

A Synopsis of the Trajectory of Politics in the Funding Of Nigerian Education, 1962-2010: Implications for University Education.

Benjamin. N. Nyewusira, Ph.D¹ Dr (Mrs) T. A Jamabo²

Department of Educational Foundations, University of Port Harcourt, Port Harcourt.

Department of Educational Psychology, Guidance & Counselling Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port Harcourt.

Abstract: *In recent years, funding for the Nigerian educational system has been in discourse for sundry reasons, chief of which is the quest for sufficient and stable funding for the system, as poor funding which hit the universities under the Nigerian jack-boot regimes has been a recurring decimal. Therefore, this paper is a historical synopsis cum appraisal of the pattern of funding for education, mostly as it affects university education, under an emerging democracy. The paper submits that lack of political will and government's refusal to prioritise the education sector for funding is remotely the major bane towards the much desired appropriate funding for university education. It therefore advocates for a revolutionary mind-set in order for government to correct the errors in funding university education.*

I. Introduction

Education is of great importance to many nations of the earth that see it as priority. This is not evidently the case in Nigeria. Indeed, in a sarcastic attempt to typically illustrate the level of priority or attention that political leadership may have accorded education in Nigeria, Udoidem (2006:55-56) intoned:

When Mr. Tony Blair, the former Prime Minister of Britain was campaigning for re-election, he was asked what his hierarchy of priorities would be and he said: Priority 1: Education, Priority 2: Education, Priority 3: Education. Similarly, Bill Clinton, a one time President of the United States of America was asked what his priority would be if re-elected, and he answered "Education all the way". When Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, was asked what would be his priority if re-elected for a second term he answered: "The preservation of the nascent democracy".

The above scenario clearly showed the difference in the attitude of a Nigerian leader towards his value and priority for education when compared to the esteemed value the two other political leaders had for their national educational systems. Udoidem (2006) therefore issued a pertinent poser and that is: "What is nascent democracy without education"?

What can also be deduced from this illustration is that in Nigeria the contemporary political leader does not see education as a foremost priority for the nation. In Nigeria, politicians and the governments they represent have not been genuinely committed to educational development. In fact, Akpan and Undie (2007:79) were more rounded when they said that "both the Federal and some State governments do not accord education the priority it deserves." As such, a number of Nigerian leaders only pay lip service to education. They mostly use education as instrument for achieving political legitimacy and consolidation (Kosemani, 1995; Abernethy, 1969). These attitudes of the Nigerian government and political leadership towards education can only handicap genuine development of education.

But much more, the deployment of fiscal and other resources that education gets from the national purse is usually a function of the vision and political will of the leadership of the State (Paulley, 2009). Indeed, education never really gets what it deserves, but what the government is willing and interested to allocate to it (Nwagwu, 2003). In Nigeria however, when government usually declares interest in the development of education, through political pledges, it hardly marches such interest with the requisite financial resources. This therefore not only goes to make nonsense of such purported interest but also brings to doubt whether government does find the much desired political will that is required for powering education.

Nevertheless, given that government's influence on education and university education in particular is so critical and that in Nigeria government is the principle proprietor of public universities, it is only important that its mould of funding the universities ought to be affirmatively fashioned in such a way that the basic objectives of excellence in teaching, research development and other goals associated with university education do not suffer. Hence, the need for proper funding in the university system.

II. Overview of University funding before 1999.

In the early days of university education, funding was not all that a challenge. Ukeje (2002) observed that from the earliest times, starting from 1962 to 1975, there was no substantive difference each year between the amount requested by the universities and the amount received from the Regional Governments. In fact it was reported that there were years in which the amount received was slightly more than the amount requested. However, the year 1976 marked the beginning of the challenges of funding as universities began recording shortfall in the amount they requested, following the completion of the takeover of regional universities by the federal government and the additional establishment of seven universities in 1975. Since then, the funding of the Nigerian universities has been on the decline.

The above situation was made worse by the third phase of university expansion in Nigeria, which resulted in the establishment of more federal Universities of Technology and eight State-owned universities by the Second Republic politicians between 1979 and 1983. Because of the vested political considerations that informed the expansion of universities at this period, funding implications were rarely given due consideration (Onyenor, 2010). Again, the increase in the number of universities at this time was not commensurate to their financial allocation due to world economic recession arising from the politics of oil and the consequent glut in the international crude oil market. Thus, government could no longer meet its financial obligations to its universities (Okorosanye-Orubite, 2003).

Also way back in 1978, the federal government apparently started politicking with its approach in financing universities when it abolished tuition fees in universities and at the same time also withdrew its meal subsidy on students feeding to the tune of N1 per student per day. This was clearly a political intrigue; giving with the right hand and taking back with the left hand (Okorosaye-Orubite, 2003).

The overall negative trends in the funding of the universities from 1976 to 1980 could simply be reflected in the table below:

Table 1: Grant Requested by the Universities in Relation to Actual Grants Given by the Federal Government (1976-1980)

Year	Total Grants Requested	Grant Given by Federal Government	Difference	Percentage
1976-77	291, 281, 966	153, 000,000	138,282,966	47.50%
1977-78	375,168,450	185,000,000	190,168,450	50.70%
1978-79	391,050,715	158,000,000	233,140,715	59.50%
1979-80	411,031,076	200,000,000	211,031,076	51.30%

Source: Salami, 1990.

Furthermore, by mid 1980s, the interplay of politics in the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) had also begun to reflect in government's funding pattern for universities. Indeed, the politics of SAP initiated further down-turn in the funding of university education. This was as a result of the insistence of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund on Nigeria's implementation of neo-liberal policies targeted on gross reductions in public sector expenditure by the Federal Government as part of the conditionality for debt re-scheduling and financial assistance. With particular reference to Nigerian universities, the Britton Woods Institutions argued:

That the reduction of expenditures for universities /polytechnics will help to channel resources to intermediate level technical manpower development which is lacking in most of Africa. Such rationalization might also enable resources to be freed for support to the primary education sector (Olukoshi 1998:33).

Ade-Ajayi (2001:2) also captured the position of one of these institutions, in respect to university funding, when he stated:

The World Bank has been pushing the heretical idea that the return to the state as compared to the return to the individual beneficiary is highest in elementary education and lowest in higher education. And, therefore, the state must, in the name of structural adjustment, increase the allocation of resources to elementary education at the expense of higher education.

This idea of the World Bank was followed with a publication on Financing Education in Developing Countries, FEDC, in which the World Bank categorically recommended, amongst other things, the recovering of public cost of higher education and re-allocating government spending towards the level with the highest social returns. According to Okorosaye-Orubite (2007:184), the option of "recovering public cost of higher education" in relation to the Nigerian situation meant government removing subvention, thereby increasing the fees students pay and charging tuition fees for university education. Government however showed lack of political will to reintroduce tuition fees which had been abolished because of the perceived political implications and controversy that the reintroduction of fees could generate (Ajibade, 1988). This was not surprising considering the wave of demonstration after demonstration by African student movements against SAP, saying "No to

tuition fees” (Federici and Caffentzis, 2000:115). Of course, the Federal government earlier in 1984 had also avoided the reintroduction of tuition fees even after it set up the ‘Study Group on Funding Education’ under the chairmanship of Professor Aliyu Babs Fafunwa, which expressly recommended that there should be “payment of fee in all institutions of higher learning” in the country (Okorosaye-Orubite,2003). Since then however, except in the State universities where some sort of tuition fee is paid, the recommendation of the Fafunwa Committee has not been implemented by the Federal Government due to lack of political will (Okorosaye-Orubite, 2003). Ultimately therefore, the politics and policies inherent in SAP dealt a severe blow on the funding of universities (Nwideeduh, 1995).

In the face of the funding difficulty for the universities during the years of SAP, the only known intervention measure by government, as it affected university funding, was in 1993 when government, via the Education Tax Act NO 7 of 1993, introduced the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund), aimed at providing funding for educational facilities and infrastructural development not just for universities but for other forms of tertiary institutions owned by the federal and state governments. But then, under the disbursement formula, the Board of TETFund is empowered to give due consideration to the peculiarities of each geo-political zone in the country.

Besides the effects of SAP on the decline of funding for the universities, politics in the articulating of national priorities particularly by the military also had its adverse effects on the funding of university education. According to Jega (2000) the under-funding of university education can also be traceable and understood in the context of the misplacement of national priorities by the military regimes. The military regimes, rather than improve the budgetary provision for education and by extension the universities, embarked on upward rise in the budgetary allocation for defense outlays in a time when the nation was neither at internal or external wars. This for example manifested in the gulf between the pay for military officers and university lecturers (Adekanye, 1993)

From the foregoing, it can be observed that the policies and priorities of the military government negatively affected university funding, reflecting the extent to which funding was very much subjected to political whims and caprices of the military government.

III. A précis of funding pattern since 1999.

Funding of university education has equally remained a challenge since the return of civil rule in 1999. In the early years of the Obasanjo civil administration in 2001, the Committee of Vice Chancellors observed:

From the beginning of this year, the universities have received only 40 percent of what is required to pay salaries monthly. Consequently, universities have been unable to pay salaries and allowances as and when due. Many universities have exhausted their reserves and borrowed money from financial institutions in order to sustain payment of emoluments. Moreover, only 30 percent of year 2001 capital grant had been received by the universities (CVC, 2001:11).

The fact however, is that the situation as observed by the Committee of Vice Chancellors did not witness much significant changes even in the years following because of the chequered percentages of budgetary allocation to education that was the hallmark of the eight-year term of Obasanjo. As Osagie (2009:3), observes:

In 1999, Obasanjo’s administration allocated 11.2 % or N23.047b of the budget to education, 8.3% or N44.25b in 2000 and 7.0% or 39.885b in 2001. In 2002, the administration budgeted 5.09% or N100.2b; in 2003, 11.83% or N64.7b in 2004, 7.8% or N72.22b; in 2005, 8.3% or N92.59b, in 2006, 8.7% or N166.6b and in 2007, it allocated 6.07 % or N137.48b.

Suffice it to also note that the Obasanjo’s government, agreed in 2001 to consistently increase the percentage of budgetary allocation to education. Section 4.2.1 (d) of that agreement with ASUU stated that government will be “providing for progressive increase of annual budgetary allocation to Education to 26% beginning by 2009 to 2020” and that 50% of the budgeted 26% shall be allocated to universities (ASUU, 2011, COSEN,2011). Yet in the eight years of that administration, the proportion of budgetary allocation to education was only fluctuating and even at that it did not go beyond 11.83%. Indeed, to adumbrate Ukachukwu Awuzie, “When you look at Obasanjo’s funding of education, you find out that it was epileptic” (TELL, Nov 8, 2008:114).

Nonetheless, it was as well noted that out of the N263b spent on education by the federal government between 2001 and 2007, only N32b was expended on capital projects. The rest went to consumables (Osagie, 2009). This trend had also reflected in the universities as it also was noted that they equally spent disproportionate percentage of their financial allocations in things other than those that have direct bearings on education (Okorosaye-Orubite, 2003). Records from NUC equally indicate that between 2005 to 2010 funds voted for Overhead and Capital expenditures were consistently greater than fund meant for Direct Teaching and Learning Components (DTLC) as well as for Training and Research (T&RE) (NUC,2012). This stems from the fact that the NUC allocates funds to universities in accordance with formula spelt out by the federal government

(Okojie, 2011). Suffice to say that the designing or spelling out of such formula is, as Akinsolu (1990) notes, usually subjected to elements of politics that have no direct benefits to the actual financial needs of universities. The characteristics of such politics could therefore also explain why “the federal government made direct release to some universities from approved budget/allocation in some years without reference to the NUC.” (NUC, 2012)

On the other hand, the Yar'Adua administration in its inception bettered budgetary allocation to education by allocating N210b or 13% in 2008. His administration went further to ensure that education featured prominently in his seven-point agenda, the blue print it designed to make the country one of the 20 economies in the world by 2020. But unfortunately, the administration of Yar'Adua could not sustain its initial improvement in budgetary allocation to education. By the twilight of that administration budgetary allocation to education went down to 8.7% in 2009 and 5.3% in 2010 (Osagie, 2009; COSEN, 2011).

The pattern of budgetary allocation to education since the return of civil rule only shows that funding for universities could not have fared any better. Thus, Okafor (2002:15) observes that “since the inception of civilian administration in May 1999, Federal government subvention to its universities has been dwindling”. This is clearly evident in the consistent “deficit in funding” that has become a recurring decimal for the pattern of funding for federal universities between 1999 and 2004 (NUC, 2012).

It is also pertinent to remark that the funding patterns for State universities over the years are in anyway less fanciful than those of the federal universities. This is overwhelmingly supported by Okorosaye-Orubite (2003) who notes that funding situation in State-owned universities is not better and that, in most cases, it is worse than what obtains in the federal universities.

The précis of the above appraisal indicates that past governments in Nigeria have been guilty of pitiable funding of university education. Funding for the universities has remained an intractable political challenge to government. The trajectory of funding for universities points towards the path of downward trend, particularly owing to the long standing effects of neo-liberal political measures that brought handicap to government's financial allocations to higher education. The pattern of funding to universities also manifested in the lack of the political will to improve and sustain better funding for the educational system over the years. The trail of funding for university education signified that the issue of funding has not gained the political will of the Nigerian Governments, be it in military or civil rule, be it at the Federal or State level.

IV. Implications

The effects of the pattern of deficit in funding or underfunding for university education were not only predictable but very negative in many respects. Okorosaye-Orubite (2003) substantiates this by noting that government's noncommittal to appreciable funding did not only make meaningful planning for universities difficult, it also left other negative implications for the quality of teaching and research going on in the universities because the moneys that were needed to adequately fund teaching and research were perennially in short supply. Government's mold of funding has thus generally led to the collapse in teaching and research facilities. Likewise, as Blair (1992) notes, inadequate financing for the universities also kill staff morale, resulting in the loss of staff to the private sector or to universities in other countries. Equally, under the circumstance, many projects for the development of the universities would have been stalled, abandoned or put on hold. Besides, since universities have been constrained to seeking financial support elsewhere, through internally generated revenues, there is no guarantee that the funds so generated would be accounted for properly. This is a situation that only exposes the managers of such funds to the dangers of financial impropriety.

That universities have been perennially beleaguered with poor funding has equally culminated in the persistent strike in the university system. The demand for proper funding of the universities has always topped the list of demands by university teachers, under the aegis of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), beginning from 1972 when government rejected the first request by the teachers for pay rise up to the 2009 major industrial dispute where ASUU insisted on adequate funding for the revitalization of the universities. The inability of government to address such demands created rooms for the regimes of industrial standoff which not only necessitated the periodic abandonment of the focal business of the university system, which is teaching and learning but also heaped unspeakable hardship on the students (Nyewusira, 2014).

But more worrisome is that the Nigerian government has not made consistent or progressive efforts towards achieving the UNESCO recommended 26% minimum budgetary allocation to education, especially since 2001 after it entered into agreement with ASUU to do so and to commit 50% of such allocation to university funding (Tell Magazine, 2008; COSEN, 2011). It is impossible to subscribe to government's traditional excuse of the paucity of fund, as the commonest explanation for not meeting this UNESCO recommended benchmark for budgetary allocation to education, considering the immense wealth in the country and that other developing countries like Ghana, Morocco, Malaysia etc have long attained and surpassed this recommended budget target for their national systems of education. Ironically, some of these countries are places where most Nigerian politicians and top government officials presently send their children and wards to

acquire university education (Tell Magazine, 2008). Hence, it does appear that the main reason government cannot adequately fund its university system is that it has not considered it a foremost priority.

V. Recommendations And Conclusion

The university system is a costly venture that can only be successfully financed by the government, as the historic Ashby Commission noted. However, much as it is admissible in contemporary times that government cannot fund university education all alone, it is also germane that the government that established universities must be held fully responsible for the financial welfare and survival of such institutions. Government should accept the responsibility of maintaining the institutions it established without necessarily asking the universities to fend for themselves. It is this idea of self-sustainability through Internally Generated Revenues (IGR) that has opened the floodgate of aberrant behaviours in the management of universities, such as allowing for various private kiosks around the universities in the name of raising revenue for the universities or allowing for universities to engage in other forms of private fund-raising that may not be properly accounted for. In the face of the evident monumental financial profligacy and prodigality that is replete in the chronicles of our past and present governments, it is only convincing that the government can fund education to the tune of 26% UNESCO minimum benchmark or much more than that, if there is political determination. It should be certainly reprehensible for Nigerian leaders that other developing countries have long accomplished the UNESCO recommended 26% budget target for education.

Equally, as provided in 2009 Federal Government and ASUU agreement, government should facilitate and encourage the private sector of the Nigerian economy, voluntary agencies, philanthropic individuals, through tax relief and other means, to make voluntary financial and material contributions to Nigerian universities.

Suffice it to say also that the federal government in particular must stop to play the ostrich and find the political fortitude to reintroduce tuition fees in the federal universities and provide for guidelines for the introduction of any form of necessary charges to augment government's funding for the universities. Since it has become obvious that government is finding it difficult to adequately finance education in general and university education in particular, government should be bold to disengage itself from the political gimmick of avoiding the reintroduction of tuition and the charging of essential fees.

It is also very imperative that government should redirect and re-engage its systems of financial appropriations towards considering university education as an emergency, a foremost priority and an institution that requires a revolutionary attention. That way, Nigerian universities will cease to suffer poor governance, inadequate funding, infrastructural deficiency and varied industrial needs. As Perkins (1976) notes, university education is the most important institution which enables every civilized society to acquire, digest and advance knowledge relevant to the task which will confront it in the future. The realization of this cardinal goal of university education can only be facilitated by proficient funding of the system.

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