



STUDENTS COPING MECHANISM IN NIGERIAN'S ECONOMIC CHALLENGES: REPORT FROM AMBROSE ALLI UNIVERSITY, EKPOMA, NIGERIA

B. A. Azelama

&

J. A. Onimawo

Department of Public Administration
Faculty of Management Sciences, Ambrose Alli University
Ekpoma, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

This paper is a report of the study conducted on Ambrose Alli University students coping mechanism in the Nigerian economic challenges. Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was the method adopted. Nine faculties of the University were covered in the study. The study found that the students were adequately aware of the causes of Nigerian economic down-turn and had a clear picture of how they were affected by the economic challenges. The reported coping mechanisms were reprioritization of their consumption pattern, participating in income generating works like sale and repair of GSM materials, trading, body care, entertainment and farming. Prominent among their reported works was engagement in building activities, areas that had become very lucrative as a result of exodus of non-students workers in the area to the less lucrative commercial motorcycle operation.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Nigeria has been increasingly experiencing daunting economic challenges. Factors that have been dominantly responsible for the challenges are glut in oil market in international economy, dwindling foreign earnings and reserves, continuous decrease in the country's currency (the Naira), failure to diversify Nigeria's economy over the years, corruption crises, etc. Various sectors and groups are affected by the emerging economic down-turn. They include agriculture, industries, education, families, etc.

This study concerns itself with mechanisms adopted by students to cope with the economic challenges. Students of Ambrose Alli University, (A. A. U), Ekpoma, were taken as the case study. According to Azelama (2012), this University was established in 1981 as the then Bendel State University. It is now Ambrose Alli University owned by Edo State in Nigeria. It is therefore a State University.

PURPOSE

The study recognizes that as parts of the Nigerian economy, the students of the University would be affected by the economic challenges. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to look at the major areas the students were affected and examine the various mechanisms adopted them to be able to cope with the challenges. This is to enable them continue in their studies by meeting the financial requirements and avoiding a high level of stress and other factors that could have made them to discontinue their studies.

METHOD

The method adopted was Focus Group Discussion (FGD). Nine groups were formed from nine faculties of the University. They are Faculties of Agriculture, Arts, Basic Medical Sciences, Education, Engineering and Technology, Environmental Studies, Law, Management Sciences and Social Sciences. Each faculty had a group made up of between 6 to 12 students. The discussions centred on their personal experiences and the experiences of their fellow students relating to the ways they were affected by the economic challenges of the country and their adopted coping mechanisms.

THE FINDINGS

The results of the findings from the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) are outlined as follows:

- The discussants were dominantly aware of the causes of the Nigerian economic challenges. The causes were identified as a glut in the international oil market, failure of Nigeria to adequately diversify her economy over the years, dwindling foreign reserves and earnings, increasing falls in the value of naira and corruption crises;
- The discussants mostly recognized the ways they were affected by the economic challenges. They are increases in school fees, increases in prices of books and other school materials, increases in rents paid by off campus students, increases in prices of food items, transportation, fuel and other commodities they consume;
- The students established that they were differently affected by the economic challenges depending on their levels of income;
- The coping mechanisms found to be prominent among the students were reprioritization of their expenditure, engaging themselves in income generating works mainly in building industry, repairs and sales of GSM materials, body care materials, commercial works and farming, within and outside the campus.

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

Although the causes of Nigerian economic challenges at the time of this study were adequately recorded and clear, the discussions did not go without some political colouration. Bulk passing were between discussants sympathizing with All Progressives Congress (APC) the current ruling Political Party in the country and those of People Democratic Party (PDP) the opposition party that ruled the country for a period of 16 years. Two important points were precipitated by the political arguments. The first is a policy issue which emphasized the need to make Nigerian Universities more productive in revenue generation to enable them contribute adequately to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). This is in line with earlier findings of Moja (2000), Adelemo (2002) and Olojuwo (2004). The second point is the need for management of Nigerian Universities particularly in the public sector to be done in a way to avoid huge financial waste and corruption which have had negative impacts on the Nigerian economy. This position falls into the arguments of Onumajuru (2004), United Nations (2012) and Transparency International (2015). The ways the discussants reported how they were affected by the economic challenges were such that they could lead to stress for the students which in turn could have negative effects on their studies, Selye (1976), Mischel and Shada (1995) and Azelama (2015). The discussants did not significantly report experience of stress. The explanation could then be in line with Azelama (2015) that although the economic challenges would naturally constitute stressors, the students' responses to them were such that stress was not experienced.

The report that the students were differently affected by the economic challenges was natural. The students' sources of income would not be expected to be the same. Their responses to economic stressors would also differ from one student to the other. One particularly interesting report in this area is that the discussants could not identify any student of the University who had had to end his/her studies as a result of inability to cope with the economic challenges.

Students coping mechanisms to the Nigerian economic challenges by students of Ambrose Alli University particularly attracts attention. One of the already itemized students coping mechanisms is reprioritization of their consumption or expenditure. Cost saving and waste minimizations were naturally required. The students have benefited from them. Students' engagements in income yielding activities were reported. Involvement in sales and repairs of GSM materials, body care like hair fixing, nail fixing, etc, were reported. Participation in trade (buying and selling), photographing, entertainment, revenue yielding church activities and farming were also reported.

One particularly revealing students coping mechanism is involvement in works in building industry. One would normally expect that students (undergraduates and postgraduates) in building related discipline like engineering, architecture, environmental studies, etc, would engage in building or construction works, It was found that the students of the University irrespective of their programme of study had dominated building works of unskilled labour as

well as skilled ones. The skilled ones were mainly those of bricklayers, building electricians, carpenters, plumbers; handling fittings, painting, etc in the environment of the University. The discussion revealed that the dominant part of non-student workers skilful in these areas had abandoned their works in building industry to take to commercial motor cycle works, carrying passengers. It was particularly revealing that the work of motor cycle commercial operation was less income yielding than the building works they had abandoned. This is in addition to their commercial motor cycle operation being very risky. It was also found that the students participating in building works predominantly learnt their trade after they had become students of the University. Yet the students did not believe that the various works they were involved in had negative effects on their studies as they argued that the students who were not involved in such activities did not do better than those involved in their studies. This is therefore an area apparently requiring further research.

CONCLUSION

The study revealed that the students of Ambrose Alli University (A.A.U), Ekpoma, Nigeria were adequately aware of causes of Nigerian economic challenges. They had a clear picture of how they were affected by the economic challenges which differed among the students. They reported their coping mechanisms as reprioritization of their consumption pattern, engaging in commercial activities like building and construction works, repairs and sales of GSM materials, trade and farming. They reported that they had taken advantage of higher demand than supply of building workers as the dominant part of non-student workers had trooped to join the risky and less lucrative commercial motorcycle operation. It was reported that the discussants did not believe that these mechanisms had negative effects on their studies.

REFERFENCES

- Adelemo, A. I. (2001). Higher Education in Nigeria: Institutional Inadequacies System Performance and Sustainability. *Nigeria Social Scientist Vol.4 No. 2, pp23-29*
- Azelama, J. U. (2012) Administration Of Nigerian Tertiary Institutions. Benin City: Everblessed Publishers.
- Mischel, W. and Shoda, Y (1995). A Cognitive-Effective System Theory of Personality: Reconceptualizing Situations, Dispositions, and invariance in Personality Structure. *Psychological Review*, Vol.102, pp. 248 – 268.

Moja, T. (2000). Nigerian Education Sector Analysis: An Analytical Synthesis of Performance and Main Issues. Washington D. C.: World Bank.

Olojuwo, O.T. (2004). Education in Nigeria: A Futuristic Perspective. Central Education Service, Lagos Nigeria.

Onumajuru, E. M. (2004). Challenges and Future of University Education in Nigeria. *Journal of Empirical studies in Psychology and Education*, Vol. 1, No.9, pp. 105 – 116.

Selye, H. (1976). *The Stress of Life*, (Rev. Edu.) – New York: McGraw-Hill.

Azelama, B. A. (2015). Job Stress and Burn Out Among Academic Staff of Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma. An unpublished Master Degree Research Dissertation submitted to the School of Postgraduate Studies, Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Nigeria.

Transparency International (2015) Corruption Perception Index (CPI). Retrieved December 18, 2015 from <http://cpi.transparency.org/cpi.2015/results/>.

United Nations (2012). United Nations Convention against corruption. Retrieved December 18, 2015 from <http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/treaties/CAC/>.