

Public Universities in North-Central Geo-Political Zone of Nigeria: Challenges and Way Forward

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Abstract:

Purpose: This paper examined the challenges public universities in North Central geo-political are faced with and possible ways forward.

Method: Content analysis method was adopted in the paper. Data used are secondary data. The data were sourced from online and print resources.

Conclusion: The paper concludes that inadequate funding, shortage of academic staff, inadequate infrastructural facilities, brain-drain, insecurity problems, strike actions, corruption and political influence are the challenges public universities are facing in North-Central geo-political zone of Nigeria.

Recommendation: The government at both federal and state government level should increase the funding of public universities in the region.

Keyword: Funding, North –central. Public, Universities.

Introduction

Public universities are universities owned by the government. Public universities are universities established to provide post-secondary schools for Nigerians. Public universities are universities established by act of parliament to serve the interest of the general public. Public universities deal with the provision of teaching, research and community services (Ogunode, 2020). The objectives of the universities in Nigerian Higher education, including professional education has the following aims: the acquisition, development and inculcation of the proper value orientation for the survival of the individual and societies; the development of the intellectual capacities of individuals to understand and appreciate environment; the acquisition of both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to develop into useful members of the community; the acquisition of an overview of the local and external environments (FGN, 2013; Ogunode,2020).

Public universities in Nigeria are grouped into federal and state owned universities. The federal universities are owned by the federal government of Nigeria while the state universities are owned by the state government. The total number of federal and state public universities are 49 and 59 according to (Punch, 2022).

The federal government of Nigeria established the National Universities Commission to oversee the external administration and supervision of all universities in Nigeria. The administration of public universities in Nigeria takes two dimensions: the external administration and internal administration. The external administration is done through the federal ministries and other regulatory agencies in the country (Ogunode, 2020). The external administration handle planning, policy formulation, programme accreditation, supervision, funding and quality control of the universities. The internal administration headed by the school administrators and other principal managers within the universities. The function of internal administration is to ensure implementation of policies, coordinate, supervise and organize the human and materials resources of the universities to accomplish the objectives of the universities (Ogunode, 2020).

North central geo-political zone is one of the six political zones in Nigeria. The North central zone comprises of Kogi state, Nasarawa state, Benue State, Plateaus state, Niger state, Krawa state and FCT, Abuja. North central geo-political zone is one of the largest political zones in Nigeria. The zone is hosting the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. North central geo-political zone is host to many public higher institutions especially the universities. North central geo-political zone is hosting seven federal universities and six state universities and other higher institutions. The public universities in the region were established with the aims of providing higher education for the residents in the region. It has been observed that many of the public universities in the region are faced with some challenges. This paper discusses the challenges public universities in the region are faced with.

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Challenges facing Public Universities in North-Central Geo-Political Zone of Nigeria

In this paper, inadequate funding, shortage of academic staff, inadequate infrastructural facilities, brain-drain, insecurity problems, strike actions, corruption and political influence would be considered as the challenges public universities in North central geo-political zone are facing.

Inadequate Funding

Inadequate funding is a major problems facing public universities in North central geo-political zone of Nigeria and this problem is affecting the performance of the universities in the region. This problem of shortage of funds is affecting both state and federal universities in the region. Ogunode (2020b) did a study in FCT and discovered that inadequate fund is a challenge facing the administration of higher institutions in FCT, Abuja which also include other states in the region. At the federal level Ogunode (2020b); Ogunode and Adah (2022); Ogunode, and Musa (2020); Ogunode and Ahaotu (2020) submitted that inadequate funding is one of the major problems facing the administration of public universities in Nigeria. The budgetary allocation for the administration of public universities in Nigeria is not adequate to implement the programme of universities in Nigeria. The poor funding of public universities in Nigeria is responsible for the poor quality of education and decay infrastructural facilities (Ademola, Ogundipe, & Babatunde, 2014; Adetunji, & Ogunleye, 2015). Factors responsible for inadequate funding of public universities in Nigeria according to Ogunode (2020); Ogunode and Onyekachi (2021) include lack of political will, corruption, increase in population, inflation, fall in national revenue and poor financial planning. The implications of underfunding of the public universities include; inadequate infrastructural facilities, shortage of academic staff, poor quality of education, brain-drain and strike action (Olowonefa, Ogunode, & Ohibime, 2022; Ogunode, Abubakar, & Ajape, 2021).

Shortage of Academic Staff

Many public universities in the North central Nigeria are faced with the problem of shortage of academics staff. This was confirmed by Ogunode (2020b) who concluded that tertiary institutions in the FCT and the region are understaffed. Inadequate academic staff is another major problem facing the administration of public universities in Nigeria. Many public universities in Nigeria are understaffed and lack the financial capacity to employ adequate staff. The Nigerian universities are faced with the problem of shortage of lecturers in many departments and faculties especially in programme like the sciences (Ogunode & Musa, 2020). The shortage of lecturers in many departments and faculties is responsible for high teacher-student ratio in the Nigerian universities (Ogunode & Adamu, 2021). The inadequate academic staff is preventing effective administration of public universities in Nigeria. The understaffing of universities in Nigeria has serious implications for quality instruction and academic productivity in the institutions. The situation has led to an increasing culture of visiting lecturers in the system. The few available qualified lecturers are recycled as visiting, adjunct, sabbatical and contract lecturers to work in many universities at the same time. Many of them are always on the road travelling from one university town to another and unable to meet their primary obligations with their tenure-employer (NEEDS, 2014; Federal Ministry of Education, 2012). This problem of inadequate teachers in public universities is caused by underfunding of the universities, corruptions, brain-drain, poor motivation, unconducive working environment and lack of manpower planning (Ogunode & Okwelogu, 2022). The implication of shortage of academic staff in the Nigerian public universities include high student –teacher ratio, poor learning, poor delivery of teaching, low productivities and poor quality of education (Ogunode & Adamu, 2021).

Inadequate Infrastructural Facilities

Inadequate infrastructural facilities is a very big problem facing the administration of public universities in North central geo-political of Nigeria. Many public universities in Nigeria especially the state universities do not have adequate infrastructural facilities. Infrastructural facilities according to Ogunode (2020) and Ogunode and Agwor (2021) refer to facilities aiding delivery of academic and non-academic services in educational institutions. Infrastructural facilities include; libraries, laboratories, halls, offices, administrative blocks, hostels, roads facilities, water, electricity, internet etc. The availability of the infrastructural facilities in adequate quantities will support effective administration of educational institutions and the inadequacies will prevent effective administration of educational institutions. Atelhe and Akande (2018); Ahmed and Dantata (2016); Ogunode, Olugbenga and Ezema (2022); Ogunode and Adanna (2022) submit that many public universities in Nigeria do not have adequate lectures halls, laboratories and offices for both students and academic staff. Many academic and non-academic staff do not have offices and para-venture they have one is been shared by five by six lecturers. The offices of the deans and heads of departments are not something to write home about. The Students do not have adequate lecture halls and hostels accommodations (Ogunode & Musa, 2020). Ogunode (2020b) carried out a study and found out that inadequate infrastructural facilities is a challenge facing the administration of higher institutions in FCT, Abuja, Nigeria. The factors responsible for inadequate infrastructural facilities in Nigerian public universities include; underfunding, increased in students population, corruption, poor infrastructural facilities planning, poor supervision and inflation. The implication of inadequate infrastructural facilities in the Nigerian public universities include; poor quality of education, poor teaching and learning, low productivities, brain-drain and overcrowdings of lecture halls (Ogunode, Ahmed, Gregory, Abubakar 2020; Ogunode & Jegede, 2021; Barbara, Joicey, Pletcher, Shaw, Whaley Peters, & Dunlap, 2014).

Brain-drain

Brain-drain is a major problem facing public universities in North central region of Nigeria. Ogunode and Adamu (2021) define Brain drain as massive movement of professional (academician) from developing countries to developed countries for a better employment opportunities and security. Hundreds of academician are leaving the Nigerian public higher institutions especially the universities leaving to the institutions starve of lecturers. The problem of brain-drain is affecting both federal and state universities in the region. For instance, Ogunode and Ndubuisi, (2021) did a study and discovered that Brain-drain problem is another problem facing the internal administration of public tertiary institutions in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja and some states in the region. Ogunode (2020a) submitted another problem preventing effective administration of public universities in Nigeria is the challenge of brain-drain problem. Ogunode, Akinlade and Abubakar, (2021); Ogunode, Okwelogu, Enyinnaya, and Yahaya (2021); Ogunode, Jegede and Musa (2021) observed that the mass movement of academicians from the Nigerian public universities is affecting the administration of the universities because academic staff are very important for the implementation of universities' programme. Factors responsible for Brain-drain in the Nigerian public universities according to Ogunode and Atobauka, (2021) include; poor motivation, uncondusive working environment, insecurity, underfunding and political interferences. The implication of brain-drain in the Nigerian public universities include; shortage of lecturers, poor quality of education and high student-teacher ratio (Ogunode, 2020a).

Insecurity

Insecurity is another problem facing the administration of public universities in North central Nigeria. Nigeria is facing insecurity challenge and this is affecting the entire educational institutions in the country. The Islamic sect called Boko haram meaning western education is forbidden is attacking educational institutions in the Northern part of Nigeria. Ogunode, Akin-Ibidiran and Ibidiran (2022); Ogunode and Ndayebom (2022); Ogunode, Ezema, and Olugbenga, (2022); Ogunode and Ukozor (2022) opined that many public universities located in the Northern Nigeria have been victims of continuous attacks. Many students, lecturers and administrators have been killed while others kidnapped. The various attacks on the universities have resulted to school closure leading to unstable academic programme (Ogunode, 2020). Public universities in the region have come under attacks. For instance, university of Abuja was attack and some lecturers were kidnapped as reported by Dailytrust (2021). Ogunode, Zhenseh, and Olatunde-Aiyedun, (2022); Adamu, Ogunode and Musa (2021) identified Brain-drain, increased in the cost of running tertiary education, destruction of infrastructural facilities, loss of manpower, reduction in enrolment of students and disruption of academic programme as the effects of insecurity on tertiary education in Nigeria.

Strike Actions

Strike actions in the Nigerian public universities in North central Nigeria is another problem facing the administration of public universities in the region. Strike actions is affecting the federal universities and state universities in the region. Punch (2017) reported that all tertiary institutions in Nasarawa state embarked on an indefinite strike over poor implementation of agreement with the state government. Tribune online (2017) also report that higher institutions in Kogi state embarked on warning strike to draw the attention of the state government to the plight the union members are facing in the state. Tribune online (2022) reports that all tertiary institutions in Benue state has embarked on indefinite strike because of poor implementation of agreement reached with all the unions in the state. At the federal level, Ogunode (2020a) submitted that the Nigerian public universities are known for continuous strike actions by different union groups in the public universities including those in the North central geo-political zone. Ogunode (2020b) carried out a study and discovered that strike action is a challenge facing the administration of higher institutions in FCT, Abuja, Nigeria. Ogunode, Ugochukwu and Jegede (2022); Ogunode (2020a); Ogunode and Adanna, (2022); Ogunode, Akinjobi, and Musa (2022) opined that the reasons for the strike actions by different union groups include; underfunding of the public universities, inadequate infrastructural facilities, poor implementation of agreement reached with union groups and poor working condition. The implications of the continuous strike actions on the public universities include; disruption in the academic programme, poor quality of education, bad image for the universities, poor ranking internationally and poor patronage of public universities in Nigeria.

Corruption

Corruption is another problem the public universities in the region are facing. The problem of corruption is hindering the development of both state and federal universities in the region. Ogunode and Ndubuisi (2021) opined that corruption is another challenge facing the internal administration of public tertiary institutions in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja which also include other states within the zone. Corruption is high in some federal universities in the region, for instance, Duru (2019) reported that the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, (EFCC) on Tuesday arraigned the former Vice-Chancellor of the Federal University of Agriculture, Makurdi, Prof. Emmanuel Kucha, at the Federal High Court for misappropriation of public funds. The ex- vice chancellor was arraigned before Justice Mobolaji Olajuwon on a four-count charge of conspiracy, misappropriation of public funds, abuse of office and gratification. Ishaya and Ogunode (2021); Ogunode (2020a) observed that corruption in the public universities in Nigeria is another problem preventing effective administration of public universities in Nigeria. The high rate of corruption in the Nigerian public universities has hindered effective administration of the universities. Many public universities are in the present condition because of the corruption in the system. Funds provided for implementation of programme, provision of infrastructural facilities, employment of staff and programme development ended up been looted or diverted into private account. Punch (2020) submitted that much of

the little funds that go into the universities are stolen. In the course of the face-off, the government claimed “the fraud in the universities is amazing and you will be shocked. ICPC did a system check recently, and it was so shocking. In fact, the worst two organisations they mentioned are the Teaching Hospitals and the universities. In 2018, the Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project claimed that there were allegations of corruption in several federal universities relating to the unfair allocation of grades; contract inflation; truncation of staff’s salary on the payroll; employment of unqualified staff; certificate scandal; examination malpractice; sexual harassment; and issuance of results for expelled students to graduate. Ogunode, Josiah and Ajape (2021) identified the following as the reasons for high financial corruption in the public universities in Nigeria: corrupt school administrators, lecturers and students; weak monitoring and evaluation system; weak trade unions; political interference; weak educational system; and poor accountability system. Also, they identified the implication of financial corruption on the public universities in Nigeria to include: reduction in the volume of funds, inadequate facilities, shortage of staff, and poor quality of university education, poor academic programme accreditation status, strike actions, and bad international image.

Political Influence

Another big challenge facing the administration of public universities in North-central Nigeria is the problem of political influence. The problem of political influence is affecting both the state and federal universities. At the federal level, Ogunode (2020b) did a study in FCT and discovered that political influence is affecting the administration and management of higher institutions in the territory. Majority of the state governors in the region influenced siting of the state universities in their constituencies. Ogunode and Musa (2020) observed that the activities of these governing councils is affecting effective administration of the public universities in Nigeria. The alarming level of political interference in the administration of public universities in Nigeria is frightening. The visitors of the universities who are the chief executives (president/governor) have reserved powers to appoint the chancellors and constitute the governing council of various universities under them and select their cronies as members. These appointees in turn interfere in the internal management of the university such selection of VCs and other principal officers of the universities. This practice is seriously jeopardizing the administrations of universities in Nigeria. Ogunode and Musa (2022) concluded that political influence is manifested in the administration of public tertiary institutions in the following ways: employment/recruitment of staff, the appointment of school administrators (VCs, Bursar, and Registrar), planning and establishment of public universities, location of universities, appointment of council members, expansion of National Universities Commission powers and admission of students into the various public universities. They also identified corruption, overconcentration of public universities, poor leadership, uneven development of public universities, and poor ranking of public universities as effects of political influence on the administration of Nigerian public universities.

Conclusion

The paper concludes that inadequate funding, shortage of academic staff, inadequate infrastructure facilities, brain-drain, insecurity problems, strike actions, corruption and political influence are the challenges public universities in North-central geo-political zone are facing.

Recommendations

To solve the challenges facing the public universities in North central geo-political, the following were recommended:

- a) The federal and state government should increase the funding of public universities in the region. This will help to develop the universities.
- b) The government should direct employment in all the public universities in the region. This will help to reduce the problem of high student-teachers in the universities.
- c) The government should provide adequate fund to expand the facilities in all the public universities in the region.
- d) The government should increase the salaries of lecturers to prevent brain-drain in the system in the region.
- e) The government should address problems causing insecurity in the region and provide adequate security in all the public universities in the region.
- f) The government should ensure agreement reached with different union groups in the public universities in the region are implemented to avoid strike actions in the public universities.
- g) The government should direct all its anti-corruption agencies to monitor all the funds released to the public universities in the region to prevent mismanagement of funds in the universities.
- h) The government should grant autonomy to all the public universities in the region. This will help to reduce the rate of political influence.

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