

| CHAPTER TWO |

THE PARADOX OF AGE INEQUALITY VIS-À-VIS ADMINISTRATIVE EXCELLENCE: PERSPECTIVES FROM PROF. EUGENE OKOYE NWADIALOR

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Introduction

The golden age philosophers posited that the human person is indeed a political animal. They argued this point by stating the fact that no one is an island and that one can only actualize one's full potentials in a state. Taking a walk down memory lane, it is obvious that the human person has devised many ways in different parts of the world towards making his society habitable by establishing leadership and administrative positions. It is very obvious that in every society or wherever human beings are found, there is need for someone to act as a head or a leader. Sometimes, this leadership is either taken (naturally) or bestowed on one by the members of the society or even appointed by a higher authority. Experience has shown, especially in Africa, that the appointment or election into leadership and administrative positions is now linked to the age of the potential occupier of such position. More so, some people have been denied some leadership and administrative positions either because they are believed to be too young or too old.

It is important to note that the matter of age is not generally

accepted in every society. M. Edward Davis and Robert D. Utiger observed that “there is no universally accepted age that is considered old among or within societies. Often discrepancies exist as to what age a society may consider old and what members in that society of that age and older may consider old.”¹ In any case, studies have shown that most countries of the world accept eligibility for retirement age between 60 – 68 years.² Consequently, one can say that a person between the ages of 60 – 70 can be considered as an old or elderly person.

Against this backdrop, this chapter is set to analyse the connection between age inequality and administrative excellence with special focus on Prof. Eugene Okoye Nwadiakor's administration as the Vice Chancellor of Tansian University, Umuaya. The zeal to undertake this research work is consuming considering the look of things in the political sphere of most African countries and Nigeria in particular. There is this general belief in some quarters that administrative excellence is for the youth because they possess enormous energy and are very viable. Others are of the opinion that only the elders can engender administrative excellence since they are believed to possess high level of wisdom and the required administrative capacity. These arguments hinge on age inequality in administration. The pertinent questions now are: Is administrative excellence measured by age of the leader? What should be the best approach to the issues bothering on the age of an administrator in an office? These and the related questions will guide our study as we make effort to interrogate them from phenomenological and critical points of view.

¹M. Edward Davis and Robert D. Utiger, “Old age: human life span”, retrieved from: <https://www.britannica.com/science/infancy>

²Cf. World Population Review, “Retirement Age by Country 2023” retrieved from: <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/retirement-age-by-country/>; M. Edward Davis and Robert D. Utiger, “Old age: human life span”, retrieved from: <https://www.britannica.com/science/infancy>

WHAT IS AGE INEQUALITY?

Age inequality is one of the manifest signs of social stratification in our society. Social stratification is an existential phenomenon. This has to do with the categorization of people based on age, gender, colour, tribe, religion, status, education, etc. Social stratification, according to Kendall, “involves the pattern of structural inequality that are associated with financial statuses, race/ethnicity, gender, age, and other attributes as well as the ideologies that support inequality.”³ This is what sociologists and social philosophers call social inequality. Social inequality, as E. J. O. Ndubisi and V. C. Udoh opined, has to do with “any type of treatment given to human persons not on the basis of their being human but on the basis of their nationality, tribe, colour, age, social status, gender, religion, etc.”⁴ In this regard, age inequality is one of the visible signs of the inequalities that exist in our society.

Without mincing words, age inequality has to do with unequal treatment given to a person or group of persons not necessarily from the point of view of their being human beings but simply from the point of view of their age. It has to do with the distribution of goods and services purely based on age. Simply put, age inequality involves any form of discrimination against people based on their age. Age inequality can be against either the older adults or young people. It has no specific boundary. The UN Global Report indicates that half of the world population are against the older persons.⁵ This Report leaves much to be desired. The Independent Expert, Claudia Mahler, observes that age inequality “manifests in stereotypes, prejudices and/or discrimination against older persons based on their age or on a

³D. Kendall, *Sociology in our Times: The Essentials*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 194.

⁴E. J. O. Ndubisi and V. C. Udoh, “Gender Inequality: A Challenge to Sustainable Development”, *International Journal of Gender and Development Issues*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (2015), 150.

⁵Claudia Mahler, “Eliminate Ageism and Age Discrimination”, retrieved from: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/stories/2021/09/eliminate-ageism-and-age-discrimination-says-un-expert>

perception that a person is 'old'⁶The concern of this paper is on the discrimination given to older adults on the ground that they cannot add any good to the society or because their ideas are out-dated. Some older adults have been denied certain rights, offices, goods, etc. simply because of some biases and stereotypes with reference to their old age. It is argued in some quarters that productivity declines with age; that is, the older a person becomes, the less productive the person will be.⁷ Some people are of the opinion that the mental and physical states of older people are no longer strong enough to take serious administrative responsibilities. This goes to explain the thrust of this paper from the perspective of Prof. Eugene OkoyeNwadiakor's administration in Tansian University. But before delving into the main thrust of this paper, let us take a brief look at the notion of administrative excellence.

GENERAL NOTION OF ADMINISTRATIVE EXCELLENCE

On a general note, an administrator is one that oversees the management and administration of an organisation, institution or establishment. He or she is one that helps to build an organisation. An administrator is responsible for the effective and efficient running of an organisation. On the other hand, excellence simply means the ability of one to manifest outstanding qualities in whatever one does. Put differently, to say that one has excelled in something means that one has done exceptionally well in that thing. Excellence has to do with a very high display of intelligence in whatever one does. It has to do with bringing out one's best in doing something. Excellence is synonymous with distinction, transcendence, superiority, value, merit, greatness, eminence, etc.

⁶Ibid.

⁷The National Academy of Sciences, "Age Discrimination, One Source of Inequality" retrieved from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK588538/>

Being excellent is a reflection of personality trait anchored on uprightness, ideas, innovation and strategy, time and productivity. It has to do with the determination to pursue standard and maintain it. It is being critically consistent to matters of reality as it affects results and ends. It is not a start-stop kind of disposition. It is rather the intensity with which the pursuit of worthwhile ventures whether personal or collective is done.⁸

From the above understanding, one can say that the quality of work and the calibre of service that one provides in carrying out one's responsibilities are referred to as administrative excellence. It has to do with the calculated attempt to transcend the ontological goodness of the human person as a leader or an administrator. It means a high display of intelligence in focusing and achieving one's set goals with **exceptional efficiency and effectiveness**. According to Robbie Berzman, an excellent administrator is one that possesses such characteristics as **team-building, time management, collaboration skills, motivation, supportive, passionate about organisation's mission and vision, conscientious, decisive, thoughtful, confident, strategic, tolerant of risks, flexible, etc.**⁹ One who does not possess the above qualities and more, cannot be said to be an excellent administrator.

E. O. NWADIAOR'S ADMINISTRATIVE EXCELLENCE IN TANSIAN UNIVERSITY AND THE PARADOX OF AGE INEQUALITY

Against the general belief that administrative excellence only requires youthful energy and that older people have nothing

⁸Ejikemeuwa J. O. Ndubisi and Vincent Gerald Onwudinjo, "J.B. AkamAnd The Culture Of Excellence: Implications For Nigerian Youths" in Ejikemeuwa J. O. Ndubisi and Peter Okey Ejikeme (Eds.), *Society and Human Development*(Benin: Bobpeco Publishers, 2017), 122.

⁹Robbie Berzman, "Key Traits of an Outstanding Administrator" retrieved from: <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/what-personal-characteristics-define-an-excellent-administrator>

significant to offer in administration, Prof. E. O. Nwadiakor's administration in Tansian University has proved that such belief was founded on a very shaky and illogical foundation. It is important to recall that Prof. Nwadiakor was born in 1942 and that he assumed office as the Vice Chancellor and Chief Executive of Tansian University in 2019. This presupposes that he was already 77 years of age as at the time he became the Vice Chancellor of Tansian University. From our discussion above, he can be considered without any equivocation as an elderly person or simply an old man.¹⁰

When he assumed office as the Vice Chancellor, there were some mixed feelings both within and outside the members of staff of Tansian University because of his age. This explains why some persons both within and outside Tansian University were very cold in accepting him as at the time because, for them, he is an old man and will have nothing or little to offer. Some of the personal interactions the present researcher had with some members of the staff as at the time he was employed attest to this claim.¹¹ Mr. James Nkwocha¹² opined: “How can *they* bring such an old man [Prof. Nwadiakor] to Tansian University? What do *they* think that this old man will bring to Tansian University? He is too old to be the Vice Chancellor of Tansian University.” Chiazon Menkiti¹³ was of the view that the position of the Vice Chancellor should be for young adult who are very energetic and full of life and not for the aged like Prof. Nwadiakor. In the view of Nnamdi Ikeme, “Tansian University is not a dumping ground for old

¹⁰See, World Population Review, “Retirement Age by Country 2023” retrieved from: <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/retirement-age-by-country/>

¹¹M. Edward Davis and Robert D. Utiger, “Old age: human life span”, retrieved from: <https://www.britannica.com/science/infancy>

¹²For some personal and security reasons, I will use pseudonyms to relate the views of some members of the Governing Council and also some members of staff of Tansian University concerning their negative impressions of Prof. Nwadiakor as an old man who is incapable of doing anything.

¹³This is a pseudonym used to hide the real name of the person

¹⁴A pseudonym

people”¹⁴ There were some other negative comments about Prof. Nwadiolor as at the time he assumed office as the Vice Chancellor of Tansian University, but the above will suffice for the purpose of this study. In sum, the arguments of these people and those in their camp point to the assumption that Prof. Nwadiolor is too old to be the Vice Chancellor of Tansian University. This is a clear manifestation of age inequality; that is, treatment given to a person based on the age of the individual person and not necessarily as a human person.

The above pejorative comments notwithstanding, Prof. Nwadiolor's administration in Tansian University so far, as at the time of writing this paper (2019 – 2024), is a testament of administrative excellence and an affirmation of the paradox or the inherent contradiction of age inequality. Nwadiolor's administrative excellence as the Vice Chancellor of Tansian University is one of a unique kind. His collaborative and team spirit has singled him out as an excellent administrator. He runs an open door administration and would like to do everything to carry his subjects along in whatever he does.

Having worked under more than five different Vice Chancellors in Tansian University, the present researcher can attest objectively and comparatively that Prof. Eugene Okoye Nwadiolor is an excellent leader and manager of persons and things. He has a unique way of motivating and influencing his subjects to make contributions for the good of the institution. He can simply be called a transformative and constructive administrator. Prof. Nwadiolor is a charismatic leader that strongly believes that there is something good in all his subjects and equally makes efforts to harness the good in them in order to build a unified and progressive system. One can simply say that Prof. Nwadiolor possesses enormous leadership and administrative qualities,¹⁵ namely, accountability, active listening, collaboration, open door policy,

¹⁴Personal communication with the informant [a pseudonym]

¹⁵Some of the administrative and leadership qualities in Prof. Nwadiolor are found in: Rebecca Knight, “8 Essential Qualities of a Successful Leader”,

<https://hbr.org/2023/12/8-essential-qualities-of-successful-leaders>;

Erin Wike, “20 Leadership Qualities that make a Great Leader”,

<https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/leadership-qualities-that-make-a-great-leader>

empathy, flexibility, innovation, optimism, problem-solving, being resilience, being focused, analytical prowess, creativity, courage, humility, etc. These and other related administrative and leadership qualities in Prof. Nwadiolor have made him to stand tall among all the past Vice Chancellors in Tansian University. It is very visible even to the blind that Prof. Nwadiolor has achieved what no other Vice Chancellor has done since the establishment of Tansian University.

As the Vice Chancellor of Tansian University, Prof. Eugene Okoye Nwadiolor, through his outstanding and transformative administrative and managerial approaches ensured: (1) the accreditation of all programmes in Tansian University by the National Universities Commission, including Nursing Science and Law; (2) the establishment of more than ten new programmes including Radiography and Medical Imaging Sciences, Medical Laboratory Sciences, Public Health, International Relations and Diplomacy, etc.; (3) the establishment of the Postgraduate programmes in Tansian University; (4) regular payment of staff salaries; (5) massive infrastructural developments; (6) introduction of the culture of Inaugural Lectures in Tansian University; (7) attracted good spirited philanthropists to collaborate with the building of the University; (8) introduction and implementation of staff development programmes; among others. Prof. Nwadiolor believes that a University without sound and qualified professors does not worth its name. This explains why he attracted and employed capable and knowledgeable professors in Tansian University. Since the inception of Tansian University, the University has never produced the number of indigenous professors and PhD holders as we have them today. Immense thanks to the administrative acumen of Prof. Nwadiolor. During the third Inaugural Lecture of Tansian University, the Lecturer affirmed:

When you [Prof. Eugene Okoye Nwadiolor] assumed office as the Vice Chancellor of Tansian University in May, 2019, Tansian University could only boast of two standing Indigenous Professors – Rev. Fr. Prof. P. O. J. Umechukwu and Rev. Fr. Prof. Ikechukwu Anthony Kanu, OSA. But today [8th November, 2023], within a

can now boast of more than twelve reputable indigenous Professors and seven sound Associate Professors of International Standard. Posterity will always remember the numerous seeds that you have sown in Tansian University.¹⁶

The point being made above is that Tansian University has recently witnessed varied forms of developments because of the man who is at the helm of affairs of institution – Prof. Nwadiolor. This is a clear show of administrative excellence and no one (not even the enemy) can take it away from Prof. Eugene Okoye Nwadiolor.

Conclusion

From our discussion so far, it is evident that discrimination based on age is not the way to go. Tansian University, for instance, has had younger persons as Vice Chancellors in the past but they could not perform excellently well compared to the administration of Prof. Nwadiolor. The fact remains that we are all human beings and as such, all should be treated equally irrespective of age, gender, religion, political party affiliations, etc. There is urgent need for a paradigm shift in this regard. The fact that one is younger or older does not necessarily make one more suitable or unsuitable to occupy a particular office. There should be equal opportunity for all to prove oneself. The underlying factor here is: EQUAL OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL. Our contemporary society will grow and develop if we maintain fairness and equity in our treatment of others. Yes, we are all human beings. Experience has shown that wisdom is not necessarily measured by age. The fact that one is younger or older does not make one to be more human or less human. We all share the same humanity of the human person and as such, we all should be treated equally.

¹⁶Ejikemeuwa J. O. Ndubisi, *Humanism, The Paranormals and the African in a Changing World: Implications for the Contemporary Society* [3rd Inaugural Lecture of Tansian University, Umunya], (Onitsha: Bechor Publication, 2023), 65.

Therefore, knowing too well that Prof. Nwadiakor is now an octogenarian who has displayed such high level of administrative excellence in Tansian University, one can say that administrative excellence does not necessarily depend on whether one is older or younger. The position of this paper is that administration position should be open to all adults irrespective of individual's particular age. While it is a fact that some older adults have done very well in administration, there are also some older adults who have done very badly; the same applies to the young adults. Therefore, this paper recommends, in the light of our discussion, that both the younger and older adults should be given equal opportunities to prove themselves. One who is not able to prove oneself should therefore be shown the way. There should not be any form of *a priori* exclusion of anyone based on age. In matters of leadership and administration, all adults, as human beings, should be treated equally.