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Funding Higher Education in the Face of Rising Inflation and Emerging Trends in the 21st Century, Nigeria

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Before 1986, African government invested heavily in education and studies shows that in Nigeria and other countries in Africa, this was the period of the most rapid expansion of education. The economic crisis of the 1980s which is still persisting up to this present 21st century, led to the introduction of structural adjustment programmes (SAP) with prescription from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank for reduction in public investment in education. In reality, these policies led to decrease in public expenditure on education, increased participation of the private sector, commercialization of education and stagnation of salary of lecturers in the face of rising inflation leading to a decline in the quality of education. One other way that has led to declining quality of education in this 21st century is the neglect of tertiary institutions in Nigeria especially as from the time President Bola Alhmade Tinnubu announced the removal of fuel subsidy in May 2023 after his swearing in as the Nigeria president. This paper assessed comparatively Nigeria's budgetary allocation to education sector from 2015-2024 when APC party took over the governance of this country Nigeria. Against this background, the paper finds out that the allocated funds to higher education in particular and entire education sector in general were not fully implemented by relevant agencies. For this to be critical, the paper recommended among others that, the country should implement at least the 26 percent target in its yearly budgets, more funds should be allocated for capital projects, and there is need for recommitment and fiscal discipline in the formulation and implementation of budgets so as to revitalize facilities in higher education sector in the face of this rising inflation.

Keywords: funding, higher education, rising inflation, emerging trends

Introduction

Education is the hub to human existence and development. It is through education that values are transmitted across generations. Education enables society to create and domesticate knowledge. In the kind of knowledge-driven society that the global village we call the world has turned into, any society that endangers its educational system by not properly funding it, and endangers the life of its future generations. The university is the most important institution for the creation and dissemination of knowledge. However, the higher education is an expensive institution to run. Every society has to decide for itself how to run its education. One extreme position in terms of tertiary education funding is for the direct beneficiaries of university education for example to bear

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the full cost of such education. The other extreme at the other end of the funding spectrum is for government to bear the full cost. In between these two extremes are various funding options involving the direct beneficiaries, government, and third parties or cost-sharing (Abayomi, 2012).

Nigeria's public higher education institutions have, for quite some time now, become a sorry sight. This has been occasioned by the seemingly endless list of heartrending challenges. Several problems are befalling the university and other tertiary education sector with various policy documents detailing the way forward on these sectors. Some of the challenges facing the facilities like classrooms, lecture halls/theatres, laboratories, workshops, staff offices, recreational facilities, hostels, e-learning facilities, studios, and workshops. There is also the perennial, unattractive remuneration for the community members comprising both the academic and non-academic staff. The absence of appropriate welfare package adds up to the problems. Proprietors of the public education institutions at the federal, state, and church councils with education regulatory agencies do not help matters either. They overreach themselves by going beyond their briefs to create obstacles towards effective university management and that of other tertiary institutions which they anchor their excuses on these emerging trends of rising inflation in Nigeria as we are witnessing today.

Even the National Universities Commission (NUC) and other higher education monitoring agency in this country, appear not to be up and doing in fully discharging its regulatory role at the public institutions under its care. At a recent interactive media chat in Abuja on the state of Nigeria's education, startling revelations were made, especially on how budgetary allocations are squandered on flimsy excuses, and on how internationally set standards are grossly undermined by official corruption. This paper takes a critical look at the growing divide between fiscal projections and the development of the higher education sector before 2015 to this present year of 2024. In this paper, the writers will attempt to highlight the various education funding options, within the context of the Nigeria's stage of development in the face of this rising inflation and emerging trends in this 21st century Nigeria, and make suggestions on the way forward.

Education Finance

Government funding of higher education has been inadequate. The funding of higher education is shared among different levels of government and supplemented by funds from other sources such as businesses, community organizations, and levies charged to parents. The revenue collected through fees constitutes an insignificant proportion of the revenue of the institutions. Inadequate funding of education has been one of the most significant causes of the low quality of much of the education offered at all levels. Funding allocations have been in flux during the last decade. In all, there has been a drop in the funding of higher level of education.

Education finance is one of those academic fields which lie on the borderline between economics of education and education law. It is concerned with the income and expenditure of authorities of educational institutions and with the adjustment of expected income and expected expenditure. Ogbonnaya (2012) described education finance as the process by which tax revenues and other resources are derived for the establishment and operation of educational institutions as well as the process by which these resources are allocated to institutions in different geo-political zones in the polity. The scope of education finance includes among the following: imprest, payment vouchers, finance vehement, bank statements, cash management, and financial control; taxation budget, classification of government expenditure, capital and recurrent expenditure.

Role of Government and Nongovernmental Agencies in the Funding of Higher Education and Problems of Funding Higher Educational Programmes in Nigeria

The practice at the beginning of every financial year is that the federal, state, and the local governments announce the estimated revenue and expenditure for the year based on projected estimate of the income accruing to them. The actual revenue may be more or less than the initial estimated revenue and this will necessarily affect expenditure. Some state ministries of education and/or their agencies give grants to students in higher institutions in their areas of jurisdiction in form of bursary. The grants are used for the payment of their necessary fees and levies in their respective institutions, the provision of school uniforms, textbooks, and instructional materials. However, one major question about funding education is: who should finance education?

Sources of Funding Higher Education

The argument has always been whether the cost of Education should be borne by government or by individuals receiving education. There has been a lot of debate about cost of education especially on who should bear the cost now that citizens are facing rising inflation. The debate can be reduced to three contending perspectives. These are the Capitalist, the Socialist, and Mixed-economy that is situated between the two extremes.

The Capitalist Perspectives

The first perspective argues that cost of education should be borne essentially by parents with government providing the enabling environment. That is, individual beneficiaries are fully responsible for funding his or her education. They are of the view that education should be subjected to free market forces. This group posits that families and individuals ought to pay fees in order to access nominally available public services, otherwise these services would not be available or their quality would become unacceptably low (Omole,2012). To address the problem of quality, institutions were encouraged to charge fees that are moderate bearing in mind the rising inflation which has crippled peoples purchasing power. The major setback with this view is that those who are poor will not be able to pay and they will be denied access to higher education (Sule-Kano & Edeh, 2007).

The Socialist Perspectives

The second thesis argues that education is a right, which must be funded by government. This perspective is pure socialist solution and is the case where government funds education fully. They argue that there are enough resources in the world to fund at least basic education for all youths of a country who desires to achieve higher education. They posit that, the problem of inadequate funding is as a result of corruption, misplaced priority, inequality, and poor policy choices. This thesis adds that education should not only be free but also compulsory. They are of the view that government should bear all the costs because even if the direct costs of education are borne by government, the indirect costs (such as uniform, transport, and school meals) may be beyond the capacity of the family while the opportunity cost may be impossible to bear. This view equally believes that education is a human right issue that should be accorded to all human beings solely by reason of being human. There are a lot of international and domestic human rights instruments that provide for education as a fundamental human right.

These include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966), the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (1981), and the Child

Rights Act (2003). Scholars such as Sule-Kano & Ede (2007) and Okowa (2011) among others are the major defenders of this view. For this school of thought, there is a relationship between education and development and as such education is a key index of development. Specifically, the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria provides as follows: "Government shall strive to eradicate illiteracy, and to this end, Government shall as and when practicable provide: (a) Free compulsory and universal primary education; (b) Free secondary education; (c) Free university education." (FRN, 1999, Section18(c)).

In pursuant of this part of the 1999 Constitution, all governments at the federal, state, and local levels should vigorously and progressively drive Nigeria's higher educational funding towards the minimum benchmark of 26 percent. It would then be relatively easy to define what other stakeholders have to contribute. Given the foregoing, it is important for the government to increase her education allocation to 26 percent. This perspective equally posit that no right could exist without corresponding government obligation and that government is obliged to make education available, accessible, acceptable, and adaptable mostly in the face of rising inflation and emerging trends in Nigeria .

The Mixed-Economy Perspectives

The third group while coming from the rights-based approach like the second Socialist perspective, posits that education is a right and government must not only endeavor to remove all the barriers to education but must also take steps to utilize to the maximum of its available resources to achieve progressively the full realization of the right to education and other social and economic rights. The International Donor Agencies and International Development Partners namely the DFID (UKaid), USAID, UNICEF, UNESCO, UNDP, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), China International Development Agency (CHIDA), Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), and the British Council assist Nigeria in the implementation of the programmes and projects. Nigeria receives generous support from them and one major significant development was the admission of Nigeria into the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) which enabled her to receive a grant of 100 million US Dollars (Federal Government of Nigerian, 2015).

According to Igbuzor (2006), in order to promote the International rights-based approach, which emphasizes the participation of citizens led to the convocation of the World Conference on Education for All (WCEFA) in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990 which clearly states in Article 1 that every person—child, youth and adult—shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic needs. This declaration was reaffirmed at the World Summit for Children also held in 1990, which stated that all children should have access to basic education by the year 2000. The World Summit for Children placed a lot of emphasis on raising the levels of female literacy. In a bid to achieve education goals, the Dakar World Education Forum was held as a follow-up meeting to the WCEFA where new sets of goals were set to be attained by the year 2015.

Two of the Dakar goals (Goals 2 and 6) address the issue of quality education. Similarly, the Millennium Developments Goals (MDGs) adopted in September 2000 at the United Nations Millennium Declaration has two of the eight goals devoted to education. There are Goal 2 (to achieve universal primary education) and Goal 3 (to promote gender equality and empower women) (United Nations, 2000).

As noted above, the right to education is enshrined in many international human rights covenants. Similarly, the right of all Nigerians to education has always been provided for in Nigerian Constitutions. Specifically, the 1999 Constitution provides in Section 18 that:

(1) Government shall direct its policy towards ensuring that there are equal and adequate educational opportunities at all levels.

(2) Government shall promote science and technology.

(3) Government shall strive to eradicate illiteracy, and to this end, Government shall as soon and when practicable provide: (a) Free, compulsory and universal primary education; (b) Free secondary education; (c) Free university education; (d) Free adult literacy programme. (Federal Government of Nigerian, 1999).

This perspective also argues that there are three layers of obligations in matters of social and economic rights: obligations to respect, protect, and fulfill.

The obligation to respect requires states to refrain from interfering with social and economic rights e.g. refrain from forced eviction. The obligation to protect requires states to prevent violations by third parties, for example, ensuring that private employers comply with labour standards. The obligation to fulfill requires states to take appropriate legislative, administrative, budgetary, judicial, and other measures towards the full realization of such rights (Igbuzor, 2006).

In view of this thesis, one of the major fallouts from the vision is to guarantee the well-being and productivity of the people; since education is key in the realization of national set goals like building human capacity for sustainable livelihood and national development and ensuring the maximum development of the potentials of individual in a knowledge-driven society. The provision of infrastructure, increasing enrolment figure, enhancing capacity and competence of teachers, enforcing guidelines for standards and education quality assurance, was seen as highly imperative, and was therefore featured in the vision. Furthermore, in the former President Jonathan's Transformation Agenda, education was regarded as a tool for the transformation of the Nigerian society and allocations are made for the years of the implementation of the Agenda. Although scholars and policy analysts are not in agreement on cost sharing arrangement for education, there are certain costs that must be borne by government if we must achieve universal access to education as posited by Action Aid (2003). In a cost tracking workshop, organised by them from 13-17 October, 2003, in Johannesburg, development practitioners drawn from Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin America discussed issues of cost of education and recommended a cost sharing formula among the various stakeholders of education.

To this end, participants allocated various costs of education to the community, government, and private sector. The workshop concluded that all stakeholders have some responsibilities to ensure that children are supported to acquire quality education. The issue of who pays for what should be critically examined within particular context. Communities need to understand the various dynamics involved in national budgeting to adequately mobilize them to make demands while the role of Action Aid and benchmark organizations will be to facilitate this process (Igbuzor, 2006). Among the major exponents of this view include Nigeria-UNESCO (Babalola, 2002; Omole, 2012; Obasanjo & Varkey, 2012; World Bank, 1988).

Supporting this perspective and since education is on the legislative concurrent list, responsibility is shared between the federal, state, and local governments. However, the Federal Ministry of Education (FME) plays a dominant role in regulating the education sector, engaging in policy formation, monitoring of implementation, and setting and maintaining standards. The ministry is also responsible for collecting and collating data for purposes of educational planning and financing; maintaining uniform standards of education throughout the supervisory role of the inspectorate services department within the ministry; harmonizing educational policies and procedures of all the state of the federation through the instrumentality of the national council on education;

affecting co-operation in educational matters on an international scale, and developing curricula and syllabuses at the national level in conjunction with other bodies.

Since President Bola Tinubu signed the 2024 budget estimates of N27.05 trillion out of which N6.83 billion was proposed for higher education, some observers have contended that the vote still fell short of UNESCO’s 26 percent recommendation and was not likely to affect change in the troubled sector. The trend of course is far from encouraging considering the deplorable state of our education system particularly in the face of this rising inflation in Nigeria. Nigeria needs to improve the current allocation to shake off the ignoble state of the system by applying the funds largely to significantly improve facilities for teaching and learning, teacher quality and welfare and curriculum delivery. We need the funds to break down obstacles to access of over 20 million out-of-school children. We need the funds to improve school safety. We need the funds to improve reading culture among our youths and for overall improvement in the quality of delivery of education. The allocation for education only gives a narrow view of the anticipated picture of funding higher education in Nigeria in 2024 fiscal year.

In consideration of the resources invested by government in education, it is clear that Nigeria is failing to invest the maximum of available resources for the progressive realization of the right to education. This is evident when FGN education investments are compared to the resources other nations with less endowments than Nigerian put into education. This is a failure of the fulfillment obligation.

The four cardinal parameters of the right to education are availability, accessibility, acceptability, and adaptability. Putting low investment in education within a historical perspective, Okezie (2014) posited that in the 1960s and 1970s, African governments invested heavily in education and studies show that in Nigeria and other countries in Africa, this is the period of the most rapid expansion of education. The economic crisis of the 1980s led to the introduction of structural adjustment programmes (SAP) with prescription from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank for reduction in public investment in education. As Inyang (2016) adds that: The Bank did not suggest that public spending on education should be boosted at the expense of servicing external debts.

The World Bank prescribed adjustment, revitalization, and selective expansion policies in order to address the education problems. The purpose of adjustment was to “alleviate the burden of education and training on public budgets”. Because the Bank expected to continue structural adjustment to further erode public spending on education, it recommended adjustment to diversify sources of educational finance “through increased cost sharing in public education”, and the “encouragement of nongovernmental supplies of educational services”. The Bank recommended “increased user charges” in public education, especially for tertiary education. The Bank also recommended “containment of unit costs”, and “especially in utilization of teachers” (low pay policy for teachers), lowering construction standards for educational infrastructure, and benefiting from “the tendency of students to repeat grades or drop out of school” (Bonat, 2003, p. 7).

In reality, these policies led to decrease in public expenditure on education, increased participation of the private sector, commercialization of education, and stagnation of salary of teachers in the face of inflation leading to decline in the quality of education. One other way that has led to declining quality of education is the neglect of tertiary institutions in Nigeria especially as from the mid-2016. It has been documented that: The World Bank has, since the mid-1980s, canvassed the position that Nigeria and African countries do not need higher education but only training of its youth in basic education and technical education. The UBE is predicated on the same assumption: pay less attention to university education and fund UBE; leave universities to private hands; re-introduce the 1986 Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) formula of cost recovery, rationalization, and commercialization and public universities will die a natural death. But UBE will survive because the World Bank will fund it. This is the illusion of the decade (Igbuzor, 2006, p. 23). Therefore, the sudden removal of fuel subsidy has led to this unimaginable rise of inflation in Nigeria.

In post-military era in 1999, the status of education allocation did not change. A look at the World Bank (2012) report of the annual budgetary allocation to education by some countries in Africa is saddening. Nigeria ranks last at 8.4% and Ghana ranks highest at 31.0%. This is from a country that prides herself on being the Giant of Africa. Several smaller African countries are allocating more to their educational sectors, than Nigeria, the second largest and the most populated country in Africa. A minimum budgetary allocation of 26% was recommended by UNESCO and Nigeria lags behind, averaging a meager 9%. This shows how seriously the government takes education.

Grants and foreign aids have not also alleviated the plethora of issues battling the education sector. The Nigerian government has not put in place appropriate policy measures that would monitor the maximum and effective utilization of foreign aids. The United States has supplied Nigeria with foreign aid for years, with little to show for the effort. Foreign aid mostly goes into the hands of corrupt bureaucrats who just end up siphoning the money away into their own pockets. For instance, between 1999 and 2024, the cumulative government's budgetary allocation to the education sector was grossly inadequate to address the problems in the sector.

According to Okezie (2014) while citing a publication by the Centre for Social Justice titled: Right to Education in Nigeria, it is posited that the financial projections that were made for capital projects in Vision 20:2020 for instance and the education sector budgets 2009-2013 showed a gross disconnect, as it recorded a shortfall of over N346.8billion. Similarly, a review of the fiscal projections of the transformation agenda and education sector budgets also reveals a shortfall of N28.7 billion. Furthermore, the financial provisions in the transformation agenda and the SURE-P made provision for vocational education and implementation so far, has not been encouraging (Federal Ministry of Education, 2014).

An analysis of the budgetary provisions for the year 2009-2024 showed that the budget was suffered with recurrent expenditure while capital expenditure received an average of 18.1%. This is below expectations in Education for all fast track initiative benchmark of at least 20% of the sector budget being allocated to capital projects. On the average, over the 2015-2024 periods, only 55.4% of the total released capital budget for the sector was utilized for projects. This shows low absorptive capacity on the part of the Federal Ministry of Education.

Further, the average utilization rate vis-à-vis the overall education capital budget was 44.7% over the period. The percentage of capital budget released on the average was 60.15% and the percentage of capital budget cash backed amounted to 57.22%. Also, on the average, only 63.1% of the cash backed funds were utilized in advancing the right to education (Federal Ministry of Education, 2014). Thus, the problem is not only centered on the amount provided to the sector, but also the poor releases and poor implementation of the budget.

As a result of unparalleled decadence in the education system, the Obasanjo government decided to improve the situation in all federal tertiary institutions. The government encouraged universities, colleges, polytechnics, and research institutes to partner with the private with the private sector for funding as it was realized that government alone could not fund education. As the largest employer of the products from such tertiary institutions, the private sector was encouraged to contribute to the training of its potential employees.

It could be seen from the discussion that the estimates are not consistent and do not show either an increasing or decreasing trend over the years. This pattern show that education funding especially higher education was being done in an inconsistent manner depending on the interest of government in office. It also shows that there was no constituency and continuity of programme of action by the successive governments. The expectation is to see a pattern that will show an increase over the period as an indication of a growing economy. Therefore, in the face of rising inflation, Nigerian government needs to increase the funding of higher education in order to improve facilities and staff welfare in our tertiary institutions.

Recommendations

In this paper, the authors attempted to highlight the various options, and within the context of the country's stage of development, some suggestions are made on the way forward.

(1) Despite the fact that the price of crude oil rose to an unprecedented level in this present Tinubu governments leading to this rising of inflation and emerging trends in education in Nigeria, this present government should consider using part of the excess crude oil revenue to provide or money being recovered from those political looters of public treasury to revitalize and make free higher education in Nigerians.

(2) Nevertheless, the Obasanjo government has left the education sector much better than it met. In terms of quality and quantity of access to tertiary education, lecturer's motivation, quality control, and infrastructure development, Nigeria government should improve funding of higher education in order to make much progress.

(3) However, in order to properly assess the required contribution of non-government stakeholders, government has to do its part by allocating a minimum of 26 percent of her budget to education.

(4) The disbursement of extra budgetary interventions such as TETFUND and NDDC funds should also be made to increase progressively.

(5) Government should also take steps to meet the minimum capital expenditure investment of at least 20% as recommended in the Education for all fast track initiative benchmark and thereafter progressively increase it to 40%.

(6) A special education infrastructure fund should also be provided to bridge the infrastructure deficit and improve teaching skills through enhanced training skill acquisition by teachers.

(7) It is hoped for instance that the full implementation of the blueprint of resuscitating public tertiary education submitted by the Committee on Needs Assessment of Nigerian should be given needed attention.

(8) It has also been established in this paper that the cost of providing good quality education to all qualified candidates is so much that government alone cannot do the job as the amount involved is more than the whole federal budget. Clearly, it is imperative that other stakeholders should have to contribute.

(9) There is also the need for government to promote fiscal discipline.

(10) Returning education to its pride of place requires the absolute commitment and sincerity of purpose of all the stakeholders including the proprietors, management, staff, students, host communities, catchment areas, and the citizens.

(11) The federal government should strive to progressively achieve the 26% UESCO benchmark in education funding, so as to ensure availability,acceptability, and adaptability of education.

Conclusion

The first major conclusion from this study is that world-wide, it is the norm for governments to be heavily involved in the funding of education. The second conclusion that has emerged from this paper is that in general, government funding of higher education institutions has not matched the growth of enrolment and these institutions have therefore been forced to increasingly look elsewhere for their sustenance. This has meant a steady increase in tuition fees for those institutions that charge such fees and the introduction of tuition fees for those that did not.

Education is central to human existence and development. It is through education that values are transmitted across generations. Education enables society to create and domesticate knowledge. In the kind of knowledge-driven society, the global village we call the world has turned into, any society that endangers its educational system, and endangers its future. Higher education institutions are the most important institutions for the creation and dissemination of knowledge. However, these institutions are expensive institutions to run. Every society has to decide for itself how to run its higher education institutions. One extreme position in terms of funding it, is for the direct beneficiaries of education to bear the full cost of such education. The other extreme at the other end of the funding spectrum is for government to bear the full cost. In between these two extremes are various funding options involving the direct beneficiaries, government, and other stakeholders in education management.

In spite of all, it should be noted that every human society is aspiring for continuous improvement. A society that expresses complete satisfaction with its education may go back to its knees, therefore, Federal Government funding of federal government-owned education institutions has not matched the growth of these institutions and there is a clear imperative for the government to increase such funding to at least match the minimum of 26 percent of the federal budgets as recommended by the UNESCO. This is more so as the 1999 Constitution has free university education as a major ultimate national objective.

However, critical to an enduring, stable public education system is collective bargaining and keeping faith with all agreements, especially by the proprietors. When agreements are disobeyed, it weakens the desire to enter more, and so subjects the education system to perennial crises. The Nigerian public education system must have square pegs in square holes ably supported by government Universities (CNANU) inaugurated in 2012 by the federal government which will be the starting-point of a comprehensive turn-around of the public education system.

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