

PRIVATE COST PAYMENT ABILITY AND COHESION AMONG UNDERGRADUATES IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES: A CASE STUDY OF AMBROSE ALLI UNIVERSITY, EKPOMA

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Abstract

The problem of undergraduates not paying school charges as and when due is commonly observed in many Nigerian universities. From security reports in the universities, these category of students are often indicted for involvement in social vices within and outside university premises. This therefore necessitated the present study to investigate students' ability to pay private cost and the level of cohesion in Nigerian universities using the Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Edo State as a case study. Two research questions and one hypothesis were raised to guide the study. Since the population was infinite and heterogeneous, a convenient number of 50 undergraduates were randomly selected from each of the 13 identified population parameters to constitute the study sample. A questionnaire titled: Funding Private Cost and Cohesion Among Students Questionnaire (FUPRICOQUE) was designed, validated, pilot-tested (N=20, r=.88) by the researchers and used for the study. Section "A" collected demographic information on students that served as respondents while "B" contained a comprehensive list of 48 private expenditures students rated their ability to pay their private cost on a 4-Point rating scale. Section "C" of the questionnaire rated the level of cohesion among students also on a 4-Point rating scale ranging from "Very Strong Cohesion" with 4 points to "Very Weak Cohesion" rated 1 point. The cohesion factors of religion, sports, unionism, academic and social matters each had 4 items that were rated on the scale. Data collected were descriptively analysed to answer research questions 1 and 2 while the only hypothesis was tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation statistics. The results of analysis showed that students who have weak ability to pay private cost also have weak level of cohesion. Based on the findings. It was recommended among others that government and university authorities should implement policies that would mitigate or subsidize the private cost of attending universities in Nigeria

Keywords: *Funding, Private Cost, Cohesion, Undergraduates, Universities, Ability*

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Introduction

The importance of university education in enhancing the capacity of people to perform socio-economic activities cannot be over-emphasized. In particular, university education according to Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2013) is expected to make optimum contributions to national development. For the realization of this expectation, commendable efforts have been made by the government to expand access to university education in Nigeria. One of such efforts is the establishment of new universities by both government and private investors. Presently in Nigeria, the number of universities has increased to over 178 within a period of 38 years. As would be expected, student enrolment that was less than 5,000 within the period under reference has also increased to over 7 million. The few academic programmes available at that time with little or no accreditation have also significantly increased to over 400 with more than 90 percent enjoying full accreditation status (NUC, 2018). To consolidate on the gains of this expansion, placement of university applicants into these academic programmes is liberalized through government deliberate policy to sustain access. For example, the age of applicants has been reduced from 18 to 16 in addition to the other factors of merit, catchment area, educationally disadvantaged areas and discretion that are considered for the admission of students.

In terms of funding, government has also made some efforts. In the last 5 years according to NUC (2018), over ₦1.6 trillion has been invested to finance only the recurrent expenditures of the 34 federal government owed universities. Besides the direct investment, universities are allowed to enjoy autonomy and oversee the utilisation of internally generated revenues (IGR) that run into several millions of naira. This effort notwithstanding, the funding situation in the nation's universities is still inadequate with observed scarcity of all education production inputs except students. For instance, classrooms, hostels and other infrastructures and hostels are often overcrowded, a situation that makes teaching and learning very difficult or lessective. It is therefore evident that the cost of university education is enormous and prohibitive thereby making it difficult for government alone to provide the required funds. Beneficiaries of university education particularly students in the circumstance must therefore be ready to assist in the funding especially as it concerns the payment of private cost component of the total cost of university education.

Private cost encapsulates school fees, cost of books, medicare, accommodation, transportation and sundry social activities. It is as important as the institutional and social costs types of education cost. It is seen to be particularly high and relatively prohibitive among undergraduates in the universities. In the different studies carried out by Sanyal and Martins (2006), Johnstone (2007) and Ahmed (2015) only about 10% of university students are able to adequately pay their private cost. In the same vein, studies on the socio-economic background of households in Nigeria reveal that over 70 percent are poor and only about 29% of families that manage to send their children to post-secondary schools pay only tuition fees with little or no attention on how the children will pay for other personal expenses like feeding, transportation, accommodation, medicals and sundry social issues. (Johnson, 2012).

The burden of financing private cost in Communist economies as reported by Abu-Mustafa and Al-Sameery (2008) is borne by the government alone while in many Socialist countries, the burden is shared by government and parents (Louis, 2007). In the Capitalist economies citing Nigeria as a case study, the burden of paying private cost in the report of Igbineweka, Iguodala and Iwerebor (2018) is solely borne by the students

and their sponsors. Therefore, the hustling and bustling activities students engage in to raise money to pay their private cost according to scholars negatively impact on cohesion in the school with diverse manifestation of aggressive behaviours (WHO, 2002).

Students are more likely to give in to peer pressure and manifest unacceptable behaviours that could have negative impact on themselves and the school (Khatri & Kupersdmidt, 2003). Also, Lukman & Kamadi (2014) argue that peer group pressure influences what the students may value, know, wear, eat or learn. Bezuidenhout (2013) posited that students display disruptive behaviours only when they are in groups. This is explained by the social learning theory which states that students learn to display socially unacceptable behaviour when they are unable to interact freely with people. Therefore, when students are frustrated as a result of inability to pay private cost, they form themselves into gangs or groups and start taking drugs, alcohol, tobacco including weapons to willfully bully other students who are not part of their group (Muammria & Mahee, 2004). They also often break the school rules to show their disapproval of the school authorities or the society that fails to meet their needs. According to Fosch, Frank and Dishion (2011), coercion and contagion are the two processes that impact on the students' behaviour. Coercion is an interpersonal exchange during which the student uses an aggressive behaviour to escape experiences he/she does not like while contagion is a process in which students mutually reinforce themselves through aggressive behaviour to share their mutual emotional patterns.

Based on the fore-going narratives, increasing incidents of aggression/violence among students have been seen in many universities all over the world including Nigeria. On many campuses, behaviours such as armed robbery, kidnapping, slapping, hitting, rape, truancy and other high-risk behaviours are common. In a study carried out by Manoj and Palaniappan (2014), nearly 18.6 percent of students engage in serious fight during school hours in India; 14.1 percent participate in a group-against-group fight while 5.7 percent attack innocent fellow students with intent to cause harm. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2002) earlier observed that the frequency of physical fighting among students at high school was 25 percent in Sweden, 44 percent in the United States and 76 percent in Spain.

The theoretical foundation that explains the foregoing discourse is the general theory of tension. The theory according to Johnson (2012), considers deviation as the result of a situation or long-lasting context of tension usually caused by feelings of rage and rebellion from relationships that bring negative notions or stimuli to persons. The tension may be created by failures in achieving goals or lack of positively valued assets or by suppression of positive stimuli toward other persons. Among the stimuli that could lead to deviation, some are related to the experience of persons in the school environment. Such negative stimuli are derogatory treatment from teachers or classmates, verbal insults, poverty, physical aggressions, inappropriate or negligent treatment from teachers, excessive or humiliating punishments among others. In terms of generating contexts of tension in the school environment, these stimuli may predict poor interpersonal relationship among students that could weaken cohesion in the school community.

Problem of the Study

The increasing aggressive behaviour observed among undergraduates have made some Nigerian universities notorious for tension in the recent past. Victims of such aggression allege that the aggressors are identified to be fellow students who hustle for

money to survive in school, a claim the security department has reportedly also corroborated. Students stealing phones, books, laptops or even involving themselves in armed robbery and abduction of persons for ransom are common sights in the universities. It is also common to see students trekking long distances, squatting in the hostels, looking hungry and borrowing all manner of things because of lack of money to afford them. A situation like this according to the reports of studies carried out by Zebun (2016) in India; Lama (2014) in Jordan and Louis (2017) in Mauritius weakens cohesion among students in high schools. When cohesion is weakened, cordial interpersonal relationship becomes difficult. At the Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma for example, casualties of hostilities among students are frequently observed and reported, a situation that makes the school notorious. This study investigated the extent to which Nigerian university undergraduates are able to pay their private cost and maintain cordial interpersonal relationships. The specific objectives are to find out the level of cohesion among students and the extent to which they are able to pay their private cost. Additionally, the relationship between ability to pay private cost and level of cohesion among students was investigated.

Research Questions

1. To what extent are undergraduates able to pay private cost in Nigerian universities?
2. What is the level of cohesion among undergraduates in Nigerian universities?

Hypothesis

Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between level of cohesion and ability to pay private cost in Nigerian universities.

Methodology

The descriptive survey research design was chosen to observe and describe the extent to which Nigerian university students are able to pay private cost and stay together cohesively. All the 178 universities in Nigeria as at January 2018 according to NUC (2018) constituted the study population with the Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Edo State as a case study. Since the population of study was infinite and heterogeneous, a convenient number of 50 undergraduates were randomly selected from each of the 13 identified population parameters to constitute the study sample. A questionnaire titled: **Funding Private Cost and Cohesion Among Students Questionnaire** (FUPRICOQUE) was designed, validated, pilot tested (N=20, r=.88) by the researchers and used for the study. Section "A" collected demographic information on students that served as respondents while "B" contained a comprehensive list of 48 private expenditures students rated their ability to finance on a 4-Point rating scale. Section "C" of the questionnaire rated the level of cohesion among students also on a 4-Point rating scale ranging from "Very Strong Cohesion" with 4 points to "Very Weak Cohesion" rated 1 point. The cohesion factors of religion, sports, unionism, academic and social matters each had 4 items that were rated on the scale. Data collected were descriptively analysed to answer research questions 1 and 2 while the only hypothesis was tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation statistics. Alpha level of significance was set at 0.05 and the theoretical mean 2.50.

Results

Research Questions 1. *To what extent are undergraduates able to pay private cost in Nigerian universities?*

To answer research question 1, representatives of the entire students in Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma who served as respondents rated their ability to pay private cost on a 4- Point rating scale. Their responses were descriptively analysed and results presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Mean Analysis of Students’ Ability to Pay Private Cost In Nigerian Universities

Private Cost Items	Mean	SD	Remarks
School fees and other Charges	2.58	0.38	Strong
Feeding	2.18	0.45	Weak
Accommodation	2.34	0.44	Weak
Transportation	2.11	0.42	Weak
Medicare	2.26	0.38	Weak
Clothes	1.88	0.47	Weak
Socials and Sundry Expenses	2.42	0.42	Weak
Mean Total	2.25	0.42	Weak

Theoretical Mean = 2.50; N= 650

According to the data in Table 1, the ability of undergraduates to pay private cost is weak. (2.25) with a standard deviation of 0.42. Concerning item analysis, result showed that students have strong ability to pay only school fees (2.58) which perhaps they consider a priority.

Research Question 2. *What is the level of cohesion among undergraduates in Nigerian universities?*

To answer research question 2, the same students that responded to research question 1 assessed the level of cohesiveness among students on a 4-Point rating scale. Their responses were descriptively analysed and result presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Mean Analysis of Undergraduates’ Level of Cohesion in Nigerian Universities

Platforms for Relationships	Mean	SD	Remarks
Learning Activities	2.36	0.38	Weak
Sports Activities	2.74	0.42	Strong
Union Activities	2.40	0.40	Weak
Hostel Activities	1.92	0.42	Weak
Social Activities	2.02	0.44	Weak
MeanTotal	2.28	0.41	Weak

Theoretical Mean = 2.50: N = 650

According to the data in Table 2, the level of cohesion among students in Nigerian Universities is weak (2.28). Concerning item analysis, it is only in sports activities that students are have strong cohesion.

Hypothesis

H₀₁: *There is no significant relationship between level of cohesion and ability to pay private cost in Nigerian universities*

In testing hypothesis one, responses of students on the two variables were subjected to Pearson correlation analysis and result presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Summary of Pearson r Showing Relationship Between Ability to Pay Private Cost and Cohesion in Nigerian Universities

Variable	N	r	Sig (2 tailed)
Ability to Pay Private Cost Cohesion among Students	630	0.097	0.000

P<0.05

Table 3 shows that the observed $r(0.097)$ is greater than the **P**-value (.000). Therefore, hypothesis one is rejected meaning that a significant relationship exists between students' ability to pay private cost and cohesion in Nigerian universities.

Discussion

The result of research question 1 revealed that undergraduates in Nigerian universities have weak ability to pay their private cost. It is probably because of this that several students do not pay their school fees as and when due. School charges from the reports of Vice Chancellors are always paid in arrears after the students have probably hustled for money. The funding of other private expenditures such as feeding, accommodation, transportation, clothing, medicare and socials is often seen as an uphill task. This result is supported by the findings of studies carried by Al-Fokhaa (2001) in the Philadelphia University including Manoj and Palaniappan (2014) in India.

The insinuation in many university campuses that students who fail to pay school charges as and when due become aggressive and engage in criminal acts, necessitated research question 2. The result revealed a weak cohesion among the students. The fear of being a victim of aggression in the postulations of Bezuidenhout (2013), Al-Fokhaa (2001) and Johnson (2012) supports this present study that found out the existence of poor interpersonal relationship amongst students, a situation that weakens cohesion in the universities.

The testing of the research hypothesis revealed a significant and positive relationship between level of cohesion and ability to pay private cost in Nigerian universities. This result was expected. This is because Nigeria is a capitalist economy where people are categorised according to socio-economic status. The study carried out by Okojie (2010) and Ahmed (2015) showed that wealthy individuals and organizations do not have sustainable endowment funds to aid the financing of university education in Nigeria. In a situation like this, accessing financial assistance to fund private cost becomes difficult, a situation that may cause disappointment and aggression.

Conclusion

The weakness in the ability of students to pay private cost is probably the bane of the observed poor interpersonal relationship amongst students in Nigerian universities. When students are unable to pay their private bills, they become disappointed, angry and will not like to relate with anybody, a situation that gives them some level of impunity to commit misdemeanours.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. Many students are not able to pay their private bills like acquiring needed textbooks, feeding, accommodation and many others. The capacity of such indigent students

- therefore can be boosted by granting them scholarships, bursary awards and inaugurating viable work-study programmes as a matter of policy in every university.
2. Sports have been found to develop strong cohesion among students. Therefore, universities should increase the time for recreation and encourage maximum participation of students in sports activities.
 3. Only university applicants that have proven ability to pay private cost should be identified and admitted into the university campuses.

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