institutions:

1. Staff accommodation

The institution ought to provide decent accommodation on campus for interested members of staff. Provision of accommodation for staff in tertiary institutions ensures that employees, particularly those recruited from distant locations, have access to safe, affordable, and convenient housing within or close to the institution. This arrangement reduces commuting time and costs, minimizes stress, and enables staff to devote more time and energy to their academic and administrative duties. Staff housing can also foster a sense of community among employees, encourage collaboration, and improve overall job satisfaction, which contributes to improved productivity.

2. Housing loan scheme

Adequate housing is essential for the well-being and survival of staff. A housing loan, also known as a home loan, refers to a sum of money borrowed from a bank or financial institution to purchase a house. Such loans come with either fixed or flexible interest rates and repayment terms, with the property serving as collateral until the loan is fully repaid. Housing loans may be accessed by real estate investors to finance property purchases or by existing homeowners to secure funds for other purposes, using the property as security. To support employees in becoming homeowners, institutions should establish loan schemes that make this possible. Okorie (2024) ^[28], notes that in discussions on urban housing, the significant gap between housing demand and supply—particularly in developing countries—remains a major concern. Consequently, one effective way to boost teachers' job satisfaction is for the government to facilitate their access to bank loans for home ownership.

3. Free tuition for children of staff in the institution's staff school

The children of staff should be exempted from paying tuition in tertiary institutions owned and run by the school. Offering free tuition for staff members' children in the institution's staff school is a highly valued welfare benefit that alleviates the financial burden of education. It serves as both a motivational and retention tool, encouraging staff to remain committed to the institution. This benefit not only enhances staff morale but also reflects the institution's recognition of the employees' contributions, creating a stronger sense of belonging and loyalty. By supporting staff in meeting their family's educational needs, the institution indirectly contributes to their peace of mind and improved job performance.

4. Subsidized school fees for children of staff in the institution

There should be subsidy on the fees paid by children of staff in each institution secondary School. Subsidizing tuition fees for staff members' children who study within the institution is another effective welfare measure. It reduces the cost of higher education for employees, making it more affordable for them to provide quality education for their dependents. This scheme can serve as a significant incentive for staff to remain in the institution, as it is both a financial relief and a show of institutional support for their personal and family development. Such provisions can also enhance staff loyalty, reduce turnover, and promote a positive work climate.

5. The healthcare insurance package

To maintain their well-being and enjoy a healthy retirement, staff members require a comprehensive health and safety programme. The absence of such a programme can negatively affect their efficiency and overall productivity. Ensuring health and safety in the workplace should be a shared responsibility between employers and healthcare providers, as employees are vital to the functioning of the educational system. A well-structured healthcare package typically provides benefits through an insurance plan, which should offer equal advantages to all staff members. According to Adelabu (2005) ^[1], the establishment of the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) was designed to deduct a specific percentage of civil servants' salaries, thereby encouraging the government to provide contributors

with accessible and affordable medical care. Similarly, Ayemyo (2015) ^[2], affirmed that the provision of medical services to workers enhances their commitment and dedication to the operations of the state.

6. Staff recreation centres

They should be provision of functional recreation facilities on campus. The establishment of staff recreation centres provides employees with facilities for leisure, exercise, and social interaction. Access to such centres promotes physical fitness, mental relaxation, and stress reduction, which are essential for sustaining high levels of productivity. Recreation centres can also serve as venues for team-building activities, fostering collegial relationships among staff members across departments. This improves interpersonal communication, boosts morale, and contributes to a healthier work-life balance, all of which are critical for better job performance in tertiary institutions.

Importance of staff social welfare policies

Effective staff welfare policies help the staff both academic and non-academic to remain committed, thereby contributing to the attainment of school goals.

- Boosts employee morale and job satisfaction.
- Reduces absenteeism and staff turnover.
- Enhances productivity and commitment.
- Promotes loyalty and long-term retention.
- Contributes to the overall success of the institution.

Concept of Social Work

Social work is a professional discipline and practice that is concerned with promoting human well-being, enhancing social justice, and improving the quality of life of individuals, groups, and communities. It is guided by core values such as respect for human dignity, equity, care, and advocacy. Social work emphasizes the empowerment of vulnerable and marginalized populations by addressing social problems, alleviating human suffering, and facilitating access to resources and opportunities. According to the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW, 2021), social work involves engaging people and structures to address life challenges and enhance collective well-being. In institutional contexts such as education, social work principles are applied through welfare policies and practices that support staff and students, thereby fostering commitment, productivity, and social cohesion.

Duties of social workers in tertiary education

Social workers play a crucial role in tertiary institutions by ensuring the welfare of both staff and students, while also contributing to institutional effectiveness. Their work is guided by principles of equity, justice, care, and empowerment, which align with the objectives of education and staff welfare policies. The following are some of the duties of social workers within the context of tertiary education:

1. Advocacy and representation: Social workers serve as advocates for staff and students, ensuring that their rights, needs, and interests are recognized within the institution. They help bridge the gap between management and stakeholders by voicing concerns related to welfare, working conditions, or academic support. Through advocacy, social

workers promote fairness and equity, which strengthens trust in institutional governance.

2. Welfare support and counseling: A key responsibility of social workers is to provide welfare support and counseling services that address emotional, psychological, and social challenges faced by staff and students. This includes guidance on stress management, work-life balance, and family-related issues. By offering such support, social workers foster a healthier academic environment that enhances productivity and staff well-being.

3. Policy guidance and implementation: Social workers play an advisory role in ensuring that staff welfare programs, such as health insurance, housing, and professional development, are practical, inclusive, and responsive to the real needs of the staff. Their involvement ensures that policy implementation aligns with institutional goals while upholding human dignity.

4. Capacity building and empowerment: Another vital duty of social workers in tertiary education is organizing training, workshops, and capacity-building programs. These initiatives aim to empower staff and students by equipping them with skills for professional growth, resilience, and problem-solving. Such efforts enhance institutional effectiveness by ensuring a competent and motivated workforce.

5. Crisis management and mediation: Tertiary institutions often face crises such as conflicts between staff and management, student unrest, or personal emergencies affecting staff. Social workers intervene in such situations by providing mediation and conflict resolution strategies. Their role in crisis management promotes peace, stability, and a supportive academic environment conducive to teaching, learning, and research.

Challenges in the implementation of staff social welfare policies in tertiary institution

1. Corruption and mismanagement of resources

Corruption within tertiary institutions severely undermines staff welfare. Misappropriation of funds is the highest type of fraud committed in all sectors of the economy (Obona et al., 2020) ^[21]. People deliberately convert the public fund to personal use without a blink of fear or conscience disturbance. Ekpoh (2022) ^[7], highlights issues such as fraud, embezzlement, nepotism, and extortion, often perpetrated by institutional leaders. Misappropriation of scarce funds—diverted from staff welfare schemes to personal luxuries—limits the provision of essential benefits. Ikenga and Ejumude (2015) note that corruption manifests in practices like contract inflation, kickbacks, over-invoicing, and outright looting, all of which deprive staff of incentives and demotivate them, thereby weakening organizational commitment.

2. Inadequate funding

Persistent financial constraints remain one of the most significant obstacles to implementing effective staff welfare policies in Nigerian tertiary institutions. Ekpoh et al. (2024) ^[8], describe the situation as “financial strangulation,” with government allocations remaining far below the UNESCO-

recommended 26% of the national budget for education. Actual allocations have been consistently under 8% between 2017 and 2022, despite rising enrolments and operational costs. This chronic underfunding limits resources for staff welfare programs, forces institutions to over-enroll students for revenue generation, and diverts attention from quality staff support to survival-driven income strategies (Okebukola, 2010) ^[27].

3. Inconsistent policy directions

Frequent shifts in government policy and poorly planned reforms create instability in welfare policy implementation. For example, the decision to convert polytechnics into universities to address the perceived inequality between university and HND qualifications was introduced without adequate stakeholder consultation or readiness. Such abrupt policy changes disrupt existing welfare structures, create uncertainty among staff, and hinder the establishment of sustainable support systems.

4. Infrastructural decay

Poor physical infrastructure impedes the delivery of staff welfare initiatives that require functional facilities. Duruji, Azuh, and Oviasogie (2014) ^[4], emphasize that inadequate and deteriorating infrastructure—including outdated equipment, dilapidated buildings, ill-equipped libraries, and overcrowded classrooms—reduces the capacity to offer quality working conditions. Such environments negatively impact staff morale and limit access to welfare amenities.

5. Insecurity

Rising insecurity poses a significant threat to the implementation of staff welfare policies. Incidents of kidnapping and armed attacks, such as the abduction of nine students from Confluence University of Science and Technology in Kogi State (AP News, 2024, May 10), disrupt academic activities and create unsafe working environments. The National Universities Commission (NUC, 2024, June 7) warns that such threats undermine research, teaching, and the overall well-being of staff, making it difficult to sustain welfare programs in affected regions. These challenges may lead to dissatisfaction among staff, reduced morale, industrial actions, as well as a decline in the quality of teaching, research, and institutional output, hence the need to address them promptly.

Strategic approaches for mitigating the challenges

1. Increase and diversify funding sources

Inadequate funding remains a major challenge for public tertiary institutions in Nigeria, often resulting in frequent strikes by labour unions. The federal government has, at times, failed to honour agreements and memoranda of understanding (MoUs) concerning staff welfare, particularly in training and development. To address this, the government should significantly increase budgetary allocations to federal universities nationwide. Additionally, corporate organisations, wealthy individuals, and private companies can be encouraged to support academic staff development through endowments, research chairs, and scholarship schemes. As Ogbogu (2011) ^[20], notes, underfunding is largely a consequence of system expansion to meet the rising demand for higher education.

2. Strengthen monitoring and accountability mechanisms

Providing funds without strict monitoring often results in poor implementation outcomes. Therefore, university managements and relevant government agencies should institute robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks to track fund utilization for training and development. Regular audits, transparent reporting systems, and quarterly reviews should be mandatory to assess progress and ensure alignment with set objectives. Ukaegbu and Otu (2017) ^[34], emphasize that such reviews enhance accountability and policy success.

3. Implement fair and inclusive motivational strategies

Motivation plays a crucial role in the successful implementation of welfare policies. Staff should receive timely access to welfare benefits such as scholarships, study leave grants, research funding, and development allowances. Promotions and other rewards should be based on merit, without discrimination on the grounds of ethnicity, gender, or personal affiliations. This fosters trust and encourages active participation in professional development programmes.

4. Enhance policy adaptation to local contexts

Some welfare policies originate from foreign models that may not fully align with Nigeria's institutional realities and cultural values. Adapting such policies to suit the socio-cultural and operational context of Nigerian tertiary institutions will improve relevance and effectiveness. This involves stakeholder engagement, needs assessment, and localisation of implementation guidelines.

5. Strengthen stakeholder collaboration

Effective implementation requires synergy among key stakeholders, including government agencies, university managements, academic unions, non-governmental organisations, and private sector partners. Collaborative platforms for regular dialogue, policy review, and joint problem-solving can help to address emerging challenges, promote shared ownership of initiatives, and ensure sustained commitment to welfare policy goals.

Implications of social work principles in staff welfare policies for effective policy implementation in Nigerian Tertiary Education

The integration of social work principles into staff welfare policies provides a useful framework for understanding their role in policy implementation within Nigerian tertiary education. Social work emphasizes values such as human dignity, social justice, care, advocacy, empowerment, and well-being, all of which align with the objectives of welfare provisions for academic and non-academic staff. When these principles are embedded in institutional welfare policies, they not only enhance the quality of work life but also strengthen staff commitment, trust in governance, and overall productivity. Consequently, applying social work perspectives to staff welfare policies offers critical insights into how effective policy implementation can be achieved in Nigerian tertiary institutions.

1. Promotion of staff well-being and productivity

Drawing from social work's core principle of enhancing human well-being, welfare policies that provide health insurance, housing, and counseling services create an

Enabling environment for staff to work productively. When staff needs are met, policy implementation becomes more effective.

2. Reduction of industrial conflicts through social justice

Social work emphasizes fairness and equity. Applying this principle in staff welfare policies—such as fair remuneration and equal opportunities—reduces disputes and strike actions in tertiary institutions, thereby fostering a stable climate for implementing institutional policies.

3. Retention of skilled personnel through care and support

Social work advocates for care and support of vulnerable groups. Similarly, when tertiary institutions provide comprehensive welfare packages (e.g., pension schemes, medical care), staff feel supported and are less likely to leave, ensuring continuity in policy implementation.

4. Fostering positive work attitudes through dignity and respect

Respect for the dignity of persons is central to social work. Welfare policies that uphold staff dignity—through recognition, professional growth opportunities, and work-life balance—enhance morale and encourage staff to embrace institutional policies.

5. Strengthening institutional governance through advocacy

Social workers are known for advocacy. By integrating advocacy principles into welfare policies, staff voices are heard and considered in decision-making. This strengthens trust in governance and promotes compliance with educational policies.

6. Alignment with national educational goals through social responsibility

Social work stresses responsibility to the wider society. Welfare policies guided by this principle ensure that tertiary institutions retain competent staff who can drive national educational goals, thereby making implementation of broader education policies more feasible.

7. Encouragement of innovation and research

A central goal of social work is empowerment. Welfare policies that empower staff economically and socially free them from undue pressures, allowing them to focus on teaching, research, and innovation—all vital to effective policy implementation.

Conclusion

The integration of social work principles into staff welfare policies provides a valuable framework for understanding their role in policy implementation within Nigerian tertiary education. Findings from the study revealed that although staff social welfare policies are designed to improve the quality of life, productivity, and professional development of both academic and non-academic staff, their implementation is hindered by persistent challenges. These challenges include inadequate funding, corruption, mismanagement of resources, and inconsistent policy directions. Such limitations have often resulted in staff dissatisfaction, low morale, frequent industrial actions, and a decline in the quality of teaching, research, and overall institutional

performance. This persistent gap between policy formulation and practical execution undermines the original objectives of welfare provisions in the tertiary education system.

To address these issues, the study recommends a deliberate and multi-dimensional approach. Suggested strategies include expanding and diversifying funding sources, strengthening monitoring and accountability mechanisms, implementing fair and inclusive motivational practices, adapting policies to suit local institutional contexts, and fostering stakeholder collaboration. If effectively implemented, these measures can enhance policy outcomes, rebuild trust between staff and management, and create a more supportive and enabling work environment. Embedding social work principles such as equity, care, justice, and support into welfare policies not only improves staff well-being and quality of work life but also strengthens commitment, trust in governance, and institutional productivity. Ultimately, improving the implementation of staff welfare policies is essential for enhancing staff morale, promoting academic excellence, and ensuring sustainable development within Nigeria's tertiary education sector.

Recommendations

- Institutional management, in collaboration with social workers, should design welfare policies that consider staff's personal needs, thereby promoting well-being and improving institutional effectiveness.
- Workers should be provided with adequate housing, transportation, and health allowances, alongside commendation packages to reward outstanding performance and productivity.

Government and management authorities should incorporate voluntary welfare incentives to further motivate employees and promote higher productivity.

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