

IMPACT OF TETFUND INTERVENTIONS ON RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract

The Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFUND) was established by the Nigerian government to revitalize the tertiary education system, with particular emphasis on research and development. Nigerian universities play a crucial role in knowledge creation, technological advancement, and socio-economic development. However, for decades, they have been characterized by inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, low research output, and weak global competitiveness. This paper critically examines the interventions of TETFUND in Nigerian universities, particularly their impact on research and development. Using descriptive analysis and secondary data from government reports, scholarly articles, and institutional records, the study found that TETFUND has significantly enhanced research capacity through grants, sponsorship of postgraduate training, conference attendance, and provision of research infrastructure. Despite these achievements, issues such as mismanagement of funds, limited international collaboration, and excessive dependence on government interventions still hinder optimal outcomes. The study concludes that while TETFUND has made tremendous contributions to research in Nigerian universities, sustainable progress requires improved accountability, diversification of funding sources, and stronger linkages between research and national development priorities.

Keywords: TETFUND, Research, Development, Universities

Introduction

Research and development (R&D) are the lifelines of universities across the world. In developed countries, universities are not only centers of teaching but also hubs of innovation, problem-solving, and knowledge transfer. Nations such as the United States, China, and Germany invest heavily in university research, recognizing that sustainable economic growth and technological advancement depend largely on robust R&D activities. In Africa, countries like South Africa and Egypt have positioned their universities as strong players in global

research output, thereby improving their rankings and relevance in global knowledge economies.

In Nigeria, the story has been different. For decades, Nigerian universities have faced severe underfunding, poor infrastructure, and a lack of adequate investment in research. According to Okebukola (2015), research output in Nigeria before the establishment of TETFUND was alarmingly low, with many academics unable to publish in reputable international journals due to financial constraints, poor laboratories, and lack of institutional support. Recognizing this problem, the Federal Government of Nigeria established the Education Trust Fund in 1993, which was later restructured and renamed the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFUND) in 2011.

The major mandate of TETFUND is to provide supplementary support to all levels of public tertiary institutions, with special emphasis on research, staff development, and infrastructure. Through interventions such as research grants, sponsorship of postgraduate programmes, and provision of modern facilities, TETFUND has attempted to bridge the gap between Nigerian universities and their global counterparts.

Despite the creation of TETFUND and its laudable interventions, questions remain about the actual impact of these interventions on research and development in Nigerian universities. Nigerian institutions are still poorly ranked globally, research outputs are limited compared to peer countries, and many innovations from Nigerian universities have little impact on industrial and economic growth. Furthermore, persistent issues of corruption, poor monitoring, and overdependence on TETFUND interventions raise concerns about sustainability. The problem, therefore, is whether TETFUND has effectively improved research and development in Nigerian universities or whether its efforts have been undermined by systemic challenges.

This study is significant because it contributes to the ongoing discourse on higher education financing and quality improvement in Nigeria. Policymakers will find the findings useful in strengthening TETFUND's framework and ensuring better accountability. University administrators and researchers will also benefit by understanding the opportunities and challenges associated with TETFUND. Furthermore, the study adds to the body of knowledge on educational management and serves as a reference for future research.

This study adopted a descriptive survey design relying mainly on secondary data sources. A descriptive approach was considered most appropriate since the study focused on assessing the interventions of TETFUND in Nigerian universities without manipulating variables. The approach allows for systematic review, synthesis, and interpretation of existing literature, government reports, and institutional documents related to TETFUND.

The population of the study comprises all public universities in Nigeria, including federal and state-owned institutions. As of 2024, Nigeria has over 50 federal universities and more than 60 state universities. Given the nationwide coverage of TETFUND interventions, the study did not focus on a single institution but adopted a broad perspective using representative data and literature. Data were collected from multiple secondary sources including:

Government policy documents on TETFUND (such as the TETFUND Act, annual reports, and official bulletins). Scholarly publications in Nigerian and international journals. Empirical studies conducted by researchers on TETFUND-funded projects. Reports from the National Universities Commission (NUC) and Ministry of Education.

The data collected were subjected to content analysis. Emerging themes such as funding for research, staff development, conference sponsorship, publication support, and infrastructural development were analyzed and discussed. The analysis also included comparative insights from international models of research funding to provide a broader perspective.

Literature Review

Concept of Research and Development in Universities

Research and development refer to systematic investigations aimed at generating new knowledge, solving problems, and improving human life. In universities, R&D includes basic research, applied research, and experimental development. Universities are expected not only to teach but also to contribute to national development by producing innovations, policies, and solutions to societal challenges (Altbach & Salmi, 2011).

In Nigeria, research in universities has historically been underfunded. Unlike in developed nations where research is often linked with industry, Nigerian universities have been isolated from industrial development, leading to poor commercialization of research findings (Aina, 2013).

Historical Development of TETFUND in Nigeria

The Education Tax Act of 1993 gave birth to the Education Trust Fund, which was later transformed into TETFUND by the 2011 Tertiary Education Trust Fund Act. The Act mandates TETFUND to impose a two percent education tax on the assessable profit of registered companies in Nigeria. The fund is then disbursed to universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education for infrastructural development, staff training, and research promotion (Okojie, 2017).

Objectives and Mandates of TETFUND

TETFUND's mandates include:

Funding research projects in tertiary institutions.

Sponsoring academic staff for postgraduate studies locally and internationally.

Providing academic conference sponsorships.

Supporting the publication of academic journals and textbooks.

Developing research infrastructure including laboratories and ICT centers.

TETFUND and Academic Staff Development

One of the key interventions of TETFUND is the Academic Staff Training and Development programme. Through this scheme, thousands of lecturers have received sponsorship for Masters and Doctoral studies in Nigerian and foreign universities. This has enhanced the quality of teaching and research in Nigerian universities (Ebuara, 2020).

TETFUND and Research Grants in Nigerian Universities

TETFUND allocates Institutional Based Research (IBR) grants to universities annually. These grants enable academic staff to conduct research that contributes to knowledge and national development. Okebukola (2015) notes that the scheme has significantly improved publication rates in Nigerian universities.

TETFUND and Infrastructural Development for Research

Modern libraries, laboratories, ICT facilities, and lecture halls have been constructed across Nigerian universities through TETFUND funding. These infrastructures provide the enabling environment for research productivity. For example, the University of Ibadan, University of Lagos, and Ahmadu Bello University have benefited from state-of-the-art laboratories funded by TETFUND.

Challenges of TETFUND in Research Promotion

Despite its successes, TETFUND faces several challenges, including:

Mismanagement of funds at institutional levels.

Bureaucratic delays in accessing grants.

Poor monitoring and evaluation of funded projects.

Overdependence of universities on TETFUND, discouraging diversification of funding sources.

International Perspectives on Research Funding and Implications for Nigeria

Countries like South Africa and Egypt have diversified funding models that combine government, private sector, and international donors. Nigeria's heavy reliance on TETFUND alone is unsustainable. To achieve global competitiveness, Nigerian universities must develop industry linkages and attract international funding (Altbach & Salmi, 2011).

TETFUND and Research Productivity in Nigerian Universities

The findings show that TETFUND has significantly contributed to research productivity in Nigerian universities. Many academics now have access to research grants through the Institutional Based Research (IBR) initiative. Okebukola (2015) observed that between 2011 and 2015, Nigerian universities recorded a noticeable increase in the number of journal publications, partly due to TETFUND sponsorship. Similarly, Ebuara (2020) confirmed that

academics who benefited from TETFUND grants were more likely to publish in both local and international journals.

However, while publication rates have increased, the quality and global visibility of these publications remain debatable. A large proportion of TETFUND-funded research ends up in local journals that are not indexed in global citation databases, thereby limiting the international competitiveness of Nigerian scholarship.

TETFUND and Academic Staff Training and Development

The Academic Staff Training and Development (ASTD) programme of TETFUND has greatly improved the capacity of Nigerian academics. Thousands of lecturers have benefited from local and foreign postgraduate sponsorships. For instance, lecturers from universities such as Ahmadu Bello University, University of Nigeria Nsukka, and Imo State University have completed PhD studies abroad under TETFUND sponsorship. This has improved the quality of teaching and supervision of postgraduate students, thereby contributing to long-term research culture.

Nonetheless, there are cases where beneficiaries fail to return after completing their studies abroad, creating a “brain drain” effect. Some institutions also struggle to effectively integrate the knowledge and expertise acquired by returning academics into institutional development.

Impact of TETFUND on Research Infrastructure

TETFUND has funded the construction of libraries, ICT centres, laboratories, and research facilities across Nigerian universities. For example, at the University of Ibadan, TETFUND sponsored the construction of a biotechnology laboratory that has supported groundbreaking research. At the University of Lagos, TETFUND funded a modern ICT hub that supports e-learning and data analysis. These interventions have created an enabling environment for research and teaching.

Despite this progress, many facilities are poorly maintained due to lack of recurrent funding. In some cases, equipment lies unused because of poor technical expertise and irregular electricity supply. This suggests that infrastructural development must be matched with sustainable maintenance plans.

Challenges in the Utilization of TETFUND Research Grants

Several challenges hinder the effective utilization of TETFUND funds:

1. **Bureaucratic Bottlenecks:** The process of applying for and accessing TETFUND grants is often cumbersome, discouraging many academics.
2. **Mismanagement of Funds:** Cases of fund diversion and poor accountability at institutional levels have been reported.
3. **Weak Monitoring and Evaluation:** Completed projects are often not tracked, leading to wastage and duplication.

4. Limited International Collaboration: Most TETFUND-funded projects are insular, lacking partnerships with international research networks.

These challenges reduce the impact of TETFUND and perpetuate a cycle of dependency without sustainable development.

Comparative Analysis with Other African Countries

A comparison with South Africa and Ghana shows that Nigeria's heavy reliance on TETFUND is unsustainable. In South Africa, research funding comes from multiple sources including the National Research Foundation, private industries, and international donors. This has led to higher research productivity and stronger global rankings. Ghana also combines government funding with industry partnerships to support university research. Nigeria must therefore diversify its funding base beyond TETFUND to achieve meaningful competitiveness. Universities should engage industries, alumni, and international agencies in research collaborations.

Conclusion

TETFUND remains one of the most important interventions in Nigerian higher education. Without it, many universities would have collapsed under the weight of underfunding. Its contributions to research productivity, staff development, and infrastructure are commendable. However, to truly transform Nigerian universities into globally competitive institutions,

The study revealed that TETFUND has made significant contributions to research and development in Nigerian universities through funding research projects, staff training, conference sponsorship, and infrastructural development. However, systemic challenges such as mismanagement of funds, poor monitoring, bureaucratic bottlenecks, and limited international collaboration continue to undermine its effectiveness.

TETFUND interventions must be complemented by strong accountability frameworks, diversified funding sources, and integration of research outcomes into national development priorities.

Recommendations

- xxxii. Strengthen Monitoring and Evaluation: Establish a transparent framework for monitoring TETFUND-funded projects to ensure accountability and sustainability.
- xxxiii. Diversify Funding Sources: Universities should develop partnerships with industries, alumni associations, and international donors to reduce dependence on TETFUND.

- xxxiv. Promote International Collaboration: TETFUND should prioritize funding projects with international linkages to increase global visibility of Nigerian research.
- xxxv. Capacity Building in Research Management: Provide training in grant writing, project management, and innovation commercialization for Nigerian academics.
- xxxvi. Link Research to National Development: TETFUND-funded projects should address Nigeria's socio-economic challenges such as energy, health, and agriculture to ensure relevance.

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