Financing Tertiary Institutions for Qualitative Education in the 21st Century in Nigeria: *The Way Out*

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Abstract

The success or otherwise of any educational system depends not only on the quality and calibre of teachers but also on adequate funding. Education is capital intensive venture, unfortunately in Nigeria; tertiary institutions have continued to bemoan inadequate funding in the face of escalating costs of maintaining infrastructure and running academic progammes. This paper examines the current funding of these institutions and the consequences of underfunding in contemporary Nigeria. The paper also suggests alternative avenues of funding in order to cope with the challenges of the 21st century.

Keywords: Financing tertiary institutions, qualitative education, 21st Century, Nigeria

Introduction

Education is the process of training of mind and character. It is the method by which a people hands down from one generation to another its knowledge, culture and values. The individual being educated develops physically mentally, emotionally, morally and socially and the work of education may be accomplished by an individual teacher or any other group in the society.

Since the introduction of formal education into Nigeria in 1840's, Education has continued to expand and develop in terms of the number of schools and number students. Consequent upon this expansion is the 1882 Education ordinance which made a bold attempt to classify schools into two - the government schools maintained and funded by government and the assisted schools established by private individuals, missionaries and funded by such bodies. This system of funding schools continued up to 1976. In that year, the federal Government introduced the Universal Primary Education (UPE). The implication of this revolution was an enrolment explosion spilled over to secondary

schools and tertiary institutions where the burden of funding assumed greater proportions.

From available statistics, we have more than 126 universities, 50 polytechnics and more than 43 colleges of education (Private, Federal and State) in the country. This growth and expansion is by no means a giant achievement in a country desirous to catch up with the developed world. According to Adekoya (1995), from 1981 to1985, education votes on percentage of federal budget were about 12.5% and 23% for state governments. Between 1986 and 1990, these percentages went down to 5.2% for the federal government and 20% for the states. In 1992, federal education vote was 2.2% of the budget and by 1995; education had a lion share of the budget.

In spite of the fact that education's share of the country's financial resources has continued to rise with each successive budget, the cost of financing education continues to escalate rapidly. This rising cost is occasioned by the sudden explosion of youth population, the increasing demand for education particularly tertiary education, the high drop-out and repeater rates and the extra costs to improve quality set against problems of dwindling revenue, global inflation, heavy external debt and the continued fall in the value of the naira.

The reality and enormity of funding tertiary education in contemporary Nigeria would hardly be ignored. Perhaps, no less a person has captured this reality than the former Director General, Federal Ministry of Education and Youth Development, Alhaji Mallam Yahaya Hamza. According to him:

> ....Funding education assumes a sharper focus andpresents a challenge which is almost daunting in its enormity.... Yet there is no running away from the problem since the desire to proper education is too gloomy to contemplate particularly for a country such as ours which is in a hurry to bridge the development gap between it and industrialized nations.

There is no doubt that finance is central to the success of any educational venture. In the words of Anayo (2005):

> It is when enough money is put in the system that teachers will be taken care of, there will be dedication on the part of teachers. More money also means more facilities in the schools to make for conducive, learning. Until this is done, the nation's standard of education will continue to deteriorate.

Similarly, Munsone in Adesina and Fagbemiye (2008) stressed that the effect of formal education "will be more or less effective depending on whether its share of expenditure is consistent with its significance in relation to other development need...." And that the growth of an economy can actually be hindered by having an educational programme which is too costly for the economy to bear. Adesina and Fagbemiye also cautioned against developing the educational sector to the neglect of other sectors of the economy. According to them;

> ...except for the resource allocation to defense, which is not a productive sector, the emphasis placed on other sectors during the third plan can be justified in the sense that to make educational development more meaningful, other sectors of the economy should be developed.

In Nigeria today, tertiary institutions, particularly those owned by the Federal Government are funded through the various commissions. Federal Universities receive their statutory grants from the Nigerian Universities Commission (NUC), polytechnics from the

National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) and colleges of education from NCCE. The grants which are released on quarterly basis to cover staff salaries and other programmes have, in recent time, proved inadequate with some consequences on the educational structure at the tertiary level.

The Consequences of Underfunding Tertiary Institutions

One major manifestation of inadequate funding of our tertiary institution has been the frequent closure of these institutions either because of industrial actions by the various categories of employees or on account of students' unrest. The frequency of industrial actions reached the peak in 1992 when Universities and some Polytechnics and Colleges of Education were shut for about six months.

This trend has become the bane for our higher institutions. The current ASUU versus Federal Government face-up is a clear testimony of the inability of Government to adequately fund these institutions. This development does not portend any good for the future development of education in the country.

Perhaps, the most disturbing trend of underfunding is the brain-drain syndrome. The past five years have witnessed mass exodus of academics to other lucrative sectors of the economy. Some have even gone overseas for better working condition of service and job fulfillment. Majority of those still teaching in these institutions are ready and willing to leave anytime better offers come up. In this regards, Shonekan (2005) states that:

to further compound our problems, we have continued to experience an alarming exodus of seasoned academics from our higher institutions of learning. This is because lecturers now feel a sense of fulfillment in their careers.

This trend is particularly disturbing as we may begin to have only second rate scholars to teach in our higher institutions.

In addition, gross underfunding is noticeable in the absence or depreciation of infrastructures in our campuses. Abandon project dot the landscape of many institutions – a development which has made the completion of such projects more costly than the original projections. Thus, it is not uncommon to find empty libraries, laboratories and dilapidated hostels and classrooms which constitute death traps than conveniences for teaching and learning. The whole scenario paints a picture of decay and wanton abandonment.

The rising incidence of unethical practices including examination malpractices is traceable to underfunding. As a result of lack of essential text-books, journal and other references for serious academic work, many students have adopted cheating as the quickest way to obtain certificates, diplomas and degrees. Thus, scholarship and excellence which used to be the hallmark of a tertiary institution is gradually giving way to these unethical practices. Today's NCE holders or graduates can no longer defend their certificates or diplomas – situation which has made some foreign universities and institutions to begin to doubt the quality of our degrees and other certificates.

Again, the spate of students' unrest is an indication that all is not well with our institution of higher learning. The reasons often advanced for these confrontations range from inadequate hostel and classroom accommodation, empty libraries and laboratories, epileptic power supply and lack of constant water supply. The truth is that faced with inadequate funds, administrators of our higher institutions are increasingly finding it difficult if not impossible, to supply these basic facilities in campuses. Other manifestations of underfunding include poor remuneration, lack of incentives and overall poor working environment. These variables have directly and indirectly

affected the quality of scholarship in our tertiary institutions in the country.

Ways of Funding Tertiary Institutions in the 21st Century

There is no doubt that in this 21st century, the cost of funding education will certainly escalate. This is because the current political and economic situation does not offer a ray of hope in the century. Therefore against the backdrop of the present economic quagmire, Government alone may not adequately fund education in the country if development of other sectors is to be achieved. The burden of funding therefore must be shared between the direct Government, institutions and private sector if qualitative education is to be realized.

One possible avenue of funding Education in this century may come through the introduction of education Tax. This measure must be backed by the promulgation of a Law making it mandatory for the private sector to contribute adequately to education financing if we are to recoup our past glory in education. There is no doubt that private companies have been declaring huge profits after tax over the years. It is therefore necessary that a certain percentage of such profits be paid as Education Tax. This fund can then be managed by a board of trustees and disbursed to various institutions based on agreed formula. This will, no doubt, help to alleviate some of the problems of these institutions.

One need to stress that the time has come for the introduction of tuition fees in all tertiary institutions in the country. The long mistaken notion that education should be obtained free of charge is over. This notion has more or less created a disparity and discrimination between Federal and State Institutions. The present and future times call for tuition fees that will be used to maintain and upgrade decaying and collapsing infrastructures in our campuses.

The 21st Century calls for increased budgetary allocation to the educational sector because education is indispensable to national development. In the words of Shonekan (2005);

"higher institutions of learning in other regions of the world are the main harbingers of rapid development and economic transformation ... economic development and worldwide industrial success is today dependent on human capital accumulation which is first and foremost a function of the quality and content of education and training at the tertiary level".

This can be achieved through a deliberate policy whereby local, state and Federal Government review their expenditure patterns to accord priority to financing education in the allocation of funds. Professor Babs Fafunwa has suggested that the country's defense budget be pruned down to 50% and the balance be used to finance education in the country.

Conclusion

The time has come for institutions of higher learning to wake up from their slumber and begin to explore avenues of raising funds independent of government. The introduction of consultancy services by some institutions is a welcome development. Such services need to be sustained and accelerated in the years ahead if tertiary education is to discharge its obligations to the nation. Institutions should plunge into 2005) puts it that:

> The leading universities in the world today are where they are because of their ability to raise funds independently.Cambridge University Worldwide is richer than many private organizations and even governments ... funds thus raised can be invested in commercially viable projects which

would be managed by experts. This to my mind is one of the ways which we can fix the financing problems we have at the tertiary level of our education.

Apart from raising funds through the institutions of endowment funds, commercialization of publications and running of specialized Executive programmes such as the MBA, Law and other related fields which some institutions have already started, the establishment and maintenance of bilateral assistance on external sources would help boost the finances of tertiary institutions. Such agencies and bodies through which help can be solicited include the British Council, USAID, European Union, Canada Agency for International Development in areas of finance, manpower development and exchange of staff.

The reality of our contemporary existence is that the cost of financing education will continue to escalate and that government alone cannot adequately fund education. While it is the statutory responsibility of Government to fund education, the 21st century demands that administrators of higher Education should see themselves not just academic supervisors alone; but as seasoned managers of empires that require sustained and resourceful generation and mobilization of funds and efficient management of all resources for the attainment of qualitative education in this century.

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