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CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED BY THE SOUTH-WEST NIGERIAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN ACCESSING TETFUND INTERVENTION ASSISTANCE

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the challenges faced by public universities in the South-west region of Nigeria in accessing intervention assistance provided by the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund). The study examined the challenges encountered by public universities in South-west Nigeria in accessing TETFund intervention assistance. Three (3) research questions were raised and answered in this study. The study employed a survey research design. A total sample of 2,476 respondents was selected through a simple random sampling technique. The instruments used for data collection are: TETFund Facilities Availability Check List (TFAC); TETFund Academic Staff Facilities Availability Checklist (TASFAC), and TETFund Accessibility Check List (TACL). With reliability coefficients of 0.92, 0.94 and 0.94, respectively. Data gathered for the study were analysed using the combined qualitative and quantitative analytical methods involving thematic, frequency counts and percentages. Findings revealed that: TETFund desk officers identified three major challenges facing universities in meeting the criteria listed by TETFund for normal (regular) intervention. These were late programmes, stringent standards, and programme suspension. It concludes that many eligible academic staff are unable to benefit from TETFund, despite the fund's objective to support educational development. Based on the findings, it was recommended that universities have not been able to meet some of the criteria listed by TETFund for accessing normal (regular) intervention of the agency's stringent standards.

Introduction

Funding is critical to the development of the university education system as many other factors such as staff training, library, research and infrastructural development, conference among others depend on the availability of funds. Therefore, inadequate funding will hinder the accomplishment of the expected goals of the agency or any other body related to the development of the educational sector (Wenibowei &Warrant, 2021). This fact necessitated the establishment of the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund).

TETFund was originally established as Education Trust Fund (ETF) by the Act No 7 of 1993 as amended by Act No 40 of 1998 (now repealed and replaced with (Tertiary Education Trust Fund Act 2011). It is an intervention agency set up to provide supplementary support to all level 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. The main source of income available to the Fund is the two per cent education tax paid from the assessable profit of companies registered in Nigeria. The Federal Inland Revenue Services (FIRS) assesses and collects the tax on behalf of the Fund (TETFund, 2025).

The funds are disbursed for the general improvement of education in Federal and State tertiary educations, specifically for the provision or maintenance of:

- Essential physical infrastructure for teaching and learning
- Instructional materials and equipment
- Research and publications
- Academic staff training and development and
- Any other need which, in the opinion of the Board of Trustees, is critical and essential for the improvement and maintenance of standards in the higher educational institutions.

Despite the TETFund Enactment Act and compulsory education tax made payable by all registered companies operating in Nigeria, it is still apparent that resources, both financial and human, are generally declining in Nigerian universities as a result of underfunding. This agency is a body that steps in to provide infrastructure to facilitate the expansion of universities, training and retraining of the staff through higher degrees, conferences, and seminars within and outside the country for human capital development and has been observed to have failed in the delivery of some of her statutory obligations. It could be said that the intervention funds are not appropriately used for what they are purposively allocated for, and this has become another threat

to the support provided for university education in Nigeria. In a press conference in May 2018, the then TETFund Executive Secretary, Dr. Abdullahi Bichi Baffa, acknowledged that when he was appointed in August 2016, the agency was marked by corruption (Premium Times, 2018).

A study conducted by Aprebo and Amaewhule (2018), it revealed how much the research done by State universities in Rivers and Bayelsa can access and use TETFund facilities for infrastructural development. The findings revealed that there was agreement among the desk officers, directors of the work, academic planning, and physical planning. Consequently, TETFund cannot be quickly accessed by universities upon request, even if they can demonstrate a need for it. Universities are not given TETFund facilities based on careful evaluation or in accordance with precedence. This is accurate as all of the items' means fall below the 2.50 threshold, and it has been established that universities in Rivers and Bayelsa states do not have easy access to the TET fund.

The study also revealed that desk officers, work directors, physical planning directors, and academic planning directors at the DVC, and directors of academic planning all agreed that universities in the states of Rivers and Bayelsa could use TETFund to build their infrastructure. Based on the findings, it was concluded that TETFund is utilised for the provision of institutional buildings, administrative offices, ICT infrastructure, instructional technology, leisure facilities, and lecture/classroom halls. Given that the mean scores for these items exceeded the criterion mean of 2.50, it is evident that TETFund plays a significant role in enhancing infrastructural development in Nigerian universities.

Onwuchekwa (2016) also conducted a study to assess, with a focus on the South-east of the country, the effect of the TETFund intervention financial resources on educational research at Nigerian institutions. According to the survey, just 0.14 per cent of the 265.02 billion naira set aside for research were accessed. In other words, the lecturers in Southeast Universities only accessed and used 5.28 per cent of the TETFund intervention money. 94.72 per cent of the funds are not being used. As a result, the researcher found that TETFund intervention money has little or no impact on academic research in universities in the South-East, Nigeria. It was recommended that TETFund should endeavour to establish ICT centers for the state owned tertiary institutions to make the students ICT conscious and literate, TETFund should as well endeavour to fund the provision of other infrastructures like new office furniture, school library, electricity and borehole, and they should make a greater effort to fund seminars, workshops, conferences,

overseas training, academic staff development at state tertiary institutions would involve ICT application training and retraining.

In another study conducted by Oraka et al. (2017), the Education Tax Fund (ETF), with an emphasis on tertiary institutions specifically, has favourably impacted the development of Nigerian education, according to the hypotheses tested. The results also showed how much funding is given to each institution relative to the total amounts given to all the tertiary institutions under consideration. On average, the university system receives 50% of the total annual funding, while the remaining 50% shared between colleges of education and polytechnics. The third hypothesis claimed that one of the factors confusing the nation's educational funding is the rising expense of state administration, the high student population in all educational institutions, and the increased debt loads. Loans are scarce; thus, this might also be requested for staff training to increase capacity and gain technical know-how.

Despite TETFund's involvement in staff training, Onyeizugbe et al. (2016) stated that the criteria for receiving the funds given to them are difficult for many tertiary schools to meet. They concluded that some academic staff are missing out on free tools for professional development. Additionally, Eno-Abasi (2015) discussed how many universities had complained about how challenging it is to get funding. It was further revealed that TETFund alone cannot bear the entire responsibility and that the management of the institutions is also to blame for failing to promote the fund. The institution-level internal politics are another barrier to accessing the money. The study recommended that to access the amount allotted for them, academic staff and institution management should work towards timely and effective proposal completion.

The numerous obstacles involved in gaining access to the fund may be the cause of academic staff missing out on the fantastic chance to receive funding through TETFund intervention. Academic staff members with administrative experience typically hold a variety of roles. Olayemi and Adebayo (2020), established that academic staff members who have held administrative positions such as Dean, Director of Programs, Head of Department, Vice Chancellor, or Deputy Vice Chancellor may possess enhanced insight into the challenges involved in accessing TETFund support. Their accumulated administrative experience could reduce the likelihood of encountering obstacles related to obtaining training or research funding, as their roles may have granted them procedural knowledge and institutional leverage.

In a study conducted by Akomolafe and Belo (2019) on the difficulties in accessing TETFund and the training of academic staff in Southwest Nigerian universities. It was discovered that there are many obstacles that academic staff must overcome in order to access the TETFund

for training. These obstacles include a lengthy application process, low staff knowledge of the fund, and strict requirements, among others. This implies that there are significant difficulties in obtaining funding for training the teaching staff. This situation may have arisen due to the unavailability or delayed disbursement of funds to academic staff when needed. Consequently, certain policies perceived as stringent or challenging by some staff were introduced to regulate fund access. A plausible justification for these measures is to prevent the misuse or misappropriation of TETFund resources (Adebayo & Ojo, 2021).

In another study conducted by Grace (2016), the results showed that academic study in South East Nigerian universities was not significantly impacted by the 5.28% influence of the TETFund intervention money. This indicated that while 94.72% of the TETFund intervention money was not accessible, the lecturers at these universities only accessed and used 5.28 of it. The researcher concluded that the federal government, through TETFUND, had provided funding to universities so that they could carry out studies that would fulfil the requirements of the general public. Because of the complicated requirements, the lecturers are unable to utilise the fund. The money is permitted to go dormant. Low research output is the result of this.

The quality of the research, according to TETFUND, is subpar. As a result, the research intervention fund for TETFUND has little impact on educational research in Nigerian institutions. The researcher recommended that TETFund streamline its application procedures to enable lecturers to access funding promptly. It was also suggested that lecturers undertake studies to demonstrate the extent to which universities provide training on the necessary steps involved from proposal submission to the application for the first tranche of funding. Furthermore, the researcher emphasised the importance of ensuring that both the public and private sectors are furnished with relevant data that can drive socioeconomic development and improve the standard of living.

The findings of the study conducted by Abdulaziz et al. (2020) showed that Lagos State University in Nigeria, a trust fund for higher education intervention regarding the training of academic staff ability, revealed a dissatisfying element of the fund's accessibility. The results also demonstrated that TETFund's involvement at Lagos State University was a top priority for the professional growth of the academic staff. Due to the expected role they will play in the development of the country, the empowerment of university lecturers is not a contentious issue. Additionally, through academic staff development programs at LASU, the TETFund intervention played a major part in positively transforming teaching and learning.

The poor implementation of TETFund to lecturers is referenced to the conclusion on the effect of TETFund intervention on academic staff performance and the distribution of TETFund

intervention to lecturers at LASU for research and improved performance. It was determined that the TETFund's efforts to improve the Faculties at Lagos State University were successful insofar as they had a significant impact on the establishment of the facilities necessary for efficient teaching and learning there. Additionally, TETFund's assistance was primarily intended to support Lagos State University's academic faculties. It also implied that there should be a reduction or elimination of the degree of bureaucratic obstacles typically associated with obtaining monies that have been granted.

TETFund's ability to create tertiary institutions necessary for Nigeria's national development has been questioned on a number of occasions. Wenibowei and Warrant (2021) claimed that although the fund has the ability, there may be a number of constraints. The following issues were mentioned by Professor Suleiman Bogoro in his report on the opinion of the Executive Secretary of the Fund:

1. The restrictions imposed by the Fund's enabling legislation which preclude her from looking into other options for boosting its revenue streams outside of education tax receipts and investments in secure securities.
2. interference with the distribution of funding for projects by some state governments;
3. Inconsistencies in education tax payments by businesses leading to low EDT collections;
4. Some of the beneficiary organisations' insufficient use of the disbursements;
5. The Fund faces significant challenges as a result of the nation's reliance on oil and gas as its primary sources of income, as any decline in price has a detrimental impact on the collection of EDT.
6. Given the Fund's limited and competitive resources, the frequency with which governments at all levels create tertiary public institutions places tremendous pressure on the Fund;
7. There is a preponderance for state governments to establish many universities politically, only to leave them to their fate or force them to depend almost entirely on TETFund.
8. A significant source of worry has been the lack of coordination between the pertinent government bodies' procedures for granting tax holidays to businesses.
9. Beneficiaries' overt and covert misinterpretation of the TETFund's guidelines for its interventions;

10. the public's view that intervention funds are to be misused; and

Worrisome state government meddling in the allocation of TETFund funds to state tertiary institutions' procurement processes has slowed down project projection (Bogoro, 2019).

Considering these limiting factors, the Fund may struggle to achieve its intended impact on Nigeria's tertiary education system. Notably, one of the most pressing challenges facing both TETFund and the broader tertiary education sector is the persistent issue of inadequate funding. In lieu of this background, the study investigated the challenges encountered by the South-west Nigerian public universities in accessing TETFund intervention assistance.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the establishment of the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) as a critical mechanism for addressing infrastructural decay, academic staff development, and research funding in Nigerian public tertiary institutions, universities in South-west Nigeria continue to face significant barriers in accessing its intervention assistance. While the Fund was designed to provide equitable and timely financial support, several institutions report procedural bottlenecks, bureaucratic delays, a lack of awareness among academic staff, inadequate training on proposal writing, and insufficient institutional capacity to meet eligibility requirements. These challenges have undermined the effectiveness of TETFund in fulfilling its core mandate within the region. In some cases, universities either fail to access available grants or experience substantial delays in disbursement, thereby stalling academic and infrastructural development. Moreover, there are concerns about transparency and administrative inefficiencies that further complicate the process. Given the strategic role that South-west Nigerian public universities play in national development and innovation, it is imperative to identify and critically examine the specific challenges that hinder their access to TETFund assistance. Understanding these issues is essential for proposing workable solutions that will enhance institutional access, optimise fund utilisation, and improve the quality of tertiary education in the region.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised and answered in this study;

1. What are the challenges facing universities in meeting the criteria listed by TETFund for normal (regular) intervention?

2. What are the challenges facing universities in meeting the criteria listed by TETFund for special intervention?
3. What are the challenges facing universities in meeting the criteria listed by TETFund for special high-impact intervention?

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. This is because the variable challenges encountered by public universities in South-West Nigeria in accessing TETFund intervention funds had already occurred, and the researcher did not manipulate the variables of the study. The population for this study consists of all the 15 TETFund's Desk Officers, 15 Directors of Physical Planning and all the 10,699 lecturers in the fifteen (15) public Universities in South-west Nigeria, which are made up of seven (7) Federal and eight (8) State Universities recognised by the National Universities Commission (NUC, 2022).

The sample size for this study consisted of two thousand four hundred and seventy-six (2,476) respondents (that is, 40% of the total population of the academic staff of the universities selected for this study). Simple random and purposive sampling techniques were used to select 50% of the total public universities in South-west, Nigeria for this study. Eight (8) public universities (4 States and 4 Federal) were selected for this study. One (1) TETFund's Desk Officer and one (1) Director of Physical Planning in each of the selected universities were purposively sampled because in each of the selected universities, there is only one (1) TETFund's Desk Officer and one (1) Director of Physical Planning. The simple random sampling technique was adopted to select 2,476 (40% academic staff) of the total population of the universities selected for this study in South West, Nigeria (lecturers that have worked for the minimum period of 5 years were sampled for this study because those categories of lecturers are no longer on probation and their services must have been confirmed by the University management). A stratified sampling technique based on ownership (that is, State and Federal universities) was used to select universities in the South West.

Three (3) sets of instruments were used for data collection in this study. These are: TETFund Facilities Availability Check List (TFAC), TETFund Academic Staff Facilities Availability Checklist (TASFAC) and TETFund Accessibility Check List (TACL). The reliability of the instruments was determined through a pilot test using the Rater's reliability. The inter-raters' scores obtained from the observers were correlated. The reliability coefficients of 0.92, 0.94 and 0.94 from the observers provided that the TASFAC, TFAC and TACL instruments were

reliable. Data gathered for the study were analysed using the combined qualitative and quantitative analytical methods involving thematic, frequency counts and percentages.

Results and Discussion

In answering the research questions, the open-ended section addressing the challenges of public universities to meet the enlisted criteria for normal, special and high impact interventions, the questionnaire data were transcribed and organised to form common themes. The identified themes from the TETFund desk officers' responses were used, given a detailed descriptive narrative of the under-listed challenges.

Research Question 1: What are the challenges facing universities in meeting the criteria listed by TETFund for normal (regular) intervention?

Table 1: *Challenges for Normal, Special and High Impact Interventions by Universities (n= 8)*

Description of Common Themes	Example Quote	Frequency
		n (%)
Normal (Regular) Intervention		
Late programme	"Those who have started their programme before the years of intervention have not been receiving a favourable response from TETFund. The majority of them were denied approval by TETFund. Only those who have a current date of admission were approved."	2 (25.0)
Stringent standard	"For the Academic Research Journal, we have not been accessing of late because of our inability to meet up with one of the criteria set by TETFund..."	3 (37.5)
Programme suspension	"... Conference Attendance was put on suspension since March 2020."	3 (37.5)
Special Intervention		
Subjective Practice	"Special intervention funds for zonal intervention, national research fund, and higher	6 (75.0)

education book development are based on the discretionary powers of the Board.”

Special High Impact Intervention	5 (62.5)
Constitutional Power of the Board	“Special high-impact intervention funds, such as high-impact intervention and disaster recovery intervention, were based on the discretionary powers of the Board.”

Based on the varied experiences of the respondents, according to Table 1, TETFund desk officers identified three major challenges facing universities in meeting the criteria listed by TETFund for normal (regular) intervention. These were (a) a late programme, (b) a stringent standard, and (c) programme suspension. Two of the respondents (TETFund desk officers) shared their views that missing an intervention programme year could later become a difficult task to fulfil in the following year. One of these respondents noted the challenge by stating that:

Those who have started their programme before the years of intervention have not been receiving a favourable response from TETFund. The majority of them were denied approval by TETFund. Only those who have a current date of admission were approved.

The majority of the respondents (at least three TETFund desk officers) also see stringent standards and suspension of the intervention programme as one of the major challenges facing universities in meeting the criteria listed for normal (regular) intervention. One of these respondents shared the view that:

For the Academic Research Journal, we have not been accessing of late because of our inability to meet one of the criteria set by TETFund. Conference Attendance has been suspended since March 2020.

Research Question 2: What are the challenges facing universities in meeting the criteria listed by TETFund for special intervention?

Challenges for Special Intervention

Most of the respondents (six TETFund desk officers) attributed the challenges facing universities in meeting the criteria listed by TETFund for special intervention to subjective practice by board members of the agency (Tertiary Education Trust Fund). One respondent noted that “special intervention funds for zonal intervention, national research fund, and higher education book development are based on discretionary powers of the Board.” This means that

intervention funds of this type can only be disbursed at the discretion of the Board of Trustees of TETFund, a challenge confronting virtually all public universities in the Southwest, Nigeria.

Research Question 3: What are the challenges facing universities in meeting the criteria listed by TETFund for special high-impact intervention?

Challenges for Special High-Impact Intervention

Most of the respondents (five TETFund desk officers) also attributed the challenges facing universities in meeting the criteria listed by TETFund for special high-impact intervention to subjective practice within the board of the agency (Tertiary Education Trust Fund). The majority of the respondents stated that “special high-impact intervention funds, such as high-impact intervention and disaster recovery intervention, were based on discretionary powers of the Board.” This means that intervention funds of this type can only be disbursed at the discretion of the Board of Trustees of TETFund, a challenge confronting nearly two-thirds of public universities in the Southwest, Nigeria.

This finding implies that most of the challenges encountered by beneficiary institutions are made by the agency. This finding is corroborated by Onyeizugbe, Obiageli and Igbodo (2016), who noted that in spite of the intervention of TETFund in the area of staff training, many tertiary institutions are unable to meet the conditions for accessing funds allocated to them. They concluded that many academic staff thus miss the opportunities to access the free funds for academic training and development. Eno-Abasi (2015) equally remarked that many institutions complained that the process of accessing the fund is cumbersome. It was further explained that TETFund alone cannot take all the blame, but the managers of the institutions are also to be blamed for not publicising the fund. Another hindrance to accessing the fund, according to him, is the in-house politics at the institutional level. He therefore suggested that academic staff and institutions’ management should work towards achieving the timely and successful completion of proposals to access the fund earmarked for them. The reason why academic staff miss the golden opportunity of getting funds through TETFund intervention could be traced to the series of challenges inherent in accessing the fund. Dayo (2014) also reported that incomplete documentation on the part of the institutions applying for the fund is one of the reasons for not accessing these funds. It may be that the institutions failed to file the document on time or did not complete the process.

The findings are also supported by Akomolafe and Belo (2019) in a study conducted on academic staff training and the challenges of accessing TETFund in Southwest Nigerian

Universities. The study revealed that there are many challenges inherent in accessing TETFund for training by academic staff; some of which include cumbersome procedures for accessing the fund, low level of staff awareness about the fund, and stringent conditions, among others. The implication of this is that the challenges involved in accessing the fund for academic staff training are on a high level. A probable reason for this could be that the available funds could not go around the academic staff when the need it arises. Hence, the introduction of some policies could be interpreted by some academic staff as challenges. Another probable reason could be to checkmate abuse of the fund.

Conclusion

The findings from the study reveal that public universities in Southwest Nigeria face significant challenges in accessing TETFund intervention assistance across regular, special, and high-impact interventions. For regular interventions, factors such as late program initiation, stringent eligibility standards, and programme suspension hinder universities from meeting TETFund's criteria. Notably, missing a year of intervention often results in difficulty accessing funding in subsequent years. Special interventions are largely influenced by the discretionary powers of TETFund's Board of Trustees, making the process subjective and less transparent. This discretionary practice also extends to special high-impact interventions, such as zonal and disaster recovery funding, limiting equitable access for many institutions in the region.

The challenges identified are both systemic and institutional. On one hand, TETFund's bureaucratic procedures, unclear guidelines, and inconsistent disbursement practices hamper accessibility. On the other hand, institutional shortcomings such as inadequate documentation, lack of awareness among academic staff, and internal politics also contribute to missing funding opportunities. Consequently, many eligible academic staff are unable to benefit from TETFund, despite the fund's objective to support educational development.

In light of these findings, it is clear that both TETFund and the beneficiary institutions must adopt reforms. TETFund should simplify its procedures, enhance transparency, and ensure equitable disbursement of funds. Meanwhile, universities should build internal capacity, sensitise academic staff, and ensure timely and complete documentation to fully benefit from the intervention opportunities.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were suggested;

- Universities have not been able to meet some of the criteria listed by TETFund for accessing normal (regular) intervention of the agency's stringent standards. For public universities to fully benefit from the objectives of TETFund, the agency's board of trustees should endeavour to restructure some of its policy statements to accommodate access for more public universities to benefit from the agency's fund.
- The percentage of academic staff who benefited from academic staff training and development (AST&D) intervention programme, academic research journal intervention programme, national research grant intervention programme, and academic/manuscripts development intervention programme is drastically low; also, the same categories of people continually benefits from the fund on yearly basis while some others are deprived of the privilege as a result of favoritism and nepotism. The agency should ensure that all the qualified academic staff in public universities benefit from the fund, and the administrators of the beneficiary universities should be cautioned and regulated to ameliorate the level of favouritism and nepotism among university staff.
- It has been reaffirmed time without time again that information is power, and the gain you get from empowering your associates more than offsets the risk of informing your competitor. The management of the beneficiary institutions should enlighten lecturers on the processes involved to access the fund from the submission stage to the application for the first tranche.

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