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## Public Opinion and Perception on Postgraduate Tuition in Edo State Private Universities

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### ABSTRACT

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*This study investigates public perceptions of postgraduate tuition fees in private universities in Edo State, Nigeria. The research is grounded in the broader context of higher education's role in individual and societal development, referencing key educational policies established by the Federal Government of Nigeria. Using a cross-sectional survey design, data was collected from 50 respondents aged 22 to 60, employing a stratified random sampling method to ensure diverse representation with descriptive statistics, including mean, median, mode, and standard deviation to analyze responses. The findings reveal significant trends in public opinion. Respondents generally disagree with the notion about private universities offer better value for postgraduate education compared to public universities, as indicated by lower mean values for questions related to university location and reputation. However, there is strong agreement on the reasonableness of tuition fees in private universities and the perceived higher quality of education they provide, evidenced by higher mean and median values for these questions. Mixed responses were noted regarding the critical factors influencing the choice of university, such as location and research opportunities. The study concludes that while there is a general positive sentiment towards the quality and value of education in private universities, cost remains a contentious issue. The variability in opinions suggests a need for targeted communication and policy adjustments to address diverse viewpoints. Recommendations include reinforcing policies in areas of strong agreement, investigating causes of dissatisfaction, and conducting further qualitative research to understand the divided opinions better. Overall, the research provides valuable insights into public perceptions of postgraduate tuition fees in private universities, highlighting areas of consensus and contention that can inform future educational policies and university practices*

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Higher institution is the bedrock of Education, no doubt you can't be bold enough to say you are educated without a formal education from a tertiary university. The quest for building a successful career in life, preparation for work, personal growth, and contribution to society is an advantage for attaining higher education (Case et al. 2018; Brooks et al 2022). This drive made the Federal Government of Nigeria develop educational policies in the year 2004 which serves as a guide to the university educational system in Nigeria. The policies are as follows:

1. Promote national development by providing highly qualified, pertinent workforce training.
2. Establish and instill moral principles that are necessary for both individual and societal survival.
3. Foster the intellectual ability of people to comprehend and value their immediate and surrounding environments.
4. Encourage communication and understanding between countries.
5. Encourage community service and scholarship programs.

The Nigerian federal government has established several tertiary universities throughout the nation in order to ensure

that students receive a proper and high-quality education. According to (Ige Akindele, M. 2012), the beginning of private intervention in Nigerian university education dates back to 1979, when the then-governing civilian government placed education on the concurrent legislative list between the federal and state governments. This means that both the federal and state governments have the authority to create, fund, and oversee universities. As a result, Nigeria saw the founding of twenty-six (26) private universities. He added that the Federal Military Government's Decree 19 of 1984 forbade the founding of new private universities and abolished those that already existed due to the trend of private university establishment and the anticipated decline in the caliber of university education in Nigeria. Many factors and agitations led to the abolishment of that law and this led to the introduction of private universities in 1999. Some of these factors include but are not limited to Cultism, strikes, Admission Processes, Moral decadence, and Negative attitudes of lecturers in public Universities (Ige Akindele, M. 2012). These factors are some of the reasons why people prefer private universities to public universities. The strike is a common problem that oftentimes delays students from graduating at the stipulated time. This

is a major drawback and many parents are willing to pay the price of giving their children a good education regardless of the cost. The major reason why a private university is more expensive than a public university is because the school is self-funded, unlike public universities that are funded by the Federal Government. (Oguejiofor, J.O. 2020).

The self-financing system of these private universities made the tuition fees not to be uniform across the country because it depends on how much academic, non-academic, and casual workers are being paid at the end of the month, the cost of running a generator in case of power failure. However, regardless of the exuberant cost of attending private universities, some of these schools are relatively cheaper than others, the fact that they are cheaper does not mean that the quality of education is poor. It is about competition and wooing of students to apply to these schools for any academic program of their choice.

There is a growing demand for post-graduate programs in Nigerian universities (F.S. Akinwumi, 2007). Students tend to go for post-graduate programs after completing their undergraduate degree for several reasons, some of the reasons are getting promotions at the place of work, Academic Research Purposes, getting better job employment, advancing a career in a choice research discipline, etc. Regardless of the reason why people pursue post-graduate programs, it is important to state that the need to have a post-graduate degree is important in this age and time we live in. Several factors influence the choice of a student when it comes to which school to enroll for his or her post-graduate studies. Some of the factors are proximity, graduating at the stipulated time, cost of running the program, etc. Out of the factors listed, the major fear of students is the timeframe and this is a major setback in public universities in Nigeria due to incessant strike activities carried out by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) because of unresolved differences with the Federal Government of Nigeria. These leave students with the choice to choose a private university for their post-graduate programs.

However, there lies the issue of Cost, that is Tuition fees and some other expenses in completing such a program in a private university, and this is another reason why people shy away from private universities. However, research shows that the tuition fees for some of these private universities are quite cheap compared to the assumed cost in the minds of people when the term private university is mentioned. This research hopes to sample the opinions of the public about the tuition fees for a post-graduate program in Edo State private universities.

Private universities are being financed mainly by the tuition and other fees paid by the students and the cost of running and sustaining a university education is very high and may remain so because of the prevailing economic situation, this accounts for the reason why tuition and other fees in the private universities will keep increasing (Ajadi and Timothy Olugbenga 2010). This is one of the reasons why public universities are more crowded compared to Private universities. However, Ajadi and Timothy Olugbenga made an argument on the possibility of Private Universities compromising on their quality of education standard due to

the massive trooping of students into the private universities from the public universities because of the dilapidating structure and infrastructure of the public universities, and they think this might be a future challenge for private universities. We think it might not get to that point because the private universities are self-funded and the inflation rise will also lead to a rise in tuition fees which many people still can't afford and the standard in these private schools might not get so bad.

Experts in the economics of higher education argue that universities are losing their ability to effectively discriminate prices of postgraduate education (Okafor, 2004). The tuition fees in private universities vary based on different factors, however, there are still considerable fees for some post-graduate programs in these private universities.

'Tough times for students, parents as schools hike fees by 200%' (The Guardian newspaper, 2023). The publication stated that since most federal and state universities have raised their fees to mitigate the effects of funding challenges in public institutions, many institutions have increased their fees by 100 to 200 percent, which may force some impoverished students out of school. It provided justification for the increase in the nation's inadequate tertiary education funding and rising inflation, which reached 22.4 percent last year the highest level in 17 years according to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS).

However, graduating students look forward to postgraduate programs in private universities for the following reasons, better lecturer relationships, educational experience and tools of higher standard, guaranteed graduation date, smaller lecture population as compared to fees as an alternative where reputation cannot be compared to cost because Private doesn't necessarily mean for profit in comparison to increase in rising inflation; because, the learning institution is funded by private endowments from allies of the institutions, cooperations, alumni, students and guardians.

With the current trend of youths having strong migration interest for foreign study programs, (McLendon, M. K., Hearn, J. C., and Deaton, R. 2014), give a summary of the latest innovations in state policy in the United States and point out the opportunities and difficulties in researching the relationship between state higher education attainment and public policy.

Efforts to understand how states can best improve higher education attainment must contend with a number of powerful obstacles. One challenge is the multitude of sources of variation between states that make it difficult to draw the necessary and simple conclusions about which policy conditions influence educational outcomes. The demographics (population size and growth, race/ethnicity, and educational attainment), socioeconomic development (tax structure, income levels, patterns in economic activity, and unemployment), political systems (election results and partisanship patterns), and higher education systems (e.g., number of institutions and their respective accreditation) of the states differ significantly from one another. However, understanding the financial burden of postgraduate tuition in Nigeria's private universities and how it shapes public opinion matters a lot.

According to (Archibald, R. B., and Feldman, D. H. 2011), a lot of the writing on colleges and universities links the rapidly increasing cost of tuition to dysfunctional behavior within the academic community. Gold-plated amenities, bloated administration, and university prestige games are common targets of dysfunction. The writers firmly situate the higher education sector within the greater economic history of the United States in order to explain rising college and post-college costs. It's no accident that the cost of college follows a similar trajectory to the cost behavior of many other industries. Higher education is a personalized service that needs workers with advanced degrees. Over the past three decades, a trio of broad economic forces centered around technology has combined to drive up costs in many other industries, including higher education, far faster than the rate of inflation.

On recent research by (Michael Paul Pilani et al., 2023), many factors, including but not limited to funding, infrastructure, instructional effectiveness, research output, and student satisfaction, affect how well universities perform in Nigeria. Accordingly, the emergence of private universities has had a major impact on Nigeria's higher education market. For example, more students have access to higher education even if they are unable to get into the limited number of openings in public universities. They have also raised industry innovation and competitiveness, which has raised the caliber of education provided by both public and private universities. As a result, private universities frequently provide excellent instruction. Frequently, they provide better facilities, experienced teachers, and a more student-centered approach to instruction. Veritas University, Covenant University, Babcock University, Afe Babalola University, and Bowen University are a few examples of other universities. These universities are well known for their outstanding teaching, research output, and academic standards. It's crucial to remember, though, that performance levels vary among Nigeria's private universities. The overall performance of certain private universities may be impacted by their lack of adequate facilities or financial difficulties. Subsequently, there were allegations that certain private colleges in Nigeria were operating without adequate regulatory oversight and offering inferior quality education. Concerns were also raised about these institutions' accreditation and regulation. However, the Nigerian government has taken action to address these issues by establishing regulatory bodies like the National Universities Commission (NUC), which is in charge of accrediting and regulating all institutions in Nigeria, both public and private. Another relevant resource is (Edugist, 2023) which explores the broader role of private universities in Nigeria, while it focuses on the undergraduate experience, it touches on financial challenges, such as high tuition fees, which also apply to postgraduate students, he stated that as Nigeria grapples with the demand for higher education, a notable shift has occurred. The rise of private universities has changed the scene and given students who want to take their academic careers to the next level a ray of hope.

According to (Bolaji Abdullahi's Report, 2023), the state needs to revitalize the education quality assurance system

and focus it on the demands of the private sector, the labor market, and Nigeria's long-term goals for human capital development. He asserted that in order to keep an eye on the caliber of research and instruction at universities, a National Higher Education Quality Assurance Agency (NHEQAA) with some degree of autonomy must be established. According to him, this needs to be assessed in light of how well they meet Nigeria's plans for economic development and workforce needs. The former minister declared, "Transforming universities in Nigeria will not be a job for the minister or the Ministry of Education alone." "The Organized Private Sector (OPS), the Ministry of Labor and Productivity, and the Ministry of National Planning must work closely together. "But the process has to be led by the president of the country or someone who has his convening authority to drive the process."

At the approval of two reputable universities in Nigeria, Lighthouse University in Evbuobanosa, Edo state, and the African School of Economics in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), the Acting Executive Secretary of the National Universities Commission (NUC), (Chris Maiyaki, 2024), stated that private universities add something special to the country's educational landscape. While the commission commended some of these private universities for their innovative approach, Maiyaki pointed out that the ministry, working with the commission, drastically altered the curricula to conform to the highest international standards. Additionally, it is relevant to note that the NUC's strict oversight of the growing number of private universities is a crucial countermeasure against the spread of degree mills and illicit colleges across the nation. "I wish to enjoin you to acquaint yourselves with the code of governance for private universities which aims to enhance the successful running and sustainability of institutions". "It has been further reviewed to give some latitude to the proprietors on the issue of appointment of principle officers". "We continue to reemphasized and stress that the venture of establishing private universities is not for profit, it is a social service and a journey of passion," he said. Nonetheless, he urged the owners to make sure that no aspect of their business is sacrificed for financial gain, as any deviation from NUC regulations would result in penalties.

As a result, the literature review on public opinion and perception of postgraduate tuition in Edo State's private universities presents a complex picture that is marked by both challenges and changing viewpoints. The general consensus among stakeholders, parents, and students reflects a complex understanding of the cost of postgraduate education. There is widespread concern over the high cost of tuition, with many voicing worries about affordability and the possible effects on access to higher education.

Studies reveal that although private universities in Edo State provide a variety of programs at different tuition rates, there is a great deal of uncertainty regarding how these expenses relate to the caliber and results of the education given. Many stakeholders contend that the promises of better career opportunities and academic resources frequently justify high tuition costs; nevertheless, there is ongoing debate over whether these claims are regularly kept.

Additionally, the literature points to an increasing awareness

of and discussion about the benefits of postgraduate education in the private sector. Public perception is largely shaped by elements like program relevance, institutional reputation, and employment prospects after graduation. The growing gap between the cost of postgraduate degrees and their increasing demand has spurred debates about institutional accountability, financial aid options, and transparent pricing.

In summary, the review emphasizes the need for continued research and discourse to address the complexities surrounding postgraduate tuition at private universities. Policymakers, academic institutions, and prospective students are among the stakeholders who need to work together to strike a balance between accessibility, affordability, and quality in order to keep postgraduate education a worthwhile and viable option for people in Edo State.

## 2.0. Materials and Methods

The research design for this study is a cross-sectional survey aimed at getting the public opinion on post-graduate tuition fees in private universities in Edo State. The primary objective is to gather and analyze data to understand the perceptions and differences in opinions across various demographic groups.

### 2.1 Participants

The target populations for this study are individuals in the age range of 22 to 60 years who have academic qualification and are either current, postgraduate students or have children or relatives in postgraduate school, their source of income was also considered to know if their choices were based on their financial strength or not. A stratified random sampling method was used to ensure representation across different age groups, genders, and educational backgrounds. A total of 50 participants were surveyed.

### 2.2 Data Collection

Data was collected using a questionnaire distributed via face-to-face interviews in offices, schools, and other places passed by pedestrians. The questionnaire was designed

using Microsoft Word and were closed-ended questions, all the participants voluntarily completed the survey.

### 2.3 Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire comprised two sections: demographic information, and opinions on tuition fees. The questions were closed-ended and included Likert scale items to rate affordability (1-5).

#### Data Analysis

Data analysis was performed using SPSS and Microsoft

Excel. Descriptive statistics including frequencies and percentages were calculated for demographic variables; while, mean, median, mode and standard deviation were calculated for the responses.

## 2.4 Report Findings

These results of the data analysis, including descriptive statistics, and key insights derived from the questionnaire responses can be found below.

		X1	X2	X3	X4
N	Valid	50	50	50	50
	Missing	0	0	0	0
Mean		2.46	1.58	3.70	2.10

## 2.5 Descriptive Analysis

The sample consisted of 58% females and 42% males. The respondents were 48% aged 40-50, 18% aged 22 -30, 26% aged 30 – 40, 8% aged 50 - 60. Regarding educational background, 46% had Bachelor's degree, 24% had Master's degree, 8% had Doctorate, 14% had HND degree and 8% had ND degree. Regarding the Employment Status, 18% are self-employed, 74% are employed; while,8% are unemployed.

Fig. 1: Mean distribution

Fig. 2: Gender information

An overview of the central tendency and response variability is provided in the table below.

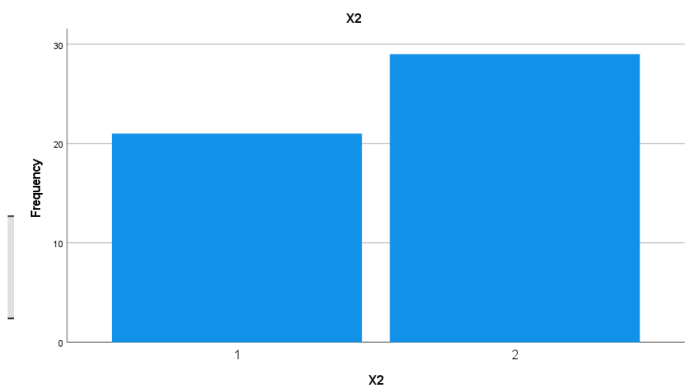


Fig. 3: Mean, median, and standard deviation table

## 3.0. DISCUSSIONS

The table summarizes the mean, median, and standard deviation for each question (X5 to X17).

### 3.1. Mean

An average answer to each question is provided by the mean. For example, the mean for questions X5 (University location is important when selecting a private university

over a public university) and X7 (University reputation is important when selecting a postgraduate program?) is 1.58. has a mean of 1.78, meaning that respondents are essentially in the middle of the "Strongly Disagree" and "Disagree" categories. Higher means, such as 3.62 for question X13 (Postgraduate tuition at Benson Idahosa is less expensive than at other private universities in Edo State) and 3.70 for question X6 (Postgraduate education is more valuable when obtained from private universities compared to public universities?) indicate that respondents are more likely to agree or strongly agree with the respective questions.

### 3.2. Median

When responses are arranged in order, the median indicates the middle value. The data indicates that a minimum of 50% of the respondents selected "Strongly Disagree" for X5, which asks whether location is a crucial factor in selecting a private university over a public university. A minimum of 50% of the respondents selected "Agree" based on a median score of 4.00 for X6 (Tuition costs should be taken into account when selecting a postgraduate program), X11 (Post Graduate tuition fees in private universities are reasonable), X13 (Higher tuition fees at private universities generally reflect higher quality education), and X14 (Post Graduate Students from private schools are satisfied with the level of education received considering the tuition fees they paid).

### 3.3 Mode Analysis

The trends observed in the mean and median are supported by the mode values. The mode for a number of questions (such as X5, X7, and X8) is 2, which denotes frequent disagreement. Modes of 4 for questions like X6, X11, and X13 indicate that this is the area in which respondents are most in agreement.

### 3.4 Standard Deviation

The standard deviation calculates the response distribution. Greater variability in responses is indicated by a higher value, such as 1.413 for X13. Responses are more closely distributed around the mean when standard deviations are lower, as in the case of X5, which is .702.

### 3.5 Trends and Patterns

#### 1. General Agreement

With high mean and median values, questions X6 (Is postgraduate education more valuable from private universities than from public universities?), X11 (Postgraduate tuition fees in private universities are reasonable), and X13 (Higher tuition fees at private universities generally reflect higher quality education) may be well-liked by respondents. Consistent agreement among respondents is indicated by the low standard deviation of these questions.

#### 2. General Disagreement

Question X5: What role does postgraduate education play in career advancement, in your opinion? And X7 (Is the university's reputation a factor to take into account when selecting a postgraduate program?) have low mean and

median values, indicating that the majority of respondents don't agree or disagree strongly with these topics. Respondents' consistent disagreement is indicated by the low standard deviation of these questions.

### 3. Mixed Responses

The mean values of questions X9, X10, X14, X15, and X16 indicate that private universities offer tuition fees in installments to students, that research opportunities and internships are important factors in university selection, that postgraduate students from private schools are satisfied with the quality of education they received given the tuition they paid, and that the government should have a role in regulating tuition fees in private universities. These mean values are close to 3.00. For these questions, the standard deviation is comparatively high, indicating a wide range of opinions.

### 4. Specific Insights

X5 (Mean: 1.58, Median: 1.00): Low variability and strong disagreement. X6: Moderate variability, strong agreement (mean: 3.70, median: 4.00). X11: Moderate variability, agreement (mean: 3.26, median: 4.00). X13: High variability and strong agreement (mean: 3.62, median: 4.00).

### 4.0 CONCLUSION

There is a definite pattern wherein high levels of disagreement are seen in question X5, while high levels of agreement are seen in questions X6, X11, and X13. Divergent answers can be found for questions such as X9, X10, and X15, which suggest that respondents have different perspectives. Higher variability questions (like X13) reveal dissenting opinions and fewer unanimity among respondents. The following are the main conclusions drawn from the statistical analysis of the public opinion survey on postgraduate studies in private universities: Lower mean values, medians of 2, and modes of 2 for questions like X5, X7, X8, and X10 point to a general trend of disagreement or unfavorable sentiment among the respondents. This implies that the majority of people do not have a positive opinion of some particular aspects of postgraduate study at private universities. Higher mean values and modes of 4 are found in questions like X6, X11, and X13, which indicate widespread agreement or favorable sentiment. These fields may reflect advantages or strong points of graduate study at for-profit universities. Respondents' neutral or indifferent attitude is indicated by questions X15 and X17, which have medians and modes of 3. This implies that the public views these characteristics as neither especially positive nor negative. While there is agreement among respondents on some questions, there is disagreement on others, as indicated by the different standard deviations.

Higher standard deviation questions may call for more focused outreach or changes to policy to take into account the various points of view. Policies or practices in these areas could be upheld or reinforced for questions with high levels of agreement because the public appears to find them acceptable. In cases where there is a significant degree of disagreement, more research into the reasons behind the dissatisfaction is required. By addressing these issues,

private universities may be able to increase public acceptance of their postgraduate tuition costs. Further qualitative research, such as focus groups or interviews, may be helpful for questions that elicit conflicting answers. This will allow researchers to better understand the reasons behind the differing viewpoints and pinpoint the precise variables influencing the general public's perceptions.

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