Research on Humanities and Social Sciences www.iiste.org
ISSN (Paper)2224-5766 ISSN (Online)2225-0484 (Online)
Vol.6, No.20, 2016

Sustainable Funding of Higher Education in Nigerian Universities in the Austere Period: Institutional Analysis

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Abstract
In spite of the importance of higher education to national development, the problem of underfunding has constituted the bane to accessing quality education in Nigeria. Over the years there has been general outcry about poor quality of higher education despite government allocations to financing education. The trend has fallen short of UNESCO recommendations and as a result tertiary institutions have been encouraged to source for alternative funding mechanisms. The study aimed at investigating the funding of Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki in order to ascertain major sources of financial inflows. Three research questions guided the study. Descriptive research design was adopted for the study. The area of the study was Ebonyi State University Abakaliki. The population of this study made up of six thousand seven hundred and twenty one (6721) academic and non-academic staff of the university under investigation. The sample of the study comprised of two hundred (200) academic and non-academic staff purposively selected for the study based on qualification and experience. The instrument for data collection was structured questionnaire entitled "Sources of Revenue Inflows into Funding of Ebonyi State University" (SRIFESU). The instrument was subjected to face-validation by three specialists-one from Measurement and Evaluation and two from the Educational Administration and Planning all in EBSU, Abakaliki. The reliability coefficient of 0.66, 0.69, 0.70 and the general reliability index of 0.68 were obtained. The questionnaire was administered and by the researcher. The data collected were answered using mean and standard deviation. The results showed that the state government is the major financier of EBSU, Abakaliki. It showed that university management complement through students' school fees and levies. It also showed that the university funds the school through proceeds from consultancy services. It also showed that the extent the university explored external grants and international services are low among others. The study recommended among others that the university should explore other alternative funding mechanisms to improve on revenue generation to avoid over dependence on state allocation.
Keywords: university sustainability, funding, higher education, Nigeria universities, austere times

Introduction
Generally speaking, investment in higher education revolves around capital and recurrent expenditure which are considered cogent to academic survival of higher institutions in this period of global competition. Funding of Nigeria higher education is also imperative because of the costs involved in maintaining an institution. Nwadiani (2000) rightly noted that continuing cost of governance is ascribed to increasing higher educational bills of many countries particularly developing countries such as Nigeria. It needs not be overemphasized that education occupies unique position among the sectors of the Nigerian economy. Government has always realized and acknowledged that the business of providing quality education to her citizens particularly at higher level is a huge investment to manpower development and a pre-requisite to economic development. To this end, government therefore over the years has been allocating substantial amounts of money for the financing of education sector. This is why the government (federal and state) is regarded as the major financier of higher education in Nigeria.

However, Nigerian government for sometime has been battling with providing adequate funds to manage higher education more effectively. This is because the education sector has been characterized by poor funding and poor management. For instance, Ekundayo (2008) argued that the Nigerian government over the years has not been able to meet the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) recommendation of 26% of the total budget allocation to education sector despite the government's allocation towards education. As further posited by Nwadiani (2000) government hardly recognize education as an area of investment. As a result of the lean budgetary allocation for education in Nigeria, infrastructural facilities in schools have been grossly inadequate while most of those available are in a state of disrepair. Olu, Omiyale and Adebola (2015) attributed this financial squeeze not just to the social and economic depression of the country but also to the country's desire to be integrated into the modern knowledge economy with an increased enrolment without adequate planning. High social demand for higher education also has consistently created financial burden on the government in trying to meet the challenging financial needs. Students' enrolments have been on the increase without commensurate infrastructural development. Other vital learning facilities are in short supply in many of the tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Ekundayo (2008) observed that most of the capital projects being undertaken to meet the increasing number of students have been abandoned due to lack of funds. Corroborating, Adeniyi (2008) observed that the subvention being received from government for financing education is grossly inadequate in meeting the financial burden. This precarious situation of poor funding has led to dysfunctional and unethical practices in the system. In view of this, Hartnett (2000) suggested that more creative and adaptable financial strategies are needed in order for Nigerian universities to offset the declining educational quality, resource use efficiency and learning effectiveness that now confronts them. There are other sources such as the internally generated revenue but the bulk of funds are from the government.

Unfortunately, issues surrounding adequate funding of higher education in Nigeria have been under criticism for being inefficient and ineffective. The trend of funding by the government in terms of budgetary allocation has not been consistent and steady. It has been fluctuating and more importantly considered to be grossly inadequate. The financial proportion as observed has not been more than 13% of the total budget, which is grossly inadequate in meeting the financial demand from educational sector. Furthermore, Adeniyi (2008) reiterated the problem of poor financing and poor management of the meager funds made available to institutions contributes to the existing misalignment between the priorities of the government and the objectives of higher education. Poor funding results to continuous increase in students' enrolment without accompanying increase in state funding. Other issues arising from problems of overcrowding and inadequate supply of financial resources are said to have contributed to steady decline in the quality of higher education. Nwagwu (2005) observed that the foundation of education is frail when education is not well funded. According to him, the products from such services are weak intellectuals. This is really a sad development for a country that believes so much in emancipation of her citizens from ignorance and aiming at achieving sustainable development and the millennium goals within the limited time frame.

The challenges of underfunding of higher education and institutions have a significant effect on the performance of staff and students who are at the receiving end. Olu, Omiyale and Adebola (2015) noted that the quality of lecturing and research work has significantly declined over the years. Ekundayo (2008) observed that many school capital projects have been abandoned due to lack of funds. There is problem of overcrowding arising from increasing number of students' enrolment. There is also pressure on the government to meet the welfare needs of staff and students. There is decline on the welfare package and remuneration coupled with depreciation of working conditions and environment. There is decline in the welfare package needs and remuneration of staff coupled with depreciation of working conditions and environment. As a result, there is pressure on government to meet these needs of staff and students. The resultant effects are high brain drain of professional staff, persistent strike action, protests, admission runs, high rate of cultism, fund embezzlement and all manner of social vices. According to Hartnett (2000) inadequate funding deters growth in tertiary institutions.

The system therefore has far outgrown the resources available for it to continue offering high quality educational services. This increase has therefore gone so high the government can no longer be solely responsible for funding tertiary institutions. For instance, the simulation exercise carried out by Hartnett (2000) also revealed that funding gap exists in achieving the policy goals set for tertiary institutions. The funding gap according to him is relatively high ranging from 50% to 90% across 2010 to year 2020. This implies that the key players in tertiary education in Nigeria would have to search for alternative and improved means of filling the void created by underfunding by reviewing alternative funding means, accountability, resource management, good leadership, promotion of public-private partnership in higher institutions. It is timely to seek ways of strengthening resource inflow for instance, in order to capture the general dynamics of resource accumulation. It is instructive also to note that education is a right and not a privilege and if it is to be sustained there is need to develop better and all inclusive financing models by integrating alternate funding channels into revenue base in financing educational institutions. This will help to provide baseline information on the extent of financial inflows in the funding of the tertiary institutions in order to be able to ascertain its sustainability. It is against this backdrop that this study sought to examine the extent of financial resource inflows into the funding of Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki. The research questions posed were:

1. To what extent does state government financial allocation contribute to revenue generation in EBSU, Abakaliki?
2. To what extent do students' school fees and levies contribute to revenue generation?
3. To what extent do consultancy services contribute to revenue generation?

Method

Descriptive survey design was used for this study. This design is one that produces a snap shot of a population at a particular point in time. Nwangwu (2005) defined the design as the representative sample of the population consisting of individuals of different ages. This design was aimed at examining the extent of financial resource inflow into Ebonyi State University (EBSU), Abakaliki for the possibility of maintaining sustainable funding. The area of the study was Ebonyi State University Abakaliki. EBSU is made up of four (4) Campuses- Faculty of Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts (Permanent Site Campus), Faculty of Education (Ishieke Campus), Faculties of Agricultural Sciences and Law (CAS Campus), and College of Basic Medicine and Sciences (Presco Campus). The university is located at the heart of Abakaliki Town. The population of this study comprised of all the six thousand seven hundred and twenty one (6721) academic and non-academic staff of the university under investigation (EBSU Personnel Department, 2015).

The sample of the study comprised of two hundred (200) academic and non-academic staff purposively selected for the study based on qualification and experience. The instrument for data collection was structured questionnaire entitled “Sources of Revenue Inflows into Funding of Ebonyi State University” (SRIFESU). The instrument is made up of two parts-A and B. Part A sought information on the personal data of the staff while Part B sought information on the respondents’ opinions which were divided into three clusters. Cluster 1 elicited data on the extent of state allocation contributes to revenue inflow in the funding of EBSU; B elicited data on the extent of how school fees and levies contribute to revenue inflows while cluster C elicited data on the extent of how revenue from internally generated sources contribute to financial inflow in EBSU. The instrument is made up of fifteen items on four point- likert scale assigned numerically values as follow Very High Extent (VHE) 4, High Extent (HE) 3, Low Extent (LE) 2, Very Low Extent (VLE) 1.

The instrument was subjected to face-validation by three specialists-one from Measurement and Evaluation (Department of Science Education), and two from the Administration and Planning (Department of Educational Foundations) all in EBSU, Abakaliki. The measure of internal consistency of the instrument was established by administering the instrument to 30 staff of Federal University Ndufu Alike Ikwo, Ebonyi State which was different from the area of the study. The data collected were analyzed through Cronbach alpha reliability approach with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) which yielded the reliability coefficient of 0.66, 0.69, 0.70 and the general reliability index of 0.68. The questionnaire was administered to the 200 academic and non-academic staff of the university personally in order to make some clarifications on the item where the need arose. The whole 200 sets of questionnaire distributed were returned at completion. The data collected were answered using mean and standard deviation. Any mean score of 2.50 and above was accepted while mean score below 2.50 was rejected.

Results

The data collected through questionnaire were analyzed based on the three research questions developed for the study.

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of academic and non-academic staff on what extent state government subvention contribute to financial revenue base of EBSU, Abakaliki.

S/N	Items Description	Mean	Standard Deviation	Decision
1	State government’s subvention largely constitutes to resource inflow of the university.	3.40	1.20	Accepted
2	Other state government agencies contribute to financial revenue inflow in the university funding.	2.40	1.50	Rejected
3	The subvention received by the university from state government is adequately sufficient in meeting all the financial needs.	2.12	1.21	Rejected
4	The university depends solely on government subventions for the running of the university.	2.41	0.68	Rejected
5	The state government allocation to university funding fluctuates.	2.80	1.06	Accepted

Grand Mean Score=2.63

The analysis of research question one on table 1 revealed that the state government contributes financially to a high extent in the university revenue base and also that government subvention to the university fluctuates with mean scores of 3.40 and 2.80 respectively with standard deviation of 1.20 and 1.06. However, items, 2, 3 and 4 were rejected with mean scores of 2.40, 2.12 and 2.41 with standard deviation of 1.50, 1.21, and 0.68. Therefore, state government’s subvention to the university constitutes the major source of financial inflow in the university and therefore government needs to tackle the issue of fluctuations in order for the inflow to be stabilized to meet the financial needs in the university.

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation of academic and non-academic staff on the extent students’ school fees and other levies contribute to financial inflow of the university revenue generation.

S/N	Items Description	Mean	Standard Deviation	Decision
6	Regular Students’ School Fees.	3.01	1.30	Accepted
7	Health Insurance Scheme and Students’ Medical Registration Fees.	2.40	1.50	Rejected
8	SUG Levies.	2.89	1.90	Accepted
9	Course Registration Fees.	2.96	0.74	Accepted
10	Faculty and Departmental Dues.	3.00	1.11	Accepted

Grand Mean Score =2.85

The analysis of research question two on table 2 revealed that the academic and non-academic staff agreed with the mean scores of 3.01, 2.89, 2.96 and 3.00 with standard deviation of 1.30, 1.90, 0.74 and 1.11 for items 6, 8, 9 and 10 that school fees, course registration fees, SUG levies and Faculty and Departmental Dues contribute to a large extent to financial inflow of the university. It only showed that Health Insurance Fees contribute to low extent in the financial inflow of the university. Therefore, improving on Health Insurance Scheme of the university could be used to enhance the University internally generated revenue.

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of academic and non-academic staff on the extent consultancy services contribute to financial inflow of the university revenue base.

S/N	Items Description	Mean	Standard Deviation	Decision
11	University consultancy outlet contributes largely to financial inflow.	3.10	1.11	Accepted
12	Grants from funding agencies contribute to substantial financial inflow.	2.41	0.68	Rejected
13	Support from research linkages contribute to the financial inflow of the University.	2.40	1.50	Rejected
14	ETF/TETFUND contributes to revenue base of the University.	3.40	1.20	Accepted
15	University distance learning programmes contribute financially to revenue inflow of the university.	2.81	0.93	Accepted

Grand Mean Score = 2.82

The analysis of research question three on table 3 revealed that items 11, 14 and 15 had mean scores of 3.10, 3.40 and 2.81 with standard deviation of 1.11, 1.20, 0.93, which were accepted as yielding to high extent. It therefore showed that the university consultancy outlets, ETF/TETFUND, Distance learning programmes run by the university all contribute to a high extent to revenue inflow of the university. On the other hand, items that bore grants from funding agencies, supports from research linkages where the mean scores were with were rejected.

Therefore increases financial inflow of revenue of the university to a high extent.

Summary of Findings

The following findings were obtained from the data analyzed on tables:

1. That the state government financial subvention is a major source of financial revenue base in the University under study.
2. That the state government financial allocation to the University fluctuates which implies that there is need for exploring other financial sources to increase financial inflow.
3. That the university receives financial supports from TETFUND, school fees as well as other levies to supplement government allocation.
4. That the university has not been able explore opportunities from external grants to increase financial inflows.
5. That the university has not to a large extent been engaged with international research linkages to increase revenue generation.

Discussion of Findings

This study explored information on how funds are being sourced for financing Ebonyi Sate University (EBSU), Abakaliki. The discussion of findings was made based on the three research questions developed for the study. The analysis of research question one revealed that the state government is the major financier of the university. However, there is instability in the inflow because of fluctuation of funding from the source. The validity of this finding is that although the state government contributes a lion share for financing the Institution, there is over dependency on the government. The finding is in tandem with the finding of Ekundayo (2008) who maintained that over dependency of institutions on government for funding has continued to create financial constraints. The finding also showed that the university sources for alternative means of financial sustenance which corroborate Haetnett (2000) The finding also correlates with the findings of Adeniyi (2008) and Olu et al (2015) whose findings postulate that universities generates revenues through internally generated revenue to sustain their running costs.

The analysis of research question 2 revealed that the University partnership programmes or collaboration with other institutions could improve the University internally generated revenue. This finding is in consonance with the finding of Adeniyi (2008) who submitted that the extension programmes and partnership of University to another in terms of affiliation of programme is a source of revenue mobilization of the Universities. This is because, it enable the university to advertise her programmes and increases the population of students thereby promoting the IGR through school fees and other tuitions. This is important because the standardization of programmes and students' capacity of the University determines the level of revenue generation.

The analysis of research question 3 revealed that that adoption of consultancy outfit as well as funds that accrue from TETFUND complement revenue generation in the university. This finding also collaborates with the finding of Hartnett (2000) who substantiated that improving on internally generation of funds creates viability in the management of higher institutions. This finding is important because over dependency on state government handout without exploring ways of improving the financial capacity of the universities could lead to financial chaos in university management in Nigeria.

Conclusion

This study has explored information on the alternative strategies for improving the internally generated revenue of Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki. It is imperative to note therefore that financial capacity of the universities would reduce the over dependency for State and Federal Government funding. It is also imperative to note that the financial activities of the Universities are the major source of revenue of the University. This study therefore concluded that teaching and learning require an enabling environment which calls for adequate funding for the maintenance of facilities as well as addressing staff and student welfare matters, developmental issues and research. For this to take place, the University managers must utilize any of the strategies suggested by this study to ensure revenue generation and mobilization.

Recommendations

1. The state government should increase financial budget to EBSU, Abakaliki in order for the university to continue to maintain quality service delivery and to curtail the imminent doom of brain drain from the institution.
2. The university should widen their internal revenue generation base to accommodate more financial resource base. This implies that the university administrators, staff and students should become pro-active towards revenue generation to make the university financially sustainable.
3. The university should encourage staff and students through organizing periodic seminars on how to write competitive proposals on research works that can attract more funding and grants from foreign donor agencies and countries.

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