

Public University Education in North-West Geo-Political Zone of Nigeria: Problems and Way Forward

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ABSTRACT

North-West geo-political zone of Nigeria is one of the largest geo-political zones with seven states. The geopolitical zone is host to many educational institutions which include public universities. The public universities in the zone are faced with some challenges which are hindering their development. This paper discussed the challenges the public universities in North-West are facing. Secondary data were used to provide empirical support to the various points raised. The paper concluded that inadequate funding, shortages of academic staffs, insecurity problems, poor motivation, poor research programmes, inadequate infrastructural facilities, corruption, brain-drain and strike actions are part of the challenges facing public universities in the North-west geo-political zone of Nigeria. The paper recommended that the federal and state government should increase the funding of the universities in the region, more academic staffs should be employed and more infrastructural facilities should be put in place. Academic staffs should be motivated and the agreements that both states and federal governments reached with union groups within the universities should be implemented. Adequate security and corruption problems should be tackled by addressing all factors responsible for insecurity and the deployment of anti-corruption agencies to monitor funds released to the various universities and the activities of universities in the region.

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 07 Nov 2022

Received in revised form
08 Dec 2022

Accepted 16 Jan 2023

Keywords: Administration, Challenges, Public University, North-West, Zone.

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Introduction

The North West (often hyphenated to the North-West) is one of the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria representing both a geographic and political region of the country's northwest area. It comprises seven states – Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto, and Zamfara. Geographically, the zone is almost entirely within the tropical West Sudanian savanna eco-region. Culturally, the majority of the zone falls within Hausaland—the indigenous cultural homeland of the Hausa people, a group which makes up the largest ethnic percentage of the northwestern population; however, there are sizable minorities of Fulani people and other groups, mainly on the zone's peripheries.

Economically, the North West's urban areas—like the city of Kano—are large boosts to the Nigerian economy while most rural areas lag due to insecurity, low education rates, and government neglect. The

region has a population of about 49 million people, around 23% of the total population of the country. The North West is host to many public universities including state and federal universities. These public universities were established to provide quality university education in the region. The public universities are also saddled with the responsibilities of manpower production and developments in the region. The public universities in the region are plagued with many problems which have affected their operations and performances. This paper is aimed to discuss the problems public universities in North-West geo-political region are faced with and suggest ways of solving the problems for universities sustainability and development in Nigeria.

Concept of Public Universities

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 an act of parliament to serve the interest of the general public. Public universities deal with the provision of teaching, research and community services. 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 (Ogunode, 2020).

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

Public University Education in North West Geo-Political Zone and Problems

The problems facing university education in North-West geo-political zone include; inadequate funding, shortage of academic staffs, insecurity problem, poor motivation, poor research programmes, inadequate infrastructural facilities, corruption, brain-drain and strike actions.

Inadequate Funding

Adequate funding is critical to the development of university education. It is what can guarantee holistic development in the university system. Many public universities in North-west geo-political zone are underfunded and this is affecting their performances in terms of quality. The funding problem has affected both state and federal universities across the region. Musa (2017) reported that many public higher institutions in the zone are not properly funded by the federal and state government. Specifically, Kaduna State University, Zamfara state university and Katsina state university were reported to be poorly funded (Musa 2017; Abu, 2019). Ogunode (2020) and Okebukola (2018) observed that the poor funding of public universities in Nigeria is responsible for the poor quality of education and the decay of infrastructural facilities. The inability of both the federal and state government to objectively implement the UNESCO 26% recommendation for the funding of education in Nigeria is contributing to the poor performance of the public universities in the country. For instance, in 2022 budget, the Federal Government, allocated the sum of N355.47 billion to the 44 federal universities from the total budget of N875.93 billion given to the education sector. According to a document by a civic organization, BudgIT, out of the N355.47 billion allocated to the federal universities, N326.9 billion would go for recurrent expenditure comprising N320.7 billion for personnel cost and N6.1 billion for overhead cost. Only N25.5 billion is slated for capital projects in the universities (Vanguard, 2022). The factors responsible for inadequate funding of public universities in Nigeria were identified by Ogunode (2020) and Ogunode, Akinlade, & Musa (2021) to include lack of political will, corruption, increase in population, inflation, fall in national revenue and poor financial planning. The implications of underfunding of public universities include; inadequate infrastructural facilities, shortage of academic staffs, poor quality of education, brain-drain and strike action.

Shortage of Academic Staff

Shortage of academic staff is another major problem public universities in the North-west geo-political zone of Nigeria are faced with. According to Ogunode & Abubakar (2021), that academic staffs or lecturers are faculty members in higher institutions or universities. The lecturers are responsible for implementing the teaching programme; they are the line unit in the university setting, and they deliver academic services of teaching and assessing the students. The roles of the academic staffs in the development of university education cannot be underestimated. As important as the academic staff is to the development of the universities it is unfortunate that many public universities in the North-West geo-political zone do not have adequate academics. For example, a Daily trust (2021) investigation revealed that for the past two years, Zamfara State University has been operating from its temporary site, even without academic and non-academic staff. As a result, all the functions of the institution that are expected to be carried out by the relevant management staff, such as deans, heads of departments and examination officers are being performed by the visiting lecturers, who periodically come from other universities across the country. There are no permanent lecturers and the visiting ones who come from time to time are not even paid. It is obvious that the governor is not serious about the university because since he came into office he has neither rendered any financial assistance nor visited the institution,” he said. NUC digest (2019) revealed that Ahmadu Bello University has 2,225, Bayero University has 1,946, Usmanu Danfodiyo University has 1,150, Kaduna State University has 689, Umaru Musa Yar’Adua has 476, Kebbi State University of Science. & Technology has 455, Sokoto State University has 221, Federal University Birnin Kebbi 217 and Zamfara State University 200 academic staffs, compared with the number of students in the universities. Those state universities are faced with a shortage of academic staffs. The problem of inadequate academic staffs also affected the federal universities. According to NUC digest (2019), no federal university scored up to 50 per cent in the ranking of full professors. This implies that no federal university has the required number of full professors they require. Some of the federal universities ranked in the top 10 are the Usmanu Dan-Fodiyo University, Sokoto, with 36.44 percent; Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife, 35.80 percent; University of Ibadan, 29.04 percent; Federal University of Technology, Akure, 27.28 percent; Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta, 27.25 percent; University of Abuja, 25.33 percent; University of Benin, 23.26 percent; University of Port Harcourt, 21.26 percent; University of Calabar, 21.20 percent; and University of Ilorin, 21.12 percent. The NUC data also puts the number of academic staff in Nigerian universities at 100,000. “The entire system has about 2.1 million students and staff strength of about 170,000 non-teaching and 100,000 academic staff,” the NUC stated. 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 (Ogunode 2020; NEEDS, 2014). Ogunode & Okwelogu (2022) and Ogunode & Adamu (2021) identified; inadequate funding, lack of strategic manpower planning, brain drain, poor motivation, un-conducive working environment and corruption as the reasons for the shortage of academic staff in Nigerian higher institutions. They also identified low productivity, poor quality of teaching, and poor quality of education as the effects of a shortage of academic staff in Nigerian public higher institutions.

Insecurity Problem

Insecurity is another problem facing the administration of public universities in the North-West geo-political zone of Nigeria. Public universities in the zone had experienced different attacks from the Bandits and Boko haram members. Daily Trust (201) reported that the abduction and subsequent release of students of the Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), Zaria along the Kaduna-Abuja highway and the invasion of the home of Bello Atiku of the Nuhu Bamali Polytechnic, also in Zaria, together with that of Dr Ibrahim Bako, a lecturer in the Department of Physiology, ABU, have sent fears into the academic community as there’s an indication that students and lecturers are no longer safe. Ogunode (2020) and Ogunode, Okwelogu, Enyinnaya & Yahaya (2021) observed that Nigeria is facing an 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. Many public universities located in Northern Nigeria have been victims of continuous attacks.

Many students, lecturers and administrators have been killed while others kidnapped. As presented by Ayoko (2022), the issue of schools attack by the insurgent especially in the northern part of the country calls for a serious intervention because no meaningful development and progress can take place in the administration of schools under such condition because the high frequency of risk factors caused by insecurity in the northern Nigeria will continue to contribute to the rate of school dropout. The various attacks on the universities have resulted in school closure leading to an unstable academic programme. Muhammed & Ogunode (2021) concluded that the insecurity challenges in North-West geo-political zone have led to death of teachers and students, affected achievement of education objective, enrolment and retention of students and also led to disruption of school administration and academic calendar of the schools across the zone.

Poor Motivation

Academic staff of public universities in the zone is also faced with poor motivation. Academic staffs from different universities in the region have embarked on strike actions because of poor working conditions. Salaries are not paid on time, earned allowances and other promotion allowance are also not paid on time. Majorities of the academic staff are not promoted as at when due. For example, the Academic Staff Union of University (ASUU), Kano University of Science and Technology branch, said it would embark on an indefinite strike following what the union described as negligence of the University authority towards the plight of lecturers. The Union has been airing complaints about the University's management over refusal to pay the staffs their entitlements, and illegal deduction of a certain percentage from students' registration fees by Kano State Internal Revenue Service (KIRS). A joint press release by the branch's Chairman, Professor Muhammad Sani Gaya, and Secretary, Dr. Murtala Muhammad accused the management of nonchalance attitudes towards the plight of lecturers and students. "Our demands center on the unremitted staff pension contributions by the University Authority amounting to the tune of N 352 Million, non-payment of staff benefits (Earned Allowance, Hazard Allowance, PG grant (2nd batch), SIWES/TP/Field trips), and the non-remittance of the taxes deducted from staffs salaries and Withholding tax amounting to N 190 Million," the statement said. The problem of poor motivation is not only associated with public universities in the region alone but a common problem facing the academic staff working in majorities of the public universities in Nigeria (Ogunode, Jegede & Musa 2021).

The reason behind the poor motivation in the education sector is that the salaries are low when compared to other professionals, poor work environment, no decision making authority, and also not giving them opportunity to develop their careers. Motivation plays an important role in the school organization because it increases the productivity of teachers so that the goals can be achieved in an efficient way. The behavior of employees can be change through motivation in any organization (Ogunode, Ahmed, & Ayoko, 2023)

Poor Research Programme

Poor research programme is another challenge facing the public universities in the North-east zone. The research programme of both federal and state universities is weak. Research is the second cardinal programme of the universities. Universities conduct research to solve problems and improve the society. Ogunode (2020) submitted that poor research programme is another issue in the Nigerian university education system. The Nigerian universities especially the public universities are not doing well in term of research programme. Ogunode, Jegede, Adah, Audu, Ajape (2021) observed that research programme is one of the major programme of the universities. They observed that inadequate research funding, unstable academic calendar/strike actions, inadequate infrastructural facilities, brain-drain, insecurity, corruption, poor technological advancement/poor ICT literacy are few of the many problems facing the administration of research programme in Nigerian University. Others are poor participation of the private sector in research development and lack of conducive working (research) environment (Ogunode, Jegede, Adah, Audu, & Ajape, 2021).

Inadequate Infrastructural Facilities

Inadequate infrastructural facilities are major problems facing the public universities in the North-West geo-political zone of Nigeria. Many public universities in the region do not have adequate infrastructural facilities. The problem of infrastructural facilities both affects the state owned universities and federal

universities in the region. For instance, Ogunode (2020) viewed infrastructural facilities as those 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. In Nigeria Ogunode (2020) and Ogunode & Ndayebom, (2022) submitted that many public universities in the region do not have adequate lectures halls, laboratories and offices for both students and academic staff. Also, Lawal (2021) as quoted by Tribune (2021) noted that despite huge sums of funds allocated to education by both Federal and State Governments every year, those funds have not had a physical impact on the sectors in the areas of infrastructure and facilities on the campuses. According to him, during visits to some of the universities, both Federal and State-owned institutions, students fight to secure venue for lectures and examination, because of acute shortage of lecture halls, no equipment for practicals, lecturers struggle to get office space, most structures are archaic and dilapidated. Generally, Tribune (2021) observed that lack of infrastructure such as accommodation and power have remained the major challenges facing many universities across the country. Most campuses of tertiary institutions are laced with decayed infrastructure such as hostels, lecture halls, health centres and roads. They remain issues that have continued to elicit protests in federal and state universities. In most universities, the conditions of students leave much to be desired in both classes and hostels. Students' hostel facilities are an integral part of welfare system. Due to high demand for campus accommodation, more students require attention in this regard. What is usually observed is that these situations often linger on unnecessarily rather disheartening since students need comfortable accommodations in order to conveniently carry out their primary purpose of learning.

Corruption

Corruption is another problem facing university education in North-West Nigeria. Ololube, (2016) submitted that the universities system is plagued with corruption. Some public universities administrators in the North-West region are accused with corruption allegations. For instance, Pressreader (2017) reported that the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), Kano Zone has frowned at the non-payment of excess workload allowance and postgraduate research grant totaling N273 million, as well as other conflicting issues at Kano University of Science and Technology (KUST), Wudil. Also, in federal university Zamfara, Daily trust reported that the staff of the Federal University, Gusau, have accused the university's Vice-Chancellor, Professor Magaji Garba, of corruption and disregard for due process in the award of contracts, and requested for an investigation into the matter. It is a known fact that the Vice-Chancellor was guilty of splitting contracts for procurement and consultancy illegally awarded to a company. "For instance, the Vice-Chancellor awarded a contract and entered into Public-Private-Partnership (PPP) agreement with a company without following due process and against the rules governing such projects. "On the illegal recruitment of staff, evidence was available in which the Vice-Chancellor never followed due process. Some instances were unraveled in the Council's Investigation Committee's report," the petitioners said (Daily trust, 2020). Generally, Ogunode & Abubakar (2021); Ogunode, Josiah, & Ajape (2021) and Madaki (2019) observed that institutional corruption is one of the major problems facing the administration of the universities in Nigeria. The entire higher educational system is engulfed in corrupt practices. The budgetary allocation for the administration of university education in Nigeria is sometimes diverted by officials within the system. There are many forms of corrupt practices in the universities in Nigeria. Some of them include sex for marks, bribery to get position, NYSC mobilization scandal, issuing of fake transcript, illegal employments, unmerited promotion staffs, formation of cliques and groups, inflating contracts etc. Ogunode, & Abubakar, (2020), Ogbondah (2010) and Dare (2008) agreed in their respective papers that corruption is a challenge facing the higher institutions in Nigeria.

Brain-Drain

Another problem preventing development of public universities in Nigeria and in North-West geopolitical zone is the problem of brain-drain. Ogunode (2020) defined brain-drain as the movement of professionals from developing countries to developed countries for a better job offers. Brain-drain is a situation whereby professional individuals are migrating from their countries to another country to seek greener pasture. According to Muhhame (2019) brain-drain is a general problem facing both state and federal universities in Nigeria. Many lecturers and researchers are leaving public universities in North-

West geo political zone and other part of the country because of insecurity problems and other factors to go to other African countries and European countries for a better job offer and more conducive working environment. Ogunode (2020) and Ogunode & Atobauka, (2021a) submitted 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 include; poor motivation, unconducive 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, Yiolokun, & Akeredolu, 2019).

Strike Actions

According to Ogunode, Ezema & Ayoko, (2022), Nigerian public universities are faced with the problems of continuous ASUU strike. Programme planned and developed by various leaders in the higher institutions for the development of the institutions are frustrated by strike action

Strike simply means protest by employees (mostly under labour unions) through concerted cessation of work due to an impasse with the employers. It is the last resort for employees to have their grievances addressed. However, the incessant strike action is adversely affecting the effective running of universities in Nigeria and especially the north-western zone.

Strike action is a very serious problem facing the university education in Nigeria. Both federal and state universities are affected by the problems of strike actions. Strikes action by different unions in the Nigerian universities is another problem preventing effective administration of the universities (Okoli, Ogbondah, & Ewor, 2016; Ogunode & Abubakar 2021). For instance, a survey by premium times, an online newspaper revealed that in the last two decades Nigerian universities were shut down fifteen times due to strikes and the period spent spanned about fifty months (still counting). This effect is massive; the most affected area is the academic calendar. Once the school is closed for strike, there must be changes in its existing plans of activities and the implication is that a programme that is designed to four years would have additional month(s) or year(s). Adanwa & Ogunode (2022) opined that strike becomes a bottleneck in the smooth running of universities in Nigeria. Lawan & Ogunode (2021) and Ogunode, Ugochukwu, & Jegede (2022) established that strike actions is one of the major problem facing the university system in Nigeria.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The paper looked at the problems public universities in North-West are faced with, that is hindering their development. The paper concluded that inadequate funding, shortage of academic staffs, insecurity problem, poor motivation, poor research programme, inadequate infrastructural facilities, corruption, brain-drain and strike actions are some of the problems facing university education in the North-West geo-political zone of Nigeria.

To address the problems that public universities in North-West geo-political zone are facing, the paper hereby recommended that:

- a) Both federal and state government should increase the funding of the university education in the zone to enable the universities administrators to acquire necessary human and materials resources for the development of the universities in the region;
- b) Both federal and state government should provide more infrastructural facilities in all the public universities across the region;
- c) Both federal and state government should direct all the school administrators to employ more academic staffs in their various universities in the region;
- d) All forms of corruption in the university system should be fought by both federal and state government using her anti-corruption agencies;
- e) Both federal and state government should motivate all academic staffs to prevent the brain-drain syndrome in the universities located in the region;

- f) Agreement reached with various unions within the universities in the zone should be implemented to avoid strike actions in the universities;
- g) The government should increase the research funding of the universities;
- h) Government should address factors responsible for the insecurity challenges in the region and provide adequate security in all the public universities located in the region.

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