

Underfunding: A Grand Conspiracy of the Government against Public Universities in Nigeria

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Abstract

Nigerian University education is nearing its worst state and if the standard of the university education falls lower than this, it will become the national cesspool. This paper examines the level of insensitivity of governments to public universities in terms of funding in Nigeria. The thesis contends that Nigerian Governments have not been able to bring Universities particularly public universities in Nigeria to an acceptable standard due to underfunding. The Nigerian governments over the years have not been meeting the United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural organization (UNESCO) recommendation of 26% of the total budget allocation to education sector. There has been a gross inadequacy of academic staff compare to the number of students in the universities leading to a very high academic student's ratio. This is at great variance with the International Best Practices and Nigeria's National Benchmark Minimum Standard and the National Universities Commission recommendation per programme. Consequent upon this, from the Olympian heights where the first Universities stood in the 1960s they have all tumbled down to the murky grounds. Any attempt to destroy the public universities in Nigeria by starving them of funds will amount to destroying the educational system and by extension the entire nation, Nigeria. Thus, that the quality of university education is a function of adequate funding is a truism.

Keywords: University, Underfunding, Teaching and learning Infrastructure

Introduction

What is University? University has its main stem from "universe" which is made up of two morphemes "uni" and "versus" or "vertere". These are latin words and while "uni" means one, entire or whole, "versus" or "vertere" means make or turn. Thus, the meaning of uni + versus or uni + vertere is, turned into one or made into a whole. These latin words are the morphological constitution of "university".

John Henry Newman (1909) wrote:

"if I were asked to describe as briefly and popularly as I could, what a university was, I should draw my answer from its ancient designation of a *Stadium General*, or "School of Universal Learning". This description implies the assemblage of strangers from all parts in one spot; - *from all parts*; else, how will you find professors and students for every department of knowledge? and *in one spot*; else, how can there be any school at all? Accordingly, in its simple and rudimental form, it is a school of knowledge of every kind, consisting of teachers and learners from everywhere and or quarter."

In the same way, Walter (1911) in his inaugural address titled; 'the meaning of university' delivered to his students had this to say about the university:

"If I am to make general statement on the question, I should say that a university is an institution for guarding and increasing our inheritance of knowledge alive. Life implies decay and renewal; a university must be perpetually alert to discard superseded methods and to detect the importance and significance of new studies and new ways of approach. It rehandles all fundamental conceptions, and revises them. It begins at the beginning, and builds from the foundation. It raises fresh crops by turning over the old soil. It is constantly vigilant on the frontiers of knowledge."

It is on the basis of the foregoing that, university in its essence is referred to in Latin as "*universitas magistrorum et scholarium*," which means, that university is a community of teachers and scholars. These teachers and scholars and engaged in the generation, propagation and dissemination of knowledge for the advancement are development of humanity.

Historical Development of University Education in Nigeria.

The development of university education in Nigeria started with the establishment of University College, Ibadan (UCI), in 1948. University College, Ibadan, now University of Ibadan was established on the recommendations of the Asquith Commission on Higher Education. The university was set up as an affiliate of the University of London. Asquith Commission was set up in 1943 to advise the British Government on the higher educational needs. This commission was chaired by Rt. Hon. Walter Elliot in the West African sub-region. The Commission published a report which recommended the establishment of University of Ibadan, Ibadan in 1948.

UCI was an affiliate of the University of London (Ike, 1976). According to Ibukun (1997), the UCI was saddled with a number of problems at inception ranging from rigid constitutional provisions, poor staffing, and low enrolment to high dropout rate. In April 1959, the Federal Government commissioned an inquiry (the Ashby Commission) to advise it on the higher education needs of the country for its first two decades. Before the submission of the report, the eastern region government established its own university at Nsukka (University of Nigeria, Nsukka in 1960). The implementation of the Ashby Report led to the establishment of University of Ife (now known as Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife) in 1962 by the then Western region, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria in 1962 by the Northern Region and University of Lagos in 1962 by the Federal Government. Babalola et al (2007) posited that the University College, Ibadan became a full-fledged university in 1962. This meant that UCI, Ibadan and University of Lagos became the first two federal universities in Nigeria while the other three remained regional. In 1970, the newly created Midwestern region opted for a university known as University of Benin. The six universities established during this period 1960-1970 are still referred to as first generation universities. Babalola et al (2007) remarked that during this period, universities in Nigeria were under the close surveillance of the then governments. Appointments of lay members of the council, and that of the vice chancellors, were politically motivated. In the third national development plan (1975-1980), the government established seven universities instead of the four proposed in the plan, and also took over the four regional universities in 1975. They were Universities of Calabar, Ilorin, Jos, Sokoto, Maiduguri, Portharcourt and Ado Bayero University, Kano- All these universities are known as second generation universities. The third generation universities were established between 1980 and early 1990. They are: the Federal University of Technology in Owerri, Makurdi, Yola, Akure and Bauchi. While state universities were found in Imo, Ondo, Lagos, Akwa-Ibom, Oyo, Cross River and Bendel now Edo. The fourth generation universities are those established between 1991 and the present date. They include the more state universities, Nigeria Open University and private universities (Ajayi and Ekundayo, 2008)

State of Universities in Nigeria: Public Perceptions/ Impressions

Professor Oyewole Tomori, Pioneer Vice Chancellor, Redeemer's University, Ogun State, Nigeria, in his interview with Punch Newspaper lamented and analyzed the problems of Nigeria's education sector. According to him:

“the state of the Nigerian education sector is not much different from that of other neglected and abandoned sectors of our national life - health, security, agriculture etc. Indeed, the education sector is in a worse state than those of the other sectors of our national life, having been maltreated by successive governments since independence, each government surpassing the predecessor in abusing our education. Today, our university education is nearing its worst state. If the standard of our education falls lower than this, it will become the national cesspool. Nigerian's education system has numerous gaps. These included: (i) basic infrastructure and resources-unsuitable school buildings and inadequate facilities, resulting in poor learning environment; (ii) poor quality and insufficient number of teaching staff at all levels; (iii) inconsistency in implementation of plans, and slothfulness in following through approved education policies; (iv) insufficient funding and a penchant for misusing approved funding” (Punch, 2012).

A former Executive Secretary, National University Commission NUC, Professor Peter Okebukola has stated how poor funding has affected the standard of university education in Nigeria. He declared:

“many Nigerian universities are like glorified secondary schools when compared with other universities in the world. The lack of funds ravaging the sector speaks volumes of why none of our universities is ranked among the first thousand in the world. In the universities, we have challenges regarding teachers' number and quality as large proportion of our lecturers does not have Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) degrees The Federal Government Committee on Needs Assessments revealed that these deficiencies are prevalent in many universities” (Vanguard, 2013).

It has been revealed that public universities have largely become a mockery of what citadels of learning should be. Guardian (2012) captured this and gave a report which exposed the rot in the universities in Nigeria. The following is the excerpt;

“physical facilities for teaching and learning in most of the universities are inadequate, dilapidated, over-stretched and improvised. Laboratories and workshops are old with inappropriate furnishing. Scanty and broken furniture and overcrowded power and water supply problems persist. Equipment and consumables are absent, inadequate and outdated. Kerosene stoves are being used as Bunsen burners. It was also discovered that less than 10 percent of the universities have video conferencing facility; less than 20 percent use interactive boards; more than 50 percent do not use public address systems in their lecture theatres and none of the universities have fully automated library resources. Infact, many library resources are found to be outdated while less than 35 percent are only partially automated and the universities are understaffed with academics. The report affirmed that there are 37, 504 academics in

the country's public universities, out of which 23,030 or 61 percent are employed in federal universities while 14,474 or 39 percent are in the state owned universities. The result is, very high teaching staff/students ratio in the universities. Instead of having 100 percent academics with doctorate degrees, only 43 percent have the qualifications, while 57 percent don't. There are only about 109,509 (representing 10.3 percent of total student population) on-campus hostels' bed spaces across all public universities. The lavatories in most of the hostels of universities are both inadequate and unfit for human use. This is not surprising given the average ratio of toilet to users of 1:20. The unhealthy condition of lavatories is forcing some students to use the bush and/or the surrounding compounds of the hostels as open toilets. Female students take their bath in the open because the bathrooms are in very poor condition. The hostels are infested with rodents. Laundries and common rooms have been converted into rooms where students live, and in these improvised rooms there is no limit to the number of occupants".

Iyayi (2013) stated that the federal government itself carried out a survey of universities in Nigeria and recognizes that the universities are actually in a pathetic state. According to him;

"It found out that the classrooms were grossly inadequate and could accommodate only about 30 percent of the number of students that needed to enter those classrooms; they went round and found students standing in their lecture theatres with other students writing on their backs; they found lectures going on under trees in some of the universities; they went to laboratory where they found students using kerosene stoves instead of Bunsen burners to conduct experiments; they found specimens being kept in **pure water bottles** instead of the appropriate places where such specimens should be kept. They found chemistry laboratories without water; they found people doing examinations called theory of practical and you will imagine what the practical ought to be. If you go round the universities, lecturers have generators in their offices to be able to work; some departments have two or three generators to be able to do their work. Is that what a university should be like? If you go to students' hostels, they are in a sorry state. Students live 12 in a room; they are like piggery; they now have what they called **short-puts**; they excrete in polythene bags and throw them through the windows into the fields because there are no toilets. If you walk round some of our universities you will find faeces sometimes in the classrooms because students have no place to use".

Ogu (2008), in his studies of the "Challenges facing Nigerian University, noted that only about 30 percent of Nigerian university student population has adequate access to classrooms, lecture theaters, laboratories, workshops and libraries. These infrastructure deficiencies and inadequacies in the Nigerian universities are areas that pose hindrance to learning and research work. A good number of Nigerian university are offering technological education program. The question is how many of these universities offering these technological programmes have the basic infrastructure to run the programme. For example, in most universities offering computer courses, students graduate without touching a computer. Thus it suffices to state here that the dearth of infrastructure in our universities is sickening and runs short of an ideal university academic environment.

A former Minister of State for Education Dr. Jerry Agada also described the state of university in Nigeria. He decried;

"some of the things I have found to be responsible for the poor standard of education in the country are factors such as poor funding, poor facilities and lack of quality teachers. UNESCO said that in every country's budget, 26 percent of the budget should be expended on education. Do we have that in Nigerian? Sometimes you hear that 11 percent of the annual budget is taken to education but at the end of the day, do they release the money? At the end of the budgeting year, you will discover that not all that was allocated that actually got released for the sector. Therefore, you will see that things continue to go bad instead of improving. If you go to the universities, some are like glorified secondary schools. You need standard laboratories, standard libraries; do we have them in our universities. It is not just enough to have a building with a sign board that says University of this or that and you enter it and you come out, then you say you are a graduate (Leadership, 2013)."

Kukah (2013) also decried the state of Nigerian Universities as he noted that university system in Nigeria has been utterly neglected by the government for many years in many areas among which are underfunding and assault on academic freedom. He said that through the manipulation of the choices of members of governing councils, the universities had been reduced to extensions of the fiefdoms of those who run the affairs of the country. From the enviable Olympian heights where the early Nigerian universities stood in the first ten or more years of their existence, they have all tumbled down to the murky grounds of our national life.

The State of Nigerian Universities: Empirical Investigation

Until 1960s university educational system was properly administered. Students lived like kings, the academic staff was a rich mix of white and black and the universities were relatively standard. The quality of graduates

was high and certificates awarded by the universities were equal to those awarded by universities in the Western Worlds. However, things went really sour in the late 1970s, and education was neglected; and the quality of graduates has since been compromised, affecting every facet of the society. Demand for higher education in Nigeria increased during the oil boom of the 1970s and the government continued to create more universities without correspondingly increasing the allocation to this sector of education. The establishment of universities largely went out of the fundamental principles designed to guide the path of university. It was now based on the discretion of the politicians and the principles of the politics. The following data analysis shows that funding for education has not been commensurate with the demand of the education sector.

Table 1 shows the report of the dwindling percentages of federal government budgetary allocation to education, between 1999 and 2013. It was 8.3% in 2000, 5.1% in 2002, 6.1% in 2007, 6.4% in 2010 and 8.7% in 2013. According to Faggae (2013), on the average, government has only spent 8.37% of its budget to education from 1999 – 2013. He argued that if you compare Nigerian education with Ghana that has been allocating over 30% of its budgets to education or South Africa with over 40%, there has never been a time when Nigerian budgetary allocation to education was over 13%. This shows that the Nigeria government over the years has not been meeting the United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) recommendation of 26% of the total budget allocation to education sector. The condition becomes more pathetic when Nigeria's Gross National Product (GNP) allocation to education is compared with those of less affluent African Nations that allocate greater percentages. Table 2 shows the percentage of GNP spending on education by some African countries compared to Nigeria. It is clear from the table that while country like Malawi could allocate 5.4% of its GNP to education, South Africa 7.9%, Cote d' Voire 5.0% and Kenya 6.5%, Nigeria could only allocate 0.76% of its GNP to education. All these show that government priority to education in terms of funding is really very low in Nigeria. This has been the veritable reason the universities in Nigeria have been ranked very low in both African continent and the World. Table 3 shows the position of the best Nigerian Universities in the universities ranking in Sub-Saharan Africa, Africa and the world. Universities in Nigeria that were once highly rated were ranked very low in Africa. The university that ranked first in Nigeria was ranked 5, 484th in the world.

The analysis shows a gross inadequacy of academic staff compare to the number of students in the universities. For instance, there are about sixty two thousand, five hundred and twenty eight (62,528) students in university of Abuja with only five hundred and fourteen (514) academic staff giving academic-student ratio of 1:121. In the case of Lagos State University, Ojo, there are about ninety thousand eight hundred and eighty five (90,885) students with seven hundred and ninety five (795) academics giving an academic-student – ratio of 1:114. In National Open University of Nigeria, Lagos, there are fifty seven thousand seven hundred and fifty nine (57,759) students with only one hundred and fifty nine (159) academics giving academic-student ratio of 1:363. The overall analysis shows that the average national academic ratio is 1:40 in Nigerian universities. These ratios are very high and at great variance with the International Best Practice and Nigeria's National Benchmark Minimum Standard and the National University Commission recommendations per programme.

Quality university education is a foundation of adequate funding. In Nigeria, funds for university education have become traditionally sacrificed at the alter of other less important issues. For instance, a national Newspaper disclosed that government allocates about 25% of National budget to Natonal Assembly alone. Nigerian Federal Legislators received an annual salary of about \$189,000 equivalent of thirty million naira (#30 million), which is 116 time the country's gross domestic product (GDP) per person (table 4). Table 4 also shows that the Nigerian legislators beat their counterparts in wealthy nations like Britain who takes \$105,400 yearly as well as those France (\$85,900), South Africa (\$104,000), and Saudi Arabia (64,000). It is important to note that while the salary of a Nigerian Lawmaker is 116 times of the country's GDP per person that of a British Member of Parliament is just 2.7 times. Although Australia Lawmakers, with \$201,200 annual salary receive higher amounts compared to Nigerian legislators, but their salaries are only 3 times their country's GDP per person. Unfortunately, a professor in Nigerian Universities who toil all their lives to dig deep into the mines of knowledge for the advancement of society receives parsimonious salary of about #450000 a month.

Table 1: Federal Government Budgetary Allocation to Education Sector in Nigeria

S/N	YEAR	Allocation(Billion Naira)	Percentage (%)
1	1999	23.0	11.2
2	2000	44.2	8.3
3	2001	39.9	7.0
4	2002	100.2	5.1
5	2003	64.8	11.8
6	2004	72.2	7.8
7	2005	92.6	8.3
8	2006	166.6	8.7
9	2007	137.5	6.1
10	2008	210.0	13.0
11	2009	183.4	7
12	2010	249.1	6.4
13	2011	356.49	7.5
14	2012		8.4
15	2013	426.53	8.7
Average			8.37

Source: ISDMG, 2013

Table 2: Percentages (%) Spending on Education by Some African Countries Compared to Nigeria

Country	% GNP Spent on Education
Angola	4.9
Cote d' Voire	5.0
Ghana	4.4
Kenya	6.5
South Africa	7.9
Malawi	5.4
Mozambique	4.1
Nigeria	0.76%
Tanzania	3.4
Uganda	2.6

Source: Extracted from Lawal M.B. (2011)

Table 3: Nigerian Universities Ranking in Sub-Saharan, Africa and the World

Universities	Nigeria Ranking	Sub-Saharan Africa	African Ranking	World Raking
University of Ilorin	1 st	31 st	55 th	5,484
Obafemi Awolowo University	2 nd	34 th	61 th	5,756
University of Jos	3 rd	36 th	66 th	5,882
University of Lagos	4 th	3 th	68 th	5,936
University of Benin	5 th	42 nd	77 th	6,324
University of Ibadan	6 th	43 rd 79 th	79 th	6,425
University of Nigeria, Nsukka	7 th	49 th	99 th	7,196

Source: www.webometrics.org (July, 2010)

Table 4: Basic Salary of Lawmakers of Selected Countries in the World, 2013

S/N	Countries	Salaries(\$)	GDP Per Person
1	Nigeria	189000	116 times the Country's GDP per Person
2	Kenya	74500	76 per Person
3	Ghana	46500	
4	Indonesia	65000	
5	South Africa	104100	
6	Brazil	157600	
7	Thailand	43800	
8	India	11200	
9	Italy	182000	
10	Bangladesh	4000	
11	Isreal	114800	
13	Hong Kong	130700	
14	United States	174000	
15	Japan	149700	
16	Singapore	154000	
17	Australia	201200	3 times the Country's GDP per Person
18	Canada	154000	
19	New Zealand	112500	
20	Germany	119500	
21	Ireland	120400	
22	Britain	105400	2.7 times the Country's GDP per Person
23	Pakistan	3500	
24	Saudi Arabia	64000	
25	Malaysia	25300	
26	France	85900	
27	Sweden	99300	
28	Sri Lanka	5100	
29	Spain	43900	
30	Norway	138000	

Source: Culled from Daily Trust, Monday July 22, 2013; 5

Underfunding: A Grand Conspiracy against Public Universities

Senator Basheer Garba Mohammed representing Kano Central sponsored a bill in 2012 mandating the children of Nigerian Government Officials to attend Public Schools. Although the bill has not seen the light of the day, it was prepared essentially to discourage public officials from sending their children and wards to school abroad except for courses not offered in the Nigerian institutions. The aim is therefore to get the public servants whose duty it is to make education work in the country, to make the sacrifice needed to revamp the sector.

Experience shows that it is only past and serving Political Office Holders, Political Appointees, Political Contractors, Private Sector Businessmen who defraud the state. It is only these and the high ranking Public Servants and all who walk the corridors of power at the Federal, State and Local Governments' level that go or send their children Overseas for studies. For instance, around the last week of September 2010, a serving minister of State for Education confessed that his daughter was an undergraduate in a Ghanaian University. Once a Nigerian secures a political office, he makes haste to send his family members abroad to enjoy the social amenities the provision of which is anathema to him (Ikechukwu, 2010). Lately, the US Department of Education announced that Nigeria has the highest number of foreign students in its Universities (Punch, 2010). About 20,000 Nigerians are in UK tertiary institutions alone and remitting over a quarter of a trillion naira from Nigeria annually to that country. The figure of Nigerian students in UK is expected to increase to 30,000 by 2015 and of course the corresponding remittances. For African countries, the story is not different. A total of 71,000 Nigerians students are in Ghana and their remittances calculated by the Central Bank of Nigeria are to the huge sum of one hundred and fifty (150) billion naira annually (Daily Trust, 2012). Yet Nigeria's budget for education in 2011 was not up to the one hundred and fifty (150) billion naira which Nigerian students spend in a year in Ghanaian universities In the Republic of Benin, there is a University whose 7,000 students' strength has 5,000 Nigerians (Punch, 2010). When the figures of Nigerians in USA, Canada, Korea, China, India and other parts of the world are computed, the remittance by Nigerian students to these countries will be in trillions of naira. These flows of fund outside and away from the educational systems because Nigerians seeks educational products outside the country is a huge **capital flight** that will not happen if the government can fund and restructure the

university system in the country. Thus, it can be categorically stated that the lack of political will by the governments of Nigeria to adequately fund university education is the reason the country's Universities not in world class. This is why Erinosh (2007), stated that there is a **grand conspiracy against public universities**. According to him, this **conspiracy** was hatched when government did not see the need to fund University education in Nigeria. Hence, it opened the gate of higher education to private providers and began to conduct a campaign of calumny in order to discredit the quality of public universities. The protagonists of the **conspiracy** have sought to foist on us the argument that private universities hold the key to development. However, these protagonists failed to consider the historical antecedents in the United State, United Kingdom, Canada, or South Africa where the governments have historically been the principal mover of higher/university education. They refused/failed to appreciate the fact that our former colonial masters (i.e. the British) and these other countries are not promoting private universities at the expense of the public. They failed to realize that the best Universities in the United Kingdom (Cambridge and Oxford), Canada (Toronto and McGill) and Australia (Melbourne and Sydney) are public and not private universities. The protagonists of this **grand conspiracy** refused to ask the following questions: why are these countries not privatizing Oxford or Cambridge or Toronto or McGill? Why are governments of South Africa and Ghana in Africa still keeping their institutions like the Universities of Cape Town and Wits in the former and University of Ghana and Kwame Nkrumah University, Kumasi in the latter in remarkably good shape and standard to the extent that they are the only one attracting the thousands or hundreds of students from Nigeria, North America and Europe? Anywhere in the world, Private Universities can only complement rather than replace Public Universities. Any attempt to destroy the public universities by starving them of fund will amount to destroying the educational system and by extension, the entire nation. That will only mean producing substantial number of doctors that kill people; teachers that are incompetent; architects that design buildings that are likely to collapse.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The United Nations Declaration of Human Rights has it that everyone has the right to education and that higher education shall equally be accessible to all on the basis of merit. This simply means that education is a public good and government must own, fund and manage university education. Governments of Nigeria have not been seeing university education as a public good, they have been seeing Nigerian universities as industries to be privatized and deregulated. This is the reason governments are underfunding the universities. Underfunding is tantamount to deregulation and there has been an indirect call of the and by the government to privatize the Nigerian universities. It is important to recall that the World Bank and IMF at various times have come up to Nigerian governments with a doleful projects tending towards deregulation of university education. It must be articulated at this juncture therefore that deregulation or privatization amount to the sale of knowledge to the highest bidder. It is important to note that deregulation of universities is a negation of university education quality. This means that quality education and quality access based on merit cannot be guaranteed under a deregulated university education system in Nigeria because the private providers have to lower the standards for the attraction of customers which is already a commonplace in most of the private schools particularly the private universities. Categorically, private individuals or corporate bodies are into education enterprises not for its values and its dispositions but for profit maximization. Therefore, the government of Nigeria must stop **its grand conspiracy against public universities in Nigeria** and begin to fund them as required. The governments of Nigeria must stop the continuous or the creation of more universities to enable them concentrate on the funding, upgrading and the development of the existing ones. The funding of the universities should be in a manner in which all the tiers of government could contribute in agreed proportions to the running of all universities

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