

FUNDING OF TERTIARY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Protocol

It is with great delight that I express my appreciation to the Organizers of the 26th Nigerian Academy of Education (NAE) Seminar for inviting me to speak on the topic: “**Funding of Tertiary Education in Nigeria**” during this crucial period of our national rebirth.

There is a need to briefly discuss education on a broad spectrum before exploring the specifics of tertiary education. Education can generally be viewed as the process of acquiring knowledge, new values and skills for the purpose of self fulfilment, economic mobility, social transformation and effective functioning of society. According to Fafunwa (1974) education is what each generation gives to its younger ones which makes them develop attitudes, abilities, skills and other behaviours which generates positive values to the society in which they live.

Tertiary Education is referred as higher education because it reflects the advancement of both the content and educational experience as well as the expected contributions of the scholars to society upon graduation. It heralds the transition from basic education to a more progressive, specialized and intellectually demanding aspect of learning and personal development thus referred to as the peak of formal education. It typically follows the completion of secondary education and represents a significant stage in a student's intellectual and personal development.

Some defining attributes of tertiary education are that it offers specialized instruction in a wide range of academic, professional, and technical fields, spanning various disciplines. Tertiary institutions emphasize research and scholarship thereby providing opportunities for students and faculty to engage in original research, contribute to academic discourse, and advance the frontiers of knowledge in various realms. This depth of instruction

provides students with the expertise and skills necessary for careers in their chosen fields.

Tertiary education plays a transformative role in shaping an individual's knowledge, reasoning, skills and mindset which are needed to navigate the complexities of the world and most certainly, the dynamism of our country. The National Policy on Education stipulates that tertiary education in particular, must be made to solve the social and technological needs of the society by promoting capacity building through skills acquisition, manpower training, career counseling and lifelong learning programmes all geared towards entrenching sustainable national development.

Historical Background of Tertiary Education in Nigeria

Historically, formal education in Nigeria can be traced to the advent and activities of European Missionaries and Colonialists. Although the colonial administration basically introduced formal education with a view to creating the manpower, capacity, and competencies to run the new economic, social, political, and administrative set up that was introduced to Nigerians. This necessitated the expansion of primary and secondary education and subsequently, the introduction of tertiary education in Nigeria.

Tertiary education is regarded as the post-secondary section of the National education system, which is delivered by the Universities, Polytechnics, Colleges of Education and other relevant institutions of higher learning. The establishment of Yaba Higher College in 1932 as the first institution of higher learning in the country marked the starting point of tertiary education system in Nigeria. The Elliot Commission set up in 1943 by the colonial administration recommended the establishment of universities in Nigeria, which laid the foundation for the establishment of the University College Ibadan in 1948. In 1960 at independence, University College of Ibadan became a full-fledged university. University of Nigeria, Nsukka, was

established in 1960, while Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, University of Lagos and University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University) took off in 1962. University of Benin was established in 1970, and in 1975 seven new universities in Jos, Calabar, Maiduguri, Kano, Ilorin, Port Harcourt and Sokoto were established and they commenced academic activities by 1977/78 (Taiwo, 1980). Since then, many tertiary institutions notably universities, polytechnics, monotechnics and colleges of education have been established in Nigeria.

The National Universities Commission (NUC) has reported **52** Federal Universities, **63** State Universities, and **147** Private Universities, which brings the total number of recognized Universities in Nigeria to **262** as at January 2024. Similarly, the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) has recognized **183** Federal, States, and Privately-owned Polytechnics in the country, while Monotechnics are **227**, Innovation Enterprise Institutions (IEIs) are **181**, and Vocational Enterprise Institutions (VEIs) are **84**. In the same vein, the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) has accredited **236** NCE Awarding Institutions in Nigeria owned by the Federal, States and Private entities.

The initial aim for the establishment of tertiary educational institutions in Nigeria was to meet the requirements of graduating manpower that will work in different capacities to contribute to the nation's political and socio-economic development (Abdulkareem, Fasasi & Akinnubi, 2011). The stated goal is to ensure the production of community of Nigerians that are highly skilled, and who will be well prepared for the world of work, sustainable national development and global competitiveness in terms of expertise.

The Significance of Tertiary Education

Essentially, education is the most powerful instrument for societal transformation, serving as a catalyst for individual, families and national

growth. Higher education in particular, plays a critical role in the development process, especially in the global context in which knowledge-based innovations and products fetch high value in the market. Beyond economic benefits, higher education also offers scope for cultural and community development.

The transition from the stone age to the iron age; the inventions in agriculture; the advent of traditional and modern technology; developments in science, energy, communication and modern warfare have all been ascribed to tertiary education and capacity building. Throughout history, human beings have often sought to advance their well-being by improving and mastering their environment, and have succeeded overtime primarily due to improvement in the higher education and knowledge acquired.

Over the last few decades, Nigeria has witnessed tremendous growth in its higher education and research sphere. This, to a large extent, is a manifestation of the recognition by key stakeholders, including political leaders, on the imperative of tertiary education in achieving national priorities and developmental aspirations. However, the nation is yet to feel the desired impact of our education system in economic transformation and addressing societal challenges to ensure sustainable national development, as the structure of the economy has largely remained undiversified.

With the rate of population growth in Nigeria, it became obvious that public tertiary institutions alone cannot cater for needed tertiary education to accommodate the teeming youth graduating from secondary schools annually, hence, the need for private universities and other private tertiary institutions to complement the public institutions in the delivery of tertiary education in the country (Omomia, Omomia, & Babalola, 2014; Yusuf, 2014).

Education has a direct relationship with economic growth and sustainable development. The World Bank has maintained that the development of nations in the 21st Century largely depends on the quality and quantity of the level of education in different countries. It has also been established that there is an inverse relationship between the amount of tertiary education level graduates in an economy and the extent of reliance on the state. Higher education is believed to generate a higher level of social cohesion and complement the process of crime reduction.

Besides, the World Bank (2002) asserted that tertiary education, through its role in empowering domestic constituencies, building institutions and nurturing favourable regulatory frameworks and governance structures, is critical to a country's efforts to increase social capital and to promote social cohesion, which is proving to be an important determinant of economic growth and development. Although tertiary education alone will not make development happen, it is instructive that development in this knowledge era cannot happen without tertiary education. A sustainable tertiary education system is critical for a country and its citizens to participate in and benefit from the global knowledge economy, yet a thriving economy is required to generate the wealth necessary to fund tertiary education sustainably.

No doubt, tertiary education occupies a unique position among the sectors of any economy being the catalyst for sustainable transformation. Thus, to achieve sustainable development, sustainable funding of tertiary education cannot be ignored.

Current Status on Funding of Tertiary Education in Nigeria

Tertiary Institutions are broadly categorized as Public Tertiary Institutions owned by the Federal and State Governments; and Private Tertiary Institutions owned by private individuals and organizations. The funding of tertiary institutions revolves around capital and recurrent expenditure that are germane to academic and administrative survival of the institutions in an

increasingly competitive environment for attracting funding and expertise. Notably, the funding of the institutions is largely shouldered by the proprietors of the institutions, whether public or private. While the funding of public tertiary institutions by Governments is anchored on the consideration of public goods and social services, the funding of private institutions is anchored on business considerations which explains the high students fees charged by the institutions.

The underlying rationale for public funding of tertiary education is to equip people with the requisite knowledge, skills and capacity to enhance the quality of life, augment productivity and capacity to gain knowledge of new techniques for production, and prepare learners to participate evocatively in the development process. Public sector funding of tertiary education in Nigeria is anchored on the notion that for society to continue in perpetuity, the new generation must be given the appropriate access to knowledge that previous generation have accumulated (Afolayan, 2015).

In the last few decades, tertiary education in Nigeria has witnessed a significant growth in terms of population expansion through increase in student enrolment and establishment of additional institutions, necessitating corresponding increase in funding. The Federal and States Governments provide the funds needed for capital and recurrent expenditures in most public tertiary institutions in Nigeria, whereas payments of tuition fees is the most essential sources of funding for private tertiary institutions. According to Bamiro (2016), the Federal Government of Nigeria has expressed its desire to fund most public Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to attain world-class status through the injection of special intervention funds. However, institutions aspiring to transform to world-class must have access to multiple sources of funding to achieve their vision. Although funding of public tertiary institutions has been improving over the years, it has not kept pace with assessed needs and demands occasioned by the rapid increase in enrolment.

Thus, Nigerian Government has not been meeting the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) recommendation of 26 percent of the total budget allocation to education sector, due to other competing demands from various sectors. Nonetheless, Government has always been conscious of the fact that the business of providing quality education to her citizens, particularly at tertiary level, is a huge investment to manpower development and a pre-requisite for economic growth and shared prosperity. In response to this realization, governments at national and sub-national levels have over the years, undertaken massive infrastructural development at all levels of our educational system, established new institutions, improved their carrying capacities, and expanded access to quality education at all levels. The private sector has also invested hugely in our educational system by establishing complementary institutions at various levels.

The rapid expansion of tertiary education system, particularly over the last few decades, coupled with the re-occurring global economic crisis and fiscal stringency arising from the structure of the economy, has affected the funding of tertiary education institutions in Nigeria. The problems of tertiary institutions in the country which have been attributed to inadequate funding are enormous, ranging from steady drop in education quality, overcrowding, in class rooms, outdated curriculum and deteriorating facilities, high students-lecturer ratio, high ratio of non-teaching staff to teaching staff, lack of adequate motivation, brain drain, inability to attract academics from across the globe as well as a shift of recurrent expenditures to salaries, and neglect of other essentials such as library, educational materials and maintenance of existing facilities among others.

Understandably, issues surrounding funding for tertiary education in Nigeria have been under criticism for being inefficient and ineffective. This is

essentially so, because the challenges of underfunding of tertiary institutions have significant effect on the performance of staff and students, as well as dysfunctional and unethical practices in the system.

The public tertiary institutions in Nigeria are facing the twin pressure of rising demand and fiscal constraint. The growing population of the country, particularly the youth and the resultant increasing demand for enrolments in tertiary institutions have aggravated the funding challenges for tertiary education system. However, the extent to which public tertiary institutions would solely depend on funding from government budgetary allocations to meet their financial requirements is a significant policy issue that needs to be addressed in order to guarantee the future of tertiary education system in Nigeria. In the area of financing tertiary education, developing countries face particular challenges due to greater vulnerability to fluctuations in economies that are inherently dominated by single commodity, which makes financial sustainability risky, since they are more vulnerable to financial crisis in the global economy.

TETFund Response to Funding of Tertiary Institutions

The establishment of the Tertiary Education Trust Fund by the Federal Government to provide intervention support towards the rehabilitation, restoration and consolidation of tertiary education in Nigeria, is part of conscious and deliberate efforts of government to ensure the transformation of our public tertiary institutions. The law setting up the Fund stipulates that a 2 percent (now 3 percent) education tax be imposed on the profits of all registered companies in Nigeria. In the disbursement of the funds, 50 percent goes to the Universities, 25 percent to the Polytechnics, while 25 percent goes to Colleges of Education (TETFund Act 2011). The Table below indicates the total amount remitted to TETFund from 2011-2023.

2011 – 2023 (AS PER CBN TRANSFER)

YEAR	COLLECTION
2011	₱128.52 billion
2012	₱188.37 billion
2013	₱279.17 billion
2014	₱189.61 billion
2015	₱207.43 billion
2016	₱130.12 billion
2017	₱154.96 billion
2018	₱203.28 billion
2019	₱221.30 billion
2020	₱257.01 billion
2021	₱189.54 billion
2022	₱328.80 billion
2023	₱725.74 billion
TOTAL	₱3.203 trillion

The funds disbursed to public tertiary institutions are to be used for the provision or maintenance of:

- i. Essential physical infrastructure for teaching and learning;
- ii. Instructional materials and equipment;
- iii. Research and publication;
- iv. Academic staff training and development; and
- v. Any other need which, in the opinion of the Board of Trustees, is critical and essential for the improvement of quality and maintenance of standards in the higher educational institutions.

To date, TETFund has funded **5,525** physical infrastructural projects, **188** equipment fabrication, and provision of **576** faculty/departmental libraries in tertiary institutions across the country.

Similarly, TETFund has awarded grants for **19,297** Institution Based Research (IBR) projects and **912** research projects under the National Research Fund (NRF) designed to support impactful research which will contribute to national developmental efforts as well as tackle global

challenges. The Fund has also sponsored and supported several research and innovation initiatives such as Research for Impact (R4i), TETFund Alliance for Innovative Research (TETFAIR), and the Innovation Fellowship for Aspiring Inventors and Researchers (i-FAIR) programmes, all targeted at deepening impactful research and uptake of research outcomes with potentials for commercialization as panacea to societal problems.

In addition, TETFund has funded the procurement of **3,099,871** library books in beneficiary institutions. The Fund has also sponsored the publication of **845** titled Academic Research Journals projects, and the development of **2,307** Academic Manuscripts to Books.

In the area of capacity building, TETFund has sponsored **23,271** academic staff of public tertiary institutions for PhD programmes. Out of this, **4,598** were sponsored to foreign institutions, while **18,673** attended institutions within Nigeria. Likewise, **15,977** academic staff were sponsored for Masters degree programme. **3,525** were in foreign institutions, while **12,452** undertook their studies in local institutions within the country. In addition, **911** scholars were sponsored for Benchwork in foreign institutions and **872** academic staff for Post-Doctoral programme specially targeted at strengthening scientific research capacity of the country. Also, **31,071** academic staff of tertiary institutions were sponsored to attend international conferences in foreign countries, while **46,604** were sponsored for local conferences, bringing the total scholars sponsored for academic conferences to **77,675**. Furthermore, **110,432** academic staff of colleges of education were sponsored to conduct supervision of teaching practice across the country.

The intervention supports to tertiary institutions and other steps taken by the government have enabled Nigeria to be ranked as one of the six most improved countries in Time Higher Education Rankings between 2021 -2022. However, despite all these laudable efforts, there is still a huge gap that needs

to be covered, particularly in the area of funding to enable government provide the much-needed quality tertiary education to its citizenry.

Strategies for Sustainable Funding of Tertiary Education in Nigeria

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, although there has been significant improvement in recent years in government expenditure on tertiary education in Nigeria, it is obvious that government alone cannot meet the present and projected needs of the sector in attaining global competitiveness. The incessant industrial actions over the last few decades by various staff unions in our tertiary institutions bordering on challenges of funding has further heightened the need to explore innovative and sustainable funding regime for tertiary education in the country. This implies rethinking stakeholders' involvement in education financing to secure qualitative and functional tertiary education system, which is an essential tool for sustainable development (Afolayan, 2015).

At the moment, the National Policy on Education provides that basic education should be free and compulsory in the country. However, tertiary education is the most expensive level of education in any given country; and providing a full range of learning options and opportunities can be very costly. This is particularly so in developing economies, where unit costs are likely to be higher due to greater difficulties to achieve economies of scale. Besides, for the society, the rate of return on education is higher at the basic level, whereas the rate of return is higher for the individual recipient of the education at the tertiary level.

Notably, increased social demand for tertiary education in Nigeria and the desire of the country to participate in the knowledge economy have created the need for greater investment in tertiary education through sustainable funding. But the question is, where will the funds for the needed investments

in the institutions come from? On this note, let me re-echo the sustainable funding model I advocated at the Convocation Lecture of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka held in March 2023.

Sustainable financing of tertiary education requires predictable and guaranteed funding. Hence, the future lies in sustainable funding, which is clearly rooted in sharing costs, diversifying income sources, creating new sources of income, building partnerships at home and abroad, and creating wealth beyond teaching and research.

The funding challenges for tertiary education system inevitably impacts on the individual institutions. The inability of Government to solely and fully finance tertiary education necessitates that the institutions be given the leverage to explore alternative sources of funding to become more efficient and effective in line with new vistas.

To address the aforementioned question on funding sources, some pertinent policy issues with obvious implications for funding options readily come to mind. These include: -

- Where does tertiary education fit, in terms of national strategy for development?
- What are the specific policy goals and targets for each segment of our tertiary university education?
- What is the role of the government in a diversified university education system?
- What is the desirable limit of government expenditure in tertiary education?
- How much infrastructure is the government able to fund?
- What is the role of government in research and innovations, and what is the funding strategy?

- How can a student financing system be developed with due consideration for equity?
- Will the private sector be willing to invest in public institutions? and under what conditions?

Arising from the issues highlighted above, the options for sustainable funding of tertiary education system in Nigeria should be able to address three key financing issues: the sustainable financing of expanding publicly funded tertiary education; the need for better mechanisms for student support in a context of growing demand and social stratification of the student, and the need to expand and upgrade infrastructure to support a more diversified offerings with more emphasis on costly areas, such as in medicine, science, and technology.

It is worth repeating that considering the circumstances surrounding the funding of higher education in Nigeria today, government alone cannot be the sole source of financing for education. Accordingly, the following thought-provoking funding models may be explored as workable options for sustainable funding:

- (a) Cost-Sharing, to enable parents and the students who are primary beneficiaries to contribute to the funding of the system through the payment of tuition fees to complement government subvention to the institution. It is also instructive to state that some institutions owned by State Governments have already started implementing this initiative.
- (b) The Students Loans (Access to Higher Education) Act, 2024 which came into effect following Presidential Assent on April 3, 2024 is a commendable effort on the part of Government, since it seeks to guarantee sustainable higher education and functional skill development for all Nigerian students and youth, regardless of their status or income level of their parents/guardians. The interest-free

loan with a moratorium will provide an avenue for growing number of students to access loans at affordable rate to pay their fees and support their education. The significance of the student loan scheme, which targets primary beneficiary of education is that it shifts the burden of payment by the student to after graduation, when the graduate is able to earn and repay the loan.

- (c) Provision of scholarship and bursary to top bright students and some exceptionally underprivileged students by relevant stakeholders should be sustained in order to provide access to tertiary education for those who otherwise would not be privileged to further their education. Targeted scholarships and fellowships for specialized/identified areas of national needs should also be promoted. Selection should be strictly based on merit.
- (d) The tertiary institutions should be encouraged and supported to seek for alternative and additional revenue sources by developing a range of pathways and mechanisms, including ventures related to their core business of education delivery, research and services such as clinical medical facilities, ICT, vocational and enterprise centres/innovations hubs, that would be self-financing to generate surplus to the institution and similar initiatives.
- (e) Tertiary institutions should, as a matter of policy, explore partnerships and collaboration with funding agencies and development partners both at home and abroad to attract support and complementary resources to support the institutions.
- (f) The institutions should make conscious efforts to strengthen their R&D activities, and ensure effective linkage and collaboration with industry towards the commercialization of their research output to generate revenue and sustain the system. They should design

specialized programmes tailored to deepen their relevance/impact on their immediate communities to attract patronage and support.

- (g) Each institution should be encouraged and supported to establish functional Business Development Office to support fund-raising and pursue knowledge intensive business opportunities as well as opportunities for research grant funding. These should feature not only in the ranking of institutions but also in the promotion prospects of faculty members.
- (h) Institutions should device innovative ways of engaging in entrepreneurship initiatives and explore commercial opportunities in activities related with the institution and community investment to generate revenues to guarantee self-sufficiency.
- (i) Mechanisms should be put in place to mobilize and attract private sector investments beyond corporate social responsibility, award of honorary degrees and endowment of professional chairs. A good example is the Tetfund promoted partnership between beneficiary institutions and private sector developers in the provision of students hostels in tertiary institution.

Conclusion

Tertiary education plays a central role in human transformation and rapid development of societies. To realize these lofty goals, our tertiary education system should have a sustainable funding mechanism that is truly dynamic, resourceful and responsive to our national aspirations. There must be deliberate efforts to ensure effective synergy between the academia, industry, and government to achieve the fundamental objectives of tertiary education for speedy socio-economic development.

I will conclude by submitting, like I did in many fora, that no nation can rise above the quality of its education. Functional education is directly related to

human capital development, global competitiveness, and sustainable national development. All stakeholders must collaboratively ensure that our tertiary educational system is effectively funded in consonance with contemporary realities and our developmental trajectory. As we confront the future with renewed hope and optimism, the Fund seizes this opportunity to renew its commitment to deepen its transformative interventions to enhance the competitiveness of our tertiary institutions for sustainable national development.

In doing so, consideration should be given to the motivation, mobilization and harnessing of our intellectual assets as well as their effective deployment to address national challenges and exploit opportunities arising therefrom. It is only then that the nation can derive maximum benefits from effective funding of tertiary education in Nigeria.

I thank you immensely for your attention and wish you successful and fruitful deliberations.

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