

Financing Public Tertiary Education in Nigeria: Problems, Challenges and the Way-Forward

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Abstract

This study examines the pragmatic approaches to financing public tertiary education in Nigeria by exploring the problems, challenges and the way forward. In doing that, exploratory study was employed as the research design for the study. Indeed, data were collected from the secondary sources through (the internet/Online materials, Budget Office of the Federation, the Federal Ministry of Education, National Bureau of Statistics and Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)). Content analysis was employed as the techniques for data analysis in the study. Based on the findings, it was revealed that continuous decline in budgetary allocation, accumulated external debt servicing, unlimited passage of bills for the establishment of public tertiary educational institutions, poor Internally Generated Revenue (IGR) by the public tertiary educational institutions, revenue smoothing by the tertiary educational administrators were amongst others, the nagging problems obstructing the financing of public tertiary education in Nigeria. It was also found that foreign capital flight from education, incessant strikes, outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic, constant global economic instability/recessions are some of the challenges inherent in financing public tertiary education in Nigeria. Therefore, it is necessary and desirable for all relevant stakeholders at all levels to embark on collaborative efforts designed at providing a road map for curbing the problems and challenges hindering the funding of public tertiary education in Nigeria. The findings of this study underline the urgent need for the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) to come up with blue-print that will ensure compliance with the local and global best standard of practice vis-à-vis funding of public tertiary education in Nigeria as stipulated by the UNESCO.

Keywords: Financial Constraints, Public Tertiary Education, Obstacles, Budgetary Allocation, Nigeria.

Introduction

History and growth of the tertiary education rooted from 1948 with the establishment of the University College Ibadan (currently University of Ibadan) by the British Colonial Masters (Alao & Jagboro, 2017). Over the years, this has sprung into a three segment of tertiary education system comprising of Federal, State and Private tertiary educational institutions. Each segment is funding its own created institutions. The last strike by

academic staff of public schools in Nigeria (Federal and State) when they were clamoring for government's positive response on poor financing of tertiary education is a point of reference. These forms of strikes had negatively touched the standard of education in Nigeria to the extent that none of Nigeria's tertiary educational institution is rated among the first seven educational institutions in Africa (Baro, Bosah & Obi, 2017).

In consonance with the prior scenario in this country, wide-ranging concerns of the Federal Government to tackle this issue have not produced any impressive outcome. It is obvious that our tertiary educational architecture need to raise finance to complement government financing, and not only this, there is demand for effective oversight of how such financial resources are being utilized prudently due to the corrupt attitude of some stakeholders in the African continent, most especially Nigeria (Tilebius, 2022; Oluwakemi & Omolara, 2015). In this way, the public tertiary education, particularly the universities will be able to conduct relevant and quality researches, enhance the quality of graduates being produced and deliver sustainable contributions to the National development of the country.

From the extant literature, several studies were conducted on financing public tertiary education in Nigeria either as an attempt to identify the problems or challenges and the solutions to such problems. Prominent of these studies were the work of Tibelius (2022), Ukozor and Ogunode (2022), Olowonefa, Ogunode and Ernest (2022), Olowonefa, Ogunode, Joseph, Olatunde and Deborah (2022), Ogunode and Madu (2022), Godwin (2021), Ajape, Ogunode and Deborah (2020), Samuel, Adekemi and Samuel (2017) as well as Oluranti (2014) were some of the prominent studies conducted in the domestic environment of Nigeria except for Tibelius (2022) which was a foreign study conducted using Uganda as evidence. The findings have been generally inconclusive, grossly inadequate, conflicting, unresolved and empirical evidence are very scanty in this regard.

From the practical point of view, continuous and declining internally generated revenue by the federal government; whom responsibility for financing public tertiary education in Nigeria relied upon, have become the major obstacle restraining the effective financing of public tertiary education in Nigeria over the years. Another major syndrome to financing public tertiary education in Nigeria is lack of political will on the part of the government to execute policies and strategies aimed at ensuring effective funding of public tertiary education in Nigeria. These scenarios were occurring amidst era of post-covid-19 pandemic and persistent global economic instability/recession and thus, have been the bane of financing public tertiary education in emerging economies like Nigeria. Hence, the aforementioned practical and theoretical flaws have motivated the need for investigating the problems, challenges and solutions to financing public tertiary education in Nigeria.

Based on the aforementioned, it was formulated thus, what are the problems, challenges and solutions to financing public tertiary education in Nigeria? The primary objective of this study is to examine the problems, challenges and the way-forward to financing public tertiary education in Nigeria. The findings of this study is expected to provide the relevant stakeholders such as (FGN, FME, BOF, FIRS, CBN, TETFUND) among others with strategic

tools, techniques and policy measures aimed at tackling the lingering issues surrounding the financing of public tertiary education in Nigeria. This can be attained through the identification of the problems, challenges and solutions to financing public tertiary education in Nigeria. Thus, providing a road map and reference for policy implications.

The study therefore, is organized in five sections or segments. The first section which deals with the introduction, was followed by the review of related literatures in section two while the methodology was discussed in section three. It also follows with the results and discussion in section four and finally concluded the discussions and forward recommendations in section five of the study.

Review of Related Literatures and Theoretical Explanation

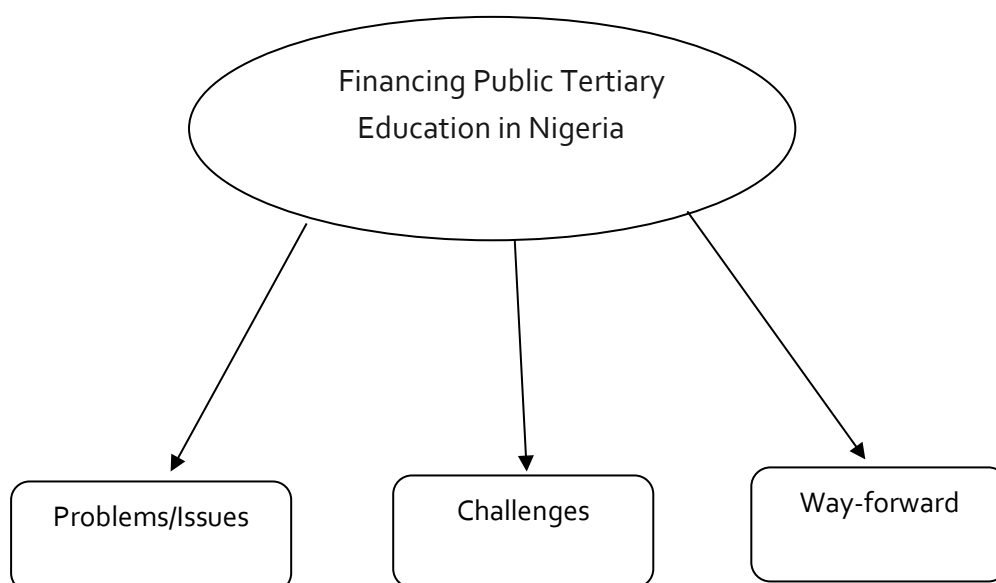


Figure 1: Conceptualization of Key Points

Source: Developed by the Researcher Based on Literature (2022).

Ukozor and Ogunode (2022) investigated subsidy administration in Nigeria, how it has negatively touched the economy and minimized expenditure on other sectors of the economy particularly the education sector. Content analysis was employed in the study. Both secondary and primary sources of data were employed in the study. The data were obtained from the national and international dailies, documented, non-documented articles and journals as well as reference materials. The study found that funds spent on subsidy of petroleum in Nigeria can be deployed in the other vital sectors of the economy like education sector (public tertiary education) and it would have wide-ranging impacts on the economy in both short term and long term perspectives. The study concluded that the re-investment of some portion of subsidy funds on the public tertiary education in Nigeria would lead to sufficient financing, infrastructural amenities, sufficient workers, effective research outcome, competent staff development, enhancement of global rating, regular

academic calendar and minimization in brain-drain syndrome. However, only subsidy removal and re-investment on public tertiary education was considered as the way-forward to the lingering problems of funding. If more pragmatic approaches will be employed, the lingering problems of funding public tertiary education in Nigeria will be drastically reduced to the barest minimum if not completely eradicated.

In the work of Olowonefa et al. (2022), they studied the influence of national revenue decline from (2015 to 2020) on the Nigerian educational system. Content analysis was used in the study while secondary data was employed as the sources of data collection in the study. The findings of the study reveal that revenue decline in Nigeria has negatively impacted on the Nigerian educational system by insufficient allocation to the education sector which resulted to the deferment of recruitment of lecturers, contract abandonment, minimization in capacity building financing and quack accomplishment of strategies and activities. Nevertheless, the study dwells much on revenue decline without adequate reference to the immediate causes, problems, challenges and the prospects of the subject matter. If a comprehensive study will be conducted by effectively taking the aforementioned issues into considerations, more reliable findings could have been documented.

Olowonefa et al. (2022) conducted a study in an attempt to explore the challenges surrounding the financing of public universities in Nigeria. Secondary data were employed from published materials and online resources on financing of universities in Nigeria. The study reveals that poor budgetary appropriation, poor internally generated income, corruption insecurity issues and regular decline in national revenues were identified as the parameters leading or contributing to poor funding in the Nigerian universities. Indeed, the influence of poor financing of public universities were discovered to consist of lack of infrastructures, incessant strikes, poor quality of university education, poor research, lack of training programme and insufficient academic staff. The study therefore, recommended that government should increase the budgetary allocation of the Public universities in Nigeria and that government should instill the political will to implement the UNESCO benchmark of 26% for the sustainable development in the educational system. Nevertheless, emphasis was placed much on universities only which represent a fraction of public tertiary educational institutions in Nigeria. Specifically, the study has neglected polytechnics, monotechnics, college of health technologies, colleges of education, and colleges of agriculture among others. A comprehensive study of the different components of tertiary educational institutions in Nigeria could have provided more reliable and generally acceptable findings.

Another study was conducted by Tilebius (2022) who analyses the prevailing channels of financing a university education in Uganda. Different stakeholders, comprising the state, the student (household), donor agencies and the university itself, are financing university education in Uganda. Findings from the study revealed that students are the bottom source of financing university education in Uganda. Over the years, the fees charged to university

students have been alarming to the level that they are presently becoming unaffordable to many students in view of the contemporary average annual household income. It was also found that the government is engaged in funding university education while the extent of engagement is unsatisfactory apart from being discriminative. The prevailing public sponsorship scheme indirectly favors students from rich backgrounds and prevents access to vulnerable students. The existing loan scheme focuses only on STEM courses and rejects students whose prospects are in the arts sector. However, in doing all this, the state uses taxpayers' money. Indirectly, poor households finance the education of students from affluent families while students from low-income families must struggle on their own. Therefore, it is recommended in this study that the current financing structure for university education in Uganda should be rehabilitated and made equitable, consistent and inclusive. Nevertheless, the study expatiated more on university funding which was a sub-component of tertiary educational institutions. Another major paucity in the study was that it was carried out based on the existing educational systems, practices and regulations in Uganda which if applied in a different educational setting or environment like Nigeria, more reliable and robust evidence could have been established.

Ogunode and Madu (2022) have also investigated the challenges facing educational financing in Nigeria. Secondary data were used to collect information for the study. The secondary data were sourced from the internet and print resources. Content analysis was employed to analyze the data collected. The findings show that Nigerian government is not executing the UNESCO 26% annual budget for education and the parameters that determine educational funding in Nigeria were identified as follows; growth of national economy, global market forces, nature of income sources and National policy on education. The problems lingering educational funding in Nigeria include; decline in national income, competition from other sectors, corruption, insecurity, natural catastrophe and lack of political will to execute UNESCO standard benchmark on education. The study, among other things, further recommended the need for the federal government to execute the financing policy on education as stipulated in the National policy on education, that 26% of the national budget should be allocated to the education sector. Despite the recency and rigourousity of the study, a comparative appraisal of public tertiary education financing in the developed countries have not been made or captured in the study.

In his research work, Godwin (2021) examined the obstacles militating against tertiary education administrators in Nigeria. The observed challenges consist of poor financing, poor amenities, incompetent personnel, corruption, regular strikes, political influence, insecurity, poor remuneration/motivation and academic independence. The study suggests that government should re-double its effort at ensuring that the investigated factors obstructing the efficiency of Nigerian tertiary education administrators are treated and determined in view of the needed progress and improvement to be made realistic in public tertiary institutions. Even though, the study is merely qualitative and lack empiricisms.

Thus, more reliable and unique research evidence could have been documented if the aforementioned areas were effectively captured and treated.

Ajape (2020) in his own work investigated the problems facing tertiary education in Nigeria. The study employed secondary data to describe the issues raised in the study. This study explored quack planning, mal-administration, poor financing, shortage of academic staff, declining infrastructural amenities, poor monitoring, brain-drain, strike actions, misappropriation and poor research activity as the problems facing the university education in Nigeria. To tackle these problems, the study suggested that government should embark on effective planning of universities education, appoint competent administrators, increase the financing of university education, provision of good infrastructural amenities, incentivize the academic staff, execute agreement, fight the mismanagement in the university structure and increase the research financing programme. Although, the findings have not captured expenditures on public tertiary education by developed economies which could have served as an eye opener on the various sources of funding tertiary education in such countries. Hence, different research findings could have been established in a developing economy perspective like Nigeria.

Samuel et al. (2017) examined the financing debacle in Public and Private Universities in Nigeria. It employs the case study of Nigeria tertiary education foundation (NHEF). Using the secondary data as the sources of collecting information. The findings reveal that private tertiary education is the fastest growing component of tertiary education globally and African universities can as well, be more proactive in getting finances from local institutions and international civic societies channels. It was recommended amongst others, the placing of greater priority to appropriation of more resources and that actualizing the accomplishment of creative financing policies should be the task of all key interested parties of University education in Nigeria. However, no proper assessment has been made regarding the annual budgetary allocation to tertiary education. Indeed, the investigation has included private tertiary institutions instead of dwelling much on public tertiary education in Nigeria. This effort was not the central focus of the study. Hence, the study cannot be generalized.

In the research work of Oluranti (2014), the study critically identified the sources of funding higher education, problems and prospects and reveals that one way out of this problem is to focus on internally generated revenue activities which can be used for research works and other development projects. It was recommended that the approach if implemented will complement government's effort and create an enabling atmosphere for regular and robust standard of education in the country. However, the study cannot be relevant enough as it was taken away by time lag and lack of recency. Thus, it fails to tackle current realities in the educational system.

The Stakeholders' Theory

Stakeholder theory is employed in this study as an analytic instrument to ascertain the

levels by which relevant parties are susceptible to details in the expenditure framework particularly where there are no moral limitations on the part of public expenditure role players (Freeman, 1984). For example, key players like the electorates, taxpayers or even the citizens who are interested to know how the government officials spend taxpayers' money. They anticipate a business-oriented strategy to governance in the aspect of absolute good faith, accountability and transparency as stipulated in the financial regulations, fiscal responsibility act and the finance act from the Nigerian context respectively. In sum, the theory was employed on the basis of the fact that providing sound and quality education requires huge financial commitment and thus, should not be vested on the government exclusively. Other key stakeholders like the tertiary institutions' administrators, the NGOs, the private sectors and the even the general public should have a role to play in financing public tertiary education in Nigeria.

Methodology

For the purpose of this study, exploratory study was employed as the research design for the study. This is because it seeks to explore or identify pragmatic approaches to financing public tertiary education in Nigeria. There are basically three (3) segments or parameters in this study. These are (a) the problems; (b) the challenges and (c) the way forward for financing public tertiary education in Nigeria. Indeed, data were collected from the secondary sources through (the internet/Online materials, Budget Office of the Federation, the Federal Ministry of Education, National Bureau of Statistics and Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)]. Content analysis was employed as the techniques for data analysis in the study.

Results and Discussion

This section dwells on the quantitative and qualitative statistics which were obtained from the secondary sources (Online/internet materials, the federal ministry of education, the Budget Office of the Federation (BOF), the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)]. This is depicted in table 1 as follows:

Table 1: Global Proportion of Expenditures on Public Tertiary Educational Institutions in GDP

S/N	COUNTRIES	FISCAL YEARS (%)								
		2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
1.	Britain (UK)	0.8	4.5	0.7	0.9	0.4	2.8	2.6	3.7	5.4
2.	USA	1.0	4.8	1.0	1.9	1.7	2.6	2.2	3.8	4.5
3.	Canada	1.5	1.2	5.2	1.4	1.1	1.5	1.2	1.5	1.7
4.	France	1.0	2.3	2.8	3.4	3.7	4.6	4.5	5.2	5.7

5.	Germany	0.9	1.3	1.8	2.6	2.8	3.7	4.3	m	m
6.	Japan	m	m	0.6	1.2	0.9	1.7	m	2.4	3.1
7.	Switzerland	1.1	n	1.3	1.4	1.3	2.7	3.5	m	5.3
8.	Turkey	0.8	1.2	1.6	2.1	2.8	3.3	3.4	n	m
9.	Australia	1.0	1.2	1.4	1.8	2.3	3.6	3.9	4.1	4.6
10.	Italy	0.6	1.3	1.9	2.4	3.5	4.1	4.2	4.5	4.8

NOTE: M: signifies that data is not available

N: Signifies that the magnitude or dimension is either scanty or empty.

Source: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), 2022.

From table 1 above, it shows the statistical information in respect of the percentage of expenditures on government or public tertiary educational institutions which was expressed as a proportion (%) of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The statistics was based on a comparison between ten (10) countries both from developed and emerging economies. This is results therefore, implies that United Kingdom (UK), United States of America (USA), Australia, Italy, France and Switzerland followed by Turkey were among the countries that invested reasonable portion of their financial resources in (GDP) terms, towards funding their tertiary educational institutions. This is evident especially in the last three years spanning from 2019, 2020 and 2021 respectively.

Moreover, the results further imply that public tertiary educational institutions in particular, were given utmost priority in terms of funding compared to the other sub-levels within the same educational sectors in the countries under study. By extension, it can be deduced at this juncture that there is high level of compliance with the global bench mark of financial allocation to the education sector particularly the public tertiary institutions. The practical implication of the report is thus, for the developing economies particularly Nigeria to come up with a holistic and pragmatic approaches which are designed at providing a roadmap for streamlining the funding architectures of public tertiary education in Nigeria and African continent at large.

Trends of Funding Tertiary Education in Nigeria

This section deals with the analysis of annual budgetary allocations to the education sector as expressed by the percentage of total public expenditures during the period under review. It therefore, consisted of the fiscal years, the amount of annual budgetary allocations, the percentage of such allocations to total expenditures and the overall status of such proportions (percentages). The status is trying to indicate whether or not the allocation has met or satisfied the global bench mark as laid down by the UNESCO.

Table 2: Federal Government of Nigeria's Annual Budgetary Allocation to Education Sector [2016 – 2023].

S/NO	FISCAL YEARS	BUDGETARY ALLOCATION (N)	PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL BUDGET (%)	STATUS
1	2016	369.6bn	7.9	Below the global bench mark
2	2017	550.5bn	7.4	Below the global bench mark
3	2018	605.8bn	7.04	Falls short of the global benchmark
4	2019	620.5bn	7.05	Falls short of the global bench mark
5	2020	671.07bn	6.7	Falls short of the global bench mark
6	2021	742.5bn	5.68	Below the global average bench mark
7	2022	1.18tr	7.2	Below the global average bench mark
8	2023	1.79tr	8.8	Still below the international bench mark

Source: Budget Office of the Federation (BOF)/National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), 2022.

From the table 1 above, an analysis of the estimated 2023 budget indicates that N1.08 trillion was earmarked for the Federal Ministry of Education (FME) and its parastatals. From the estimated amount, N239 billion was earmarked for capital expenditure, while N706.5 billion and N52.8 billion were distributed for personnel and overhead expenditures respectively. Appropriation to the ministry is largely greater than the N875 billion estimated in the 2022 budget. Indeed, the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFUND) will obtain N248.3 billion in transfers, according to the proposed 2023 appropriation bill. However, this is less than the N306 billion that was allocated to the institution in 2022. In the meantime, in a service wide vote, the Federal government planned to spend N470 billion on public tertiary institutions. The FGN had previously committed to appease the striking members of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) with the allocated amount (BOF & NBS, 2022).

In the appropriation, N170 billion was estimated for salary increment and N300 billion as revival fund. It is ambiguous if this caters for all the tertiary institutions – comprising of polytechnics and colleges of education – or is exclusively for the universities. It was asserted that for a developing economy experiencing obstacles such as the effect of the covid-19 pandemic, insurgencies, dilapidated school infrastructural equipments and an alarming rate of out-of-school children, not reaching the (UNESCO) global bench mark will also

enlarge the problems facing affordability to sound education for all children and prevent the country of its abundant human resource potentials (BOF, 2022).

Problems of Financing Public Tertiary Education in Nigeria

For the purpose of this study, the following problems were identified as hindrances to financing public tertiary education in Nigeria. These are;

- i. Declining Budgetary Allocation to public tertiary education in particular, and the education sector large;
- ii. Accumulated External Borrowings and Debt Servicing;
- iii. Unlimited Passage of Bills for the Establishment of Public Tertiary Educational Institutions in Nigeria;
- iv. Poor and Declining Internally Generated Revenue (IGR) by the FGN and the Public Tertiary Educational Institutions (PTEIs);
- v. Indiscriminate Revenue Smoothing by the Federal Ministries Department and Agencies (MDAs) and Government Owned Enterprises (GOEs).

Challenges of Financing Public Tertiary Education in Nigeria

This section deals with the highlight or description of the obstacles to financing public tertiary education in Nigeria. These are as follows:

- i. Foreign Capital Flight from Education Sector;
- ii. Incessant Strike Actions by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU);
- iii. High Cost of Governance by the FGN;
- iv. The Outbreak of Covid-19 Pandemic;
- v. Persistent Global and Local Economic Instability/Recession;
- vi. Declining level of Confidence on Public Tertiary Educational Institutions in Nigeria;
- vii. Increasing Rate of parastatals, agencies, commissions, councils, boards, schools, colleges, and other allied institutions operating under the federal ministry of education whose number have rose to over 218 different parastatals. Again, there was an estimated total number of more than Nine hundred (900+) MDAs including GOEs under the Federal Government of Nigeria.

The Way-Forward to Financing Public Tertiary Education in Nigeria

In order to provide drastic measures for curtailing the problems and challenges of financing public tertiary education in Nigeria, the following approaches were advanced:

- i. Additional budgetary allocation to the education sector in particular, and the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFUND);
- ii. Additional budgetary allocation to the tertiary educational institutions comprising of Universities, polytechnics, monotechnics, colleges of education, colleges of agriculture at both federal and state levels;

- iii. Mandatory allocation of funds to tertiary education on any external borrowings which must be stipulated in reasonable terms by the collaborative efforts of the Budget Office of the Federation (BOF) and Debt Management Office (DMO) and subject to legislative and executive approvals;
- iv. Strategizing and enhancing the internally generated revenue (IGR) base of public tertiary educational institutions in Nigeria;
- v. Instituting a holistic whistle-blowing policy aimed at blocking unnecessary leakages and loopholes in the IGR of public tertiary educational institutions in Nigeria;
- vi. Instituting a holistic digital/e-remittances of revenues by MDAs and GOEs at the federal level;
- vii. Collaborating with Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) both local and international;
- viii. Striking a balance between the existing and new tertiary institutions in Nigeria especially on financing capacities;
- ix. Bilateral and multilateral educational funding agreement with developed economies;
- x. Deployment and re-investment of subsidy removal towards funding public tertiary education in Nigeria;
- xi. Re-investment of specific and reasonable amount of looted funds recovered from corrupt public officials on financing public tertiary education in Nigeria with strict re-enforcement;
- xii. Re-building confidence on public tertiary education in Nigeria by all the relevant stakeholders;
- xiii. Restricting the migration of Nigerians for study in abroad with strict legal enforcement to prevent the continuous capital flights (outflows) from education which is running in huge billions of naira. These funds could have been utilized for funding public tertiary education in Nigeria;
- xiv. Inter-governmental collaboration for mapping out stringent issues on funding and other related technical matters;
- xv. Reducing Brain-drain through adequate incentive measures for academic staff in public tertiary educational institutions in Nigeria;
- xvi. Increasing the revenue base of the federal government;
- xvii. Establishment of new public tertiary educational institution(s) should be dependent upon the perceived revenue (IGR) generating capacity of such proposed institution(s) in order to curtail possible funding liabilities on the Federal Government;
- xviii. Strict monitoring, tracking, evaluation and remittances of IGR by the Federal Inland Revenue Service (FIRS), the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) and the Budget Office of the Federation (BOF) as well as any other relevant agencies that may be deemed necessary and expedient for giving full effect to the aforementioned issues.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it is concluded that financing of public tertiary education in Nigeria is experiencing lingering issues ranging from increasing decline in budgetary allocation to accumulated external borrowings, unlimited passage of bills by the National Assembly members, poor and declining IGR by the government and revenue smoothening. It was also concluded that financing public tertiary education in Nigeria is surrounded with serious obstacles leading to the present conditions in which the sector was going through. It was finally concluded that compliance with UNESCO global bench mark for sustainable education was the key to resolving the financing issues faced by public tertiary education in Nigeria.

Recommendations

Consistent with the aforementioned conclusion, it is up to the government at all levels to make reasonable investment in public tertiary education as a developing country. This can be attained through uplifting the fiscal appropriation to the education sector consistent with the globally approved targets of at least 4% to 6% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and/or 15% to 20% of aggregate government expenditures.

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