

Research Article

# Digital Timeliness and Sustained Productivity: Modernising Registry Performance Metrics in Nigerian Universities

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## Abstract

This study redefines administrative effectiveness within Nigerian university registries by challenging long standing reliance on attendance-based evaluation. Guided by Institutional Theory and the Digital Transformation Framework, it reconceptualises punctuality as digital timeliness and regularity as sustained productivity performance metrics better suited to Information and Communication Technology (ICT) driven administration. Data were obtained from 596 registry personnel across seven South-South universities, complemented by qualitative interviews. Quantitative analysis revealed strong correlations between punctuality, regularity, and administrative effectiveness, while qualitative evidence showed that these relationships weaken when evaluation focuses on attendance rather than deliverables. Registries that adopted digital timelines, task-tracking systems, and remote coordination sustained operations during disruptions, whereas those dependent on physical presence experienced administrative breakdowns. The study advances the concept of transformational compliance, which integrates institutional discipline with measurable digital performance. It also proposes a four-pillar performance model Output-Based (OB) Indicators, Digital Competence, Responsiveness, and Adaptability to guide sustainable reform. By combining Institutional and Digital Transformation perspectives, the study demonstrates that legitimacy in university administration now depends on the capacity to merge traditional discipline with technology driven accountability. Embedding digital timeliness and sustained productivity into daily registry practice will enhance transparency, resilience, and innovation across Nigerian higher education.

## Keywords

Digital Transformation Framework, Transformational Compliance, Sustained Productivity, Administrative Effectiveness, University Registry

## 1. Introduction

The university registry constitutes the central unit of academic administration. It serves as the custodian of institutional records, the coordinator of admissions and examinations, and the repository of institutional memory. Its effectiveness determines the coherence of internal processes and contributes significantly to the reputation and credibility of the university. Within this administrative framework, two

practices, punctuality and regularity have historically been regarded as key indicators of professionalism [1]. In Nigerian universities, these practices are embedded in appraisal systems, reinforced by civil service traditions, and equated with discipline, order, and efficiency [2].

However, the continued reliance on punctuality and regularity as attendance-based indicators is increasingly misa-

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ligned with contemporary demands in higher education administration. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the limitations of this framework: when physical access to offices was suspended, registries in many public universities were unable to sustain operations or transition services to digital platforms [1, 3, 4]. By contrast, some private universities, such as Covenant and Landmark, maintained operations by redefining punctuality in terms of adherence to service deadlines and regularity in terms of consistency in outputs, delivered either on-site or remotely. These divergent experiences highlight the need to reconsider performance metrics for registry personnel.

Globally, higher education institutions confronted with disruptions including pandemics and armed conflict have adopted digital tools and flexible work models to sustain administrative continuity [5]. Universities in Ukraine, for example, managed to preserve academic sessions despite wartime disruptions through the adoption of online systems and hybrid arrangements. Such comparative evidence underscores the imperative for Nigerian universities to adopt resilient, output-oriented, and digitally enabled approaches to administrative performance.

This paper responds to that question by proposing a redefinition of punctuality as *digital timeliness* and regularity as *sustained productivity*. Drawing on Institutional Theory [6] it combines empirical evidence from public universities in Nigeria's South-South zone [1, 3] with insights from comparative institutional practices. The goal is to develop a future-proof framework for registry performance, one that prioritises outputs, digital competence, responsiveness, and resilience over mere attendance. In doing so, the paper contributes both theoretically and practically to the scholarship on higher education administration in Nigeria and beyond.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Historical Evolution of Administrative Discipline in Nigerian Universities

The administrative ethos of Nigerian universities emerged from colonial civil-service traditions that prized punctuality, regularity, and visible commitment as moral and professional virtues. Attendance registers, supervision records, and daily sign-ins became institutional markers of diligence and order. Over time, these routines were internalized as norms of quality and accountability within public institutions. Quality assurance in higher education is founded on adherence to well-defined procedures, transparency, and compliance with institutional standards features closely linked to punctuality and regularity [2].

However, as university operations have become more complex and technology-driven, these attendance-based indicators no longer suffice as measures of effectiveness. Registry performance increasingly depends on coordination, data accuracy, and responsiveness to stakeholder needs rather than

physical presence [1]. Recent evidence confirms that higher-education systems worldwide are transitioning from procedural conformity to output-based accountability [7].

### 2.2. Institutionalisation and the Problem of Symbolic Compliance

The persistence of attendance-focused evaluation illustrates institutional isomorphism [6] whereby organisations maintain accepted routines to preserve legitimacy rather than to ensure efficiency. In university registries, punctuality and regularity often function as symbolic acts of compliance, projecting discipline without necessarily improving productivity [1].

Such behaviours are sustained through the cultural-cognitive pillar of institutions, which embodies shared assumptions about what constitutes "proper" behaviour [8]. Thus, Nigerian registries often reward conformity to presence rather than demonstrable service outcomes. Comparable global studies highlight this same inertia, where administrative rituals delay modernisation and innovation [9].

### 2.3. ICT Adoption and the Disruption of Traditional Performance Metrics

The rise of information and communication technologies (ICT) has redefined administrative effectiveness [10]. Digital correspondence, workflow automation, and electronic databases have shifted the emphasis from attendance to responsiveness, timeliness, and accuracy. Registries that adopted ICT processes achieved faster turnaround, improved transparency, and continuity during institutional disruptions [1].

Recent studies emphasize that digital transformation maturity strongly predicts institutional adaptability and governance quality [11]. Similarly, recent work identifies inadequate infrastructure, digital-skills gaps, and cultural resistance as major challenges [12] patterns mirrored in Nigerian public universities. The concept of digital timeliness thus emerges as a modern proxy for punctuality in a data-driven environment.

### 2.4. Comparative Shifts within Nigerian and Global Universities

Both public and private universities are gradually aligning performance management with measurable outputs. Public universities historically rule-bound are introducing biometric attendance systems, electronic workflows, and digital verification procedures. Private institutions, by contrast, have been quicker to link performance evaluation to quantifiable outcomes such as turnaround time, accuracy, and client satisfaction [1].

This trend reflects the global movement toward performance-based legitimacy, where institutional credibility depends on demonstrable service delivery rather than procedural adherence [7, 13]. Nonetheless, cultural attachment to traditional discipline continues to shape behaviour in many regis-

tries, producing a hybrid environment that values both procedural regularity and emerging digital efficiency.

## 2.5. Institutional Theory and Conceptual Gaps

Institutional Theory provides the interpretive lens for understanding this coexistence of old and new administrative logics. Organizations maintain established routines because these confer legitimacy, even when they no longer enhance efficiency [6, 8]. In Nigerian university registries, punctuality and regularity persist as expressions of professional identity and institutional pride. Nigerian higher-education governance is often anchored in compliance cultures where maintaining formal procedures signifies quality assurance [9].

However, the emergence of digital governance models is redefining legitimacy in functional terms. Recent global studies [7, 9] reveal that accountability, responsiveness, and innovation are becoming the new benchmarks of institutional performance. This study situates Nigerian university registries within that evolving legitimacy framework, where traditional discipline must adapt to output-based digital expectations [1].

## 2.6. The Nigerian Context: Emerging Trends and Practical Realities

Across Nigerian universities, reforms in registry operations increasingly reflect the influence of ICT and performance measurement. Many institutions now use biometric systems, digital filing, and online portals. Nonetheless, infrastructural deficits, inconsistent policy implementation, and staff resistance continue to impede full transformation [1].

Global findings confirm that digital transformation succeeds only when technological reform is matched by organizational culture change [11, 12]. To sustain progress, universities must cultivate a culture of digital accountability, where performance is evaluated by deliverables and responsiveness rather than attendance alone. In this sense, quality assurance principles [2] can evolve into continuous digital performance monitoring.

The literature demonstrates a clear evolution from attendance-based discipline to digitally mediated accountability. Punctuality and regularity, once static indicators of loyalty, now manifest as digital timeliness and sustained productivity, embodying adaptability and responsiveness [1]. Contemporary scholarship corroborates this shift, showing that institutions achieve legitimacy through measurable performance and innovation rather than ceremonial compliance [7, 9, 13].

Despite ongoing reforms, Nigerian universities remain in transition, balancing inherited procedural norms with emerging digital imperatives. This study contributes to that dialogue by proposing a framework that integrates institutional discipline with digital efficiency redefining administrative legitimacy in the context of twenty-first-century higher-education governance.

## 3. Theoretical Framework

### 3.1. Institutional Theory and Organisational Legitimacy

Institutional Theory provides the conceptual foundation for understanding how university registries maintain long-standing administrative behaviours even when these practices lose operational relevance. Organisations including Universities in Nigeria adopt formal structures not solely for efficiency but to align with socially accepted norms that confer legitimacy [6]. Such structures often evolve into *institutionalized myths* rituals or routines that symbolize order and accountability, even when they no longer contribute directly to performance.

The framework of institutional sustainability rests on three interconnected pillars—the regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive that collectively reinforce organisational legitimacy [12]. The regulative pillar enforces compliance with formal rules and sanctions (e.g., attendance registers, time logs, and reporting deadlines); the normative pillar encompasses values and professional expectations of discipline and reliability; while the cultural-cognitive pillar reflects shared beliefs about what constitutes “proper” behaviour. Together, these pillars explain why attendance, punctuality, and visible presence persist as markers of administrative diligence within Nigerian universities [1].

Within this framework, punctuality and regularity function as institutionalized behaviours that uphold legitimacy. They endure not because of proven efficiency but because they resonate with established values of procedural order. Adherence to established procedures remains central to quality assurance in higher education, underscoring the continuing importance of institutional compliance and process integrity [2]. Hence, registry personnel often equate physical presence with professional credibility, even when digital processes can achieve similar or better outcomes [1].

### 3.2. Mimetic, Coercive, and Normative Isomorphism

Institutional Theory was later expanded to explain how similarity and stability persist across organisations through three mechanisms: coercive, mimetic, and normative isomorphism [14]. Coercive isomorphism occurs when external forces such as government regulations or accreditation standards compel universities to adopt reforms (e.g., e-record systems, digital reporting).

- 1) Mimetic isomorphism involves imitation, as institutions emulate perceived successful peers to maintain legitimacy.
- 2) Normative isomorphism arises from professional socialization, training, and cultural expectations that sustain conventional definitions of discipline.

In Nigerian universities, these three forces intersect. Ex-

ternal reforms from oversight agencies create coercive pressure for modernisation, while professional norms continue to vaporize attendance and compliance. The coexistence of these pressures explains why digital innovations are introduced but not fully institutionalised a tension [1] describes as *partial transformation within traditional legitimacy structures*.

### 3.3. Digital Transformation as Institutional Disruption

Recent studies highlight that digital transformation challenges traditional sources of legitimacy in higher education. As universities adopt technology-driven governance, accountability is increasingly tied to performance indicators such as speed, accuracy, and responsiveness rather than presence [7, 11].

ICT systems thus act as *institutional disruptors*, shifting the meaning of discipline from attendance to digital traceability. Digital transformation not only alters technological systems but also reshapes the cultural and cognitive dimensions of work, redefining professional identity around measurable efficiency [9]. This transformation compels administrative units to derive legitimacy from demonstrable outputs rather than symbolic routines. In this sense, the registry is both the subject and instrument of institutional adaptation [1].

### 3.4. Integrating Institutional and Digital Performance Frameworks

Contemporary research extends Institutional Theory into digital environments. Legitimacy in modern organisations increasingly derives from technological competence, transparency, and stakeholder responsiveness [13]. Successful digital transformation depends on bridging infrastructural capacity and institutional culture [12]. This balance is conceptualised as digital maturity, encompassing technological readiness, governance structures, and organisational culture [11]. Drawing from these perspectives, this study reconceptualizes *punctuality* as digital timeliness measured by the speed and reliability of administrative responses and *regularity* as sustained productivity, represented by consistent task delivery in both physical and digital environments. These reinterpretations preserve the moral essence of discipline while redefining it within a technology-based accountability framework. In doing so, they align with [2] emphasis on quality assurance through structured processes but extend it into a performance-oriented, digitally verifiable model [1].

This integrated framework proposes that administrative effectiveness in Nigerian university registries depends on their ability to harmonise institutional legitimacy with digital adaptability. Traditional routines like punctuality and regularity maintain moral and procedural order, but genuine effectiveness arises when these routines are transformed into evidence-based, technology-supported practices.

Institutional resilience thus lies not in discarding tradition

but in reinterpreting it translating historical discipline into digital accountability. This process represents the evolution of institutional behaviour as *transformational compliance*, represents the evolution of institutional behaviour in an era where legitimacy and efficiency converge through digital innovation [1].

## 4. Discussion and Findings

### 4.1. Empirical Overview

Data from 596 registry personnel across seven South-South Nigerian universities [1] reveal that punctuality and regularity remain statistically significant predictors of administrative effectiveness. Correlation analysis shows strong positive relationships between punctuality and effectiveness ( $r = 0.68$ ) and between regularity and effectiveness ( $r = 0.74$ ).

Contextual evidence indicates that these relationships weaken when performance is assessed through deliverables rather than attendance logs. Departments that incorporated digital timelines, task-tracking tools, and remote coordination mechanisms maintained continuity during strikes and the COVID-19 closures, whereas units and divisions dependent on physical attendance suffered major disruptions. These findings indicate that while discipline retains symbolic importance, effectiveness now depends on digital adaptability and measurable productivity.

### 4.2. Redefining Punctuality: From Arrival to Digital Timeliness

Within the registry administration of Nigerian universities, punctuality has long been operationalised as arrival at the office at a specified time. This practice, inherited from civil-service traditions, has come to symbolise discipline, loyalty, and diligence. Under the influence of normative and coercive isomorphism, institutions reinforced this ritualised understanding [6] through attendance registers and punctuality awards, linking visible presence to perceived productivity.

However, findings from [3] reveal that physical presence does not necessarily correlate with administrative efficiency. Registry staff in several South-South universities often reported to duty punctually yet delayed in processing students' requests or releasing results. Similarly, [1] observed that reliance on attendance-based appraisal produced *ritual compliance* rather than measurable outputs. The COVID-19 disruption confirmed this weakness: when physical access was suspended, punctual registries became non-functional due to the absence of digital structures for continuity.

In contrast, private universities operationalised punctuality through digital responsiveness and service deadlines, emphasising the timeliness of task completion rather than arrival. Here, punctuality meant submitting student results, transcripts, or memos within defined digital timelines. This evolution

reflects mimetic isomorphism; whereby public institutions gradually emulate practices that have earned legitimacy in competitive private institutions.

Therefore, digital timeliness redefines punctuality as the ability to deliver administrative services within the expected digital time frame regardless of physical presence. It aligns with global administrative standards emphasising turnaround time, responsiveness, and ICT-driven efficiency. Under this new interpretation, the punctual registry officer is one who keeps virtual deadlines, responds promptly to queries, and ensures continuity of service through digital tools even during disruptions.

### 4.3. Rethinking Regularity: From Physical Presence to Sustained Productivity

Regularity, traditionally measured by consistent attendance, represents another deeply institutionalised norm within Nigerian university administration. Under the bureaucratic logic of institutional legitimacy, registry staff equated *being present* with *being productive*. However, [1] data show that regular attendance did not guarantee sustained workflow or uninterrupted service delivery, particularly during crises. Departments with full attendance still experienced administrative backlogs when tasks were not output-tracked or digitally coordinated.

Private universities again demonstrated an alternative approach. They assessed regularity in terms of continuity and consistency of outputs from transcript issuance to examination processing, irrespective of work modality. This practice is sustained through performance contracts, biometric integration, and hybrid work models. Here, regularity acquires a broader meaning: the capacity to sustain productivity through digital platforms, flexible scheduling, and accountability frameworks.

Under Institutional Theory, this shift represents a process of institutional decoupling: registries retain ceremonial attendance symbols to maintain legitimacy but increasingly incorporate output-based assessment to meet environmental demands for efficiency. Thus, sustained productivity redefines regularity as the consistent ability to deliver quality outputs and maintain service flow despite temporal or spatial disruptions.

Empirical findings from South-South Nigeria confirm this logic. Units that integrated ICT platforms and remote-coordination mechanisms maintained near-normal service delivery during strikes and pandemics [1]. Conversely, registries bound by attendance rituals suffered prolonged downtime. This evidence reinforces the argument that administrative effectiveness in modern universities depends less on physical regularity and more on measurable, sustained productivity.

### 4.4. Implications for Institutional Legitimacy

These re-conceptualisations demonstrate a paradigmatic shift in how Nigerian universities define administrative le-

gitimacy. Attendance-based compliance once represented symbolic conformity to bureaucratic expectations; digital timeliness and sustained productivity now represent functional legitimacy within the twenty-first-century digital environment. Universities that fail to transition risk institutional inertia remaining legitimate by tradition but ineffective by performance.

Accordingly, registry evaluation systems must evolve to reward responsiveness, innovation, and continuity rather than ritual presence. This approach will align Nigerian universities with global administrative reforms and actualise the *future-proof* framework envisioned by the study.

### 4.5. Interpreting Change Through Isomorphic Forces

Variation across universities reflects the interplay of coercive, mimetic, and normative isomorphism [14].

- 1) *Coercive pressures* from the *National Universities Commission (NUC)*, state-government directives, and ministerial circulars compel institutions to digitise registry operations, adopt e-record systems, and align with national quality-assurance frameworks.
- 2) *Mimetic behaviour* occurs as universities emulate peers, such as Covenant University, Babcock University, and University of Lagos, that have successfully implemented e-registry and electronic-clearance systems.
- 3) *Normative forces* emerge from entrenched professional cultures that continue to define diligence through physical attendance and compliance.

The coexistence of these pressures explains the uneven pace of digital transformation. Coercive forces encourage modernisation, while normative traditions preserve continuity. Consequently, institutional change in Nigerian universities is gradual and layered, with digital adoption occurring within the moral and procedural boundaries of an enduring bureaucratic culture [1].

### 4.6. Convergence of Institutional and Digital Frameworks

The findings situate Nigerian university registries within a global shift where quality assurance and digital transformation converge. Institutional legitimacy now rests on data transparency and user-centred service [13]. Infrastructural and cultural readiness are essential prerequisites for successful transformation [12]. This readiness is conceptualised as digital maturity, combining technology, governance, and organisational culture [11].

Evidence from the study indicates that registry performance reaches its peak in institutions where leadership actively promotes ICT-driven processes and declines where entrenched bureaucratic routines prevail [1]. Consequently, punctuality and regularity are transformed from static behaviours into dynamic indicators of responsiveness and sus-

tained digital engagement.

This evolution extends Institutional Theory into the digital era, showing how long-standing norms are being reinterpreted through technology-enabled accountability. The Nigerian registry system thus exemplifies the transition from procedural compliance to performance-based legitimacy, a process that defines modern administrative effectiveness in higher education [1].

#### 4.7. Implications for Administrative Effectiveness

The integrated theoretical and empirical insights reveal three major implications:

- 1) *Legitimacy must evolve.* Registry credibility should be grounded in measurable service outputs, speed, accuracy, and responsiveness, rather than ceremonial visibility.
- 2) *Institutional culture must adapt.* Leadership should re-define discipline as consistent, technology mediated

service delivery.

- 3) *Quality-assurance frameworks must modernise:* procedural standards remain vital but should now incorporate ICT-based indicators of digital timeliness and sustained productivity.

By embedding these principles, universities can transform their registries into performance driven systems that uphold both ethical discipline and technological efficiency.

Overall, the findings portray Nigerian university administration as a hybrid system where institutional tradition and digital innovation coexist. Attendance and compliance still confer moral legitimacy, but true effectiveness now depends on digital accountability.

This synthesis validates the theoretical proposition that institutional legitimacy and digital adaptability are complementary, not competing, forces. The path forward lies in transformational compliance, which retains the ethical foundation of discipline while embedding it within transparent, digitally verifiable performance systems [1].

**Table 1.** Old vs. New Metrics for Punctuality and Regularity in Nigerian Universities.

| Metric      | Public Universities (Old)      | Public Universities (New)                            | Private Universities (Old) | Private Universities (New)               |
|-------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| Punctuality | Arrival at office              | Digital timeliness (emails, transcripts, deadlines)  | Biometric arrival logs     | Service deadlines tied to outputs        |
| Regularity  | Consistent physical attendance | Sustained productivity (outputs despite disruptions) | Contractual attendance     | Hybrid attendance linked to deliverables |

**Table 2.** Proposed Modern Performance Metrics for Nigerian University Registries.

| Dimension                              | Description and Rationale                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Output-Based Indicators                | Emphasize measurable deliverables such as transcript turnaround time, examination result processing, and clearance issuance. These indicators replace symbolic attendance logs with verifiable productivity data.             |
| Digital Competence                     | Evaluate personnel's ability to deliver services via ICT platforms, manage student data securely, and adapt to digital tools. Digital literacy becomes both a performance metric and a component of institutional legitimacy. |
| Responsiveness and Service Orientation | Assess promptness in communication and stakeholder satisfaction. Registry officers should be appraised based on the timeliness and quality of their responses to students, staff, and external bodies.                        |
| Adaptability and Innovation            | Measure the capacity to sustain services under disruption whether through remote work, hybrid operations, or proactive problem-solving. These captures sustained productivity beyond traditional attendance norms.            |

## 5. Recommendations

Drawing from the study's findings and theoretical insights,

the following recommendations are proposed to guide the modernisation of registry performance metrics in Nigerian universities. They emphasize practical reforms that promote accountability, digital competence, and institutional resilience across both public and private systems.

1. *Reframe Punctuality as Digital Timeliness*: Universities should replace attendance-based evaluation with time-bound digital performance tracking. Registry personnel responsiveness to e-mails, portal updates, and document workflows should form part of performance assessment. This shift will promote measurable productivity and align with modern quality-assurance standards.
2. *Redefine Regularity as Sustained Productivity*: Registry staff evaluation should emphasize continuity of service, not mere presence. Monitoring systems should track turnaround times for transcripts, results processing, and correspondence. Regularity should mean maintaining consistent workflow both on-campus offices and remotely using verifiable digital tools.
3. *Institutionalize ICT-Driven Administrative Culture*: University management should invest not only in digital infrastructure but also in capacity building for administrative staff. Workshops, digital-skills certification, and ICT incentives should be institutionalised to embed digital confidence and reduce resistance to change.
4. *Integrate Digital Indicators into Quality-Assurance Frameworks*: The National Universities Commission (NUC) and institutional quality-assurance units should incorporate digital timeliness, online service responsiveness, and system uptime as indicators of administrative performance. Such integration will modernise evaluation criteria and encourage sustainable digital transformation.
5. *Promote Leadership Commitment to Transformational Compliance*: University leaders must model digital accountability by embedding technology use into routine governance. Management should demonstrate punctuality and regularity in digital form meeting virtual deadlines, approving documents through electronic systems, and fostering transparent data driven administration.
6. *Strengthen Inter-University Learning and Collaboration*: Universities should create peer learning platforms to share best practices in e-registry management. Institutions that have achieved measurable success in digital transformation (Covenant University, Babcock University, University of Lagos) can mentor public universities through benchmarking visits, policy dialogues, and collaborative staff development.

Collectively, these recommendations advance a coherent administrative culture that harmonises discipline with innovation and converts routine compliance into demonstrable performance. Embedding the principles of digital timeliness and sustained productivity within everyday operations will enable Nigerian university registries to remain responsive, transparent, and resilient in a rapidly evolving digital environment.

## 6. Conclusion

This study examined the inadequacy of attendance-based

metrics in university registries and advanced a framework that prioritizes digital competence, measurable outputs, and adaptability. By redefining punctuality as *digital timeliness* and regularity as *sustained productivity*, it proposes an administrative model that values functionality and resilience over ritual presence.

The study therefore advocates a new culture of accountability where compliance translates into demonstrable performance. Embedding digital timeliness and sustained productivity into routine operations will enable Nigerian university registries to remain responsive, transparent, and resilient in an increasingly digital academic environment.

## Abbreviations

|     |                                          |
|-----|------------------------------------------|
| ICT | Information and Communication Technology |
| NUC | National Universities Commission         |
| OB  | Output-Based                             |

## Author Contributions

Edho Okugbe Genesis is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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