

COST- SHARING POLICY: ABILITY AND WILLINGNESS TO PAY FOR HIGHER EDUCATION IN GOMBE STATE, NIGERIA

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Funding is said to be the central key in running higher education institutions (HEIs) world over and Nigeria in particular. Some observers have been convinced that inadequate funding of public higher education institutions in Nigeria is not unconnected to the fact that higher education institutions are fully financed by the government and the government's commitment to the financing of higher education is very low. The poor funding nature of public HEIs in Nigeria and the need for qualitative graduates has called for alternative means of funding these institutions. One of which is the cost-sharing model in which the cost of producing a graduate is shared between government and the individual student or his parent. Knowing what users of education are willing to pay for higher education is essential if improvements in cost recovery in higher education are to take place. The focus of this study is on the user fees and its implications for household in terms of the ability and willingness to pay for the cost of higher education in Gombe State Nigeria. To this end, three research questions were posed to address the focus of the study.

The study's population thus comprised households in of Gombe State, Nigeria. One local government area was randomly selected from each of the 3 senatorial districts of the State. Each of the selected Local government areas, was stratified into two; north and south. From each of the stratum, simple random sampling was used in selecting 50 residential apartments. From each of the selected residential apartment, one household was randomly selected. In all, the study sample comprised 300 households. An instrument called Gombe Households Willingness to pay for Higher Education Questionnaire (GHWTPHEQ) was used. Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient of the instrument yielded 0.78, an indication of its internal consistency reliability and construct validity. Data analysis was through simple frequency counts, percentages and chi square statistics.

The results indicate that the average income of households in Gombe State is 15, 330 Naira (\$92.9) and 75.7% earn less than N50,000 about \$303 per month. Considering that the average cost of graduate production in a year is estimated to be 78,000 naira (\$472), the study thus inferred that many households in Gombe Sate may not have the ability to pay for higher education. The results also indicate that what the households are willing to pay for each institution varies according to the institution. Cumulatively, as much as 82.3% of the respondents are not willing to pay any fees above 30,000 naira per session as the school fees for higher education. This of course indicates the high reluctance that government might face if attempts were to be made to recover cost of higher education in Gombe State through user fees.

The study thus suggests that government would need to continue to shoulder the responsibility of providing higher education in Gombe State Nigeria and the need to explore other means of cost recovery and financing of HE in Gombe State asides increment of user fees may need to be considered.