

FUNDING TERTIARY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: CHALLENGES AND THE WAY FORWARD

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Abstract

Education is a fundamental human right and a cornerstone for national development. In Nigeria, tertiary education plays a vital role in producing skilled manpower necessary for socio-economic advancement. This paper critically examines the concept, historical development, sources of funding, and challenges facing tertiary education in Nigeria. Despite the expansion of tertiary institutions—including federal, state, and private universities—the sector grapples with issues such as inadequate funding, corruption, infrastructural decay, poor research output, and brain drain among academic staff. The paper highlights that the primary sources of funding include government subventions, TETFund, tuition fees, grants, alumni support, and consultancy services. However, mismanagement and insufficient investment continue to undermine progress. Recommendations are made to enhance funding sustainability, such as diversifying revenue streams, involving non-governmental actors, and empowering institutions with greater autonomy. The paper concludes by emphasizing that collective responsibility and strategic funding reforms are crucial for revitalizing tertiary education and ensuring it meets the national development agenda.

Keywords: Funding, Tertiary Education, Challenges

Introduction

Education is a basic need and a human right that should be accorded to all human beings solely by reason of being human. Every child has a need to attend school. The education given in the school should focus on the overall development of human personality, wholesomely, physically, mentally and morally. Schools are seen as the providers of education which is also an important process that each individual has to go through in life today. Thus, education is seen as the key to unlock the treasure of knowledge and also a key index of development. As a result of its importance to economic and national development, governments all over the world through history have accorded high importance to education. Ejikeme (2014) noted that, a diligent and faithful appraisal of the Nigerian educational system would reveal that we have a tragedy in our hands. The standard of the nation's education is undergoing a free fall. The sound system bequeathed to us by the British has been deprived of its soul through bad leadership, corruption, frequent change of policy and poor planning. More worrisome is that the progress made in various areas of the education sector within the six decades of independence was not consolidated, leading to the undermining of the investments made in various aspects of the education sector.

Nevertheless, Nigeria's philosophy of education as aptly enunciated in the National Policy on Education (2017) was based on: The development of the individual into a sound and effective citizen. The full integration of the individual into the community. The provision of equal access to educational opportunities for all citizens of the country at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels both inside and outside the formal school system.

Tertiary education is education given at the postsecondary level. It composes of universities, polytechnic, colleges of technology, colleges of education and professional schools. The education has the overall goal of producing a community of Nigerians that are highly skilled and who will be prepared for the world of work and help in sustainable national development. Tertiary educational institutions

pursue these goals through teaching, research, generation and dissemination of knowledge which they achieve through a variety of programmes such as certificate, diploma, undergraduate and postgraduate courses. Specifically, tertiary education contributes to the production of high level manpower in diverse professional callings as dictated by national development requirements. The goals of tertiary education also focus on inculcation of community spirit in the students through projects and action research. This can only be achieved if there is proper funding of education and especially the tertiary level. Most tertiary institutions tend to have derived their funding from the government right from inception. All public universities are funded by government whether federal or state in Nigeria. They are funded through incremental budgetary allocations to the universities (Odetunde, 2014).

Funding which represents financial resources plays a vital role in the development of tertiary education. According to Idowu (2019) the funding of education is a vital aspect of tertiary education. The history of Tertiary Education funding in Nigeria dated back to the period of establishment of tertiary institutions. This dates back to 1948 when the University College, Ibadan (UCI) was established following the Elliot Commission's recommendation in Nigeria. The Elliot Commission was set up in the year 1943 saddled with the responsibility to report on the organization and facilities of the existing centres of higher education in British West Africa, and to make recommendations regarding future university development in that area.

However, from time to time, Nigerian tertiary institutions have been under lock and keys, at one time or another due to agitations on issues bordering on funding. While some were shut down on account of non-payment of allowance of workers, some others are as a result of issues concerning poor welfare services of students. The problem of dilapidated buildings, dearth laboratories and facilities in the universities can be traced to inadequate funding. Most student riots in the university and even most of the crisis between university unions and federal government of Nigeria can be traced to monetary issues which revolve around inadequate funding of their institutions.

The Concept of Tertiary Education

In Nigeria, tertiary education is the education that ultimately leads students into special area of development, give them maturity and prepare them for the world of work. It is the ultimate and most important level for the all-inclusive achievement of educational goals in every society. Tertiary education is multidisciplinary and interdependence in nature because it is composed of several categories of hierarchies, staff, students, stakeholders, menial workers, service providers, traders, and numerous programs for preliminary, undergraduate and postgraduate students.

According to the National Policy on Education, Federal Republic of Nigeria (2017) defined tertiary education as "education given to students after secondary education in universities, colleges of education, polytechnics, and monotechnics including those institutions offering correspondence courses" Francisco (2016) defined Tertiary education (TE) as "all education (whether public or private) that occurs following secondary education" He also differentiate between the term "tertiary education" is usually distinct from "higher education (HE)," which refers more narrowly to education offered in universities and colleges that award academic degrees and professional qualifications. The more encompassing term "tertiary education" includes not only universities and colleges, but the entire diverse set of public and private postsecondary institutions in a given country including technical and vocational education and training (TVET) institutes, community colleges, nursing schools, research laboratories, centers of excellence, distance-learning centers, and many more.

Historical Development of Tertiary Education in Nigeria

Western Education was brought to Nigeria by the missionaries who were more pre-occupied with primary and secondary education and saw no need of dabbling into higher education as their priority was evangelism. The colonial government was in no way better as they saw no need and even feared providing higher education for the Africans. The desire for the development of tertiary education in Nigeria began during the colonial era. According to Idowu, (2019), the historical development could be traced under the generations by which the universities were established:

The First Generation Universities

At the eve of independence in 1959 the Ashby Commission was set. Its report came out in September 1960. It was a nine-man commission charged with the responsibility of looking into the post-secondary school certificate and higher education for Nigeria in the next twenty years. Its report came out some few weeks before the opening of the University of Nigeria Nsukka on the 7th of October 1960 as the first autonomous full-fledge university in Nigeria. This was in addition to up-grading of the University College Ibadan to a full-fledge university. After these two, three more universities were opened as the University of Ife in Ile Ife, Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria and the University of Lagos, Lagos all in 1962. The sixth university (University of Benin) was opened in 1971 and handed over to the Federal Government in 1975. These six were the first generation universities.

The Second Generation Universities

The Third National Development plan was developed in 1972 to capture the period 1975 to 1980. The plan gave birth to seven new universities (the second generation universities). They are as follows; Bayero University Kano, Usman Danfodiyo University Sokoto, University of Port-Harcourt, University of Ilorin, University of Calabar, University of Jos, and University of Maiduguri. Thereafter, the Federal Government saw the need to set up technical universities and those of Agriculture. These were set up in Makurdi, Yola, Bauchi, Akure etc. when the government of Goodluck Jonathan in 2011-2015 decided to set up fifteen additional universities to cater for those states that had no federal university. As of December, 2024, Nigeria has 69 federal universities distributed according to the country's sic geopolitical zones. (NUC, 2024).

State Universities

The coming of the 1999 constitution and indeed civilian administration transferred university education and indeed all higher education from the exclusive legislative list to the concurrent legislative list. This made it possible for states that were willing and capable to start their own universities and other higher educational institutions, between 1979-1983 starts came out in earnest to take the advantage. Rivers state started in 1980 and was followed by others like Imo, Ondo, Ogun Old Cross Rivers, Old Anambra, and Lagos states. As at now virtually all the states of the federation have their universities, colleges of education, polytechnics and other tertiary institutions. Currently, according to NUC (2024) in Nigeria, there are 56 states universities.

Private Universities

Private universities and indeed all other tertiary institutions were permitted especially with Decree No. 19 of 1984. However, in 1985 this Decree was amended allowing the establishment of universities and other tertiary institutions by government (federal and States), companies incorporated in Nigeria, individuals or organization of individuals who are citizens of Nigeria.

In 1991 the Longe Commission on review of higher education in Nigeria gave credence to the establishment of universities and other tertiary institutions by organizations and individuals. The Federal Government accepted the report which led to the promulgation of the (National Minimum Standards and Establishment of Institutions) Decree No. 9 of 1993. This led to the abrogation of government monopoly on tertiary education.

In 1999 private ownership of tertiary institutions was liberalized further such that individuals and religious organizations became interested and set up their own universities and tertiary institutions. Some of the first are Babcock University, Madonna University, Igbinedion University all licensed in 1999. Others include Bowen University in 2001, Covenant University and Pan-African University in 2002, Al-Qalam University, 2005, Al-Istiqama University, Sumaila, 2021, Al-Ansar University, Maiduguri, 2022, Azman University, 2023 among others. (Yusuf, 2012). Currently in Nigeria, there are 112 private universities. (NUC, 2024)

Sources of Funding for Tertiary Education

According to Akinyemi (2015), currently, there are several sources through which the Nigerian Tertiary Education are funding. These funding sources which are the financial life wire of the tertiary educational system in Nigeria are discussed as follows:

1. Subvention/Budgetary Allocation: Government subvention is the major source of funds for tertiary institutions in Nigeria. This represents 90 per cent of the total income to the institutions and it is usually disbursed through National Universities Commission (NUC), National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) and National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) are the bodies that assists the government to regulate the affairs of the Nigerian institutions. (Juliet, 2019), However, the remaining 10 per cent is generated internally by each tertiary institutions through commercial ventures, tuition fees, sales of goods and services, endowment funds, rental income, etc. (Ogbogu, 2011). For the state universities, they equally receive subvention from the state governments through appropriation on education through the ministries of higher education.

2. Tertiary Education Trust Fund (Tetfund): The Tertiary Education Trust Fund was established by Education Tax Decree of 1993 in response to the recommendations of some concerned groups in the country to raise funds for the education sector. This is in realization that the private sector as the main beneficiary of the products of education should directly share in the burden of its finance. The Decree provides that companies should pay 2% of their profits to the Education Trust Fund and that the fund should be shared among the three levels of education (tertiary, secondary and primary) on pro-rata basis for physical structure development, procurement of books and library facilities, purchase and maintenance of equipment. According to Arch. Sonny Echono, the Executive Secretary, TETfund (2024) pointed out that at present, Tetfund has formed a major source of funding for teaching facilities, research, conferences, and staff training and development in the Nigerian tertiary institutions as attested by most tertiary institutions.

3. Tuition Fees: Universities receive a reasonable proportion of their revenue through students' fees. Also in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions part-time programmes are offered on a 'for-profit' basis (profit making venture), which in turn financially subsidize regular students' fees.

4. Grants: Several foreign grants have been received by the Nigerian Tertiary Institutions in form of aids to support academic programmes and staff development. Some of the agencies that have supported Nigerian tertiary institutions include John D. and Catherine T. Mac Arthur Foundation, Ford Foundation, World Health Organization (WHO), Carnegie Foundations amongst others. The MacArthur and Carnegie Foundations have been supporting 4 universities in Nigeria since 2010 in the key areas of staff development and development of ICT infrastructure (Oshemughen and Okotie, 2017).

5. Alumni Associations: There are projects embarked upon by Alumni of each institutions in their respective institutions. These projects include, construction of modern toilets on campus, provision of concrete made chairs at strategic places on campus for relaxation and construction of lecture halls.

6. Researches and Consultancy Services: Tertiary institutions in Nigeria do undertake researches for big organizations and also render consultancy services as well. These are done through conducting medium and small scale researches, collaborative research and development, providing the needed technological know-how to large, medium and small scale industries in the country, providing capacity building services, organizing workshops, seminars and in-service training for government workers and workers of private organizations.

Challenges of Funding Tertiary Education in Nigeria

Tertiary education is currently facing a number of challenges in Nigeria, there are some indices that suggest that the system is collapsing or is nearing collapse. These challenges have resulted in steep declines in educational performance, growing illiteracy levels and reduction in productivity performance. There has been a lot of debate about cost of education especially on who should bear the cost. Many individuals and corporate bodies in Nigeria have the opinion that tertiary education should be financed by the government while the government on the other hand, complain of scarce resources. It is however worrisome that the available funds in tertiary institutions are not judiciously used for the purpose for which it is meant. Corruption which has become the order of the day in the Nigerian polity

is also becoming prominent in tertiary institutions. The Provost of Anti-Corruption Academy of Nigeria, Professor Sola Akinrinade on an online platform (pulse.ng) on 7th July 2015 expressed fear on the increasing level of corruption in Nigerian tertiary institutions when he said “the high incidence of corruption in the tertiary institution system threatens Nigeria’s future. In essence, tertiary institutions are facing the problem of funding not only because of the hard times the economy of the nation is undergoing but because the available funds are actually not judiciously utilized by the management. Some of the major challenges that tertiary education is currently facing in Nigeria include the following:

1. Unstable Staff: There has been a gradual exodus of many of most talented faculty/lecturers from the tertiary institutions to other sectors and some outside the country in search of greener pasture. Thus, the tertiary institutions have ceased to be a place for exciting search for innovation/research. This occurs due to poor earning of teachers many people will now be using teaching at tertiary institutions as a stepping stone to a more attractive job. This could make teaching profession for fresh graduates just doing it until they find better jobs. Justina (2018) stated, “There was mass exodus of many brilliant lecturers that could not compete on political campus arenas from the university campus. Some left to join the rat race in the business world and others left Nigeria for better services” He further said that “experienced and seasoned professors were sidelined. The political professors often silenced the lone voices of active and academic professors. Similarly Amadi, (2020) also stated that “many experienced and young lecturers are fleeing from the frustration of university life into more rewarding and more challenging sectors of the economy and even to overseas countries” The Academic Staff Union of Universities, during an interview with the Punch Newspaper mentioned that “about 100 lecturers have left Usmanu Danfodio University, Sokoto, while the union of the of the Federal University, Gusau disclosed that the institution was in the need of about 1000 lecturers to fill the vacancies created by those who had left. The union at the Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta, Ogun State said over 350 academic vacancies were available at the institution, while 27 lecturers had left two faculties at the University of Lagos, as 100 workers at the university of Uyo travelled out of the country. (Punch Newspaper, 2023).

2. Poor Researches : As noted by Amadi (2020) of the National Open University of Nigeria, there is need to make research the centre of tertiary institutions activity, taking into account the social; cultural; and political problems that Nigeria now faces. Financial and administrative limitations and lack of resources; intellectual stimulation; and incentives demand that we find new strategies to advance this ambition. There is a diminishing scope of mentoring junior researchers by seasoned and senior researchers due to brain drain. Despite the increasing value of research in the world economy based on the supremacy of knowledge; and constant technological change; budgetary constraint; and the belief that research is costly have resulted in the virtual disappearance of research centers’ in Nigerian tertiary institutions.

3. Deteriorating Infrastructure: In most tertiary institutions, many public universities have ageing infrastructure which hinders research, teaching and students’ life, the infrastructure and facilities are fast decaying. Enumenu (2017), pointed out that, most of the required resources for education production process are in short supply. Lecture halls, laboratories, students’ hostels, library space, books and journals, official spaces are all seriously inadequate. Classroom that is over-crowded with hundreds of students designed for about thirty (30) students will come to play in a depressed economy. As such chairs may not be enough and some students and up pairing thereby have room for distractions such as piercing each other’s ear. The situation is true for both federal and state government institutions. Echono (2024) also noted that, inadequate infrastructure exacerbates inequalities, limiting access to quality education for students and hampering internationalization and global ranking of Nigerian Universities.

Recommendations

Given the present scenario in which Nigerian tertiary institutions operate, the following recommendations were made:

1. Government should demonstrate practically the political will to fund tertiary education by ensuring the needful is done. The welfare packages, salaries and allowances appropriated to political office

holders could be curtailed and re-appropriated to funding education.

2. Tertiary institutions should buckle up to confront the emerging challenge through exploring other ways to boost their internally generated revenue and maintaining existing infrastructure to extend their longevity through contributions from nongovernmental sources. Community based associations, NGOs, Philanthropists, Alumni Associations, Consultancy Services, Revenue generating ventures (self-financing academic ventures, university press, micro-finance bank, distance learning, cottage industry, guest house, computer services etc)

3. Decentralising decision making by empowering tertiary institutions to make more decisions at the institutional levels particularly regarding curriculum development and research.

Conclusion

The role of tertiary education in the growth and development in Nigeria cannot be over-emphasized. The extent to which national objectives are achieved in the country is subject to how well the tertiary system of education is attended to. Similarly, for the tertiary system to perform well, the effort of all educational stakeholders and agencies must be on deck. Thus, everyone should join hands in financing tertiary education. It is for this reason that various steps have been taking by the government to restore the dwindling fortune of the nation's educational system. The paper suggests ways of improving upon the existing funding methods. And also brings out other nonexistent but useful funding methods. It is believed that if these methods of funding are adopted, funding of tertiary institutions will yield the needed result.

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