Tertiary Education Trust Fund Intervention and Quality Assurance among Public Universities in Cross river State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study examined Tertiary Education Trust Fund intervention and quality assurance among public Universities in Cross River State, Nigeria. Survey research design was adopted for the study. Two research questions and two hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. Census sampling technique was used to sample all the 250 institutional administrators in the Universities. An instrument titled Tertiary Education Trust Fund Interventions and Quality Assurance Questionnaire (TETFIQAQ) was used for data collection. The instrument was face validated by two experts: one from Educational Management and another from Measurement and Evaluation. The Cronbach Alpha method was used to determine the reliability index of the instrument at .91 which indicated that the instrument was reliable enough for the study. Data collected were analyzed using simple linear regression. Findings revealed that TETFund intervention allocations and TETFund research grants significantly predicted quality assurance in terms of staff training, project development and research/journal publications among academic staff in public universities in Cross River State, Nigeria. Premised on the findings, it was recommended that more funds and modern research facilities should be made available with proactive monitoring team within the universities so that the challenges of underfunding and related corrupt practices can be addressed to enhance quality assurance in Cross River State public universities.

Keywords: Tertiary Education Trust Fund, quality assurance, public Universities

Introduction

Globally, university education across the world has witnessed tremendous challenges including poor accreditation of courses, disapproval of courses and programmes, low maintenance of minimum academic standards, poor monitoring of public and private universities, lack of proper guidelines for setting up of universities which has led to rampant establishment of illegal campuses. This has to a large extent hindered higher education development in Sub-Saharan African countries such as South Africa, Madagascar, Malawi Mali, Mauritania, Namibia and Niger among others. Nigeria is not exempted from this ugly trend. In fact, the issue of graduate unemployability orchestrated by poor academic performance and lack of quality assurance in higher institutions has become a major source of concern to educational stakeholders in Nigeria. The purpose of this paper therefore is to examine the influence of Tertiary Education Trust Fund in enhancing quality assurance in Nigerian higher institutions in general and Cross River State Universities in particular.

TETFund however, is one of the agencies in Nigeria set up by government for managing the University education system by overseeing and monitoring the university system. TETFund

came into existence in 2011 after it metamorphosed from the Education Trust Fund (ETF) which was established in 1993 (Ezeali, 2017). However, as an intervention agency, management of TETFund support services is the systematic process of ensuring that educational resources meant for the attainment of the objectives of tertiary institutions are effectively and efficiently utilized. Also, TETFund provides necessary resources including funding, project facilitation as well as staff training and development programmes among others. On the contrary, it is observed that there are some challenges hindering effective utilization of TETFund support services to promote quality assurance in Cross River State public Universities which have limited the success of the agency in her overall activities. The researchers observed that some lecturers have not benefited from TETFund research grants and intervention allocations. Also, funds generated and disbursed by the agency to the Universities are subject to some prescribed personal usage by institutional administrators other than for the facilitation of research and educational projects in the school system. As such, the agency lacks the freedom to express their will on how their activities should be coordinated. This seems to hinder the functions of the agency in promoting quality assurance in higher institutions.

Quality assurance simply refers to a way of preventing mistakes and defects in manufactured products and avoiding problems when delivering products or services to customers. At the university level, quality assurance involves staff training, project development and research publications. It is a part of quality management focused on providing confidence that quality requirements will be fulfilled. Quality assurance therefore implies conscious efforts put in place to ensure that the social services, facilities and human resource or capacity conform to established university standards. According to Okebukola (2014) quality assurance is a continuous process of improvement in the quality of teaching and learning activities that will be achieved through employing mechanisms that are internal and external to the universities environment.

In Cross River State public Universities, the issue of ensuring quality delivery in the products and services of the university system is what students, lecturers, parents and the public are clamoring and agitating for. There is poor implementation of professional training and development programmes in the University. Some Heads of Departments are still grappling with the implementation of most essential educational projects in the school system. There is lack of job satisfaction and work commitment among lecturers. Some lecturers find it too difficult to conduct research and publish in reputable journals due to their inability to combine teaching tasks and research hurdles. Meanwhile, the National Policy on Education (2014) states the goals of tertiary education to include inter alia: (i) to reduce skill shortages through the production of skilled manpower relevant to the needs of the labour market; (ii) to develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of the individual and society; (iii) to promote national and international understanding and interactions and (iv) to forge and cement national unity. On the contrary, this implies that without the effective and efficient management of quality assurance in the Nigerian universities, there will be confusion, chaos, anarchy and doom in the country.

One of the dimensions of quality assurance in the University work environment that enhances teaching and learning is staff personnel training. It is an aspect of human resource development in any organization that involves a planned and systematic modification of behavior through learning, event, programmes and instruction, which enable individuals (academic staff) to achieve the level of knowledge, skills and competence needed to carry out their work efficiently. Effective teaching delivery cannot exist in the university system where lecturers are denied professional training. Also, another dimension of quality assurance in the

university system is project management. It is the practice of initiating, planning, executing and controlling the work of a team to achieve specific goals and meet specific success criteria at the specified time. The primary challenge of project management is to achieve the entire project goals within the given constraints without which the objectives of quality assurance is defeated in the university system (Ezeali, 2017).

According to Ezeali (2017), research publication is also another measure of quality assurance in the University system that helps to maintain minimum academic standard. Research publication involves the creation of new knowledge/use of existing knowledge in innovative and creative ways so as to generate new concepts, methodologies, and understandings for educational outcomes. Quality assurance is achieved in the school environment when the University manager supports individuals with research resources in solving educational problems via collaborative research and publishing their findings in reputable journals and conference proceedings (Oraka, ogbodo & Raymond, 2013).

Worried about poor quality service delivery in Nigerian higher institutions, some stakeholders have in different occasions apportioned blames to higher education regulatory authorities. They have within the past ten years identified some factors as the causes of lack of quality assurance. Reports from Ezeali (2017) indicate some factors identified to include poor staff accommodation, lack of office spaces, incessant industrial action, and instability in government policies, home-school distance, and poor organisational behaviour. Others are delayed promotion, politicized accreditation services, lack of curriculum development programmes, insufficient good textbooks, high students-lecturer ratio, and low motivation, decline in staff quality and quantity which is reflected in the high rate of human capital flight, unqualified instructors, outdated curricula, shortages of learning resources, poor University governance, deficient inputs, increasing class size and inadequate financing, negative influence of departmental cultures, deterioration of quality assurance practices, and poor management of TETFund intervention services, to mention but a few.

This implies that it will be very difficult to maintain quality assurance in public university education in Cross River State without effective management of Tertiary Education Trust Fund intervention services by institutional administrators. Management, according to Okorji and Unachukwu (2014) is the process of planning, organising, directing and controlling the activities of an institution by utilizing human and material resources so as to effectively and efficiently accomplish teaching and learning. At the University level, management of TETFund support services therefore is the process of effectively utilizing managerial principles with human and material resources to sustain educational service delivery. It is therefore against this background that this study is established to find out how TETFund interventions could predict quality assurance in public universities in Cross River State, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Universities were established by law to render quality social services to staff/students and communities. But a critical observation revealed that lack of quality assurance in some universities in Cross River State public Universities has become a source of major concern to students, lecturers, parents and the general public. It has been observed that some school administrators hardly organise conferences, seminars, workshops, induction and on-the-job training for lecturers in the Universities. It seems that some lecturers are not adequately trained for effective teaching delivery. There is poor implementation of professional training and development programmes in the Universities. However, some of the TETFund intervention equipment are not installed, while others are underutilized or not properly maintained by the

benefiting institutions. Hence, the underutilization of the funds largely seems to be due to the lack of trained laboratory technologists in the area of technical and vocational education across the universities. Observations indicate that some lecturers find it too difficult to conduct research and publish in reputable journals due to the challenges inherent in accessing TETFund research grant for staff training between academic staff in the senior and junior cadres. There is high rate of put-my-name syndrome among lecturers who cannot undertake research but choose to hide under the umbrella of few good research fellows. It is also observed that some Heads of Departments are still grappling with cycles of initiation, planning, implementation, and closure of some essential educational projects in the school system.

This results in lack of job satisfaction and work commitment among lecturers. It also leads to poor quality assurance, delayed graduation as well as graduate unemployability among the students. Government have provided professional development programmes for lecturers and installed digital libraries to enhance quality assurance in university education service delivery, yet the problem persists. Therefore, this study is set to find out the extent of management of TETFund support services and quality assurance in public Universities in Cross River State, while addressing this question: To what extent can the management of TETFund support services promote quality assurance in public Universities in Cross River State of Nigeria?

Literature review
TETFund Intervention Allocations and Quality Assurance in the School System

Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) is an intervention agency set up to provide supplementary support to all levels of public tertiary institutions with the main objective of using funding alongside project management for the rehabilitation, restoration and consolidation of tertiary education in Nigeria.

Ezeali (2017) studied the impact of TETFund intervention on human resources development in government owned tertiary institutions in South Eastern Nigeria (2011-2016). The results of the correlation tests indicated that TETFund intervention on training and development has great impact on improved skills and development of the staff of tertiary institutions, and TETFund sponsorship of academic staff to conferences and workshops has significant impact on research and academic growth in tertiary institutions. Similarly, Oraka, ogbodo and Raymond (2013) explored the effect of tertiary education tax fund (TETFund) in management of Nigerian tertiary institutions. Based on the analysis, the study found that ETF fund allocations to Nigerian Tertiary Institutions have no correlation with the enrollment ratio of Nigerian Tertiary Institutions.

In a related study, Nagbe and Micah (2019) investigated the relationship between tertiary education trust fund and development of tertiary institutions in Nigeria from 2009 – 2017. The findings revealed mixed results. Tertiary trust fund depicted positive and significant relationship with staff training. However, Tertiary trust fund positively correlated with project development, research & journal publications and library development but did not have significant relationship. Anaehobi and Agim (2019) studied TETFund intervention and development of university libraries in South East, Nigeria. The findings revealed that the university libraries in South-East, Nigeria have been able to acquire information resources such as new encyclopedias and other reference sources through TETFund intervention, staff in the libraries have benefited from TETFund sponsored staff development programmes, the Fund has contributed to physical infrastructure in the libraries, research and publications of books

and journals executed by library staff in university libraries in South-East Nigeria have been sponsored through TETFund intervention.

TETFund Research Grants and Quality Assurance in the School System

TETFund research grants refer to research-oriented services rendered to individual that result in the creation of new knowledge/use of existing knowledge in new and creative ways so as to generate new concepts, methodologies, understandings and innovative outcomes. Agha and Udu (2016) examined quality and relevance of tertiary education trust fund intervention researches in tertiary institutions in South East Nigeria (2010-2015). Findings revealed that TETFund intervention to a high extent has no significant impact on quality and relevant research by employees of state owned universities in south East Nigeria. This was attributed first, to the fact that funds allocated to these institutions overtime were under accessed due to the institutions' inability to meet conditions set by TETFund for continuous access. Secondly, many academics that access research grants used part of them to take care of their personal needs leaving a paltry sum for research.

Onwuchekwa (2016) investigated the Influence of TETFUND research grant to educational research in Nigerian Universities. The findings showed that TETFUND intervention fund to a high extent has no significant influence on educational research in Universities in South East, Nigeria. Larry and Joseph (2013) explored Tertiary Education Trust Fund research grant and sustainable development in Nigerian Universities: Evidence from Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki. The study found that TETFund research grants in Nigerian Universities particularly EBSU have impacted positively on the infrastructural and human development of the institutions. Onyeike and Eseyin (2014) studied tertiary education trust fund (TETFund) and the management of university education in Nigeria. It was concluded that if well-coordinated, TETFund can help to boost the structure of University education in Nigeria.

Similarly, Omobude, Ikhisemojie, Oyetunji, and Omorogbe (2017) conducted a study on TETFUND research grants and sustainability of infrastructural facilities in the University of Benin. The study used data related to the activities of TETFUND in the University of Benin, these were analyzed, and the results of the study revealed among other things that since the inception of .TETFUND, there has been massive infrastructural development in the university, and that this has far increased the carrying capacity of the institution greatly. In the same vein, Briggs (2019) found that TETFund research grant has made significant positive impact on improving the educational sector in Nigeria by facilitating various intervention projects. It was equally found that each institution is subject to TETFund directives for determining which lecturers becomes a beneficiary. Meanwhile the principal officers such as Vice Chancellors, Rectors, Provosts and their deputies, Directors of works and librarians are not to be included as beneficiaries. The results further revealed that TETFund sharing formular nationwide for tertiary institutions were 25 percent, 12.5 percent, and 12.5 percent for universities, polytechnics and colleges of education while the remaining 50 percent was distributed to secondary and primary schools.

Adabviele (2016) found that despite the developmental impact in institutions of learning. ETF lacks effective internal control and this has given rise to numerous ills, the institution stands high risk of losing large portion of its resources through wastage and misappropriation. The study also revealed that problems that ETF is facing can be surmounted. They are lack of proper accounting record, lopsidedness in the management of ETF, lack of proper sharing formula of the fund among the tertiary institutions.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study was to investigate Tertiary Education Trust Fund intervention and quality assurance among public Universities in Cross River State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to find out how:
1)   Tertiary Education Trust Fund intervention allocation predicts quality assurance
2)   Tertiary Education Trust Fund research grants predicts quality assurance

Research Questions
1)   To what extent does Tertiary Education Trust Fund allocation intervention predict quality assurance in public universities in Cross River State?
2)   How does Tertiary Education Trust Fund research grant predict quality assurance in public universities in Cross River State?

Null Hypotheses
1)   Tertiary Education Trust Fund intervention allocation does not significantly predict quality assurance in public Universities in Cross River State.
2)   There is no significant prediction of Tertiary Education Trust Fund research grant on quality assurance in public Universities in Cross River State.

Methodology

This research was carried out in Cross River State, Nigeria. The study area is Cross River State because it is believed to be at par with quality assurance in terms of University education management through TETFund interventions. The study adopted survey research design while Census sampling technique was used to sample all the 250 institutional administrators in the Universities. The instrument used for the study was a four-point rating scale questionnaire titled: Tertiary Education Trust Fund Intervention and Quality Assurance Questionnaire (TETFIQAQ). The instrument was structured into three (3) sections A, B and C. Section A comprised of the demography of the respondents (name of university, type of unit headed, name of department and years in service as a head) using four (4) items. Section B measured the management of TETFUND Intervention services with thirty (12) items. Section C measured on the quality assurance of universities in cross River State with eighteen (18) items. The four points were: VHE (Very High Extent), HE (High Extent), LE (Low Extent) and VLE (Very Low Extent). For quality assurance, the scores of respondents were obtained using four point rating scale. The four points were: SA (Strongly Agree), A (Agree), D (Disagree) and SD (Strongly Disagree). The scales were scored 4, 3, 2, and 1 respectively for positively worded items and reversed for negatively worded items. The instrument was face validated by three experts; one from Test and Measurement and another from Educational Management of the University of Calabar. Cronbach Alpha method was used to determine the reliability coefficient at .91. Out of the 250 copies of questionnaire that were administered on the respondents with the help of trained research assistants, 238 copies were retrieved, scrutinized, gleaned and analyzed for the study.

Presentation of Results

Null Hypothesis 1:   Hypothesis one states that TETFund intervention allocations does not significantly predict quality assurance in Cross River State public Universities in terms of staff training, project development and research publications.

The independent variable is TETFund intervention allocations while the dependent variable is quality assurance assessed from three perspectives (staff training, project development and research publications). The variables were measured continuously. To test this hypothesis, simple linear regression was applied to the data. The result is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of simple linear regression analysis for the contribution of TETFund intervention allocations on quality assurance in Cross River State public Universities

Quality assurance Variables	Source of Variation	Sum of Square	Df	Mean Square	F-ratio	p-level	R^2
Staff training	Regression	13.182	1	13.182	2.133	.145	.009
	Residual	1507.814	237	6.180			
	Total	1520.996	238				
Project development	Regression	96.745	1	96.745	13.535	.000	.053
	Residual	1744.105	237	7.148			
	Total	1840.850	238				
Research publications	Regression	12.109	1	12.109	.892	.346	.004
	Residual	3311.484	237	13.572			
	Total	3323.593	238				

*$p<.05$

Table 1 showed that the analysis of variance in the regression output produced an F-ratio of 2.133 for staff training, 13.535 for project development, and .892 for research publications. These F-ratios were all statistically significant at .05 probability level. On the basis of this result, the first null hypothesis was rejected ($p>.05$). This means that, TETFund intervention allocations significantly predicted quality assurance in terms of staff training, project development and research publications. The result also shows that a coefficient of determination (R^2) of .009 for staff training, .053 for project development, and .004 for research publications. This implies that, .90%, 5.30%, and .40% of the variance in staff training, project development and research publications respectively was accounted for by TETFund intervention allocations. Thus, 99.10%, 94.70% and 99.60% of the variance in staff training, project development and research publications respectively, may be attributed to the effect of other variables extraneous to the study.

Null Hypothesis 2: There is no significant prediction of Tertiary Education Trust Fund research grant on quality assurance in public Universities in Cross River State.in terms of staff training, project development and research publications.

The independent variable is TETFund research grant while the dependent variable is quality assurance assessed from three perspectives (staff training, project development and research publications). The variables were measured continuously. To test this hypothesis, simple linear regression was applied to the data. The result is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Summary of simple linear regression analysis for the contribution of TETFund research grant to quality assurance in Cross River State public Universities

Quality assurance Variables	Source of Variation	Sum of Square	Df	Mean square	F-ratio	p-level	R^2
Staff training	Regression	2.050	1	2.050	.329	.567	.001
	Residual	1518.946	244	6.225			
	Total	1520.996	245				

Project development	Regression	285.454	1	285.454	44.78	.000	.155
	Residual	1555.396	244	6.375			
	Total	1840.850	245				
Research publications	Regression	16.009	1	16.009	1.18	.278	.005
	Residual	3307.584	244	13.556			
	Total	3323.593	245				

*p<.05

Table 2 shows that the analysis of variance in the regression output produced an F-ratio of .329 for staff training, 44.78 for project development, and 1.18 for research publications. These F-ratios were all statistically significant at .05 probability level. On the basis of this result, the second null hypothesis was rejected (p>.05). This means that, TETFund research grants significantly predicted quality assurance in terms of staff training, project development and research publications. The result also shows that a coefficient of determination (R^2) of .001 for staff training, .155 for project development, and .005 for research publications. This implies that, .10%, 15.50%, and .50% of the variance in staff training, project development and research publications respectively was accounted for by TETFund research grants. Thus, 99.9%, 99.85% and 99.55% of the variance in staff training, project development and research publications respectively, may be attributed to the effect of other variables extraneous to the study.

Discussion of the Findings

The findings from null hypothesis 1 revealed that TETFund intervention allocations significantly predicted quality assurance in public universities in the three dimensions measured. The implication of this finding is that the more institutional administrators effectively managed TETFund intervention allocation, the more quality is ensured in terms of staff training, project development and research publication. This finding is consistent with the study finding of Oraka, ogbodo and Raymond (2013), Ezeali (2017) and Nagbe and Micah (2019) whose results of the correlation tests indicated that TETFund intervention on training and development has great impact on improved skills and development of the staff of tertiary institutions, and TETFund sponsorship of academic staff to conferences and workshops has significant impact on research and academic growth in tertiary institutions. They also found that tertiary trust fund intervention allocations depicted positive and significant relationship with staff training. However, Tertiary trust fund positively correlated with project development, research & journal publications and library development in the sampled schools.

Another finding of this study revealed that TETFund research grant significantly predicted quality assurance in public universities in the three dimensions assessed. The implication of this finding is that effective utilization of TETFund research grant specifically for research publications other than for personal needs promote academic quality of research output among academic staff in the universities. This finding of this study is in tandem with the study finding of Larry and Joseph (2013), Omobude, Ikhisemojie, Oyetunji, and Omorogbe (2017) whose results revealed among other things that since the inception of .TETFUND, there has been massive infrastructural development in the university, and that this has far increased the carrying capacity of the institution greatly. Contrastingly, this finding debunked the study finding of Agha and Udu (2016), Onwuchekwa (2016) whose findings revealed that TETFund research grant to a high extent had no significant impact on quality and relevant research by employees of state owned universities in south East Nigeria. The brain behind this finding could be that research grants allocated to these institutions overtime were under accessed due to the institutions' inability to meet conditions set by TETFund for continuous access. Also, it

could be that many academics that accessed research grants used part of them to take care of their personal needs leaving a paltry sum for research. Therefore, it is logical to conclude that if TETFund research grants are well-coordinated, TETFund can help to boost quality assurance and enhance the structure of University education in Nigeria.

Conclusion

Based on the finding, it was conclude that TETFund intervention allocations and TETFund research grants significantly predicted quality assurance in terms of staff training, project development and research/journal publications among academic staff in public universities in Cross River State, Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the researchers made the following recommendations:
1.   More funds should be made available with proactive monitoring team within the universities for curbing related corrupt practices to enhance quality assurance in the Universities.
2.   Government and University management should endeavour to reduce the challenges involved in accessing TETFund research grants for academic staff publications to the barest minimum.

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