EQUITY AND QUALITY OF NIGERIAN TERTIARY EDUCATION: ISSUES AND ITS ETHICAL CHALLENGES

Rev. Fr. Aloysius Ezeanolue
Department Of Educational Foundations
Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka

Dr. Ezewuzie Jideofor J.
Department Of Educational Foundations
Federal College of Education (T) Umunze

Njoku Chinwe A.
Department Of Educational Foundations
Federal College of Education (T) Umunze Anambra State

42ND ANNUAL CONFERENCE FROM 18TH TO 21ST OCTOBER 2022 ORGANIZED BY PHILOSOPHERS OF EDUCATION ASSOCIATION OF NIGERIA (PEAN) AT UNIVERSITY OF UYO, AKWA IBOM STATE.

Abstract

Equity and quality tertiary education pose a problem to Nigeria as a nation. Several tertiary educational reform initiatives have been proposed, implemented and reviewed but the opportunity for equity and quality tertiary education in Nigeria seen to be dwindling. Indeed, this situation has ethical challenges for equity and quality of Nigerian tertiary education. This situation, therefore, emphasizes the need to identify the ethical challenges of Equity and Quality of Nigerian Tertiary Education and proffer strategies to tackle them using the south east geographical zone of Nigeria as a focal point. Three research questions were formulated to guide the researchers in conducting the study. The descriptive survey research design was adopted. The population of this study consisted of 104 respondents involving 26 heads of

tertiary institutions and chairmen of 3 unions of 26 tertiary institutions in the South Eastern part of Nigeria. No sampling was done owing to the small population. The entire population was used for the study. Data were collected with a researcher-developed questionnaire titled "Ethical challenges of Equity and Quality of Equity and Quality of Nigerian Tertiary education" (ECEQNTE). Mean ratings were used to answer the research questions. The findings imply that unless ethical challenges of Equity and Quality of Nigerian tertiary Education are tackled and eliminated, National development would remain a mirage.

Introduction

Tertiary education is a specialized type of education which students obtain at the post-secondary school level as in universities, polytechnics, colleges of education, colleges of agriculture and other monotechnics. The goals of tertiary education in Nigeria are aptly spelt out by the federal Government of Nigeria in National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013) to include:

a.   Contribute to national development through high level manpower training.

b.   Develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of the individuals and society.

c.   Develop the intellectual capability of individual to understand and appreciate their local and external environments.

d.   Acquire physical, intellectual and professional skills, which will enable the individuals to be self –reliant and useful members of the society.

e.   Promote and encourage scholarship, entrepreneurship and community service.

f.   Forge and cement national unity; and

g.   Promote national and international understanding and interaction.

It is in recognition of these goals that the Nigerian government commits immense resources to ensure that effective tertiary education is made accessible to the generality of it's citizenry. This therefore calls for equity and quality in education delivery at this level.

Equity implies same in quantity, measure, value, status or stock of being equal. Obizue, Nwosu and Emereibe (2017) view it as sameness and a mere thought or feelings which may not metamorphose into reality. Equity in tertiary education is a measure of achievement, fairness and opportunity in tertiary education. Equity in tertiary education according to Osoba (2021) refers to the different types of equity which include mathematical, legal, metaphysical, social, procedural and economic equity. None of the above form of equity is practised in Nigerian tertiary education. This is evident in the fact that difference exists in social, economic and political background and interests.

Quality is a slippery concept which according to Okafor and Ugwu (2019) imply different things to different people. It can be seen as the standard of a phenomenon when it is compared to other things like it, how good or bad something is; or to be of a high standard. In the context of tertiary education, quality is associated with the monitoring and evaluation of component of tertiary education to see whether the outcome is good and of the intended standard. Quality tertiary education according to Ziha (2019) is measured by the extent to which the training received from a tertiary institution enable the recipient to think clearly, independently and analytically to solve relevant societal problems in any given environment. Hence, quality in tertiary education is judged by both its ability to enable the students perform well in standard examinations and relevance to the needs of the students, community and society as whole.

Governments have established tertiary institutions to address the ethical challenges of providing opportunities for tertiary education. Private agencies and individuals have joined the

leagues of proprietors of tertiary institution with the hope of achieving equity and quality of Nigerian tertiary education.

To effectively manage our tertiary education for national development, ethical challenges of Equity and Quality of Nigerian tertiary Education ought to be tackled and eliminated. Obi (2015) notes that education management is synonymous with strategizing, planning, organizing, running, governance and supervision of the entire process of teaching and learning that takes place at all level of our education system.

Statement Of The Problem

In recent time, discrimination in tertiary educational opportunities is assuming an alarming dimension. Nigerian tertiary institutions are no longer guided strictly by a credible admission policy. There is a political interference in which different states have different admission cut-off marks. Ugwu (2019) observes that great danger confronts us today as there are increasing cases of corruption, tribalism and immorality in Nigerian tertiary institutions. Consequently, some Nigerian citizens are denied access to quality tertiary education. These ethical challenges affect negatively the goals of tertiary education among which is national development (Osoba, 2021).

Several tertiary educational reform initiations have been proposed, implemented and reviewed but the opportunities for equity and quality tertiary in Nigeria seem to be dwindling. This situation has ethical challenges for equity and quality of Nigerian tertiary education. This situation, therefore, emphasizes the need to examine equity and quality of Nigerian tertiary Education to find out their ethical challenges. The problem of this study was to identify the ethical challenges of equity and quality of Nigerian Tertiary Education and proffers strategies to tackle them using the south East geographical zone of Nigeria as a focal point.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

(1)   What are the ethical challenges of Equity and Quality of Nigerian Tertiary Education?

(2)   What are the causes of ethical challenges of Equity and Quality of Nigerian Tertiary education?

(3)   What are the strategies for tackling ethical challenges of Equity and Quality of Nigeria Tertiary education?

Method

The descriptive survey design was used for this study. Akuezuilo and Agu (2003) describe a survey research as the collection of data from a population in order to determine the current status of that population with respect to one or more variables. This design was ideal for use in this study, because the study is involved in collecting data from heads and chairmen of three (3) unions of 26 tertiary institutions in South East geographical zone of Nigeria with a view to identify the ethical challenges of Equity and Quality of Nigerian tertiary Education.

The population of this study consisted of 104 respondents. No sampling was done owing to the small population. The entire population was used for the study.

Data were collected with a researcher-developed questionnaire titled "Ethical challenges of Equity and Quality of Nigerian tertiary Education" (ECEQNTE) The questionnaire consisted of two parts: Part 1 was the introductory part and contained statements that sought information on the respondents' status. Part 2 comprised 15 items that were organized under 3 sections namely ethical challenges, causes of the ethical challenges and strategies to tackle the ethical challenges. The respondent were requested to indicate their

opinions on four-point rating scale of strongly agree (4) Agree (3), Disagree (2) and strongly

disagree (1).

Two experts in the department of educational foundations, Nnamdi Azikiwe University

Awka face – validated the instrument.

For reliability, split-half test was used. Person product moment correlation coefficient

of 0.78, 0.73 and 0.81 were obtained for the reliability of the three sections of the instrument.

For data analysis, the three research questions were answered using mean ratings. Based

on the 4- point rating scale, the decision rule that any mean score from 2.50 and above was

taken as agree, while mean scores below 2.50 was taken as disagree.

Results

Research question one: What are the ethical challenges of Equity and Quality of Nigerian

Tertiary Education?

Table 1: Mean rating of respondents on what constitutes the ethical challenges of Equity and

Quality of Nigerian Tertiary Education

Ethical Challenges of Equity and Quality of Nigerian tertiary education	Heads of tertiary institutions (N-26) mean	Decision	Chairmen of academic staff of tertiary institutions (N-26) mean	Decision	Chairmen of Senior staff of Non-teaching Staff (N-26) mean	Decision	Chairmen of Junior staff of Non-teaching staff (N-26) mean	Deci
Corruption	3.78	Strongly Agree	4.00	Strongly Agree	3.96	Strongly Agree	3.93	Stro Agre
Secret cults	3.97	Strongly Agree	3.84	Strongly Agree	3.79	Strongly Agree	3.80	Stro Agre
Difference in admission cut-off marks	3.94	Strongly Agree	4.00	Strongly Agree	3.97	Strongly Agree	3.87	Stro Agre

Militant student unionism	**3.44**	**Agree**	**3.31**	**Agree**	**3.28**	**Agree**	**3.21**	**Agre**
Sorting of marks for examinations	**3.00**	**Agree**	**3.05**	**Agree**	**3.08**	**Agree**	**3.04**	**Agre**

Results in Table 1 show that in the columns for heads of tertiary institutions and chairmen of

(3) three unions of tertiary institutions all the items have mean ratings above the cut-off point

of 2.50. The table also shows that all of them strongly agreed with items 1,2 and 3 and agreed

with items 4 and 5. Hence, they agreed that items 1, 2,3,4,5 constitute the ethical challenges of

Equity and Quality of Nigeria Tertiary Education.

Research Question Two: what are the causes of ethical challenges of Equity and Quality of

Nigerian Tertiary Education?

Table 2: Mean rating of respondents on the causes of ethical challenges of Equity and

Quality of Nigerian Tertiary Education.

Causes of ethical Challenges of Equity and Quality of Nigerian tertiary education	**Heads of tertiary institutions (N-26) mean**	**Decision**	**Chairmen of academic staff of tertiary institutions (N-26) mean**	**Decision**	**Chairmen of Senior staff of Non-teaching Staff (N-26) mean**	**Decision**	**Chairman of Junior staff of Non-teaching staff (N-26) mean**	**Decis**
Absence of severe penalty for corrupt staff	**3.21**	**Agree**	**3.94**	**Strongly Agree**	**3.89**	**Strongly Agree**	**3.85**	**Stron Agree**
Bad association	**3.97**	**Strongly Agree**	**3.89**	**Strongly Agree**	**3.90**	**Strongly Agree**	**4.00**	**Stron Agree**
Favoritism	**3.24**	**Agree**	**3.80**	**Strongly Agree**	**3.87**	**Strongly Agree**	**3.82**	**Stron Agree**

Absence of regular moral orientation	3.00	**Agree**	3.28	**Agree**	3.25	**Agree**	3.22	**Agree**
Inadequate monitoring of policies implementation	1.86	**Disagree**	1.95	**Disagree**	1.96	**Disagree**	1.98	**Disag**

Results in table 2 reveal that only the mean rating of item 10 was below 2.50. This indicates

that the heads of tertiary institutions and chairmen of (3) three unions in the tertiary institutions

disagree on inadequate monitoring of policies implementation as one of the causes of ethical

challenges of Equity and Quality of Nigerian Tertiary Education. Other items have mean

ratings above 2.50 showing the respondents' agreement that items 6,7,8,9 are the causes of

ethical challenges of Equity and Quality of Nigerian Tertiary Education.

Research question three: What are the strategies for tackling ethical challenges of Equity and

Quality of Nigerian Tertiary Education?

Table 3: Mean rating of respondents on the strategies for tacking ethical challenges of Equity
and Quality of Nigerian Tertiary Education.

Strategies for tackling ethical challenges of Equity and Quality of Nigerian tertiary Education	Heads of tertiary institutions (N-26) mean	Decision	Chairmen of academic staff of tertiary institutions (N-26) mean	Decision	Chairmen of Senior staff of Non-teaching Staff (N-26) mean	Decision	Chairmen of Junior staff of Non-teaching staff (N-26) mean	Deci
Establishment of severe penalty for corrupt staff	3.67	**Strongly Agree**	4.00	**Strongly Agree**	3.98	**Strongly Agree**	3.96	**Stro Agre**
Expulsion of confirmed secret cult members	3.89	**Strongly Agree**	3.71	**Strongly Agree**	3.69	**Strongly Agree**	3.67	**Stro Agre**

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Abolishment of difference in admission cut off marks	3.73	**Strongly Agree**	3.83	**Strongly Agree**	3.81	**Strongly Agree**	3.99	**Stro Agr**
Organizing regular moral orientation for students	3.62	**Strongly Agree**	3.33	**Agree**	3.40	**Agree**	3.42	**Agre**
Organizing regular work Ethics workshops for staff.	3.58	**Strongly Agree**	3.48	**Agree**	3.45	**Agree**	3.42	**Agre**

In the results as shown in table 3, all the items have mean rating above 2.50 indicating that strategies stated in the items should be used to tackle ethical challenges of Equity and Quality of Nigerian Tertiary Education.

Discussion

According to the responses to research Question 1, Heads of tertiary institutions, chairmen of academic staff, chairmen of senior staff (non-teaching) staff and chairmen of Junior staff (non- teaching) of Tertiary institutions agree that there are ethical challenges of Equity and Quality of Nigerian Tertiary Education. For the respondents to support the stated ethical challenges shows that they are aware of, and appreciate the existence of ethical challenges of Equity and Quality of Nigerian Tertiary Education. The finding agrees with the views of Olaoye (2020) and Osoba (2021) on the existence of ethical challenges of Equity and Quality of Nigerian Tertiary Education. In essence, corruption, secret cults, difference in admission cut off marks, militant student unionism and sorting of marks for examinations constitute the ethical challenges of Equity and Quality of Nigerian tertiary Education.

In research Question 2, Heads of tertiary institutions, chairmen of academic staff, chairmen of senior staff (non-teaching) and chairmen of Junior staff (non- teaching) of tertiary institutions disagree that inadequate monitoring of policies implementation is one of the causes

of ethical challenges of Equity and Quality of Nigerian Tertiary Education. They however agree that absence of severe penalty for corrupt staff, bad association, favoritism and absence of regular moral orientation are the causes of ethical challenges of Equity and Quality of Nigerian Tertiary Education.

This finding suggests that in order to achieve Equity and Quality of Nigerian Tertiary Education, it's ethical challenges, the causes of the ethical challenge must be analysed and their implications revealed. This means that it would be more ideal to base assessment of Equity and Quality of Nigerian Tertiary Education on the causes of its ethical challenges. This is in line with the view of Ugwu (2019) who stated that assessment of Equity and Quality of Nigerian Tertiary Education is chiefly based on the causes of ethical challenges of Equity and Quality of Nigerian Tertiary Education.

The responses to Research Question 3 reveal that Heads of Tertiary institutions, chairmen of academic staff, chairmen of senior staff (non-teaching) and chairmen of Junior staff (non-teaching) of Tertiary institutions agree that establishment of severe penalty for corrupt staff, expulsion of confirmed secret cult members, abolishment of difference in admission cut off marks, organizing regular moral orientation for students, organizing regular work Ethics workshops for staff are the strategies for tackling ethical challenges of Equity and Quality of Nigerian Tertiary education. This finding should be implemented because presently Nigerian Tertiary Education seem to be marred by discrimination in opportunities, favouritism and political interference in which different states have different admission cut off marks. Ziha (2019) notes that Nigerian citizens are denied access to Tertiary education owing to discriminatory factors. These factors are obstacles to Equity and Quality of Tertiary Education. Thus, adopting strategies for tackling ethical challenges of Equity and Quality of Nigerian Tertiary education would help in correcting this anomaly.

Conclusion

The findings of this study call for serious actions for managers of Nigerian Tertiary Education. Equity and Quality of Nigerian Tertiary Education is the aspirations of her citizens. Ethical challenges confront Equity and Quality of Nigeria Tertiary Education. Unless the strategies for tackling these ethical challenges are adopted and implemented, Equity and Quality of Nigerian tertiary education may not be achieved. Therefore, managers of Nigerian Tertiary Education should adopt and implement the above-mentioned strategies for tackling ethical challenges of Equity and Quality of Nigerian Tertiary Education.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made

1.   Severe penalty for corrupt staff should be established.

2.   Punishment for conformed secret cult members in Nigerian Tertiary institutions should be expulsion.

3.   Difference in admission cut off marks should be abolished.

4.   Regular moral orientations for students in Nigerian Tertiary institutions should be introduced.

5.   Regular work ethical workshops for staff in Nigerian Tertiary institutions should be made compulsory.

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