ADMINISTRATORS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF TERTIARY EDUCATON TRUST FUND (TETFUND) INTERVENTION IN IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF POLYTECHNIC EDUCATION IN NIGERIA.

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Abstract

Funding has always been the primary challenge of tertiary education in Nigeria, accounting for scores of inhibitions including the brain drain (Exodus of many of the best academics to greener pastures), dilapidated infrastructures, campus brigandage and poor teacher motivation among others. In response to public outcry, government in 1993 established the education trust fund (ETF) which in 2011was renamed the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund). The paper examined administrators' perception of the effectiveness of TETFUND in enhancing the quality of polytechnic programmes in Nigeria. Rectors, Registrars and Bursars of 30 polytechnics were surveyed using a structured questionnaire. The responses were analyzed using percentage, mean and t-test. The results showed that while TETFUND has been largely effective in improving the quality of academic programmes, staffing and physical facilities of pubic polytechnics, it has had no similar influence on private polytechnics. Science and engineering faculties and departments were also identified as the greatest beneficiaries of TETFUND grants, while the humanities (as represented by General Studies), social sciences and entrepreneurship education lagged much behind. The findings showed that funding, although much improved from the nadir of the late twentieth century, remain grossly inadequate even in public polytechnics. The study concluded that the current situation, in which capital project funding in many polytechnics is being borne almost exclusively by TETFUND, is not salutary to sustainable educational development. The study admonished polytechnic authorities to prioritize the search for alternative funding sources to moderate the current dependence on TETFUND for capital and staff development projects.

Key words: TETFUND, Intervention, Nigeria, Polytechnic, quality indicators

Introduction

The importance of adequate funding to the quality of education has been severally iterated (Eaton & Nofsinger, 2014; Taggert, 2015). No organization can function optimally without adequate resources (Ugwu, 2017). The Nigerian educational system has been afflicted with numerous malaise in recent years and many authorities have laid the blame on inadequate financing (Olawepo 2011; Adeyemi, 2021). These problems include the great exodus of some of the most qualified academics to universities in foreign climes, resulting in poor faculty quality; dilapidated and inadequate infrastructures; poor staff morale; doubtful graduate quality; widespread corruption; student-cult activities; weak

administrative support structures; poor practical training and inadequate access to the internet. All these problems have their roots in funding inadequacy.

Recurrent strikes and student unrest in the educational system forced the government in 1993 to introduce the Education Trust Fund. The Fund was authorized to collect two percent profit tax from all registered companies and spend the money to improve programmes and infrastructures of public institutions. In 2011, the ETF was transformed into the Tertiary Education Trust Fund, and was mandated to provide "focused and transformative intervention in public tertiary institutions" through funding and effective project management. Its interventions are expected to focus on infrastructure development, acquisition of facilities and equipment; academic staff training, practical teaching, library development, research and academic manuscript development (TETFUND, 2014).

With the transformation from Education Tax Fund to Tertiary Education Trust Fund, the Fund was expected to focus intently on quality indicators in tertiary education like a laser beam. Tertiary institutions in Nigeria comprise 170 Universities, 81 polytechnics and 63 Colleges of Education. Out of these, 91 universities, 51 polytechnics and 48 Colleges of Education are publicly owned and are the targets of TETFUND intervention. Private institutions cannot directly benefit from the fund, although staff mobility and the adjunct lectureship system implies that private institutions may benefit indirectly (TETFUND, 2014).

Under the Nigerian education system, the polytechnics are supposed to be the primary outlets for technological education. Polytechnics offer National Diploma and Higher National Diploma programmes in engineering, technology and the science (NBTE, 2016). While courses like Management, Accounting and Mass Communication are offered in most polytechnics and are being increasingly mainstreamed, the emphasis is on science, engineering and technology which by law must together constitute at least 70% of student enrolment.

Technological education is inherently capital-intensive with programmes often demanding sophisticated facilities and equipment. Technical teachers also need relatively more regular training and retraining to catch up with rapid technological innovations, especially in the contemporary age of Information and Communication Technology. This special need has however not always reflected in governments' fund allocations to public institution, for universities continue to have the pride of place in fund allotment (Agbo, 2017).

In recent years, public institutions have had to lean heavily on the TETFUND for funding. State-government owned institutions especially rely heavily and in some cases exclusively, on TETFUND for the funding of capital projects. Studies report that some state governments give just enough to pay staff salaries while leaving further funding to the devices of the institutions. In some states, institutions are allowed to charge realistic fees. In others, they are handicapped by government restrictions and regulations, often arising from political desire to take advantage of the emotive slogan, "Free Education."

The consequence is that in some Nigerian polytechnics and universities, the best buildings and workshops, opportunities for staff training, conference attendance and other essential services are financed almost exclusively by TETFUND. With two percent tax on the profits of the public corporations as its sole revenue, and with tax evasion reportedly rampant in Corporate Nigeria, is TETFUND adequately equipped to carry the huge burden of education funding especially in respect of the polytechnic system? That is the central question to which this study sought answers.

In Nigeria, Polytechnics are meant to train and produce the technical manpower necessary for the execution of Nigerian's development goals and strategies (Ajaja, 2006). This role has been the purview of polytechnics since 1947 when Yaba College of Technology, Nigeria's first Polytechnic was established. Polytechnics offer a two-year course leading to the award of National Diploma after which students, having gone through one-year industrial attachment to enable them acquire the requisite practical experience, may proceed to the Higher National Diploma programmes in the same or related fields. Quality assurance powers in the polytechnic system is vested in the National Board for Technical Education which has the responsibility for institutional accreditation, programme approval and setting minimum standards on admission, teaching and infrastructures (Ademiluyi, 2007).

Polytechnic education is fundamental to the development of a knowledge and skill based economy. However, in Nigeria, the objectives of polytechnic education are often thwarted by problems of finance (Saint Hartnet & Strassner, 2014) and similar limitations Maduabon (2016) stated that among the challenges confronting the polytechnic system inNigeriais the perception that Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is a last resort for those who cannot access 'better' courses; that HND holders ultimately have to 'top up' or crossover to universities for academic fulfillment, failing which they may end up in an academic cul-de-sac; and the infrastructural inadequacies which make mockery of any effort at genuine TVET skill acquisition.

Ibitoye cited in Ademiluyi (2012) also identified poor staffing, lost focus and the nation's weak science orientation as major challenges to polytechnic education. Many of these problems arose from or are exacerbated by paucity of funds.

Countries that have enhanced their innovation capacities have invested heavily in science and engineering education, and also in promoting competition as the basis for innovation (Ugwu, 2017). Government funding on education is far less than UNESCO's 26% target. In 2018, less than 8% was allocated to education. Funding of public polytechnics is further handicapped by the restriction in tuition fees. Federal polytechnics were, for a long time, not allowed to charge tuition fees. Today, public polytechnics charge only minimal fees. Student fees currently constitute only about 15 percent of total institutional incomes (Agbo, 2017). Government's position however is that: while fees and charges remain legitimate sources of revenue, the government policy for the time being is that before fees can be reintroduced or charges are raised, the students and their sponsors must be economically empowered to be able to pay such fees; a situation which entails a

visible improvement in the take home pay of workers as well as adequate scholarship and student loan schemes (Federal Ministry of Education, cited in Fagunwa, 2017).

With institutions disallowed from changing realistic fees, funding of public polytechnics rests to a great extent on the Tertiary Education Trust Fund not only for capital undertakings but also for certain recurrent expenses including training and research (Adeyemi, 2015). Public polytechnics, like other public institutions are not empowered to charge sustainable fees, yet grants by government often prove grossly inadequate(Ezeugwu, 2019) leaving the Tertiary Education Trust Fund with huge funding gaps to fill.

Nigerian institutions rarely generate money from endowments. Government allocations are often designed to take care (and in some cases, just a percentage) of staff salaries. Most polytechnics especially those located outside the major cities have weak capacity and orientation for consultancy services. The major source of reliable internally generated revenue are the school fees for part-time programmes. This however is limited by the supervisory agency, the National Board for Technical Educational, (NBTE) which pegged enrolment into part-time programme at 20% of carrying capacity. This leaves the TETFUND as the last resort of indigent public polytechnics and universities. TETFUND has arguable endeavoured within the limits of available resources, to meet the challenge.

While TETFUND Intervention resources may appear significant in quantum, issues have been raised about the effectiveness of its application. Others have described the intervention as “too little, too late” (Fagunwa, 2017). TETFUND itself, perhaps in response to some of these criticisms, has come up with the “Special Intervention Programmes” , under which selected institutions are granted massive infusion of funds for specific programmes. These special funds vary from between N500 million to 1.5 billion naira. It is however believed that the process of accessing this fund is opaque, limiting its integrity and effectiveness.

The concern of the study is to determine the effectiveness of the regular intervention programme and its adequacy in enhancing the quality of polytechnic education in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

TETFUND has become the primary source of funding for public polytechnics in Nigeria. Technicaland vocational education and training (TVET), ideally, is expensive, involving huge capital outlay for the construction and maintenance of infrastructures, acquisition and maintenance of facilities and equipment, staff training and retraining, entrepreneurship education and funding of student practical work. With two percent profit tax as its only revenue, questions arise about TETFUND’s ability to adequately meet its responsibility to the Nigerian TVET system over the long term. Questions have similarly been raised on the integrity of the fund’s administration and the effectiveness of the intervention in institutional academic programme improvement. It has also been asserted that social science courses in polytechnics are disadvantaged in terms of TETFUND grants.

This study sought to empirically determine the veracity or otherwise of some of these assertions.

The concern of the study therefore was to obtain institutional administrators'opinions on the effectiveness of TETFUND intervention regime in improving the quality of Nigerian polytechnics' academic offerings and the adequacy or otherwise of the intervention funds provided.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions: In the opinions of administrators of polytechnics in Nigeria:

i. How effective is TETFUND intervention in enhancing academic programme quality indicators?
ii. How effective is TETFUND intervention in improving the quality of physical facilities and equipment?
iii. How adequate is TETFUND intervention for the needs of polytechnics in Nigeria?

Hypothesis

The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. Administrators in public polytechnics and those in private polytechnics do not differ significantly in their mean ratings on the effectiveness of TETFUND intervention in enhancing the quality of Nigerian polytechnic programmes.

l Administrators in state polytechnics and those in federal polytechnics do not differ significantly in their mean ratings on the effectiveness of TETFUND in improving the quality of physical facilities and equipment.

Research Methods

The study employed descriptive survey design. This is because descriptive survey designs are ideal for studies seeking people's perceptions and opinions (Nwanna, 2005; Agboola, 2014).The population comprised the Rectors, Registrars, Bursars of Nigerian polytechnics. There are currently 112 approved polytechnics in Nigeria. Each of them has a rector, bursar, and registrar giving a population of 336.

Three out of the six geo-political zones in Nigeria were chosen for the study. These are the South West, South South and North Central zones. The zones were purposively selected because of their relative proximity and accessibility to the researcher. Thirty of the 78 polytechnics in the zones were selected on the basis of ownership; 12 each were owned by the federal and state governments, while six were owned by private individuals and agencies. The rector, registrar and bursar of each selected institution were studied, giving a sample size of 90.

The instrument for data collection was 45-item structured questionnaire titled "TETFUND Intervention Effectiveness and Adequacy Index Questionnaire". The instrument was divided into three sections. The first section sought demographic information on the respondents.. Section 2 was patterned on the 4- point modified Likert-type rating scale while the third section which sought information on the adequacy of TETFUND regular intervention funds was analyzed using percentage. The instrument was validated by three experts in education. It was pilot-tested on five Deputy Rectors and five Deputy Bursars to determine its reliability. A split-half method was applied to their responses and a reliability coefficient of 0.81 was obtained using the Spearman Brown Prophecy Formula.

The researcher administered the final version of the instrument with the aid of four research assistants. Where the institutional Rectors/Bursars/Registrars were not reachable, their most senior deputies were asked to complete the questionnaire on their behalf. One hundred percent return was achieved.

Mean ratings and standard deviation were used to analyze the first two research questions while percentage was used for the third. The hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significant using independent samples t-test,

For the first two research questions, items with mean values of less than or equal to 1.49 were rated as Very Ineffective (VI); those with mean value of between 1.5 and 2.49 were rated as Ineffective (IN). Items with mean value of between 2.50 and 3.49 were deemed to be Effective (EF) while those with mean scores of 3.50 and above were rated as being Very Effective (VE).

For the third research question, respondents were asked to choose any of the following: Very Adequate, Adequate, Inadequate and Grossly inadequate. The responses were analysedwith percentage. The hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance using independent-samples t-test.

Results

Research Question 1: How effective is TETFUND intervention in enhancing academic programme quality indicators?

Table 1: Effectiveness of TETFUND Intervention in improving Academic Programme

S/N	Quality Indicators	Mean	SD	S/	Remarks
1.	Admission Process	2.43	0.87		IN
2.	Examination Administration	2.63	0.82		E
3.	Continuous Assessment	1.36	0.76		VIN
4.	Curriculum Development	2.71	0.87		E
5.	Practical work coverage	2.86	0.88		E
6.	Entrepreneurship training	2.56	0.96		E
7.	Research	3.63	0.76		VE
8.	Teaching facilities	3.51	0.69		VE
9.	Quality of academicstaff	3.41	0.63		E
10.	Quality of administrative staff	2.76	0.82		E
11.	Quality of technical staff	2.77	0.74		E
12.	Staff student ratio	2.16	0.68		IN
13.	Staff training/development	3.82	0.62		VE
14.	Student excursion	2.16	0.93		IN
15.	SIWES placement/supervision	2.53	0.73		E
16.	Access to internet	3.47	0.97		E
17.	Staff conference attendance	3.73	0.62		VE
18.	Fabrication and product development	3.87	0.78		VE
19.	Manuscript development	1.99	0.66		IN
20.	Journal publications	2.73	0.77		E
	Grand Mean	**2.72**	**0.74**		**E**

Table 1 shows that TETFUND intervention has been either effective or very effective in improving 15 of the 20 (75%) quality indicators: Examination administration, journal publication, manuscript development, fabrication and product development, staff conference attendance, internet access, SIWES placement and supervision, staff training and development, quality of staff, practical coverage, entrepreneurship education, curriculum development and examination administration. It has not been so effective in improving admission process, manuscript development, student excursions, continuous assessment and the quality of technical staff.

Table 2: Effectiveness of TETFUND Intervention in Improving Physical Facilities and Equipment

Research Question 2: How effective is TETFUND intervention in improving the quality of physical facilities and equipment?

S/N	Quality Indicators	Mean	SD	Remarks
21.	Classrooms	3.55	0.96	VE
22.	Workshops	3.35	0.86	E
23.	Workshops facilities	3.40	0.77	E
24.	Laboratories	3.27	0.91	E
25.	Laboratory equipment	2.37	0.87	E
26.	Internet access	2,83	0.86	E
27.	Hostel facilities	3.53	0.77	E
28.	Library	3.12	0.86	E
29.	E Library facilities	3.12	0.86	E
30.	Textbooks and journals	3.23	0.92	E
31.	Computer/ computer accessories	2.53	0.85	E
32.	Power supply	2.77	0.89	E
33.	Medical facilities	2.56	0.76	E
34.	Staff offices	2.77	0.85	E
35.	Classroom facilities	2.86	0.93	E
36.	Office furniture	2.77	0.88	E
37.	Sports/recreation facilities	2.42	0.92	IN
38.	Maintenance of facilities	2.18	0.79	IN
39.	Servicing of equipment	2.44	0.85	IN
40.	Institutional roads and landscape	2.14	0.98	IN
	Grand Mean	**2.56**	**0.87**	**Ef**

Table 2 shows that TETFUND intervention has been effective or very effective in improving 16 of the listed items of physical facilities and equipment (80%). These include classrooms, workshops, laboratories, hostels, internet access, staff offices, power supply, recreation facilities and sports, books, e-library facilities among others. It was however, not judged effective in provision of sports and recreational facilities, facilities maintenance, equipment servicing and improvement of institutional roads and landscapes. It has however been ineffective in improving recreation facilities, equipment servicing, facilities maintenance and institutional roads and landscape.

Research Question 3:

How adequate is TETFUND intervention for the needs of polytechnics in Nigeria?

Table 3: Adequacy of TETFUND Intervention

Variables	Frequency	%
Very adequate	7	7.78
Adequate	18	20
Inadequate	38	42.22
Grossly Inadequate	27	30.00
Total	90	100

Table 3 shows that 25 or 27.78% of the respondents rated TETFUND intervention as either very adequate or adequate while 65 (72.22%) rated it is as either inadequate or grossly inadequate.

Results of Test of Hypotheses

Table 4: T-test Result of Polytechnic Administrators' Ratings of the Effectiveness of TETFUND Intervention in Improving Academic Programmes Quality Indicators

Groups	N	Mean	$\overline{SD}$	DF	t.calt.crit	Remarks
Public Polytechnics	72	2.82	1. 06	88	3.6274 2.01	Significant
Private Polytechnics	18	2.43	0. 73			

Significant (p<0.05

Table 4 shows that the calculated t is higher than the critical t. The hypothesis of no significant difference is therefore rejected.

Table 5: t-test Ratings of Administrators in State- Owned Polytechnics and those in Federal Polytechnics on the Effectiveness of TETFUND Intervention in Improving the Quality of physical Facilities and Equipment.

Groups	N	Mean	$\overline{SD}$	DF	t.calt.crit	Remarks
State Polytechnics	36	2.77	0.77	70	0.7307 2.01	NS
Federal Polytechnics	36	2.75	0.75			

Not significant (P<0.05)

The table shows that the calculated t (0.7307) is less than the critical t. The hypothesis of no difference is therefore supported and upheld.

Discussion

The purpose of the study was to determine polytechnic administrators' perception of the effectiveness and adequacy of the Tertiary Education Trust Fund intervention in enhancing the quality of polytechnic programme. The focus was on the intervention fund's effectiveness in improving academic programme quality indicators and physical facilities and equipment.

The results in respect of the first research question shows the response on the funds effectiveness in improving academic quality indicators. The results show that TETFUND has been very effective in improving conference attendance, journal publications, staff training and retraining quality of facilities, entrepreneurship training; and research. It has been effective in respect of examination administration, and moderation, curriculum development, practical coverage, technical staff and administrative staff quality, student industrial placement and supervision, internet access, product fabrication and manuscript development. It has however been "Not so Effective" in improving the admission process, continuous assessment and student excursions.

The finding is in accord with studies and anecdotal inferences which indicate that TETFUND intervention is impacting positively on many aspects of academic programme quality (Udofot, 2017; Okocha, 2016). Reports have further shown that TETFUND intervention is improving international conference attendance (Olakunrin in Udofot, 2017), staff training and retraining and teaching materials development in the university system (Ilochonwu, 2015).

The result on the second research question (presented on Table 2) shows the effectiveness of TETFUND Intervention in improving the quality and quantity of physical facilities and equipment. Most of the physical facilities and equipment quality indicators listed have been positively affected by the intervention fund. These include the quality and number of classroom, E library facilities, and library books. Others on which TETFUND intervention has been effective include staff offices, recreation facilities, textbooks and journals, power supply, air conditioning and ventilation among others.The report is also in tandem with observations and newspaper reports on the effectiveness of TETFUND intervention in raising the bar in the standard of physical facilities and equipment in tertiary institutions (Maduewesi, 2015; Ugwu, 2017).

The observations confirm that the funding situation for infrastructure and equipment in Nigerian polytechnics has improved considerably from the nadir of the late 1980s and 1990s. (Olaiya & Madubuike, 2013) but may not have reached the level it was in the 1970s and early 1980s when Nigerian institutions were highly regarded throughout the English-speaking world (Ekwue, 2009; Adegbesan, 2014).

The results on the third research question (presented in Table 3) shows the percentage ratings of respondents on the adequacy of TETFUND intervention for Polytechnic Programmes. The response shows that only 28.33% rate the intervention as adequate or very adequate while 71.66% rate the intervention as inadequate.

Given several reports of the depth to which standards of programmes, facilities and equipment have sunk in the years before TETFUND intervention, the result is not unexpected. This is because in spite of improvements, Nigeria polytechnics are still ranked low even in Africa. This suggests that the task of funding and standard improvement in the Nigerian polytechnic system is still a work in progress (Eze, 2013; Afolabi 2014). It has been argued that to meet international standards, education in Nigeria may need far greater infusion of funds than is currently provided or contemplated (UNESCO, 2005). Even TETFUND appears to be cognizant of this, having instituted a regime of special intervention involving billions of naira.

Table 4 shows the t-test statistics of the ratings of respondents in public polytechnics. With a calculated t value of 3.62, and a table value of 2.01 the null hypothesis was not supported. This is also a predictable result. TETFUND's impact on private polytechnics is at best indirect. Calls have been made that private polytechnics like public ones should also benefit from TETFUND which Agbo (2012) describes as "national patrimony".

The result in the Table 4 shows that there is statistically no significant difference in the rating of respondents in federal polytechnics and those in state polytechnics on the effectiveness of TETFUND intervention in improving the quality of physical facilities and equipment. This is not surprising given TETFUND's relative even-handedness in allocating resources through regular intervention to public polytechnics irrespective of ownership.

Conclusion

The study was aimed at finding out the perceptions of administrators on the effectiveness and adequacy of TETFUND intervention in improving the quality polytechnic programmes in Nigeria. As the results indicate, administrators have positive perceptions of TETFUND intervention; there is a general consensus that it has impacted positively on the quality of academic programmes in physical facilities and equipment of public polytechnics. The results also show that respondents in private polytechnics are not too positive in their views, having been sidelined by the intervention regime. The results also indicate that TETFUND intervention fund, though very much welcome and positively perceived, cannot be the "be all and end all" to the funding crisis in the Nigeria polytechnic system. This implies that in spite of TETFUND, the funding crisis persists and cannot be resolved by any single agency. Rather, government should endeavour to match or even surpass TETFUND allocations for capital and other essential services and projects. The idea of floating an Education Bank has recently been floated by government and a few education stakeholders. A well-intentioned and well run education bank may provide

another, much-welcomed option in the effort to adequately fund education, and technical education, especially, in Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, recommendations are proffered as follows:

1. To ensure that TETFUND has the relevant impact on institutions' academic programmes, sources of TETFUND's revenues should be expanded by ensuring that public companies pay the education tax promptly and appropriately. Private polytechnics should also be incorporated into the scheme, if only in the area of staff training, conference attendance and other areas of manpower and academic improvement..
2. Government should not leave funding of physical facilities and equipment to TETFUND alone. A situation in which TETFUND accounts for almost 80 percent of capital projects in polytechnics is not ideal. To improve institutional funding, TETFUND intervention should complement, not supplement, government funding.
3. To address the challenge of fund inadequacy, polytechnics should have autonomy to charge sustainable fees. Fees freeze, when unmatched by government grants is severely detrimental to institutional development. While market forces should have a say in school fees regimes, they should not have the final say. Polytechnics should be more creative. They should take advantage of opportunities in their environments to generate funds.

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