

Inadequate Funding and the Development of University Education in Nigeria: Challenges and Way Forward

Sirajo Bello¹⁾, Umar Abdulkadir Umar²⁾ & Lurwanu Usman³⁾

¹⁾ Department of Public Administration, Faculty of Management Sciences,
Umaru Musa Yar'adua University, Katsina, Nigeria

²⁾ Department of Public Administration, Faculty of Management Sciences,
Bayero University Kano-Nigeria

³⁾ Department of Public Administration, Faculty of Management Sciences,
Kaduna State University-Nigeria

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Abstract

The lack of political leaders' commitment resulted in inadequate funding for tertiary institutions in Nigeria. This has been a significant issue for the advancement of university education, presenting numerous challenges that negatively impact the development of Nigeria's public universities. This paper examines the challenges posed by inadequate funding for university education development in Nigeria and proposes possible solutions. The study employed a qualitative approach and used Nigerian public universities as the case study. The study was also guided by the Resource Dependency Theory, as proposed by Pfeffer and Salanick (1978). The findings of the study revealed that there are poor infrastructural facilities, poor staff development, low international ranking, series of strike actions, brain-drain of academics, poor research development and non-attraction of international students. Therefore the study recommended among others that political leaders in Nigeria at both federal and state levels should increase budgetary allocation to education sector to enable effective development of university education. There is also a need for private and non-governmental organisations to complement the government's efforts to improve university education by providing infrastructure, such as electricity, water supply, road networks, student hostels, staff housing, and the like, in universities. University administrators should enhance the sources of internally generated revenue and ensure that the funds realised from internal sources are utilised judiciously to promote the positive development of university education in Nigeria.

Keywords: Challenges; Development; Funding; and University education

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INTRODUCTION

Education is essential for both human and national development worldwide. In fact, it enhances the lives of people worldwide and contributes significantly to economic development and nation-building. Thus, the importance of Education to human and national development cannot be overemphasised. As noted by the World Bank (1999), Education enhances people's productivity and creativity, promoting entrepreneurial and technological development globally. Therefore, no responsible and responsive government in any country, whether in the developed or developing world, will underfund the education sector or treat it so lightly. Hence, University education is a critical component of human development, as it provides not only the high-level skills necessary for the global labour market but also the essential training for teachers, doctors, nurses, engineers, lawyers, scientists, social scientists, and many other professionals (Otonko, 2012). University education in Nigeria began many years ago, before the country gained independence from British colonial administrators on October 1, 1960. The establishment of University College, Ibadan, in 1948 marked the beginning of the development of public universities in Nigeria (Okoli, Ogbondah & Ewor, 2016). In view of this, five public universities were established in Nigeria between 1948 and 1962. In the western region, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife (formerly known as the University of Ile-Ife) was established. In Lagos, the University of Lagos was established, and in the northern region, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, was established. As noted by Yusuf (2015), those Universities were considered as first-generation Universities in Nigeria. They include the University of Ibadan (1948), the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (1960), the University of Ife (1962), Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria (1962), and the University of Lagos (1962). Thereafter, many more federal and state Universities were established across the country. As of 2024, Nigeria has 200 public Universities owned by the federal and state governments (NUC, 2024).

In Nigeria, government-owned universities and other tertiary institutions have been funded by the government since the colonial period. However, as shown, tertiary education funding is inadequate to enable the effective development of University education. For that reason, inadequate funding is one of the significant problems of government-owned Universities in Nigeria. Inadequate funding is a major challenge facing the administration of public Universities in Nigeria (Ogunode & Abubakar, 2021). Similarly, Jacob and Musa (2020) opined that inadequate funding is one of the problems facing tertiary Education in Nigeria. One of the significant challenges facing the management of the education sector in Nigeria is inadequate funding (Okoli, Ogbondah, & Ewor, 2016). Moreover, the lack of political leaders' commitment to improving Nigeria's education sector led to inadequate funding. For several years, successive governments in Nigeria have failed to meet the 26% annual budgetary allocation to the education sector, as recommended by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) for developing countries, including Nigeria. From 1960 to 2023, the average annual budgetary allocation to the education sector in Nigeria was 5.9% (Ohaegbulem & Chijioke, 2023). Thus, the average percentage is far below UNESCO's recommended minimum benchmark of 26%. This undoubtedly presents numerous challenges in the management of University education. The challenges include inadequate infrastructure, limited staff development, a low international ranking, frequent strikes, academic brain drain, underdeveloped research, and a lack of international student attraction. Against this background, this study examined the challenges posed by inadequate funding to the development of University education in Nigeria and suggested a way forward. The recommendations of this paper will help government and university administrators understand the current debate regarding university education, enabling them to improve and ensure adequate funding for Nigeria's public universities. Other sections of this paper include a literature review, methodology, challenges associated with inadequate funding of public universities, the benefits of adequate funding, and recommendations for the government and stakeholders in the education sector.



Historical Development of Public Universities in Nigeria

University education in Nigeria dates back many years, predating Nigeria's independence from British colonial administrators in 1960. The establishment of University College Ibadan in the south-western part of Nigeria today marked the beginning of university education in Nigeria. The University College, Ibadan, was affiliated with the University of London. Thereafter, many more universities were established by both federal and state governments across the country. In fact, among the 36 states in the Federal Republic of Nigeria, every state has one or more government-owned universities established by either the federal or state government. As of 2024, Nigeria has 274 universities, comprising 62 federal universities, 63 state universities, and 149 private universities (www.statista.com). As noted by Otonko (2012), the origin of university education in Nigeria is not unrelated to the Elliot Commission of 1943, which led to the establishment of University College Ibadan in 1948. He further explained that the college was regarded as an affiliate of the University of London.

Moreover, in 1959, the federal government of Nigeria established the Ashby Commission with a mandate to advise the government on the country's tertiary education needs. This paved the way for the establishment of the first-generation universities. The implementation of the Ashby Commission's report led to the establishment of the University of Ife (now known as Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife) in 1962 by the Western Regional Government, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, in 1962 by the Northern Regional Government, and the University of Lagos by the Federal Government of Nigeria. The then University College of Ibadan was upgraded to the University of Ibadan. Thus, with the addition of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, established in 1960, the number of first-generation universities increased to five: the University of Ibadan, the University of Lagos, the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, and Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife.

Between 1975 and 1980, the federal government established more second-generation universities in Nigeria. The second-generation universities include the University of Calabar, University of Ilorin, University of Jos, Usmanu Danfodio University, Sokoto, University of Maiduguri, University of Port Harcourt, and Bayero University, Kano. The third-generation universities were established between 1980 and early 1990. They are: the Federal University of Technology, Owerri; the Federal University of Technology, Makurdi; the Federal University of Technology, Yola; the Federal University of Technology, Akure; the Federal University of Technology, Minna; and the Federal University of Technology, Bauchi (Nwangwu, 2003). The fourth-generation universities in Nigeria were established between 1991 and the present. They include federal, state, and private universities across the country.

Funding of Public Universities in Nigeria

In Nigeria, since colonial times, the government has managed and funded public universities and other tertiary institutions. However, the Nigerian public tertiary institutions are struggling with a lack of adequate funds for staff and infrastructural development, which has damaged the education sector and led to poor staff development, poor infrastructural facilities, low international ranking, a series of strike actions, brain-drain of academics, poor research development, and non-attraction of international students. Over the years, these have posed challenges to the management of the education sector in general and university education in particular.

The declining infrastructure and falling educational standards in the 1980s and early 1990s led to agitation for reforms, primarily by the Academic Staff Union of Universities in the education sector (Bogoro, 2020). This is why, following a string of strikes by the academic staff members in the universities across the country, the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) and the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) agreed that an intervention agency in education sector from primary to tertiary institutions should be established to restore the lost glory of the sector and improve infrastructural and staff development. This led to the establishment of an interventionist



organisation, the Education Tax Fund, in 1993, with the mandate to intervene at all levels of Education (i.e., primary, secondary, and tertiary). The Education Tax Act No. 7 of 1993 (subsequently revised in 1998 and 2004) established the Education Tax Fund (ETF) as an intervention agency. This statute gave the then-ETF the authority to become involved in public institutions, i.e., primary, secondary, and tertiary educational institutions. The Act was enacted as a homegrown solution to address the problem of deteriorating infrastructure, restore the once-glory of Education and faith in the system, and increase the capacity of teachers and lecturers.

Meanwhile, the Education Tax Fund was revised and replaced by the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) under the ETF Act No. 16, 2011. The agency was refocused to intervene only in public tertiary institutions (i.e., Universities, Polytechnics, and Colleges of Education) to maximize impact and provide supplementary support. The 2% education tax deducted from the assessable profits of all registered Nigerian enterprises is the Fund's principal source of income. The disbursement ratio is 2:1:1, i.e., 50% for universities, 25% for polytechnics, and 25% for colleges of Education (TETFund document, 2018). Allocating funds for staff development and infrastructure is one of the Tertiary Education Trust Fund's (TETFund) key objectives. Additionally, in accordance with section 7, sub-section 1 of the TETFund Act of 2011, the Fund's mandate is to utilise the 2% Education Tax received from all registered firms in Nigeria to fund various programmes such as essential physical infrastructure and equipment, instructional materials and equipment, research and publications, as well as academic staff training and development.

Theoretical Framework

Resource Dependency Theory (RDT) was first propounded by Pfeffer and Salanick (1978) in the book, "The external control of organisations: A resource dependence perspective". The theory helps explain an organisation's dependence on external funding. The theory posits that organisations rely on resources that ultimately originate in their environment. The theory also stipulates that the environment contains other organisations, and that the resources one organisation needs are thus often in the hands of others. Furthermore, since resources are a basis of power, legally independent organisations can therefore depend on each other, and power and resource dependence are directly linked (Hillman, Withers, & Collins, 2009).

This theory is applicable because tertiary institutions, as organisations, depend on resources, which originate in their environment. Implicitly, public tertiary institutions in Nigeria require substantial resources and rely on the government and other sources for funding. More importantly, the RDT submits that other organisations in the broader environment compete for the same resources. Thus, public tertiary institutions, i.e., universities, polytechnics, and colleges of Education, compete for government resources. The organisations that control resources exert power in the environment.

RESEARCH METHOD

The study employed a qualitative discourse analysis to examine the challenges posed by inadequate funding for the development of Nigerian public universities and the importance of adequate funding for these institutions. The secondary data was generated from online and print publications. These include journal publications, magazines, and internet sources.

For easy analysis of the issues discussed, the paper is structured into seven sections. Section one introduces the background, problem, and significance of the study. Section two presented the literature review and theoretical frame of the study. Section three is the methodology. The fourth section discussed the challenges of inadequate funding of public universities in Nigeria. Section five highlighted the importance of adequate funding of university education. Section six presents the conclusion, while the final section outlines policy recommendations for the government to consider and act upon.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The study found that inadequate funding of the education sector poses several challenges to the development of university education in Nigeria. The challenges include the following, among others;

a. Inadequate infrastructural facilities

In Nigerian public Universities, laboratories, lecture rooms, water supply facilities, electricity, and hostels, to mention a few, are not adequately provided due to successive governments' poor funding of the education sector. Science-based postgraduate students in Nigerian government-owned universities face difficulties in undertaking research due to inadequate essential and sophisticated facilities within the universities. The introduction of the bench work programme by the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) for local scholars studying in Nigerian Universities to travel abroad for research purposes is evidence that infrastructural facilities, such as laboratories and electricity, are not adequately provided in our public Universities. Under the TETFund bench work programme, PhD and master's students in Nigerian Universities are sponsored by the Tertiary Education Trust Fund to travel to other countries to conduct their research at foreign universities, where essential and sophisticated facilities are available. This has been posing a challenge to the development of university education in Nigeria. In addition, competition for resources within the organisation contributes to the inadequate provision of infrastructure in universities.

b. Poor Staff Development

Inadequate funding for public universities affects the management of university education by leading to poor staff development. The administrators of universities are left with no option but to over-reliance on TETFund interventions for staff development, such as scholarships for PhD and Master's Programmes, conference attendance, seminars, and workshops. Due to insufficient funds, staff members in public universities usually wait several years in line before they can benefit from interventions, most especially scholarships. Therefore, the over-dependence of public universities on TETFund resources affects staff development, particularly, and, in general, university education in Nigeria. It was noted that poor staff development is a significant challenge facing tertiary institutions in Nigeria (Jacob & Musa, 2020). Ogunode, Jegede, Adah, Audu, and Ajape (2020) assert that inadequate funding of Nigerian tertiary institutions is a significant problem facing the administration of staff professional development programmes in higher education institutions. Therefore, the findings of this study are in line with the results of the previous studies conducted (Jacob & Musa, 2020, and Ogunode, Jegede, Adah, Audu & Ajape, 2020)

c. Low international ranking

Poor funding of tertiary institutions, particularly public universities, impacts their international rankings. Nigerian public universities are ranked low globally. That is why international students are not patronising the universities. This undoubtedly promotes capital flight, given the number of Nigerian students who go abroad for their studies every year. Uko (2024) submits that the low ranking of Nigerian public universities by international organisations, such as the Times Higher Education, is not unrelated to the poor funding of public universities in the country. Because many facilities and equipment needed for university rankings are not adequately provided in public universities in Nigeria. That is why none of the Nigerian public universities is among the top 1000 best in the world, as evidently shown by the University's global ranking statistics. As indicated, none of Nigeria's universities is among the world's top 1000 universities (QS, 2024). The University of Ibadan and the University of Lagos are the only two top Nigerian universities ranked in the 1100-1200 category. The best public University in Nigeria is ranked 1,163 in the world (Times Higher Education, 2023). Nigeria has only 39 universities in the general Times Higher Education World University Rankings. However, the University of Cape Town in South Africa ranked 171, the highest-ranked African University (QS, 2024).

d. Strike actions

Public universities in Nigeria have been characterised for many years by poor conditions of service, inadequate staffing, and underdeveloped infrastructure due to successive governments' inadequate funding. In an attempt to improve university education and working conditions, Academic and non-academic staff unions usually embark on strike as a last resort. This affects the academic calendar. A four-year programme may take a student 6 to 8 years due to frequent university shutdowns caused by striking staff. It is well known that students across various Universities in Nigeria are constantly faced with strike actions by the Academic and Non-Academic staff unions of Universities and other tertiary institutions (Okoli, Ogbondah, & Ewor, 2016). During the strike, both students and staff are displaced and stranded. The student's Reading abilities fell. The strike action turns many students into certificate seekers rather than knowledge seekers (Jacob, Jegede & Musa, 2021). This, no doubt, affects the quality of graduates that the universities produce.

e. Brain-drain

Brain drain refers to the situation in which lecturers in Nigerian tertiary institutions leave the country for better job opportunities and working environments in other countries. Brain drain refers to the movement of professionals from developing countries to developed countries in search of better job opportunities (Ogunode, Jegede, Adah, Audu, & Ajape, 2020). The brain drain of academics from Nigerian public Universities to other countries with better working conditions affects the management of University education in Nigeria. It affects the quality of university education and international rankings, as the best and most experienced academic staff members are leaving Nigeria for other countries, most especially advanced ones. The situation resulted from the government's inadequate funding of tertiary institutions. Massive movement of lecturers from Nigerian tertiary institutions to foreign Universities is causing a shortage of lecturers in Nigerian higher institutions (Jacob & Musa, 2020). Solomon, Jacob, and Jegede (2020) argue that the implications of brain drain for the effective management of Nigerian universities are substantial. Because capable hands that would help manage the Universities are leaving, this creates room for inexperienced and underqualified people to run the Universities in the country. Okebukola (2002) noted that the scope of mentoring junior researchers is diminishing due to brain drain.

f. Poor Research and Development

Research not only contributes to the development of the scientific body of knowledge but also helps solve organisational, societal, national, and international problems. Research is one of the fundamental objectives of establishing universities worldwide, including in Nigeria. In fact, it is the research that brought us to where we are today in terms of scientific and technological advancement. However, in Nigeria, research is not given the recognition it deserves. That is why Nigeria is left behind in respect of scientific and technological development. The situation results from the poor funding of the education sector in general. Inadequate funding of higher education institutions in Nigeria leads to poor research development (Jacob & Musa, 2020).

g. Non-attraction of international students

The poor funding of public universities is one of the factors that makes them unattractive to international students. In fact, even the Nigerians are teeming out to other universities abroad. As noted by Wahab (2020), Nigeria is no longer a significant player in the international student market, which generates over \$200 billion annually for the country. This hurts the development of university education in Nigeria. This is because a university's international outlook is one of the factors considered in global university rankings.

Additionally, many Nigerians travel abroad for foreign Education, which can be a significant financial burden. According to statistics, Nigeria has 71,753 students from various programs studying in different countries across the globe, ranking 10th among countries of origin of international students (UNESCO, 2023). According to Umeh (2024), foreign Education costs Nigeria approximately \$28.65 billion over ten years, from 2010 to 2020, with a Personal Transport Allowance of \$58.7 billion. This has multiple adverse effects on Nigeria. As noted by Lawal (2023), experts opined that the volume of dollar outflows has adverse effects on investment in domestic

Education, the naira exchange rate, and demand for dollars to pay school fees at foreign educational institutions. It also hurts Nigeria's external reserves.

Importance of Adequate Funding of Public Universities in Nigeria

There are numerous benefits to adequate funding of public universities in Nigeria. The benefits will help improve university education in Nigeria. Hence, the following are some of the benefits of adequate funding;

a. Provision of adequate infrastructural facilities

Infrastructure facilities, such as laboratories, offices, electricity, water, road networks, hostels, and internet, can be adequately provided in public universities if the government provides sufficient funds to universities. Infrastructure plays a vital role in the teaching and learning process in any educational institution worldwide. The facilities ease learning and teaching. They help determine a university's position in local and international rankings. Organisations responsible for ranking universities domestically and internationally consider a university's facilities when determining rankings. In fact, the availability of such facilities significantly determines a university's rank. The provision of infrastructural facilities helps impart knowledge to students. Jacob, Jegede, and Musa (2021) argued that infrastructure is crucial for learning to take place in any educational institution. Infrastructure facilities play a crucial role in providing quality education in any country (Eseyin, Okafor, & Uchendu, 2014). They further explained that infrastructural facilities facilitate the dissemination, assimilation, and transmission of knowledge in any educational institution.

b. Effective staff development

Adequate funding of public Universities will aid staff development. The administrators of the Universities will have sufficient funds to sponsor their staff for training, conference attendance, seminars, workshops, and research activities. These programmes equip their staff with the knowledge, skills, competence, and capacity to perform their current job and prepare them for future tasks. The quality of staff in any educational institution determines the quality of its products. Because no educational institution can perform above the quality of its staff. Thus, effective staff development is fundamental to the development of any institution of learning worldwide. Therefore, proper funding of public universities in Nigeria will help achieve effective staff development, thereby easing university management. As noted by Uku (2024), adequate funding of tertiary Education in Nigeria will guarantee effective staff development.

c. Improvement in global ranking

Funding public universities adequately in Nigeria will help provide the necessary infrastructure, such as laboratories, offices, electricity, water, road networks, hostels, and internet, that are essential for the effective management of university education. It will also help university administrators to hire and develop more staff. These will go a long way in improving the international ranking of Nigerian public universities. Hence, adequate funding of public universities is of paramount importance in determining a university's global ranking.

d. Retention of talent and experienced academics

The movement of academics from Nigerian Universities to foreign universities will stop or be drastically reduced if adequate funds are provided to Universities. Because there will be good working conditions and the staff will be well paid, they will no longer look for another job or consider leaving Nigeria for another country in search of better employment opportunities. When public universities are adequately funded, the issue of massive academic brain drain will become a thing of the past in Nigeria. In fact, Academics from other countries will appreciate the opportunity to serve in Nigerian public universities. Adequate investment in higher Education in Nigeria will help address brain drain across tertiary institutions (Uko, 2024). This will undoubtedly promote university education in Nigeria, as university administrators will have sufficient funds to train and retain talented and experienced academic staff.

e. Research development

Adequate funding of public universities will improve research and development. University managers will have the financial capacity to motivate and encourage staff to conduct research by providing grants. Research is one of the cardinal programmes of Universities. Lecturers engage in research to add to the existing body of knowledge or find solutions to organisational and societal problems. Jacob, Jegede, and Musa (2021) argued that effective research and development in higher institutions is key to the development of the entire country. Thus, any country that invests in research and development will have a better chance for development in different angles, i.e., human, technological, and scientific development. Ogunode, Jegede, Adah, Audu, and Ajape (2021) opined that the research programme is one of the significant programmes of universities and a key to university development. Research in higher institutions contributes to the acquisition, development, and inculcation of the proper value orientation for the survival of the individual and society (Okoli, Ogbondah, & Ewor, 2016).

f. Attraction of international students

Adequate funding of universities aids effective management of university education. With sufficient funding for Nigerian public universities, there will be effective staff development and the infrastructure needed for universities to meet international standards. When this is done, the academic calendar will be stable and effective, and strike actions may likely become a thing of the past in Nigerian public universities and other tertiary institutions. This will attract international students to patronise Nigerian universities. This will also go a long way in generating more revenue for the government and university management. It will also improve the global rankings of Nigerian government-owned universities.

CONCLUSION

The study examined the challenges posed by inadequate funding to the development of university education in Nigeria and suggested a way forward. The findings of the study include poor infrastructural facilities, poor staff development, low international ranking, series of strike actions, brain-drain of academics, poor research development and non-attraction of international students. Therefore, based on the findings, the study concludes that the political leaders' lack of commitment to education sector as evidently shown in the annual budgetary allocation to education sector will not ensure effective development of university education in Nigeria. Thus, political leaders should demonstrate greater commitment to the sector by providing adequate funding to public universities, thereby ensuring the effective development of university education. The study suggests that future research should examine how to improve the University's sources of internally generated revenue.

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