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The Conversion of Federal Polytechnics into Universities: The Funding Aspect (Pp. 507-522)

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Abstract

There were only two (2) federally owned universities in Nigeria in 1962. The number increased to 13 in 1975 and went further to 26 in 2008. From the mere 104 pioneer students that enrolled at the University College Ibadan in 1948, the total student enrolment in Federal Universities jumped to 2,754 in 1965, 259,904 in 1998 and 433,871 in 2003. How has funding been over the years? Will the Federal Government be able to cope in area of funding if it carries out its intention of converting all Federal Polytechnics to Universities? The paper traced the history and funding patterns of both University and Polytechnic education right from the inception to the present day, provided reasons for governments reasons for the conversion of the Polytechnics and concluded that the Federal Government definitely has to provide more funds for graduates of Federal Government universities to be accepted as equals of their counterparts in Europe and America.

Key words: Federal Universities Funding Federal Polytechnics
Conversion.

Introduction

In both developed and developing countries, funding of higher education and particularly the universities has emerged as a major topic of debate in recent years (Obikoya, 2002). Added to this at the local level, is the announcement by the Federal Government of Nigeria of its intention to convert Polytechnics

to University Colleges in affiliation to the Universities nearest to them. In Nigeria, the issue of funding has drawn more attention and it is probably the greatest problem facing university development today. Hence, there have been discussions in conferences, radio, television, newspapers and even during political campaigns on the critical issue of who should finance university education, and how should university education be financed in Nigeria.

Quality education at all levels requires quality resources and consequently adequate funding. This is so because schooling is not the same thing as education (Ukeje, 2002). Initially, the Christian Missionary Societies that introduced Western education into Nigeria financed it through Church collections and free labour from their members. The catechists invariably doubled as class teachers and their salaries were paid through Church collections.

It was not until the year 1872 that the colonial government in Nigeria became actively involved in the issue of educational financing, when it made a grant of £30 to each of the three Missionary Societies then operating educational institutions in Lagos. This marked the beginning of the scheme of grants-aid to education by the government (Ukeje, 2002). By 1882, educational financing in Nigeria was from the following sources: (i) the government, directly and through grants-in-aid; (ii) the voluntary agencies through fees and Church collections; and (iii) the communities through free labour, provision and maintenance of school buildings and staff quarters. Thus, by this time, the principle of shared responsibility in educational financing has been established (Ukeje, 2002). In 1899, the first government school for the education of Moslem children in the township of Lagos was founded.

The Rise of Universities

The history of higher education in Nigeria dates back to the year 1932, when the British Government established Yaba Higher College in Lagos in response to pressure from several quarters. It was to provide semi-professionally qualified persons in medical, engineering and allied fields and secondary school teachers. The College aimed at producing “Assistants” which were to relieve colonial administrators of menial tasks (Oduwobi, 2006). Yaba charged fees, but the sponsoring bodies such as voluntary agencies and town unions mainly paid these. No fees were charged initially when the college opened in 1932; but full tuition and boarding fees were

introduced in 1938. Thus, the principle of fees in higher education was established in 1938 (Ukeje, 2002). The University College Ibadan came into existence in 1948 as a result of the Elliot Commission on Higher Education set up in 1945. The Eastern Region established University of Nigeria, Nsukka on 7 October 1960 to coincide with and as part of the independence celebrations (Ukeje, 2002).

As a result of the Ashby Commission's report of 1962, three more universities were established in Lagos, Zaria and Ife. Lagos was a Federal Government institution, while Ife and Zaria were regional government institutions. The University of Benin was established in 1972 by the then Mid-West Region, thus bringing the total number of universities to six. In 1975, the Federal Government took over the four regional universities (Nsukka, Zaria, Ife and Benin) and went ahead to establish seven more universities at Jos, Maiduguri, Sokoto, Kano, Ilorin, Calabar and Port Harcourt. The third phase of the expansion of the Federal Government universities took place between 1979 and 1983 when seven more new Federal Universities of Technology were established. Presently, the number of Federal Government universities has increased to 25 (16 conventional universities, 5 special universities of technology, 3 universities of agriculture, and one military university) (Ukeje, 2002). A recent addition is the National Open University of Nigeria.

The Funding Pattern

The issue of funding has been a source of crisis in the Nigeria educational system. Various organizations, parents, labour unions, etc, have at various fora pointed the attention of government to the poor funding of the system (Arikewuyo, 2008). For instance, Ibukun (2004) reported that between 1987 and 1997, the average expenditure on education by the Federal Government as a percentage of the annual budget was 5.1 percent. When related to the GDP, the Federal Government expenditure on education averaged 1.1%. In addition, Arikewuyo (2004) reported that since the advent of democracy in 1999, funding of education dropped from 11.12% to 1.81% in 2003. According to data made available by The African Debt Report for 2000, Nigeria spent 0.76% of its GDP on education (Table 1). Compare this with Zimbabwe (9.5%), South Africa (7.9%), Kenya (6.5%), Malawi (5.4%), Cote D'Ivoire (5.0%), Angola (4.9%) and Ghana (4.2%). (See table 1)

Education allocation as a percentage of total budgets ranged from 3.3% in 1999 to 9.88% in 1986. The Federal Government capital expenditure allocated to education as a percentage of total capital budgets ranged from as low as 1.71% in 1999 and not up to 9% in all cases (Ajetomobi and Ayanwale, 2008). It has been discovered that increase in total enrolment contrast sharply with decline in funding of education. Computations from functional classifications of Federal Government recurrent and capital expenditures by the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) from 2002 to 2006 revealed the following (Table 2).

Education got 9.2% of the budget in 2002, 6.5% in 2003, 6.2% in 2004, 6.6% in 2005, 8.2% in 2006 (CBN, 2006:221-222) and 13% in 2008 (Olanrewaju, 2008). The average being 8.3% for the six-year period. Sambo (2005) discovered that Nigeria needs a total of N811, 459 per student for quality education (at university level). If this recommendation is followed, enrolments need to be reduced by almost 80% with the current level of funding. The Federal Government allocation to education has declined steadily since 1999 and is much lower than the average in the last five years of military rule (Olanrewaju, 2008). But the situation was not bad at the beginning.

The universities at inception were well funded. The University College Ibadan was 70% financed by the Nigerian Government, the balance coming from the United Kingdom Government. Just as in Yaba, the students were required to pay tuition and boarding fees. In addition to these, the Nigerian Cocoa Board made, at the on set, an endowment of £1,000,000 to the Faculty of Agriculture. The United African Company (U.A.C) Ltd also made donations for the building of a hall now known as Trenchard Hall (Omeregje, 1995). The Eastern Nigeria Marketing Board, the Eastern Regional Government and Michigan State University that maintained an academic link with the University of Nigeria, Nsukka funded it. As at 1975, all the six first generation universities (Ibadan, Nsukka, Lagos, Ife, Zaria and Benin) were well funded and some of them maintained internationally acclaimed and respected standards (Ukeje, 2002).

Decline in the funding of university education started in 1976, a year after the Federal Government took over the four then existing regional universities. In 1975/76, it was noted that Zaria received for the first time, an amount less than it requested for. It had a short fall of 20%. Since then, the funding of the

universities has been on the downward decline, and the decay in the universities started. Obikoya (2002) provided evidence to show that in 1980/81, Federal Universities received 61% of the amount requested for, rising to 63.30% the following session, dropping to 47.67% in 89/90 session and 53.40% in 95/96 (Table 3).

The Effects of Under Funding

Taiwo (1994) observed that the Federal Government was starving the universities of funds, providing 51.8% less than the UNESCO recommendation. Fadare (1983) summarized it this way:

“.. by the present mode and level of funding, it is abundantly clear that higher education will suffer from malnutrition...thereby debasing the quality of education...”

The overall effect was captured by Aina (2002) when he opined that the inadequate funding has had a calamitous effect on teaching and researches. To buttress this point, Ukeje (2002) provided evidence to show that lack of adequate funding did not enable most federal universities to meet their National Universities Commission (NUC) norms in terms of quality and quantity of academic staff in 1998/99. Other effects noted by Obikoya (2002) are: constraints to physical structures and facilities, constraints to academic programmes and general lack of motivation, all leading to poor standard of university education. Writing on motivation and labour turnover among university lecturers in the southwestern Nigeria, Ologunde et al (2006) were able to establish that lack of motivation was responsible for the high labour turnover among university lecturers. They recommended improved condition of service in terms of better salary package, good accommodation, and availability of adequate research grants among others. These call for improved funding.

The Concept of and the Problems with Polytechnic Education in Nigeria

At the onset of the establishment of Technological Education in 1932 by the Colonial Government, Yaba Higher College was mandated to provide training of professional character with great attention devoted to practical and manipulate skills in the areas of engineering, medicine, survey, forestry, teacher training and commercial studies (Oduwobi, 2006). According to the Federal Government Decree No 23 of 1969, which established it as an autonomous institution, the major objective of the College is to

“provide...instructions and training in technology...relevant to the needs of the development of Nigeria...and for research...” (Sanni and Akinpelu, 2005).

In 1979, the Federal Military Government established seven Federal Polytechnics with the mandate to produce *middle level manpower*, a term nobody has defined to date (Oduwobi, 2006). As at now, the number of Polytechnics owned by the Federal Government has risen to 17 according to the 2005 National Year Book of Nigeria.

The problems facing Polytechnic education had long been identified. Audu (1995) identified the following:

- (i) Identity. Most people (students, parents, and lecturers) do not want to be identified with the tag ‘middle level’ manpower associated with the Polytechnic. All and sundry try to distance themselves from it (i.e. the Polytechnic) unless they are forced by circumstances to get in.
- (ii) Discrimination against Polytechnic graduates in preference to their university counterparts.
- (iii) Self imposed discriminatory practice within the system. Polytechnics employ their own graduates as instructors and university graduates as lecturers.

The polytechnic education was not originally intended to belong to the tertiary tier of education (Sanni and Akinpelu 2005). It was initially conceived by the French and perfected by the English and Russians to be education and training aimed at discouraging elitisms and geared towards the practical preparation of its recipients to fulfill prescribed norms of the economy, which are lacking in the traditional academic institutions. The aim was to evolve an educational system based on work and training. This was later reformed in China, which led to its being regarded as university level institution, specializing in Engineering and Technology and providing in-service training and continuous education. Thus, the focus of providing polytechnic education had been lost in all its evolutionary process as observed by Ishaga and Ahmed (2000). But of recent as noted by Aina (2000), the system seems to have lost its bearing as it is being accused of “too theoretically inclined just like.... in the universities.”

Thus, this seeming lost of focus by the Polytechnics brings about the

agitation for their being upgraded to the status of universities (Ishaga and Ahmed, 2000).

Oduwobi (2006) added the following to the list:

- (i) Inconsistent government policies of lumping as many as 576 unrelated institutions together under the supervision of the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE). This is quite unlike the National Universities Commission (NUC) that caters for universities alone.
- (ii) Recommendations in the reports of various panels set up by the Federal Government on Polytechnic education were not effected as expected. These commissions are: Ademokun 1982, Gray Longe 1990, Justice Kanu Anya 1992, Justice Kayode Esho 1993, Etsu Nupe 1996 and Adamu Yabani 1999.
- (iii) Nigerian Polytechnics cannot award any certificate above Higher National Diploma (HND) unlike their oversea counterparts that award degrees up to Ph.D level.
- (iv) Academic staff in the Polytechnic cannot rise beyond certain salary level unlike their university counterparts. They retire earlier (at 60) than their university counterparts (at 65) (Sanni and Akinpelu, 2005).

Government on its part is worried about the unprecedented drops in enrolment into the Polytechnics and Colleges of Education. In 2005, 169,111 candidates applied while it increased marginally to 176,064 in 2006 (Ekponta, 2006). Compare these with 868,000 that applied to the universities in 2006. Polytechnic education holds little attraction to candidates (Ezekwesili, 2006). In fact, the apathy against Polytechnic education became apparent during the recent consolidation of banks in the country. At the height of consolidation, no fewer than 3000 HND graduates were relieved of their appointments in preference to their university counterparts (Ekponta, 2006). It was the desire to solve the above problems, and increase the carrying capacities of Federal Universities (from the present capacity of 150,000 to 500,000) among other reasons that informed the Federal Government's decision to convert Federal Polytechnics to university colleges in affiliation to the nearest universities to them. Only two Federal Polytechnics (Yaba and Kaduna) would have full autonomy. More so, many developed and not so developed countries have converted their Polytechnics into universities and Nigeria cannot afford to be left behind. Examples cited

by Ezeh (2006) include: US in 1960s, The United Kingdom in 1992, Malaysia, South Africa and Canada.

The Problem of Under Funding of Polytechnic Education

The apathy towards Polytechnic education was reflected in its funding by the Federal Government. Using 1988 as a case study, Adesina (1988) and Obikoya (2002) showed that the Federal Government provided 94.9% of the total recurrent costs in the universities, State governments providing the balance, whereas, the Federal Government provided 40.7% for the Polytechnics. For capital expenditure, the Federal Government provided 87.0% for the universities as against 50.5% for the Polytechnics.

This point was also buttressed by Oduwobi (2006) when he noted that the Education Trust Fund (ETF) disbursed a sum of N13.194 billion to the universities between 1999 and 2005 while the Polytechnics received a sum of N7.172 billion within the same period. In 1999, the Federal Government promised to allocate the sum of N20 million each to Federal tertiary institutions to fight cultism. While the universities received their grants, nothing was paid to the Polytechnics. A break down of grants released by the Federal Government to the Federal Polytechnics between 1994 and 2001 was given by Yakubu (2002). The Federal Polytechnics never got the actual amount they needed in any of the years under review. In 1994, they got 66.56% of their proposed recurrent grant (Table 5) 33.41% in 1995, 54.33% in 1996, 86.08% in 1997, 95.06% in 1998, 69.53% in 1999, 72.7% in 2000 and 78.99% in 2001; the average being 69.58% for the period.

The situation is even worst for capital expenditure. They got 36.03% in 1994, (Table 5), 32.01% in 1995, 35.96% in 1996, 43.47% in 1997, 65.47% in 1998, 23.66% in 1999, 23.33% in 2000 and 89.97% in 2001. The average being 43.74% for the period. Neither did the amount proposed nor released for research was separately shown.

The consequences of under funding of Polytechnic education had long been documented by Adegoke (2000). They include the following:

- (i) Fewer books in the libraries.
- (ii) Insufficient teaching materials resulting into fewer experiments being set up for science students due to lack of chemicals and other laboratory items.
- (iii) Inadequate equipments, machines and tools for technology

- students, which seriously impede our technological breakthrough.
- (iv) Insufficient lecture rooms to accommodate increasing number of students.
 - (v) Inadequate office accommodation for teaching and non-teaching staff.
 - (vi) Insufficient welfare packages for academic staff, little or no research grants, poor salaries and allowances for academic staff.
 - (vii) Break down of the general maintenance system in the Polytechnics. Untarred roads, huge craters on those tarred, leaking roofs, poor landscape, irregular supply of electricity and water.
 - (viii) Insufficient welfare facilities for students culminating into incessant student unrests and violent demonstrations on a number of occasions.

The Way Forward

The paper traced the history of both university and polytechnic education in Nigeria. It also traced the funding patterns of the two higher institutions. Both are poorly funded. It examined the consequences of their under funding. The reasons behind the Federal Government's intention of contemplating the conversion of existing Federal Polytechnics to Universities were discussed. But will the Federal Government be able to achieve the desired goals under the present system of funding? Will graduates from Federal Government universities be accepted without question for post-graduate studies in Europe and America? Definitely no! The following suggestions should be considered as the way forward.

- (i) Government should increase its funding of university education. If the Federal Government cannot meet the UNESCO and World Bank recommendation of 26% of the budget, it should at least meet the average in the African continent. It is a shame that non-oil producing countries like Ghana, Zimbabwe and Malawi spend more on education than Nigeria.
- (ii) The issue of tuition fees by students should not be considered at all. Though the fees were paid from the on set, the Federal Government canceled them in 1977. Even when they were being paid, they accounted for just 10% of the university budget compared with 7% in North American universities (Aina, 2002). In a research conducted on the issue, Aina (2002) wondered at what would be the

implications of charging tuition fees on students in a country where most families live below poverty line. Government polices have a way of having multiplier effects on economic variables. For the Federal Government to start charging tuition fees, which it cancelled as far back as 1977, is a clear signal to State and private universities to increase theirs. On the other side of the divide are Ukeje (2002) and Obikoya (2002). They based their arguments on the Longe Commission (1991), which recommended that

...as a result of the gross deterioration and dilapidation of facilities in the institutions, the payment of fees by students in Federal Institutions should be restored as an exercise in the partial recovery of costs...

It is also being argued that since students in State owned universities pay tuition and other fees, what is good for the geese is also good for the gander. It is on record however that Osun State University, Osogbo, was the first State University in Nigeria (in 2007/2008) to charge comparative fees like private universities. An attempt by Ogun State owned university (Olabisi Onabanjo University at Ago-Iwoye) to emulate it was rebuffed by the students.

- (iii) Endowments should be encouraged. The then regional universities and the University College Ibadan, as had earlier been shown, effectively used these.
- (iv) Foreign grants. These accounted for 4% of funding in North American universities and were in use in Nigeria. Foreign grants to Nigerian universities reduced drastically due to the military rule and abuse of human rights by the Nigerian government. It is hoped that this source of funding will be pursued more vigorously now that the country is under democracy.
- (v) Fees and levies on non- degree and diploma courses. Many Nigerian universities had long embraced this option by running MBA and diploma courses. Efforts should be made not to compromise standards.
- (vi) Universities should embark upon commercial ventures. Such ventures include commercial farms, staff schools and provision of consultancy services among many others. These should not however overshadow the primary aim of the universities.
- (vii) Other sources of funding are donations from Alumni associations, philanthropic individuals and organizations.

- (viii) One questionable source of funding by some Nigerian universities is the award of honors, doctorate degrees, at times to illiterates, just for money. In Nigeria where the unfortunate culture of holders of honorary doctorate degree appending the title 'Dr.' against their names is the norm, awarding honorary doctorate degrees to illiterates becomes another method of debasing the academia. Honorary doctorate degrees could be a good source of funding; but it must be to those who merit and deserve it, and not to anybody who has not seen the four walls of the university.
- (ix) The universities themselves should be prudent in the management of their funds. It is being claimed that some universities have no good reputation due to the manner in which their authorities mismanaged the funds entrusted to their care.

The Federal Ministry of Education (FME) (2006) organized a round table meeting with a focus on tertiary education. On funding, the following matters were addressed:

- i. The extent and by what means funding should be increased on staff salaries, support and training, equipment, buildings, and institutional running costs.
- ii. How existing funds can be more efficiently and effectively used.
- iii. How institutions and agencies can be made more accountable for financial management.

It is hoped that the meeting has charted a new course in the area of adequate funding of tertiary education in Nigeria.

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Table 1: Spending on education (% GNP) for some African countries in comparison to Nigeria

Country	% GNP	Ratio to Nigeria	Country	% GNP	Ratio to Nigeria
South Africa	7.9	11.29	Ghana	4.2	6.00
Kenya	6.5	9.29	Mozambique	4.1	5.86
Malawi	5.4	7.71	Tanzania	3.4	4.86
Cote D’ Ivoire	5.0	7.14	Uganda	2.6	3.71
Angola	4.9	7.00	Nigeria	0.76	1.00

Source: Obikoya (2002). “University education funding policy in Nigeria,” *SSAN, The Nigerian Social Scientist*, A biannual publication of the Social Science Academy of Nigeria, Vol. 5, No 1, March, p 42.

Table 2: Federal Government's Capital and Recurrent expenditure budgets on Education as percentages of the total budgets (2002-2008)

02	03	04	05	06	08	Average
9.2 %	6.5 %	6.2 %	6.6 %	8.2 %	13*%	8.3 %

Source: Computations by the author from Functional Classifications of Federal Government recurrent and capital expenditures by the Central Bank of Nigeria (2006)

* Olanrewaju S (2008): "365 days of Yar' Adua: Education – A retreat into inactivity," *The Nigerian Tribune Newspaper*, August 26, pp 18 &22.

Table 3: Federal Universities' Appropriation Need and Allocation 1980-1996 (In N'm)

Year	A Amount Requested	B NUC Recommendation	C Amount Released	C as % of A	C as % of B
80/81	352.99	290.52	215.97	61.18%	74.34%
81/82	508.56	343.51	321.91	63.30%	93.71%
82/83	710.77	579.63	334.62	47.08%	57.73%
83/84	767.52	634.53	371.47	48.40%	58.54%
84/85	821.34	634.37	428.39	52.16%	67.53%
85/86	694.61	446.02	421.90	60.74%	94.59%
86/87*	217.14	150.57	104.80	48.26%	69.63%
87/88*	176.16	125.99	65.15	36.98%	51.71%
88/89*	150.24	138.14	81.04	53.94%	58.67%
89/90*	139.07	102.05	66.29	47.67%	64.96%
90/91*1,	1,03.70	1,360.00	641.00	58.10%	47.10%
91/92*1,	1,566.30	2,917.42	2,244.10	46.40%	53.40%
92/93*	4,056.80	3,926.03	3,226.20	76.30%	98.10%
93/94*	5,022.50	6,178.86	3,405.35	67.80%	64.50%
94/95*	6,094.50	9,088.52	4,576.36	64.80%	63.60%
95/96*	8,644.70	8,542.70	5,951.30	53.40%	64.60%

*Figures from 1986 adjusted to Naira Devaluation.

Sources: Obikoya (2002) and Ukeje (2002)

Table 4: Breakdown of allocations of Research Grants to Federal Universities (1987-1998)

Year	Conventional Universities	Technological Universities	Inter-University Centers	Others	Grand Total
1987	11,379,000	757,000	-	-	12,216,000
1988	17,796,500	1,199,500	-	-	18,996,000
1989	17,579,400	1,390,025	-	-	19,090,542
1990	21,470,573	1,704,798	-	-	23,323,915
1991	21,062,151	1,937,550	-	-	23,148,245
1992	13,341,821,	794,424	300,000	100,000	14,536,245
1993	108,438,460	11,245,046	1,998,877	499,719	122,182,103
1994	116,042,390	13,456,107	2,157,856	539,646	132,195,999
1995	113,700,237	13,881,162	4,869,111	631,172	133,081,682
1996	81,282,424	11,864,673	4,921,114	640,484	98,708,695
1997	52,534,324	4,091,274	3,351,123	807,520	60,784,241
1998	15,552,618	-	-	-	155,552,618

Source: Obikoya (2002)

Table 5: Federal Government's grants released to Federal Polytechnics as percentages of amounts proposed by the Polytechnics (1994-2001)

	94	95	96	97	98	99	00
01 Average	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Recurrent grants.	66.56	33.41	54.33	86.08	95.06	69.53	72.70
78.99 69.58							
Capital grants.	36.03	32.01	35.96	43.47	65.47	23.66	23.33
89.97 43.74							

Source: Computations by the author.

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