

ALTERNATIVE FUNDING STRATEGIES AS IMPERATIVE FOR FINANCIAL AUTONOMY AND IMPROVED QUALITY OF TERTIARY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The issue of funding of tertiary education has been a topic of debate over the years in Nigeria. This has caused several industrial actions by the different academic and non-academic staff unions of universities, polytechnics and colleges of education across the country. It appears that several options have been suggested and several others accepted as way forward. Yet, the problem is unsolved. The thrust of this paper is that the development of alternative funding strategies is imperative in ensuring the financial autonomy and quality tertiary education in Nigeria. The writers of this paper submitted that for quality tertiary education to be attained there is need for tertiary education system to be less dependent on the statutory sources of funding and be able to fund tertiary education reasonably from alternative sources. The noted challenge in this paper is that the Nigerian governments overtime have shown more of lip-service than sincere commitment towards financial autonomy of the tertiary institutions as such has not reasonably supported alternative funding strategies as a way forward. On this note, the writers suggested that the management of tertiary institution should be more proactive and relentless in discovering and developing alternative funding strategies to boost resource generation and management in tertiary institutions. Again, the federal and state government should show sincere commitment through legislations and implementation approaches to help the tertiary institutions to be more autonomous by supporting its strategies on alternative funding.

Keywords: Alternative funding Strategy, financial autonomy, Tertiary Education

Introduction

Education has been globally recognized as a veritable instrument for human and national development. It has been universally agreed that through education the citizens are transformed and equipped to become functional members who will take up responsibilities toward the growth and development of that society. The important roles education play makes it paramount that the institutions responsible for the education of citizens must be equipped with human and material resources that will enable it carry out assigned tasks. It is not reasonably in doubt that finance or funding is a key determining factor to the success and failure of any education system. With funds available, administrators of tertiary education will find it easier to implement policies and execute programmes in line with mandates given to them by law. As much as we have noted that all levels of education needs adequate funding, it may not be out place to say that tertiary education needs more funding because of expanded curriculum, researches, staff-personnel and student-personnel administration, library holdings, post-graduate programmes, remuneration, incentives, ceremonials, etc. Without adequate funding, it will be difficult to talk of quality tertiary education in Nigeria as well as in other country of the world.

Quality tertiary education is realistic when there is availability and adequacy of well trained teaching and non-teaching staff, availability of infrastructural facilities and equipment, adequate staff development packages, adequate research sponsorship, responsive information and communication technology system to mention a few. All these aforementioned pre-requisite are obtainable only when funds are made sufficiently available and where collaboration and partnership exists.

Over the years the issue of funding has been a subject of discourse and a topic of debate between the federal and state governments and the Academic Staff Union of the Universities together with their counterparts in Polytechnics and Colleges of Education in Nigeria. This issue has long resulted in stakeholders clamouring for financial autonomy, arguing that the tertiary education should be made to be administratively and financially autonomous in all good sense of it.

However, it appears that both the contenders and the defenders of financial autonomy in tertiary education have not critically looked at the issue in more logical ways to define financial autonomy in the context on which it is been advocated or contended. Most often the issue of financial autonomy is perceived to be a situation where the tertiary institutions are left to manage its funds without undue interference instead of interrogating on the many components of financial autonomy. In this paper, the writers present an argument that developing alternative funding strategies is imperative for the realization of financial autonomy needed to achieve quality education in tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

Alternative funding strategies in this context suggest other planned sources of generating revenues outside the government subventions or allocation from government coffers as well as internally planned mechanisms for managing revenue without external interference. Since it is clear that quality education is not realistic without adequate funding and that government of

Nigeria is not showing commitment to adequate funding of the tertiary education, the writers of this paper posit that there is need for the management of tertiary institutions and the government to collaboratively fashion out alternative funding strategies for the purpose of making the tertiary institutions financially autonomous and to have the financial capacity to promote quality of tertiary education in Nigeria.

Alternative Funding Strategy

Alternative funding strategies entails the making of plans, approaches or tactics towards creating and developing other sources of fund other than the known source. Ukabiala (2019) described alternative funding strategy as step-by-step construction of plans and programmes geared towards raising fund through internal sources for the purpose of undertaking or sustaining projects. Smith (2018) opined that alternative funding strategies involves systematic provision of blueprint in line with the philosophy, objectives, mandate and policies guiding an institution, organization or firm. Lewis (2018:17) noted the importance of alternative funding strategies when he submitted thus: “Beside the mainstream approaches, there is need to explore alternative approaches to funding education for better efficiency, improving effectiveness and maintaining equity in education”. Onyeche (2018) submitted that advocates of alternative strategies to funding tertiary education are soliciting for diverse process of raising funds for tertiary education just likes education loans, human capital contract, deregulation fees, graduate tax, income-contingent tax, education vouchers, cost recovery and sharing, among others. One can deduce therefore that alternative funding strategies for quality tertiary education in Nigeria would involve initiating means of collecting more funds and decreasing the unnecessary expenses to minimize the spending pattern of funds in tertiary education institutions.

Financial Autonomy

From the Greek etymology, autonomy connotes self rule; that is the capacity to make rules for one’s self without any external force. It refers to self regulation or independence. Nneji (2010) noted that the concept of autonomy has psychological, socio-political, metaphysical and ethical implications because individual autonomy exists where such has the ability to make decisions without influence by anyone else. Autonomy as a concept means the ability of one to take control of one’s own thing. It suggests the freedom and independence of one to take decisions and actions without undue interference. With regards to financial autonomy, Abaogu (2021) submitted that financial autonomy is the ability of a person or group to relating the concept to education sector, Stevenson (2021) described financial autonomy as the ability of educational institutions to freely decide on its internal financial affairs, generate and manage its funds independently. One can deduce from the scholars views that financial autonomy in tertiary education involves generation and management of funds independent on mainstream source which is the government allocations and tuition fees.

Quality Education

Quality suggests excellence or up to set standard. It literarily referred to the standard of a phenomenon when it is compared to other things like it. Nzerem (2020) described quality as the ability or the degree to which a product, service or phenomenon conforms to an established standard and which makes it to be relatively superior to others. Quality education therefore connotes the meeting of precepts or standard which have been set or defined by law, institutions, regulatory and professional societies. Ukoha (2019) posited that quality education entails relevance and appropriateness of the education programmes to the needs of the community which it is provided. In another view, Emezue (2017) described quality education as that which shows efficiency in meeting the goals, relevant to environmental need and conditions open to continual exploration of new ideas and pursue excellence and development of creative abilities of recipients. Fadokun (2016:12) characterized quality by three interrelated and interdependent strands viz:

- (i) Efficiency in the meeting of its goals.
- (ii) Relevance to human and environmental conditions and needs.
- (iii) Something more to the exploration of new ideas, the pursuit of excellence and encouragement of creativity.

The definition of quality in education is often complex because of the difficulty in agreement among the various stakeholders of what constitutes quality in education. Harvey and Stensaker⁴ present five different ways of explaining quality to include:

- *Quality as exceptional.* Here quality is linked to excellence and usually operationalized as exceptionally high standards of academic achievement. Quality is attained if the required standards are met or exceeded.
- *Quality as perfection or consistency.* In this definition, quality implies zero defects and getting things right the first time. Quality in this sense is assumed not to apply to a learning situation except in the areas of consistency of academic judgment and reliability of management information.
- *Quality as fitness for purpose.* Here quality is judged by the extent to which it meets the specified purpose. It relates to customer requirements and satisfaction.
- *Quality as value for money.* Quality is accessed via returns on investment. The notion of accountability in education is brought into focus in this definition.
- *Quality as transformation.* Quality is viewed as a process of change. Education is conceived here as a transformation process which leads to qualitative change in the participants leading to their enhancement and empowerment.

Educational quality can be defined in terms of the inputs, processes and outputs. If a society is committed to providing high quality educational experiences and consequences for every person, the resources (human and financial) need to be mobilized in this direction.

Quality of tertiary education would therefore suggest that content of education, the teacher training and welfare, instructional delivery, funding, research development, and overall teaching and learning activities meet globally acceptable standard.

Tertiary Education

Tertiary education which can also be referred to as higher education entails the level of education which is provided for after the secondary level of education. Osaat and Oputa (2018) referred tertiary education as the optional final stage of formal education that occurs after secondary education. The definition given by Osaat and Oputa suggests that one has an option of proceeding to tertiary education after secondary education or not. In another point of view, Pai (2018) perceived education as the bedrock of human capital development of every nation and one of the most significant indicators of social progress. He further submitted that tertiary education does a consolidatory role in transforming the natural man into an economically, politically, and socially useful and viable member of the society. The definition or submission made by Pai is agreeable because the foundation of the child's education is laid at the early childhood (pre-primary and primary) stages, developed, streamlined and focused at the secondary level and consolidated upon at the tertiary level. In other words, the tertiary level of education is designed to refine, equip and fully empower recipients with knowledge and skills with which they can function effectively and contribute meaningfully to the development of their immediate and extended environments.

Discussion

An important step towards solving any envisaged problem is the adoption of workable and applicable measures. At any time in any situation where problem is posed, there is need to systematically address such problem to avoid its re-occurrence. In recent times, concerned Nigerians, especially the academia is beginning to express worry over the gap that exists in terms of quality in Nigerian education system at all levels. This worry has triggered continual advocacy for an improved tertiary education in Nigeria. Of course Nigeria ought not to leave any stone unturned in ensuring high quality education of its citizens because globalization has introduced competitions. The implication is therefore that if nothing is done to improve the quality of education generally and tertiary education in particular, Nigeria citizens would find it difficult to fit in the scheme of things in such a globalized world. Quality tertiary education involves inputs, processes and outputs. Scholars have lamented fallen standard of Nigerian education at various forum and this fallen standard is reflecting daily in the products of our educational institutions most of whom have not exhibited the attributes expected of the recipients of quality education. Ekejelem (2020) assessed the extent to which educational provisions is commensurate to the quality of graduates of our higher institutions education and revealed that much gap still exist between tertiary educational institutions and other sectors of Nigeria economy. Discussing further his findings, he stressed that the recipients of higher education are expected to proffer solutions to problems that are inherent in the circular world, the nation and the other smaller units of the society, which could be economic, political, technological or social cultural in nature.

Ability to proffer solutions to these problems connotes bridging of manpower gap needed for national development. He observed that these gaps are unclosed in Nigeria as she still spends reasonable amount of her resources on foreign expertise and goods.

The crux of the matter is that for the human and material resources to be mobilized towards attainment of quality education, adequate funding is imperative. On a very worrisome note, the problem of poor funding of tertiary education in Nigeria has become a recurring decimal. Poor funding is noticeable in most tertiary education institutions as it reflects on the deplorable state of infrastructure characterized by poor and inadequate physical facilities, unavailability of current technological facilities and poor maintenance of the existing ones. This situation has posed serious challenge to meeting the mandate of providing quality tertiary education in Nigeria. If not carefully addressed, there could be worsened case of students being deprived of proper training in a well prepared learning environment; and the result would be that the tertiary institutions in Nigeria will be unable produce well trained, productive and employable graduates

The continuous dependence on the government to fund the tertiary education has contributed more to the sorry state of infrastructural facilities, instructional delivery, research culture and overall human resource development in the universities, polytechnics and colleges of education. These limitations in the mainstream approaches to funding education are seriously affecting sufficiency and continuity in providing quality education for young Nigerians in the tertiary education system. How long shall the tertiary education institutions remain financially dependent? When will the financial autonomy in the tertiary education system be a reality? These are emergent issues in funding of tertiary education.

The minister of special duties and inter-governmental affairs, Zaphaniah Jisalo disclosed on 27th convocation of the University of Abuja where he represented president Bola Tinubu stressed that the present administration was proposing financial autonomy for tertiary institutions in Nigeria. This financial autonomy he noted would promote growth in the nation's education sector in line with "the renewed hope agenda. The minister added that when this agenda is made a reality, it will encourage tertiary institutions to source funds through grants and corporate sponsorship, promote self-sustainability and reduce dependency on the federal government. In other word, the current Nigerian government has perceived or have awoken to the fact that financial autonomy is one of the key ways for improving the quality of tertiary education. While getting excited about this proposals, there are questions to asked and they include: (a) is the government of Nigeria just realizing the essence of financial autonomy in education sector now? (b) Is this proposal one of those empty political statements that would never be implemented? (c) Are there modalities on ground to achieve these? Just to ask a few questions. Until we get satisfactory answers to these questions coupled with actions, we may not need to rejoice yet.

Financial autonomy no doubt will make institutions to effectively manage funds to enhance competitiveness, strive for excellence, and eradicate constant disruption caused by strike which

is the case in Nigeria till date. The present Government have also stressed in its manifesto that quality education for all is the central target of the renewed hope agenda, it has also expressed at different forum its commitment to hastening the delivery of quality education by implementing policies that prioritize technological-base learning resources, administration standards and quality assurance. These are laudable proposal but financial autonomy in tertiary education is a more serious issue that requires pragmatic approach to achieve. First, the government must be intentional about promoting quality education and appropriately fund it. If there is no such sincere intention, then the proposal will be like many other proposals earlier made but were never fulfilled.

The position of the authors in this discourse is that for financial autonomy to be a reality in tertiary education in Nigeria there is need for alternative funding strategies that would enhance alternative resources generation and management for the improvement and maintenance of infrastructural facilities and overall administration in Nigeria's tertiary institutions. However, the management of the tertiary institutions has major roles to play in developing and sustaining alternative funding strategies and promoting financial autonomy in tertiary education.

The points is that for the management of tertiary institutions to develop alternative funding strategies, there is need for mutual agreement with the government and major stakeholders; there is also need for collaboration and partnership with private sector and individuals. Where the problem lies in Nigerian experience is the political will by the government to support the ideas and alternative funding strategies of the management of tertiary institution through legislations and executive approvals. The incessant industrial actions by the Academic Staff Union of the Universities (ASSU) as well as those of Polytechnics and Colleges of Education over the years had bothered on poor funding and poor workers welfare. These lingered problems would have long ended if alternative funding strategies are developed, critically discussed and implemented. One cannot boast of financial autonomy where the management of tertiary institutions depends on tuition fees and government subventions for its day-to-day educational administration. Begin from November 4th 2023; the National University Commission (NUC) will begin another round of programme accreditation all in universities all over the nation. This accreditation exercise has been conducted over many decades yet the outcome has not reflected in improved quality of universities. The reason being that most often the university management is compelled to lie to cover up by borrowing certain equipments even personnel to satisfy the expectations of the NUC and at the end, the realities will still stark the management of tertiary education in the face

It is not out of place for the tertiary institutions to operate functional school farms, recycling factory, confessionary outfit, entertainment and arts unit, event centers, water making factories, etc as alternative means of internally generated revenue. It is also not wrong for tertiary institutions to access loans for investments. The issue is whether they will have the legislative and executive backup to venture into these?. If the federal and state governments in Nigeria will be willing, sincere and show committed to support alternative funding proposals and initiatives

of the management of tertiary institutions through favourable legislations and executive actions, the issue of financial autonomy can be guaranteed and when adequate funds are made available, necessary provisions would easily be made and the quality of tertiary education would then be guaranteed.

Conclusion

Education is the bedrock of any type of development in any nation. Nigeria as a nation has acknowledged the importance of education but facts on ground is truly placing doubt as to whether the nation is really serious with the business of using education to achieve human resource development and consequent National development. The point here is that the need to improve the quality of tertiary education has been heightened by globalization and its demands on nations' education. Nigerians ought not to be left out. Like the popular saying goes “good food is a product of good money”, there is no way quality of tertiary education can be improved without adequate funding. Since it is clear that the Nigerian government at all levels finds it difficult to adequately fund tertiary education, there is therefore the need to give room for financial autonomy in tertiary education. Importantly also, the issue of financial autonomy of the tertiary institutions will remain a mirage without development, critical assessment of modalities and implementation of alternative funding strategies. Alternative funding strategies can also not work without legislative and executive support on the side of the government. Here is therefore a call for swift action and collaboration by the government and management of tertiary institutions in Nigeria to initiate, develop, support and implement alternative funding strategies as way of promoting financial autonomy and improve quality tertiary education in Nigeria.

Suggestions

1. A steering committee should be set up in all tertiary institutions in Nigeria to undertake task of initiating ideas and work out modalities on implementing alternative funding strategies for each institution.
2. The federal and state governments in Nigeria should show sincere commitment through legislations and implementation approaches to help the tertiary institutions to be more autonomous by supporting its strategies on alternative funding.
3. Governments should in addition to subvention explore other means of providing the tertiary institutions with the necessary facilities and equipment which are capital intensive as a way of encouraging quality education at that level.
4. The management of tertiary institutions should be more prudent and proactive in managing available funds in order to encourage government to provide more funds.

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