

Perception of Teachers on the Dilemma of Funding Public Secondary Schools in Abia State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study examined the perception of teachers on the dilemma of financing public secondary schools in Abia State. An ex-post facto design was adopted for the study. Three research questions were answered while one hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance. The population consists of 4,806 teachers in public secondary schools in Abia State. Multistage sampling procedure was employed in drawing 531 teachers as the sample for the study. The instrument 'Dilemma of Funding Public Secondary Schools Questionnaire (DFPSSQ)', which was validated by three experts was employed for data collection. The reliability of the instrument was tested through the Cronbach Alpha method, and a satisfactory reliability coefficient of 0.81 was obtained. The Mean was deployed for the analysis of the research questions, whereas Z-test was used to test the hypothesis. The study found among others that the various sources of funding for secondary education have not been effective and reliable. It also revealed that there has been ineffective utilization of the available meagre fund. It was concluded that there are systemic bottlenecks in funding public secondary schools in Abia State. The study recommended that the stakeholders should become more objective and patriotic in handling all aspects of school funding.

Keywords: Teachers, Dilemma of Funding, Public Secondary Schools, Abia State

Introduction

Education is undoubtedly important for every nation's growth and development, including Nigeria. With a functional education system, Nigeria will have a crop of graduates who will continue to make meaningful contributions to the general well-being of society. A good education system can contribute to the general development of the country by producing a commendable and relevant workforce who are better equipped to meet the needs of the various industries and work economy.

By encouraging a sense of national identity and shared values, Peterside (2023) asserted that quality education is a potent weapon for reducing poverty, improving health outcomes, and

promoting social cohesion. This may help to explain why Adebisi (2023) defined education as the pillar that defines a country's potential to find its hidden richness and treasure, to innovate outstandingly, to develop distinctive capabilities, to maintain a high quality of living, to produce a successful economy, to maintain political stability, to create a secure society, and to maintain a healthy society.

Standardized education system helps in facilitating creativity, discoveries, and entrepreneurship in the populace by providing individuals with the skills, knowledge, and competencies necessary for effective operations. Achieving such standards in the Nigerian education system, and secondary level specifically is a herculean task that requires a lot of inputs, one of which is the financial resource.

The concern of stakeholders is always on how to generate and manage the finance needed to drive all other school resources for the purpose of reaching the standards set on paper. This is where the concept of funding becomes unavoidably a point of discussion. Similarly, Nwogu and Moses (2020), posited that all the resources deployed into the education endeavour require huge and steady funding for its maintenance, development, and sustenance. Funding has to do with the provision of financial resources for the advancement of a targeted project, which in this scenario is education services. Blueheaven (2019) described it as the process of making funds available to educational institutions for expenditure in the short and or long run. This means that funding in education is the provision of financial resource that is needed to cater to all categories of expenses in the sphere of education. With sufficient funds available for public secondary schools, achieving the goals would never be a problem.

However, due to the claimed diminishing financial capacity of the government, it has become almost impossible for the government to singly foot the bills of public secondary schools in Nigeria, with Abia State inclusive. Idowu (2019), observed that the education sector in Nigeria has continued to experience a progressive decline in its annual budgetary allocation for below the 26 % benchmark recommended for education by the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Idowu lamented that the proportion of the Federal Government's budget allocated to education from 2010 to 2023 has been far short of UNESCO's recommendation. For the period aforementioned, the budgetary allocation to education respectively are as follows: 6%, 9%, 9%, 9%, 11%, 11%, and 8%...5.4%, 8.3%. The implication of the meagre allocation to the education is that the sector, including the secondary level have continued to experience underfunding and financial incapacitation. Corroborating on this, Odou and Anietie (2019), pointed out that the funding of secondary school has been facing some challenging which have made the achievement of secondary educational goals quite challenging one.

This unwanted reality seems to have been worsened by the perception that secondary schools lack the right mechanisms needed for sourcing, utilizing, and accounting for the funds. This is further supported by Peterside (2023), who asserted that the challenge of funding public secondary schools seems to cut across stages, including acquisition or mobilization sources; allocation, monitoring and controlling of the utilization of funds, and the production of accounts, reports, and audits. The most painful aspect of poor funding is the misuse, diversion, and embezzlement of the little that has been earned and or generated through the available sources.

This is understandably a major systemic concern in public secondary schools' funding architecture, especially in Abia State.

The consequence of inadequate funding is observable in the deplorable state of most of the schools, including the inadequacy of classrooms, offices, laboratories, libraries, and teaching resources, inadequate qualified teachers, abandoned capital projects, poor maintenance of school facilities, lack of modern teaching and learning equipment, dearth of practical, poor morale and lackadaisical attitude to work by the staff, and lack of supervision of academic and non-academic activities. The effects of these are poor quality teaching and poor performance of students at internal and external examinations, which might be the remote reason for the pervasive examination malpractices that secondary schools are sometimes associated with. Based on the foregoing issues, the perception of teachers on the dilemma of funding public secondary schools in Abia State, Nigeria is to be investigated.

Statement of the Problem

The provision of adequate financial resources into the system and the effective utilization of such resources is no doubt the sure way to drive schools forward in pursuit of educational goals for secondary education. With sufficient provision of funds and effective utilization of financial resources, secondary education will be well-positioned to attain all the standards expected of it. However, there has been a challenge of underfunding of the public secondary schools which is compounded by shortcomings that cut across stages of mobilization sources; allocation, monitoring, and controlling of the utilization of funds, and the production of accounts, reports, and audits. The obvious situation of underfunding the sector has impacted negatively on the standards, putting its potential in jeopardy. Due to inadequacy of funds, most aspects of school plants are short in supply and in a deplorable state, modern teaching and learning tools are lacking, members of staff demonstrate a lackadaisical attitude, and supervision of academic and non-academic activities is observably low. Under such a distressed environment, most students find it difficult to learn but often resort to examination malpractices in order to scale through. As an attempt to dig deeper into the matter, the investigation is poised to answer the question: What do teachers think about the financial dilemma for public secondary schools in Abia State, Nigeria?

Purpose of the Study

The general target of this study is to find out teachers' perceptions on the dilemma of funding public secondary schools in Abia State. Specifically, the investigation sought to:

1. Highlight the setbacks inherent in sourcing funds for public secondary schools in Abia State.
2. Identify the detrimental effect of not effectively utilizing public secondary school funds in Abia State.
3. Point out the corrupt practices that mar financial reporting and accountability in public secondary school funds in Abia State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the setbacks inherent in sourcing funds for public secondary schools in Abia State?
2. What are the detrimental effects of not effectively utilizing public secondary school funds in Abia State?
3. What are the corrupt practices that mar financial reporting and accountability in public secondary school funds in Abia State?

Hypothesis

The following hypothesis which further guided the study was tested at 0.05 level of significance.

1. There is no statistically significant difference between the mean ratings of male teachers and female teachers with regard to their perception on the dilemma of funding public secondary schools in Abia State.

Methods

An ex-post facto design was adopted for the study. This aspect of research ventures into cause-effect analysis, but deals with issues that have already happened which cannot be influenced by the researcher in the course of the investigation. In the same vein, Saleh and Kowalczyk (2022), posited that ex post facto research is after-the-fact" research, and focuses on how actions that have already occurred with regard to independent variable cannot be manipulated by the participants of the investigation. The problem of poor funding of public secondary education in Nigeria, and Abia State in particular is already in existence, and the researcher and participants in the investigation do not have the power to immediately influence the situation in favour of the population. This is why ex-post facto design is considered suitable for the study, as the researcher cannot manipulate or modify the financial setbacks that schools have already been experiencing over the years.

Population of the study consists of 4,806 teachers in public secondary schools in Abia State, and a multistage sampling procedure was used to draw 531 teachers as a sample for the study. This sample size is considered adequate because it represents approximately 11% of the population. The sample size was made up of 87 male teachers and 444 female teachers. The instrument 'Dilemma of Funding Public Secondary Schools Questionnaire (DFPSSQ)', which was validated by three research experts was employed for data collection. The reliability of the instrument was tested through the Cronbach Alpha method, and a satisfactory reliability coefficient of 0.81 was obtained. The researcher, together with six research assistants collected the data used for the study. Mean was deployed for the analysis of the research questions, whereas Z-test was used to test the hypothesis.

Presentation and Interpretation of Results

Research Question 1: What are the setbacks inherent in sourcing funds for public secondary schools in Abia State?

Table 1: Mean rating of teachers on the setbacks that are inherent in sourcing for funds for public secondary schools in Abia State.

S/N	Items	Mean	Remark
1.	Insufficient government funding	3.07	HE
2.	Inadequate school fees collection	3.20	HE
3.	Limited access to grants and donations	3.00	HE
4.	Limited sponsorship and partnership opportunities with private firms	2.68	HE
5.	Schools not having robust entrepreneurial initiatives to boost internally generated revenue	2.77	HE
6.	Limited involvement and support from alumni networks	3.01	HE
7.	Limited support from PTA	2.91	HE

HE means to a high extent

Results in Table 1 shows that the average rating score of individual questionnaire item is greater than the cut-off point, 2.5. This indicates teachers are in agreement with all the suggested items pertaining to the source of funds for public secondary schools in Abia State. This implies that the setbacks that are inherent in sourcing funds for public secondary schools in Abia State include: insufficient government funding; inadequate school fees collection; limited access to grants and donations; limited sponsorship and partnership opportunities with private firms; schools not having robust entrepreneurial initiatives to boost internally generated revenue; limited involvement and support from alumni networks, and limited support from PTA.

Research Question 2: What are the detrimental effects of not effectively utilizing public secondary school funds in Abia State?

Table 2: Mean rating of teachers on the detrimental effect of not effectively utilizing public secondary school funds in Abia State.

S/N	Items	Mean	Remark
1.	Bribery and siphoning of the available meagre fund	2.88	HE
2.	Reduced quality of education delivery and standards	2.90	HE
3.	Undue favouritism and nepotism in awarding of school projects	3.33	HE
4.	Shortage of quality educators and facilitators	2.62	HE
5.	Lack of effective supervision of school programmes and activities	2.79	HE
6.	Dysfunctional school plants	2.54	HE
7.	Dysfunctional monitoring architecture for ongoing school projects	2.80	HE

HE means to a high extent

From Table 2, it was found that the Mean of each item is greater than 2.50, which is the decision-making point. This shows that the teachers perceive the items as being the effect of not effectively utilizing the funds meant for public secondary schools. These include bribery and siphoning of the available meagre fund; reduced quality of education delivery and standards; undue

favouritism and nepotism in awarding of school projects; shortage of quality educators and facilitators; lack of effective supervision of school programmes and activities; dysfunctional school plants, and dysfunctional monitoring architecture for ongoing school projects.

Research Question 3: What are the corrupt practices that mar financial reporting and accountability in public secondary school funds in Abia State?

Table 3: Mean rating of teachers on the corrupt practices that mar financial reporting and accountability in public secondary schools funds in Abia State.

S/N	Items	Mean	Remark
1.	Collaborating with the school bursar/accountant to falsify account records	2.66	HE
2.	Concealing the origins of evidence of fund received	2.70	HE
3.	Creating fictitious staff and fraudulently representing them on payroll	2.53	HE
4.	Inflating the costs of procurements on the receipts in collaboration with dealers	2.64	HE
5.	Submitting evidence of non-existing expenses for reimbursement from public and or PTA	2.52	HE
6.	Intentionally refusing to present financial records by way of procrastinations and feigning of distress or bereaved	2.32	LE
7.	Intentionally claiming have lost certain evidences of transact because of attacks	2.45	LE

HE means to a high extent

LE means to a low extent

A look at Table 3 reveals that the Mean ratings of items 1-5 are greater than 2.50, meaning that items were rated high as corrupt practices that make financial reports on the utilization of public secondary school funds questionable. On the other hand, items 6 and 7 scored Mean ratings below 2.5, hence are not considered to be corrupt practices in accounting and reporting of usage of public secondary school funds.

Hypothesis 1: There is no statistically significant difference between the mean ratings of male teachers and the female teachers with regard to their perception on the dilemma of funding public secondary schools in Abia State.

Table 4: Z-test for Mean ratings of male and female teachers with regard to their perception on the dilemma of funding public secondary schools in Abia State.

Variables	N	X	SD	z-crit	z-cal	DF	∞	Remark
Male	87	2.46	1.06	1.96	0.67	529	0.05	Not rejected
Female	444	2.51	1.10					

On Table 4, it was revealed that z-crit is 1.96 while z-cal is 0.67 at 398 degree of freedom and 0.05 level of significance. The result shows that z-crit (1.96) is greater than z-cal (0.67), leading to the null hypothesis not being rejected. This implies that there is no statistically significant difference between the mean ratings of male teachers and the female teachers with regard to their perception on the dilemma of funding public secondary schools in Abia State.

Discussion of Findings

The study found that the setbacks that are inherent in sourcing funds for public secondary schools in Abia State include: insufficient government funding; inadequate school fees collection; limited access to grants and donations; limited sponsorship and partnership opportunities with private firms; schools not having robust entrepreneurial initiatives to boost internally generated revenue; limited involvement and support from alumni networks, and limited support from PTA. Odou and Anietie (2019), in their examination of the challenges facing the funding of secondary education in Nigeria, decried the issue of over-dependence on dual sources of income which are never enough to generate considerable revenue. Similarly, Idowu (2019), argued that inadequacy and not dependable sources of funds have resulted in underfunding of the education sector, including the secondary school level. This has obviously impacted negatively on the revenue capacity of the schools to the point where they are unable to take care of needs requiring money.

The investigation's findings also showed that the teachers believed the things to be a result of not properly allocating finances for public secondary schools. There is a lack of competent teachers and facilitators, ineffective supervision of educational programs and extracurricular activities, dysfunctional school plants, dysfunctional monitoring architecture for ongoing school projects, reduced quality of education delivery and standards, unjustified favoritism and nepotism in the awarding of school projects, and bribery and siphoning of the limited funds available.

This backs up the argument made by Ezeuwa, Oruwari, and Simobi (2018), who claimed that political meddling in educational matters has made the system less effective. Additionally supporting this point, Lang (2015) noted that processes spanning the whole public sector's politics frequently determine the funds available for allocation. When contracts for building the school's infrastructure and procurements are influenced by favoritism, there is inevitably a casual attitude toward making sure the infrastructure meets the standards.

The study also revealed that unethical behaviors compromise financial reporting and accountability in public secondary schools in Abia State. These behaviors include working with the school's accountant or bursar to falsify account records, hiding the source of evidence of funds received, making up staff and placing them on the payroll, inflating the cost of purchases on receipts in cooperation with dealers, and submitting evidence of inflated costs. Ige (2013) stated that despite the sector's strategic importance in developing the human capital needed for economic growth, funding for secondary education has consistently been low. However, when the financial usage of an organization is reported, many wrongdoings are brought to light. The government frequently uses the power of the pen to deceive the public about how the allocated funds were use Furthermore, it was discovered that there is no statistically significant difference between male and female teachers' mean ratings of the difficulty of supporting public secondary schools in Abia State. This result is consistent with Titus and Ukaigwe's (2018) study, which found that male and female principals had similar perceptions of how well public secondary schools in Bayelsa State

maintain adequate record-keeping for efficient fund management. This demonstrates that neither gender has a strong opinion about the difficulty of funding secondary school.

Conclusion

The finance of public secondary schools in Abia State is hampered by structural problems. The issues are seen at many financial stages, such as mobilization or sourcing, allocation and utilization, and reporting and accountability. The study's findings showed blatant exploitation of the various financing phases by those in positions of control, which led to a dearth of resources for secondary education in the State. Citizenship that lacks patriotism is the root of it all.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following are advocated:

1. Secondary schools should fine-tune realistic approaches to boost revenue for the schools with the help of the administrators, boards, and Parents Teachers Association (PTA). Making ALUMNI associations effective at raising money, reaching out to wealthy members of society, insisting on providing students with school supplies and uniforms in exchange for a sizeable sum, etc., are a few strategies to increase the financial capacity of the schools.
2. The political elite needs to be sensitized to stop meddling in school matters, especially when it comes to hiring school heads, providing contracts to schools, and bribing them, among other things. Schools should be run on the premise of autonomy and be allowed to control the speed at which programs are implemented while the government handles oversight, regulation, and the statutory allocation of sufficient money.
3. Principals and other parties involved in school financing should adopt a more impartial and patriotic stance when disclosing all aspects of the school's financial records. They should insist on recording and disclosing the precise cost of the goods purchased and the various expenses made, avoiding the inclusion of non-existent expenditures.

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