



Deployment of Subsidy Funds on Public Universities for Sustainable Development in Nigeria

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Abstract: This paper examined subsidy regime in Nigeria, how it has negatively affected the economy and reduced spending on other sector of the economy especially the education sector. Content analysis was adopted for the paper. Both secondary and primary data were used in the paper to support points raised. The data were sources from national and international dailies, published, unpublished papers and articles and reference materials. The paper discovered that funds spent on subsidy of petroleum in Nigeria can be re-invest in the other sectors of the economy especially education (university education) and it would have multiplier effects on the economy in both short run and long run. This paper concluded that the of investment of some part of subsidy funds on the tertiary education in Nigeria would lead to adequate funding, infrastructural facilities development, adequate staff, quality research output, effective staff development, improvement international ranking, stable academic calendar and reduction in brain-drain problem. The paper recommended that the federal government should stop subsidy payment and invest the funds in the development of education (tertiary education) and other critical sectors.

Keywords: ASUU, Academic staff, Subsidy Payment, Universities.

Introduction

Subsidy was introduced into the Nigerian economy in the early 1970's, since then, subsidy payment has become part and parcel of the Nigerian system. Between 2011 and 2022, Nigeria has spent about N20t on fuel subsidies. While over N5t is currently being spent, the Minister of Finance, Budget & National Planning, Zainab Ahmed, said about N7t will be spent in 2023 on the same project. The subsidy payment is draining the revenue of Nigerian economy, according to the Finance Minister, Zainab Ahmed. Akabueze opined that the fuel subsidies had a huge impact on the economy and the lives of the people, stressing that "when you eliminate fuel subsidies or cut back on it, there will be an immediate impact on people (Punch, 2022d)."

Usen (2021) observed that Nigeria's petroleum subsidy program has crowded out spending on physical infrastructure and needed investments in critical social sectors like education, water, sanitation and health (WASH) and social protection. In a study conducted by BudgIT, it was revealed that only 2 states, Lagos and Rivers, were able to meet their operating expenses with revenues generated internally in 2020: The 34 other states had to significantly rely on federal transfers (which are made up primarily of oil revenue) and Value Added Tax (VAT) to implement their budgets. In the first quarter of 2022, the NNPC made zero remittance to federation accounts on subsidy payments, leading to a notable reduction in revenue available to be shared by different tiers of government.

The subsidy budget for 2022 is more that the budget of education, health and other critical sectors of the Nigerian economy. The subsidy payment regime is also characterized with huge corruption. Musa (2022) noted that the fuel subsidy scheme has been fraught with fraud and corruption, and the

report of a Presidential Committee on Verification and Reconciliation of Fuel Subsidy Payments between 2009 and 2011, revealed that the government wasted up to ₦667b (about \$4.3b) annually subsidizing millions of litres of petrol that Nigerians never used, or even needed. Some of the gasoline could not even be traced.

Since the objective of subsidy has been defeated, many scholars in past and present are calling for the stoppage of subsidy payment regime in Nigeria and redirection of the subsidy funds into other sector. The Director General of the Budget Office of Nigeria, Ben Akabueze, submitted that the trillions of naira spent on fuel subsidy can be deployed to other creative sectors, particularly education. Speaking on Arise TV's Global Business Report, Akabueze said the funds could be used to end the Academic Staff Union of Universities strike and increase the pay of government staff (Punch, 2022d). Also, Ibru the president of Lagos Chamber of Commerce and Industry advised the Federal Government to divert the fund into subsidizing education and health care in the country to create more enduring impact in the lives of the citizens (Primebusiness 2022). Based on these submissions, this paper is aimed to discuss deployment of some part of subsidy funds into the public universities for a sustainable development.

Concept of Public Universities

Public universities are universities owned by the government. Public universities are universities established to provide post-secondary schools for different nations. Public universities are universities established by act of parliament to serve the interest of the general public. Public universities deal with the provision of teaching, research and community services. The objectives of the universities in Nigerian Higher education, including professional education have the following aims: the acquisition, development and inculcation of the proper value orientation for the survival of the individual and societies; the development of the intellectual capacities of individuals to understand and appreciate environment; the acquisition of both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to develop into useful members of the community; the acquisition of an overview of the local and external environments (FGN, 2013). Public universities in Nigeria are grouped into federal and state owned universities (Ogunode, Ukozor, & Jegede (2022); Ogunode, Akin-Ibidiran & Ibidiran 2022). The federal universities are owned by the federal government of Nigeria while the state universities are owned by the state government. The total number of federal and state public universities are 49 and 59 respectively, across the country (NUC,2022).

The federal government of Nigeria established the National Universities Commission to oversee the external administration and supervision of all universities in Nigeria. The administration of public universities in Nigeria takes two dimensions: the external administration and internal administration. The external administration is done through the federal ministries and other regulatory agencies in the country. The external administration handles 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 implementation of policies, coordinate, supervise and organize the human and material resources of the universities to accomplish the objectives of the universities. The realization of the universities' goals and objectives depends on effective administration, planning and adequate funding.

Concept of Subsidy

Subsidy means that a fraction of the price meant to be paid by consumers is paid by the government to ease the burden off consumers. For petrol, the argument is that the amount paid for petroleum by Nigerians is lower than international benchmarks. If subsidy is removed, for instance, it means that the international market determinants will also decide what the price of petroleum will be in the country (Oyededeji, 2021). Subsidy is aimed at lessening the burden or cost of certain products and an attempt at financial support by the government. There are two types of subsidy; they are direct and indirect subsidies.

Direct subsidies are targeted towards a particular group, individual or sector. Indirect subsidies on the other hand include activities such as price reductions for required goods or services that can be

government-supported. Indirect subsidies lead to subsidized products being bought below-market rates. In this case, the government fixes the price of petrol below the 'international' rate and pays the difference (Oyediji, 2021).

Investing Subsidy Funds on Public Universities in Nigeria

Subsidy funds can be used to solve the problems facing the public universities in Nigeria. The funds can be redirected in the funding of public universities, employment of more academic and non-academic staff, development of infrastructural facilities, address ASUU demands, staff development, completion of abandoned projects and development of research programme.

Funding of Universities

Subsidy funds can be used to address the problem of poor funding in the public universities in Nigeria. It has been submitted by Ogunode (2020) that one major problem hindering the development of public universities in Nigeria is the problem of inadequate funding. Ogunode, Josiah, & Ajape (2021); Ogunode & Onyekachi, (2021) observed that the major issue in educational development is shortage of funds. One of the most serious problems threatening the survival of the educational systems is that of dwindling level of public funding in the face of rising demands and hence rising cost of higher education. This shortage of funds affects job performance and the growth of the institution. Higher educational institutions cannot perform optimally without funding. This situation calls for increased fund initiative from both the government and educational stakeholders so as to sustain the tempo and growth of education industry. The inability of the Nigerian government to objectively accept and implement the 26% funding formula for education recommended by the UNESCO impact negatively on the performance and sustainability of higher education. Thus, it has become obvious that Nigeria's neglect of the funding formula is detrimental to higher educational institution performance and development aspiration as quality performance is the veritable instrument for sustenance of education system. This neglect has further precipitated crises in the entire higher educational systems as effective teaching, research and service are no longer taking place seriously. Akinola (1990) was worried about the funding situation and commented thus: "Our higher institution education systems are in dire need of money.....to cater for both their capital and recurrent needs. For a few years past, the budget have been cut back from year to year by the federal government. This cut back has affected both capital and recurrent expenditures. In many higher institutions capital projects embarked upon few years ago, are yet to be completed due to lack of adequate funds". The factors responsible for inadequate funding of public universities in Nigeria according to Ogunode, Abubakar & Ajape (2021) include: lack of political will to implement UNESCO 26% recommendation, corruption, insecurity, sort fall in revenue generation, demand from other sectors. The problem of poor funding in the public universities can be solved by investing part of the subsidy funds in the public universities in Nigeria (Ogunode, & Oluseun, 2020; Ogunode & Atobauka, 2021a; Ogunode, 2020c). ASUU in (2022) advised the federal government of Nigeria to use the part of the proposed subsidy funds to solve the problems in the Nigerian tertiary education. Also, Ben Akabueze, Director General of the Budget office of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, has advised the Federal Government to channel the trillions of Naira spent on fuel subsidy to university education in Nigeria to stem the tide of incessant strikes (Vanguard, 2022). The availability of funds plays a significant role in determining the provision of quality university education. The quantity of funds made available during budgeting will go a long way in improving on the quality of university education provided. Adequate funding will be of importance in the provision of quality university education in Nigeria.

Employment of Adequate Staff

The subsidy funds can also be used to employ staff in the public universities across the country especially the academic staff. Academic staff are the teaching staff in the higher institutions. Academic staff are the implementers of the school curriculum and lecture presenters. Academic staff are the teachers and deliverers of instruction in the higher institutions. Academic staff are the knowledge and character builders' imparters in the higher institution. The academic staff are the engine room of the higher institutions. The functions of the academic staff include to lecture, to

prepare the lecture note, to prepare the lesson note, source for instruction materials, give assignment to students, to assess the students through continuous assessment and examination, set exams questions, mark the answer sheet, supervise students research work especially projects, theses and dissertations and prepare the students grade points. The academic staff conducts different levels of research, presents their findings and contribute to the development of knowledge in the higher institutions (Ogunode & Adamu 2021; Ogunode 2020c). The academic staff are inadequate in many public universities in Nigeria (Ogunode, Akinlade & Abubakar (2021); Ogunode, Abubakar & Ajape (2021); Ogunode, Yiolokun, & Akeredolu, (2019). Inadequate funding and other factors have been identified as one of the major factors responsible for the shortage of academic staff in the Nigerian higher institutions (Ogunode & Abubakar (2020); Ogunode, Jegede, Adah, Audu, Ajape (2020); Ogunode & Okwelogu 2022). The problem of shortage of academic staff that is facing the public universities can be solved by using some part of subsidy money. This position is supported by Ibru as reports by Primebusiness (2022) who advised the Federal Government to divert the subsidy fund into subsidizing education and health care in the country to create more enduring impact in the lives of the citizens. Ibru pointed out that so much is being spent on petroleum subsidy from the government's slim resources, hence the need to remove it and put such funds into education and health which according to him, would make every Nigerian to be better positioned to compete well in the global market place of opportunities (Primebusiness 2022). Podgursky & Springer, (2007) submitted that the availability of funds is very crucial in the employment of quality teachers. Various studies have shown that the income level is a factor that is used to attract quality teachers. It is therefore necessary that funds should be provided to acquire this crucial human resource. This is because the presence of quality teachers will help in transmitting quality knowledge to the students. Most organizations in developed countries now pay workers based on performance. The payment of high wages and salaries is now used to attract quality teachers and this is based on the availability of funds (Nwafor, Uchendu, & Akani 2015).

Infrastructural Facilities Development

Subsidy funds can be channeled into the university system to provide adequate infrastructural facilities. Infrastructural facilities refer to facilities aiding delivery of academic and non-academic services in educational institutions. Infrastructural facilities include; libraries, laboratories, halls, offices, administrative blocks, hostels, road facilities, water, electricity, internet etc. The availability of the infrastructural facilities in adequate quantities will support effective administration of educational institutions and the inadequacies will prevent effective administration of educational institutions (Ogunode 2020c; Ogunode & Ohunene & Olatunde-Aiyedun,2022; Olowonefa, Ogunode & Ohibime 2022). Many public universities in Nigeria do not have adequate lecture halls, laboratories and offices for both students and academic staff (Ogunode, 2020c; Ogunode & Agwor 2021). These facilities are in shortage supply in many public tertiary institutions across the country due to poor funding (Ogunode, Ahmed, Gregory, & Abubakar 2020; Ogunode & Ahaotu 2020a; Ogunode & Jegede, 2021). According to the federal government (2009) the Nigerian universities need the sum of 1trn to fix the infrastructure deficits in the country. This amount considering the inflation rate now would have increased to about 5trn naira. Subsidy funds if removed can be used to solve the infrastructural facilities challenges in the Nigeria tertiary institutions. Facilities development in the tertiary institutions will help to improve the ranking of the institutions, guarantee quality education, reduce foreign education, prevent brain-drain, attract international students and lecturers and ensure conducive teaching and learning environment. The deficit in the infrastructural facilities in the public universities in Nigeria can be solved by just redirecting the subsidy funds to provide infrastructural facilities in the public universities. This position is supported by Onadeko, (2021) that advised the government to borrow a leaf from other countries that have had policies on making the Oil sector better, Onadeko, (2021) also advised that there is a need to invest in education, infrastructure and creating employment, that way, people can be empowered to economically make decisions and fend for themselves, instead of paying subsidy that only a few enjoy and also giving grants that reach a few persons or more places than the other. The availability of fund is very important in the provision of school infrastructures in the universities. More funding will help the university management in providing more facilities such as classrooms, laboratories, libraries and

instructional materials. Available facilities will also be provided based on modern development while obsolete facilities will be discarded. This means that the higher the level of funding, the more the infrastructures that will be provided for teaching and learning (Nwafor, Uchendu, & Akani 2015).

Address ASUU Demand

Part of subsidy funds can be used to address various issues raised by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU). This position is also maintained by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) president who advised the federal government of Nigeria to use the proposed subsidy funds meant for first of half of 2022 subsidy payment to address the issues raised by the different unions in the public universities (Punch (2022b)). In supporting this suggestion, Ben Akabueze, director-general of the Budget Office, advised that the trillions of dollars spent on fuel subsidies in Nigeria could be used to increase the pay of public servants, thereby meeting the demands of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) members for higher wages. During an interview with Arise TV on the global business report programme, Akabueze said that public servants should be paid more than that, citing the ongoing issue of lecturers' wages and the ASUU strike, but he noted that inadequate public sector revenues limit the government's ability to pay more. (Businessday, 2022).

Staff Development

In order to develop higher education institutions and to empower them for the continued production of manpower for the development and sustainability of the country, a variety of higher education institutions have developed and established programs for the development of their staff to increase their productivity at work. The professional development program is aimed to improve the capacity of the academic and non-academic staff of the universities (Ogunode, & Oluseun (2020)). Peretomode and Chukwuma (2010) note that lecturers need to move with the times and stay up to date with the trends of knowledge development in their discipline so as not to fall behind and be made redundant. The ultimate goal of self-development is the improvement of an individual's job satisfaction and the optimization of skills, talent and task accomplishment. Ogunode, Akinjobi & Musa (2022); Ogunode, & Oluseun (2020) acknowledged that inadequate funding of Nigerian higher education institutions is a major problem facing the administration of professional development program for employees across higher education institutions. Adequate funding is vital for the implementation of the professional development program. Without adequate funding, no professional development program can be fully implemented as planned (Ogunode, Olugbenga, & Ezema 2022; Ogunode, Ukozor, & Iroegbu 2022). The professional capacity development program for higher education institutions is not effectively implemented in many public universities across the country due to the poor funding of higher education in Nigeria. Ogunode, & Oluseun (2020) also identified inadequate funding as the challenges facing the administration of professional development programme in the Nigerian higher institutions. Musa (2019) suggested that the Nigerian government can use the subsidy funds to solve the educational problems especially the pressing problems in the tertiary institutions. The subsidy fund can be used in the area of human development in the educational institutions across the country. Also, Delta State Governor, Ifeanyi Okowa, advised Federal Government to redirect fuel subsidy funds to healthcare and education services to lift poor Nigerians out of hardship. Delta State Governor, Ifeanyi Okowa argued that continued subsidy on petroleum products was tantamount to supporting the rich at the expense of the poor (Guardian, 2021a). Adequate funding of university education is a very important step in reducing the shortage of funds available for capacity building programme. Rich (2012) stated that subsidy money can served as alternative funding sources to fund human capital development programme in the educational institutions. Exploring funding sources will therefore help to reduce the burden of funding capacity building programme among the various educational stakeholders (Nwafor, Uchendu, & Akani 2015).

Completion of Abandoned Projects

The subsidy funds can be channeled into the public universities to complete the various abandoned projects across the country. There are many capital projects in many public universities that have

been abandoned because of lack of payment and poor funding (Ogunode, Ndubuisi, & Jegede (2022); Ogunode, & Murtala, (2022). Ojo (2017) cited in the Daily Trust dated June 28, 2015 when he quoted the former Director of Administration, Chartered Institute of Project Management of Nigeria, Mr. David Godswill Okoronkwo, who disclosed that there were approximately 56,000 abandoned government projects across the country including those in educational institutions. He listed them according to geopolitical zones. In his words, “South-East has 15,000; South-West, 10,000; South-South, 11,000; North-West, 6,000; North-Central, 7,000; North-East, 5,000 and Abuja, 2,000.” All these projects were estimated at N12tn. Some of the factors that brought about project abandonment according to Ogunode & Murtala (2022) include poor funding, corruption, inflation, fall in national revenue, insecurity, political instability, weak school administrators, poor monitoring and evaluation, poor planning and lack of Continuation in Policies. Subsidy funds can be used to complete all these projects.

Development of Research Programme

The poor quality research in the public universities in Nigeria can be solved by injecting some part of subsidy funds into the research programme of the public universities across the country. Ogunode & Abubakar (2020) submitted that research is the second cardinal programme of higher institutions. Research is very important to the development of the society. Research is conducted mostly in the higher institutions environment with the objectives to solve problems affecting the society. The academic staff is saddled with the responsibilities of carrying out researches in the universities. Conducting research is one criterion for measuring their performance. Paul, (2015) and Fawoel, Egbokhare, Itiola, Odejide and Olayinka (2006) defined research as a systematic investigation including development, testing and evaluation, designed to develop or to contribute to knowledge. Research is a curiosity-driven activity that has the purpose of discovery and advancement of knowledge. Higher institutions are known for conducting researches. Higher institutions' major programmes are teaching, researching, and community services. Ogunode (2020) opined that inadequate research fund is a major problem facing research programme in the Nigerian public universities. The budgetary allocation for the administration of research programme is not adequate. Ogunode & Ndayebom, (2022); Ogunode, Ezema, & Olugbenga, (2022); Paul (2015) submitted that funding has always been the major constraint to research development and their implementation. Okafor (2001) stated that lack of funds is affecting research in the universities and that there is no sign that these problems will not continue in the future. The universities are supposed to engage in research, not only to push out the frontiers of knowledge, but to solve the problems of the society. John (2009) suggested that the federal government of Nigeria can use some part of subsidy money to address the various challenges in the public universities especially the research programme challenges. This position is also supported by Musa (2019) who concluded that subsidy money can be applied in the higher institutions to solve the problem of research.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Subsidy payment is consuming a lot of funds that are supposed to be invested in other sectors of the economy especially the education sector. The university education is a very critical form of education that is designed for the production of manpower for the socio-economic and technological advancement of the country. The university education is faced with the problems of poor funding due to many factors such as subsidy payment.

Subsidy payment in Nigeria should be stopped and the proposed funds should be channeled into other sectors of the economy like the education specifically, the university education. The subsidy funds would play an important role in fixing some of the pressing challenges in the universities system in Nigeria. The subsidy funds should be used in the following areas: funding of public universities, employment of more academic and non-academic staff, development of infrastructural facilities, address ASUU demands, staff development, completion of abandoned projects and research development. In the area of administration of the funds;

1. The federal, state and local government should call media resources to educate Nigerians on the importance of fuel subsidy removal. This will help to reduce opposition from labour unions and ordinary Nigerians.
2. The federal government should come up with investment plans on the subsidy funds. Percentage that will go to each sector of the economy and when it will be released
3. A committee should set by the government where individual interest groups will nominate their representation across the thirty six states including Federal capital Territory, Abuja. This is to prevent corruption in the management of the funds
4. The percentage allocated to public universities should be handled by stakeholders in the universities sector.
5. The recommendations above set in place, there should be an annual auditing of the education institutions' accounts by a neutral body, suggestively, a foreign figure, to checkmate embezzlement of fund.

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