

Review

Impact of Fees Increase on University Students Education in Nigeria

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Abstract

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The study sought to highlight the impact of fees' increase on university students and their programmes in Nigeria. Fees' increase has serious implications for educational enterprise across the globe, especially in developing countries at the turn of the 21st century. At the inception of universities the regional governments ploughed money into the universities. Government gave scholarships, grants and subsidies to students. Many university lecturers were sponsored overseas for training in scholarly productivity. Unfortunately the military rule in relation to IMF ushered in the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), removal of subsidies, scholarships and grants, debt burden, and globalisation forces triggered serious problems that have sweeping implications for university education. Crucial issues like education, health, environmental management and others were neglected as a result of debt repayment. Findings revealed that removal of scholarships, subsidies and grants, and globalisation forces, triggered negative consequences such as violent demonstrations, open and close syndrome, decrease in enrolment, increase in drop-out rate, students' exposure to off-campus residence and attendant unsettling non-conducive environment for effective and serious academic activities that could have launched Nigeria into the 21st Century global knowledge economy. The study recommends the adoption of Unesco's 26% bench-mark for education.

Keywords: 21st century, Education and Impact, Fees Increase, Nigeria, University students

INTRODUCTION

Universities across the globe continue to face very serious issues that have terrible implications for educational practice. Guardian (2014) noted that Australian Top Eight Universities" vice-chancellors voted for higher fees and downsizing of their students. The Telegraph (2013) noted that Universities in U.K. embarked on fees increase in 2013, this led to slump in the number of applicants to the tune of 18,000. They believe that increased fees would drive students out of prestige universities to lesser. Independent Commission on Fees (2013) pointed out that there has been "a clear drop" in English students applying for admission. The

problem is more in the developing countries and Africa in particular. In Nigeria, national universities from inception began to grapple with issues of admission, accommodation, education policies, student unionism, funding and the likes. Many African leaders ploughed reasonable portions of their budgets into education. They awarded scholarships and grants to deserving groups. Many of them had linkages with developed countries in a bid to raise a strong educated and trained work-force that would help run the affairs of the nations. This was short-lived because military rule set in shortly after independence, introduced "sweeping reforms" that have

negatively affected scholarly productivity. The government removed all the subsidies from university students and introduced full payment of fees. This was in 1978, the “Ali must go” saga that rocked universities in Nigeria. Students took to the streets. The military government responded by shooting and killing students and even civilians. Thus a new phase began where contractors took over the cooking and serving of meals at exorbitant prices. The impact was devastating. The students were made to pay for all the food they bought and to pay higher tuition and accommodation. At this era too, forces of globalisation began to manifest in Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), International Monetary Fund (IMF), and dragged Nigeria into debt burden. Chima (2014) noted that Nigeria’s local or domestic indebtedness has risen to N6 trillion to date, while World Bank International Debt Statistics noted that the latest repayments on external debt, a long term + IMF in Nigeria was \$274,025,000 as of 2011. Globalisation introduced inequalities and led to reframing of educational policies especially at the Higher Education level. It was argued that post graduate programme is for individual self improvement so should be paid for to the last farthing. School fees sky-rocketed. Hostel accommodation that was N2, 090 in the 90s rose to N20, 000. Since then inadequate funding has been a most serious malady in the educational system. With inadequate funding, decay, dilapidation of few existing facilities, infrastructure, set in. Classrooms are sub-standard and grossly inadequate. Traditional approaches to teaching and learning persist while the 21st century approaches to learning are conspicuously unavailable. Lack of equipment especially for information communication technology (ICT), (paradigm shift) has made teaching and learning approaches of the 21st century impossible. Attempts by universities to internally generate funds to cushion some of the inadequacies, have triggered some challenges that have made negative impact on the students and their programmes.

Statement of the Problem

Fees increase has been a serious hindrance to access to quality education in Nigeria at the turn of the century. Okeke (2010) noted that access to education in its full and broad sense means free and unlimited, unhindered, unfettered, opportunities at each level of education to obtain knowledge and skills abilities available at that level. It is a common knowledge that Nigerian educational system has experienced hindrances in teaching and learning and distortions in the academic calendar as a result of strike actions that have become a common feature in the system. Strike actions and students demonstrations have triggered serious problems for and to all stakeholders in the system. A major issue in most of the strike actions and students demonstration has

been monetary. Shua’ara (2010) noted that the sources of funding for Public Higher Education institutions (HEIS) are: (a) appropriation from government regular intervention-Education Trust Fund (ETF), NDDC, PTDF, IDAS (b) internally generated revenue (fees, other sundry charges) (c) donations, endowments. It is pointed out that Nigeria is not anywhere near UNESCO 26% benchmark. Universities are encouraged to generate funds internally to support government’s subventions. Fees Increase has been the most common approach. PhD students paid less than N20,000 in the 90s, today they pay N189,000 other charges not included. The nation in order to service external debt and internal burden, (outcomes of globalisation,) has pushed the universities into Fees increase that has damaging impact and serious implications for education especially in the 21st century. There has been steady increase in fees since the 1990s. The increase has had a toll on many students who could not continue in their programmes and those who dare not embark on post graduate (PG) programmes because of high school fees. This has led to students resorting to off-campus accommodation where some are raped, attacked and some killed. This study looked at the Fees Increase at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels where many are working and sponsoring themselves and trying to grapple with fees increase. Some others, after years of unemployment and underemployment just decide to register for PG. To such, fees increase is an anathema. To others strike actions prolong their duration of programme which ultimately translates into more fees. Some had had to abandon their programme because of fees increase. These are unsettling conditions that make it difficult for students to settle to their studies. This study sought to ascertain the impact of fees increase on the undergraduate and post graduate students programmes and the implications for education in the 21st century in Nigeria. Specifically the study ascertained the issues in fees increase, the extent to which fees Increase has impacted on students’ academics and smooth continuation of programme and the implications for 21st century education.

Issues in fees Increase

Okoli (2003) noted that in the early 1970s, during the oil boom in Nigeria, the federal and state governments began to give grants, subsidies and scholarships to as many as gained admission into any higher institutions. Any person that gained admission to read BE.d programme then had automatic grant or scholarship. Many candidates who were indigent and who never dreamt of seeing the four walls of a university had the opportunity to go to school. By 1978 the aids were withdrawn which culminated into the “Ali must Go” saga in which both students and civilians were killed by the military. Parents began to pay full fees for their children

and wards and that closed the doors to indigent candidates who could not pay school fees. Since then there has been steady increase in fees at the higher education level. The federal government has made it mandatory for universities to find avenues of generating funds internally. It is obvious that fees increase is driven by this mandate. Moreover fees increase is also driven by the forces of globalisation. The SAP and IMF are off-shots of globalisation. Okoli (2013) noted that through globalisation nations are overtaken by global competitions and responses to IMF demands which neglect internal needs like education, health, environmental issues, welfare, etc. Globalisation has driven nations, especially in sub-Saharan African nations into debt burden. So students are made to pay increased fees. Moreover fees increase has become a global issue. In Europe, Australia, etc, many universities have increased fees and this has triggered other problems. Henry et al (2008) noted that globalisation has led to reframing of educational policies. Fees increase is an example of such reframed policies. Whereas governments gave scholarships to individuals before, today all that has changed. People now pay exorbitant fees for education especially at the higher education level.

Impact of Fees Increase on Students' Academics and Programme Continuation

Fees increase has damaging impact on both students and their programmes. For instance U.K. introduced fees increase in 2013 in her universities, the increase led to drop in enrolment up to as many as 18,000 students. In Australia, eight top universities used fees increase to down-size their students' enrolment. Thus fees increase led to increased drop-outs and loss of opportunity for education. Many students whose parents or self sponsored ones who could not afford the fees dropped-out of their programmes. In the 2011-2013 periods in my department over 15 students, no longer showed up. Some did not accept their admission while some dropped out of the programme.

Irregular attendance to school and absenteeism by students became regular features. Some of the students who did not drop-out moved out of hostel accommodation. They went to live outside the campus in cheaper accommodation. Some of the females were raped, others were robbed. Some of the males were killed. Many off-campus students began to skip classes, as a way of saving money. Some students combined schooling and doing odd jobs and so maximum attention was no longer paid to lectures. Poor performance academically set in.

Many students are unable to buy text books because of fees increase. They do not have easy access to internet to browse for research.. A major challenge in this

area is power. Power supply is irregular both day and night. This makes it difficult for students to study when they want. The infrastructural state and sizes of classrooms are deplorable. Dilapidated furniture, epileptic power with attendant failure is uncondusive for serious academic work and scholarly productivity.

Students resort to vices in order to cope in the face of fees increase. Many females engage in prostitution while males indulge in robbery. Students with weak background, who would have been brushed up, do not have that opportunity because of these difficult situations. These conditions lent breath to failure in examinations. Many students are ill-prepared for serious academic exercise and further studies. The uncondusive situation makes matters worse. Many students do not take their studies serious. They just succumb to the harsh situation and fail in their examinations.

The Implication of fees increase on 21st Century Education

The steady decline in the amount of money ploughed into universities by governments has given rise to steady decline in the quality of education and fees increase is driven by this decline. Fees increase is a serious hindrance to Education for All (EFA) in Nigeria. While some developed countries (Nordic countries) have put in place EFA at all levels of education, Nigeria is struggling with EFA at the primary level.

Fees increase and its attendant impact have serious implication for 21st century education. Obanya (2014) noted that education in Africa came into the 21st century with the heaviest human development deficit burden. Many African countries belong to the "low human development" group of countries. Africa's heavy dependence on external economic powers has its own implication.

Modern methods and gadgets for 21st century teaching and learning are conspicuously lacking in many public universities in Nigeria. The century brought with it serious pedagogical demands on the teacher, yet the traditional approaches to teaching and learning still persist. It was a worthy vision as proposed by the founding fathers of the nation's universities that the institutions meet international standards. As of today according to Okoli (2006) there is hardly a university in Nigeria that seriously meets international standards. No university in Nigeria has been ranked as meeting international standards. 21ST century education is education in a technological age. It is the age of progressive advances in science and technology, the age of computer and sophisticated appliance. Teaching methods in science and mathematics are undergoing continuous change. According to Crocket (2014) it demands that students have range of skills that develop the ability to function within rapidly changing society. Such skills should be

beyond those needed in the 20th century. This has to do with critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, innovation and more. Both teachers and students need the exceptional problem solving skills, ability to do several things at the same time. The issue of digital divide is conspicuous. The gap is wide Africa's attempt to bridge the gap through e-learning must be pursued in a manner that it will really solve current problems. The implication is that Nigeria needs to work hard for her education to produce scholars who would compete favourably with others in any part of the world without going overseas.

Eaton (2010 p 1) evolved seven global trends in education at the three levels in the 21st century:

- 1) Technology use and integration ; technology will not only enhance education, it will drive learning of all kinds
- 2) Expansion of mobile technology: technology will become increasingly mobile, meaning that opportunities for learning will and already co-exist everywhere all the time.
- 3) Asset-based approaches to evaluation: at the classroom level through use of portfolios at the regional or national scale (through the use of benchmark) and on multinational level (through the use of large scale frameworks).
- 4) Increased creativity: knowledge will be created and co-created, not simply "imparted" by teachers. Students are not just taking in fact, they are creating new knowledge.
- 5) Global approaches to learning: shared interests, curiosity and hunger for learning are driving us to reach beyond our borders.
- 6) Global mobility: teachers and students are experiencing more of the world, more often, starting from younger age.
- 7) Borderless education: the barrier of geography being transcended by technology, creativity and desire to go global.

The trends in education of the 21st century are informative, presenting developing trends in the field of education with a focus on technology. The implication is that if Nigeria must queue into the global trend she must beef up her technology according to global standards.

CONCLUSION

The approaches (paradigm shift and application of ICT) of the 21st century would be a mirage in the face of

continuous fees increase. Many people will not have what it takes to go to the University. Enrolment will continue to drop as in some countries of the world. Education for all (EFA) may never be achieved in the face of fees increase.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Nigerian government should do all in its power to adopt the UNESCO 26% bench-mark for funding education instead of the current 8.4%. Universities should seek partnership with Non-governmental Organisations in the nation.

Many countries float free education at all levels for their people. This makes it possible for majority of the citizens to go to school. Nigeria should borrow a leaf from these countries. A strong ICT base for a better 21st century education should be put in place .

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