

Impact of Economic Recession on Adult Participation in Academic Programmes: The Case of Sandwich Programme of University Of Port Harcourt

DR. OKANEZI, BRIGHT

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATIONS. FACULTY OF EDUCATION, UNIVERSITY OF PORT HARCOURT, PORT HARCOURT, NIGERIA

DR. HANACHOR, MELVINS ENWUVESI

DEPARTMENT OF ADULT AND NON-FORMAL EDUCATION, FACULTY OF EDUCATION, UNIVERSITY OF PORT HARCOURT, PORT HARCOURT, NIGERIA

Abstract

This paper examined the impact of economic recession on adult learners participation in academic programmes: the case of Sandwich Programme of University of Port Harcourt. The population for the study was 919 Year1 and Year2 adult learners in the Sandwich Programme. The sample size used was 551 participants which represents 60% of the entire population. Data were collected through questionnaire. The research questions were analysed using percentage and mean statistical tools while Pearson Product Moment Correlation Statistic was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 alpha levels. The findings revealed that salary slash, non-payment of salaries, rise in price of goods and services, low economic activities are features of economic recession. Also many of those that were granted admission in 2015/2016 session did not turn up due to recession. It also revealed that Departmental students' enrolment was retrogressive in 2015/2016 in comparison to 2014/2015 session. The study further revealed that recession affects students' rate of attending lectures occasioned by late resumption, inadequacy of upkeeps, lack of transport fare for inter-campus shuttle and weakness resulting from underfeeding or non-feeding. Also acquisition of reading materials is affected by recession. Based on the above findings, recommendations made *inter alia* include that economic summits be convoked where professionals would proffer solution to recession; Each of the three tiers of government should make their budgets to be people-oriented; diversify the economy; structures should be put in place to enhance upward social mobility vis-a-vis increased adult participation in academic programmes.

Introduction:

During the first quarter of 2016, some economists made some analysis of Nigerian economy and come up with the idea that it was titling negatively downwards. One of those with this view is Ekpo (2016: 42) who posits that "Nigerian economy is in a recession based on two consecutive negative GDP growth rates of -0.36 and -2.06% in the 1st and 2nd quarters of 2016". This negative trend of Nigerian economy became the order of the day as is found in the mass media. Unfortunately, this downturn in the economy was misconstrued as a criticism against the incumbent government. The government in their response repeatedly denied the existence of recession in the country. While the government turned deaf ears to these observations by economics analysts, the recessionary trend became more conspicuous to all and sundry as the prices of essential commodities were sky-rocketed. As the poor economic situation bit hard on majority of the Nigerian populace murmurings, became more audible. The government at this juncture admitted that the country is in recession. In support of the above assertion, Okoro (2016:9) stated that "after several months of denial, the government finally agreed that the Nigerian economy is in a period of recession". What then is recession?

According to Hornby (2000:975) recession is "a difficult time for the economy of a country when there is less trade and industrial activity than usual and more people are unemployed". Also National Bureau of Economic research as (cited in John-Bray, 2016: 2-3) defined recession as "a significant decline in economic activity spread across the economy, lasting more than six months, normally visible in real Gross Domestic Product (GDP), including employment, industrial production, wholesale and retail sales".

The two definitions above further confirm the claim that Nigeria is experiencing economic recession. It is no longer a hidden fact that the prices of essential goods like foodstuff such as rice, tomato, salt, garri, vegetable oil, palm oil, fish, meat, bread, beverages etc have gone so high that the average Nigerian can no longer afford. Similarly the prices of other goods and services have also gone up. Such goods as clothing (textile products), petroleum products, cosmetics as well as building materials are all very expensive. In the same vein, the costs of services like medicals (hospital bills) are relatively high. The situation has led many Nigerians to adjust their belts to the last possible point. No wonder the Nigerian Senate President, Senator Bukola Saraki (cited in Itua 2017:2) stated unequivocally that "Nigerians are facing widespread hunger, insecurity and inflation". This statement no doubt raises the profile of economic recession in Nigeria. In view of the above, the mass media is no longer dominated by whether there is recession or not rather solutions are being proffered to

get Nigeria out of the mess. For instance Ngwu (2017:18) stated thus

As the debate on how best to rescue our economy from recession rages on, the academia has been most surprisingly and lamentably very silent. Are they also in a kind of intellectual recession? Given the number of Universities in Nigeria, the reverse should be the case PP18.

The above notwithstanding, Nigeria is not the only nation that is experiencing recession, other countries have experienced it too. For instance, the United States of America had experienced as many as 47 recessions since 1790 till date. Greece has also experienced great depression.

It is therefore pertinent to explore a little on the causes of recession especially with regards to Nigeria. Indeed some months ago, Nigerians especially the pressure groups and government of the day have been in war of words on the causes of the recession, with the ruling party or government and the opposition party or minority are blaming each other. The incumbent administration blames the previous regime for not saving for the rainy day, during the oil boom; On the other hand, the opposition blames the incumbent administration of their failure to fulfil their electioneering campaign promises, which include payment of allowances to the unemployed, provision of employment, provision of food on the tables of Nigerians, electricity, security of lives and property as well as making the Nigerian Naira (₦) equal to United States Dollar (\$). Meanwhile other well meaning Nigerians have advanced reasons for the recession. Some attributed it to unbridled habit of consuming foreign goods which is seen as sign of status symbol in the society. Given credence to the above assertion, Okoro (2016) posits that:

This unbridled craze led to the importation of just about everything from food, clothes, shoes, wine to books, gin, furniture and many others, even when these things could be produced locally. Our preference for foreign goods also affected the Small and Medium Enterprises, SMEs which should have helped the economy to the path of growth PP9.

The above excerpt shows that Nigeria imports virtually everything which is not healthy for the economy. For a country to have a favourable balance of trade and payment, she should export more goods and services. Anything short of that portends unfavourable balance of payment and adverse economic situation. Apart from the above, it is said that the cost of running the government is so high at the detriment of producing goods and services for the populace. The federal government has 580 agencies. They are numerous and its sustainability is capital intensive (Taiwo-Obalonye 2106). Further more on the causes of recession in Nigeria, Ekpo (2016) posits that:

The recession is due to policy inconsistency, the conspicuous consumption habits of the ruling elite and their appetite for imported luxury items, the removal of subsidy, the owing of salaries to millions of workers across the land, the sharp depreciation of the naira and its intended consequences, as well as the over-reliance on an exogenous source of revenue (oil) to finance development PP42.

The above reasons or causes of recession are all convincing. It is factual that there is always causes and effect of every event, action or inaction.

The causes of recession are spelt out and naturally some effects would arise there from. Recessionary economy affects everybody irrespective of the sector. Thus while it affects the working class, it also has impact on the unemployed as well as students. What is unknown is its effects on sandwich students who double as both working class and students. This uncertainty about how recessionary economy affects adults' learning in academic programmes provoked the decision to carry out this study.

Statement of the Problem:

In the contemporary world where knowledge is revered, people are realising the value of education and as such much interest is being developed for it. Much people enrol for education on full time programmes. However, those who cannot enrol for full time due to their job or other circumstances go for the alternatives such as part time or sandwich programmes. The Sandwich programmes of the University of Port Harcourt had always improved its policies and programmes to be in line with current global best practices. The Sandwich students of the University had also kept pace with the positive trend of the University. The resultant effect is that the sandwich students of university of Port Harcourt are known for their diligence which manifest in all ramifications. Infact they are known for promptness in resumption, payment of school fees and good performance in academics.

While these noble performances are commendable, it is expected that the students should maintain this tempo. Contrary to expectations, it is alleged that both enrolment and general participation in academic programmes are too low in comparison with the previous session. This therefore becomes worrisome. What then could be the cause of the down turn in the general adult participation in academic programmes of the sandwich students in 2015/2016 session? Could it be attributed to the recession in Nigeria? It is therefore the quest to answer these questions that this research was undertaken.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to determine the impact of economic recession on adult learners of Sandwich programme of University of Port Harcourt in 2015/2016 session. Specifically, the objectives of the study were to:

1. Find out the features of economic recession
2. Ascertain if all those who were granted admission for 2015/2016 session turned up for the programme
3. Find out the Departmental students' enrolment progression in 2014/2015 and 2015/2016 sessions
4. Determine whether economic recession had impact on students' attendance to lectures in 2016 session
5. Find out the extent to which economic recession affects students' rate of acquisition of reading materials and other up keeps.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to enhance the achievement of the study objectives:

1. What are the features of economic recession?
2. What percentage of those granted admission for 2015/2016 session turned up for the programme?
3. What is the Departmental students' enrolment retrogression in 2015/2016 session when compared with 2014/2015 session?
4. To what extent did economic recession affect students' rate of attendance to lectures in 2015/2016 session?
5. To what extent did the recession affect students' rate acquisition of reading materials and other up keeps?

Hypotheses

HO₁ There is no significant relationship between features of economic recession and rate of attendance to lectures among adult learners of Sandwich Programme of University of Port Harcourt.

HO₂ There is no significant relationship between features of economic recession and acquisition of reading materials and other up-keeps among adult learners of Sandwich Programme of University of Port Harcourt.

Methodology

The study adopted the descriptive survey design. The population for the study is 919 Year1 and Year2 adult participants in the Sandwich programme of University of Port Harcourt. The sample size used for the study is 551 which represent 60% of the entire population. Stratified random sampling technique as well as simple random technique was adopted. Structured questionnaire designed by the researchers was the instrument used for data collection. It was a 12 item instrument designed in a four point likert scale responses of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). The instrument had two sections. Section 'A' elicited the respondents' bio-data while section 'B' elicited information on the research questions. The researchers personally administered the instrument and also retrieved them accordingly. The secondary data collected were analyzed using Mean statistical tool for the research questions and Pearson Product Moment Correlation Statistic for the hypotheses. The Primary data were collected from the University of Port Harcourt Sandwich office as well as the Departments in Faculty of Education.

Results

Research Question 1: What are the features of economic recession?

Table 1: Response and mean score analysis of the features of economic recession

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Total	\bar{x}	Decision
	Do you agree that the following are features of economic recession							
1.	Salary slash	216 (864)	190 (570)	58 (116)	87 (87)	551 (1637)	3.0	Agree
2.	Non-payment of Salaries	189 (756)	191 (573)	94 (188)	77 (77)	551 (1594)	2.9	Agree
3.	Rise in price of goods and services	238 (952)	162 (486)	65 (130)	86 (86)	551 (1654)	3.0	Agree
4.	Low economic Activities	176 (704)	198 (594)	79 (158)	98 (98)	551 (1554)	2.8	Agree
	Grand mean						2.9	

Table 1 above shows a grand mean of 2.9 and also shows that all the items in the table were accepted as features

of economic recession.

Research Question 2: What percentage of those granted admission for 2015/2016 session turned up for the programme?

Table 2: Percentage analysis of those granted admission for 2015/2016 session and total number that turned up for the programme as contained in the record from Sandwich office.

Departments	Total No. Granted Admission for 2015/2016 Session	Total No. that turned up for 2015/2016 session	% of those Granted Admission that turned up for the 2015/2016 session
Educational Foundations (EDF)	36	34	94.44
Educational Management (EDM)	154	92	59.74
Educational Curriculum(EDC)	69	55	79.71
Kinetic & Health Education (KHE)	14	14	100.00
Educational Psychology (EDP)	161	114	70.81
Grand Total	434	309	71.20

Table 1 above shows that approximately 71% of those that were granted admission turned up for 2015/2016 session PNCE Sandwich Programme while as much as approximately 29% did not.

Research Question 3: What are the Departmental Students' enrolment retrogression in 2015/2016 and 2014/2015 sessions?

Table 3: Retrogression analysis of Departmental Students' enrolment in 2015/2016 and 2014/2015 sessions

Departments	Enrolment 2014/2015 session	Enrolment 2015/2016 session	Retrogression Diff.	Retrogression % Diff.
EDF	70	34	36	34.6%
EDM	117	92	25	12%
EDC	193	55	138	55.6%
KHE	36	14	22	44%
EDP	194	114	80	26.0%
GRAND TOTAL	610	309	301	32.8%

Table 3 above shows the differences in the departmental enrolment figures for 2014/2015 and 2015/2016 session with their percentages

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Total	\bar{x}	Decision
	Do you agree that the recession affected students' attendance to lectures in the following ways:							
1.	Late resumption	185 (740)	207 (621)	92 (184)	67 (67)	551 (1612)	2.9	Agree
2.	Lack of transport fare for inter campus shuttle	172 (688)	296 (888)	62 (124)	21 (21)	551 (1721)	3.1	Agree
3.	Weakness as a result of under feeding	201 (804)	233 (699)	79 (158)	38 (38)	551 (1699)	3.1	Agree
4.	Inadequacy of up keeps	194 (776)	254 (762)	44 (88)	59 (59)	551 (1685)	3.1	Agree
	Grand mean						3.1	

Research Question 4: To what extent did economic recession affect students' rate of attending lectures.

Table 4: Responses and mean score analysis of how economic recession affect students' rate of attendance to lectures

Table 4 above shows a grand mean of 3.1 which indicates that economic recession affects students' rate of attendance to lectures

Research Question 5: To what extent did the recession affect students' rate of acquisition of reading material and other upkeeps?

Table 5: Responses and mean score analysis of the extent to which economic recession affect students' rate of acquisition of reading material and other upkeeps

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Total	\bar{x}	Decision
	Do you agree that the recession affected students' rate of acquisition of reading materials and other upkeeps in the following ways?							
1.	Salary slash	210 (840)	234 (702)	63 (126)	45 (45)	551 (1713)	3.1	Agree
2.	Non-payment of Salaries	156 (624)	304 (912)	38 (76)	53 (53)	551 (1665)	3.0	Agree
3.	Rise in price of goods and services	187 (748)	193 (579)	81 (162)	90 (90)	551 (1579)	2.9	Agree
4.	Low economic Activities	225 (900)	207 (621)	46 (92)	73 (73)	551 (1686)	3.1	Agree
	Grand mean						3.0	

Table 5 above has a grand mean of 3.0. it also indicates that all the items in the table were accepted as how economic recession affect students' rate of acquisition of reading materials and other upkeeps.

Hypotheses

H₀₁:

Variables	N	Df	Sign Level	r-cal	r-tab	Decision	
Features of Economic Recession	Students rate of attendance to lectures	551	549	0.05	0.304	0.195	Reject Null.

At 549 degree of freedom and 0.05 level of significance, the calculated value of "r" is 0.304 while "r" table value is 0.195. Since r-cal is greater than r-table, the Null hypothesis is therefore rejected. Alternate hypothesis is accepted which means there is significant relationship between economic recession and student rate of attendance to lectures.

H₀₂

Variables	N	Df	Sign level	r-cal	r-tab	Decision	
Features of Economic Recession	Students rate of acquisition of reading materials and the other upkeeps	551	549	0.05	0.470	0.195	Reject Null.

At 549 degree of freedom and 0.05 level of significance, the calculated value of "r" is 0.470 while "r" table value is 0.195. Since r-cal is greater than r-table, the null hypothesis is therefore rejected. Alternate hypothesis is accepted which means there is significant relationship between economic recession and student rate of attendance to lectures.

Discussion:

The study found out that the features of economic recession *inter alia* include non-payment of salaries, salary slash, rise in price of goods and services as well as low economic activities. The finding is in consonance with experiences in Nigeria. Presently some states in Nigeria cannot pay salaries owed their workers and pensioners. As a way out of the problem of inability to pay workers' salaries, the Federal Government of Nigeria has shared the Paris Club refund money among the federating states to enhance their offsetting of the backlog of debts. Of course, those owed which students are inclusive would actually find it difficult to sponsor themselves in their academic programmes. Also several companies retrenched workers which led to untold hardship. Meanwhile some employers or companies negotiated with trade unions for salary slash. This equally affects students'/adults' participating in academic programmes. Rise in price of goods and services have also been confirmed as one of the experiences in Nigeria.

The result of the analysis shows that not all those that were granted admission for 2015/2016 session turned up for the programme. For example in EDM only 92 out of 154 turned up for the programme; and also in EDP 114

out of 161 turned up for the programme. The above finding corroborates with the fact that there is economic recession. It is also factual that in recessionary economies, the citizens consider physiological needs first before attending to or addressing other needs. Abraham Maslow's hierarchical theory of needs is a typical example of what the finding of the study turned out.

Also the study reveals that the Departmental students' enrolment in 2015/2016 session in comparison to that of 2014/2015 session is conspicuously retrogressive. This is another manifestation of the impact of economic recession.

The citizens of an economy under recession invariably may not be rich enough or have savings to enrol for an academic programme. It takes only few who are determined to venture into academic programme during recession because education is capital intensive. Besides, Nigeria's misery index has been pushed up by the recession. Misery index is a measure of the economic well-being of citizens of a specified economy, computed by taking the sum of the unemployment rate and the inflation rate for a given period. Nigeria's rising Misery Index manifests in the increased unemployment, poverty rate, and loss of global competitiveness and extremely high exchange rate of ₦310/\$1. Since the Misery Index as at December, 2016 stood at 49.5%, Nigeria is said to be the fourth most miserable country in the world (Okorochoa, 2016). It is much more understandable that the unemployed are facing difficult times and as such may not enrol in academic programmes.

In relation to the above, the study reveals that economic recession affects students' rate of attending lectures in the 2015/2016 session. This finding is true because lecture rooms are not located in the hostels. The students board vehicles (buses or taxis) to lecture venues. Under the poor economic situation, the students sometimes cannot afford transport fare especially in a multi-campus institution like University of Port Harcourt. The institution has the University Park, the Delta Park, the Choba Park, the University Demonstration Secondary School and sometimes uses the Olobo Premier College, Choba which is located along the East-West Road for Sandwich programme. Also rate of attendance may be affected because students find it difficult to resume school early owing to some states' delay in payment of salaries. This inability of some states to pay their workers' salaries has caused untold hardship to some sandwich students. More so, some determined students who took to trekking most often arrive the lecture hall after the lecture has started. No wonder it is said that recession is highly frustrating.

Lastly, the study revealed that the recession affected students' rate of buying books and other up keeps. This finding is supported by the observation of Nasir El-Rufai cited in Taiwo-Obalonye (2016:41) where he stated that "if in your own household, your salary is slashed by 80 percent, what will you do?" He explains that this is what Nigeria is going through. Our revenues have reduced by about 40 to 60 percent if you compare it to what it was in 2014. In the same vein, Okoro (2016:9) states that "it is apparent that lifestyles of many people have changed dramatically due to the loss of purchasing power occasioned by the recession". More so, the prices of goods in the market have gone up which invariably would affect purchasing power of students and Nigerians generally. Dickson-Oyetayo (2016:25) posits that "the harsh economic realities, like in the prices of goods and services, especially food items, erratic electricity supply and inability of most states to pay their workers' salaries... combined to diminish the expectations of Nigerians of a better celebration during the last yuletide – season".

Conclusion

Recession as a difficult time for the economy of a country affects corporate bodies in the country as well as individuals or citizens. Adults participating in academic programmes are also affected in no small measure because the features of recession such as salary slash, non-payment of salaries, rise in price of goods and services are being experienced and at the same time, the participants are faced with educational requirement such as school fees, reading materials, upkeeps etc. This invariably causes late resumption, late registration, irregularity in attending lectures etc which culminate in general low adult participation in the Sandwich degree programme.

Recommendations

1. The government should muster the political will to make and implement the right decisions
2. Economic summits/conferences should be convoked where professionals could use as fora to proffer solutions to the recessionary economy.
3. The government should put in place favourable conditions for foreign direct investment such as promise to treat them fairly, possibility of repatriating profits, and that the rule of law is supreme.
4. Structures should be put in place to avail students opportunity to move upwards in lieu of being relatively static.
5. There is the need to improve the country's misery index as manifested in unemployment, poverty rate and high exchange rate of ₦310/\$1
6. State governments should make their budgets participatory and people-oriented

7. Diversifying of economy
8. Reorientate the Nigerian people to patronize made in Nigerian goods which would reduce importation and correct balance of trade negative.

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