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## Unaffordable Education and Criminality as a Choice among Youth in Ondo State, Nigeria

التعليم غير ميسور التكلفة والإجرام كخيار بين الشباب في ولاية أوندو، نيجيريا

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### Abstract:

Education shapes human, and it has the capacity to determine who gets what and what one becomes in life. Acquiring education in Nigeria is gradually becoming unaffordable; schools at all levels are becoming very expensive making it difficult for common men to send their children to schools. Youth in Ondo State, Nigeria, whose parents cannot afford either Secondary or University education now consider criminality as a choice. The study adopts a qualitative method – in-depth interviews were utilized in generating data from 38 interviewees. The qualitative data generated from the study were analyzed using manual content analysis. The study found that both Public/Private Secondary schools and Universities in Nigeria now charge exorbitant school fees, making the youth from low-economic family backgrounds either drop out of school and go into crime, be in school, or engage in criminal activities. Based on the findings, it is recommended that the government at both Federal and State levels should consider a reduction in school fees, as it is currently paid in public schools in Nigeria. Besides, scholarship schemes for indigent students in both secondary and tertiary institutions should be resuscitated.

**Keywords:** *Unaffordable education; criminality; youth; educational institution.*

### الملخص:

يقوم التعليم بصياغة الإنسان، وله القدرة على تحديد من يحصل على ماذا وما الذي يصبح عليه المرء في الحياة. وأصبح الحصول على التعليم في نيجيريا أمراً لا يمكن تحمله تدريجياً، وأصبحت المدارس على جميع المستويات باهظة الثمن، مما يجعل من الصعب على الرجال العاديين إرسال أطفالهم إلى المدارس. فالشباب في ولاية أوندو، نيجيريا، الذين لا يستطيع أبائهم تحمل تكاليف التعليم الثانوي أو الجامعي، يعتبرون الآن الإجرام خياراً. وتعتمد الدراسة طريقة نوعية - فتم استخدام المقابلات المتعمقة في توليد البيانات من 38 شخصاً تمت مقابلتهم. فتم تحليل البيانات النوعية التي تم الحصول عليها من الدراسة باستخدام تحليل المحتوى اليدوي. ووجدت الدراسة أن كلاً من المدارس الثانوية العامة/ الخاصة والجامعات في نيجيريا تتقاضى الآن رسوماً مدرسية باهظة، مما يجعل الشباب من خلفيات عائلية منخفضة الاقتصاد إما يتركوا المدرسة ويذهبون إلى الجريمة، أو يلتحقون بالمدرسة، وينخرطون في الأنشطة الإجرامية. واستناداً إلى النتائج، يوصى بأن تنظر الحكومة على المستويين الفيدرالي ومستوى الولايات في تخفيض الرسوم المدرسية. حيث يتم دفعها حالياً في المدارس الحكومية في نيجيريا. وإلى جانب ذلك، يجب إعادة العمل بمخططات المنح الدراسية للطلاب المعوزين في كل من المؤسسات الثانوية والجامعية.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** *تعليم باهظ التكلفة؛ إجرام؛ شباب؛ مؤسسة تعليمية.*

## Introduction:

The importance of education to both individuals and societies cannot be over-emphasized, and its importance to individual development has made most countries all over the world guarantee the right to primary education (Azubuike & Nwosu, 2017, pg 1-2; Ndanusa, Abayomi & Harada, 2017, pg 67). This right is recognized by the international human rights conventions as established by a succession of UN Conventions, from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), which acquired the status of international law in 1990. It was clearly stated in Article 28 of the Convention that governments have the responsibility of making primary education compulsory and available free to all (Ngene, Quadri, Bamigboye & Tenebe, 2018).

Education is also recognized as crucial to human development, and that is why the right to education was entrenched in Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 4 aims to ensure that all people have access to quality education and lifelong learning opportunities. This Goal focuses on the acquisition of foundational and higher-order skills at all stages of education and development; greater and more equitable access to quality education at all levels, as well as technical and vocational education and training (TVET); and the knowledge, skills and values needed to function well and contribute to society (MDGs, adopted by UN Member States in 2000; (UNESCO, 2000; NERDC, 2014; Osarenren-Osaghae & Irabor, 2018).

Over the years, the cost of acquiring formal education at all levels in public institutions has risen rapidly in Nigeria. Before now, State-owned institutions (Universities) charged tuition Fees but, the fees were very moderate and affordable while the federal institutions maintain a "no tuition fees" policy. Presently, state-owned institutions that solely depend on finances from the monthly allocation that comes from the federal government to their respective state government are finding it difficult to survive; this is due to inconsistent/insufficient monthly allocations which come from the federal government to the state (Nwangu, 2010). In order for these educational institutions to operate well and meet their statutory obligations the management of each state institution in conjunction with the state government has to increase their tuition fees (Akinyemi & Adebisi, 2012; Azubuike & Nwosu, 2017).

Tuition fees across the state educational institutions in Nigeria are on the high side. The federal institutions where tuition fees were not charged, could not accommodate the teeming youth of this country which seek admission to higher institutions on yearly basis. The majority of these youth later fall back to seeking admission into state-owned institutions, with no other option than to either accept the admission offer with exorbitant school fees or stay back at home for another year (Okoli, 2015).

The level of education a child attains depends on the social class of the parents, and this has been one of the factors determining the types of school a child attends. This is the picture of what is glaring among the Nigerian youth. State higher institutions which used to be a saving grace for the children of the common men due to the low fees charged by them are no more within their reach, and this has now made so many of our youth who are supposed to be in school to be out of school.

Unaffordable higher education has resulted in drop-out among the Nigerian youth, and this has necessitated some of these youth going into crime such as; internet fraud 'yahoo-yahoo', kidnapping, boko haram, ritual killing and armed robbery, just to mention a few. So many young men and women who are supposed to be engaged positively through education are left wasted on the streets, and these youth are now devising unacceptable means of survival, which is a crime.

Crime rate is very high in Nigeria, so also the nature of crime is becoming highly sophisticated. The majority of those who are into these criminal acts are youth whose parents could not afford higher education, and few who are in school, but struggling to finance themselves (Egwakhe & Osabuohien, 2009). Therefore, this study investigated unaffordable education and criminality among youths in Ondo State, Nigeria.

## Method:

The research design adopted for this study was exploratory. This design was chosen because it is suitable for the investigation that seeks familiarity or new insight into phenomena. The in-depth interview (IDI) method was utilized in generating primary data for the study. The choice of this qualitative technique arose from the fact that they help to better understand any phenomenon and also to gain more in-depth information that may be difficult to convey quantitatively.

The study was conducted in Ondo North and Ondo Central senatorial districts which are two of the present three senatorial districts of Ondo State. Ondo North senatorial district comprises Owo, Ose, Akoko Southwest, Akoko Southeast, Akoko Northeast and Akoko Northwest local government areas (LGAs) while Ondo South comprises Idanre, Odigbo, Okitipupa, Irele, Ese-Odo and Ilaje LGAs. Ose and Odigbo LGAs were selected as study locations for this work. Finally, one local government area was selected from each of the two senatorial districts.

The selection of Ondo North and Ondo South senatorial districts for this study was based on the fact that they are LGAs with low-income earners with the majority of the population engaging in farming, petty trading and civil service. The population for this study comprised both male and female adults and youth in both Ondo's North and

South senatorial districts. For an efficient collection of data and owing to the near impossibility of studying the entire population as a result of cost and time constraints, a fairly distributed sample was used. Convenience sampling techniques were adopted to select the interviewees and this consisted of thirty-eight (38) interviewees. The qualitative data generated from the study were analyzed using a manual content analysis.

## Results:

How affordable are school fees in public and private universities in Nigeria as a theme illuminated the rather hike in school fees, which has impacted negatively on the youth in Ondo State. The management of these educational institutions in Nigeria are implicated as they either do not consider the current economic hardship on the parents' majority of whom are either farmers, pettytraders or civil servants with static income and irregular salary payments by their incessant increase in school fees. This was expressed as being the norm rather than the exception.

For instance, one of the parent informants averred as follows:

These days, the management of educational institutions in Nigeria are not considerate at all. What they are after is money, not even considering the economic situation of the country which is currently biting so hard on the parents. For over a decade now, there has not been any upward review of workers' salaries, in fact, salaries are not paid regularly, yet, school fees continue to rise every year for higher institutions of learning (IDI, Male, Okitipupa, July, 2022).

Another informant expressed his concern about what he and his wife realize every month as salaries and the extent to which these salaries could take them as a family with children in different educational institutions of higher learning.

In anger, he said:

I and my wife are civil servants, and we are currently having three children in higher institutions of learning. When these children got admission into these institutions, the fees were not as exorbitant as they are now. The two State government (Ondo and Osun States) that owe these universities suddenly increased the fees, and the increase was about 250%. I don't know where they expect us to get the money from, or should we involve in robbery because we want to educate our children? I have been battling with this increase since then. In fact, what I and my wife take as monthly pay hardly take us for a week, this has made it very difficult to pay our children school fees. (IDI, Male, Oba-Akoko, July, 2022)

Also, a female parent opines that:

We parents are currently passing through hell in Nigeria. I did not have the opportunity to acquire western education. I stopped schooling in primary school, but with what I had experienced in life, I have decided to train all my children to university level. This I have been working towards with my husband since we got married but, look at what is happening now, I mean, what education has become. My husband is a farmer, while I am a petty-trader,

I don't know how many of our farm produce that we can sell to get us what we need to train our children in University. Our government has made higher education a thing of the elite class only. (IDI, Female, Oka-Akoko, August, 2022)

Another finding of this study borders on the unavailability of scholarships or bursaries from either state or federal government for indigent and promising students. Many informants were of the opinion that about two decades ago, the Nigerian government, both at federal and state levels had scholarship schemes that aimed at helping both parents and students towards achieving higher education, but today, things have changed. Nowadays, the scope of federal and state governments scholarship schemes is so small that its impact on students is not significant while the era of bursary has gone. The generality of the informants interviewed was of the view that scholarship schemes and bursaries had in the past positively contributed to the educational attainment of the Nigerian youth.

This view was echoed by one of the informants:

We read from history that there was a period in Southwest Nigeria when education was free, and those in universities both home and abroad enjoyed scholarships. Those who are from Southwest, who are educated, and are highly placed today, are all products of scholarship and free education. If education was to be exorbitant and also for government not to intervene into it during their time, most of them wouldn't have achieved what they have achieved today. Currently, I don't know if federal government scholarship for university students still exist, if it is at all, the impact is not felt among the students and parents. (IDI, Female, Undergraduate Student, Oka-Akoko, August, 2022)

Another informant put it succinctly thus:

Before I got admitted into university, I was aware of State bursary for students of higher institutions of learning. I was surprised that now, it has gone into extinction. State government never deemed it necessary to give bursary to students any longer. Even though the amount given then is not up to 25% of the school fees as we currently have but, it would have ameliorated the unaffordable high school fees. (IDI, Male, Undergraduate Student, Ilutuntun, August, 2022)

One of the student's participants observed that:

My father told me that when he was in University of Portharcourt, there was a state bursary scheme for the indigenes of Ondo State. According to him, this really alleviated the indigent students of which my father was one. That was the exact mind I came with to university. Unfortunately for me, when I came in, I discovered that what we have within the university system now is fraudulent. Twice, state government has brought bursary forms to our campus, and we were asked to pay One thousand three hundred naira each. This we paid, but for the two times, there has not been any response from the state government. The inability of the state government to give bursary to students has necessitated some of my colleagues dropping out of school. (IDI, Female, Supare-Akoko, July, 2022)

The study clearly unraveled the negligence and insensitivity on the part of both state and federal governments towards making education affordable to Nigerian youth. This is because schemes which had been of assistance towards making higher education achievable for the youths in the past, are currently either insignificant or no more in existence.

The situation is also not helped by the attitude of the management of some educational institutions that prevent their students from participating in Computer Based Examinations on the ground that such students have not paid their school fees.

This was captured in the narratives of one University student:

Nothing is as frustrating and painful as having read for an examination and you are prevented from participating in such examination. I experienced this when I was in 200 level, it was a computer based examinations, I was unable to complete the payment of my school fees before the commencement of the examination. When I got to the examination centre, and was unable to produce a tally which was given as an evidence for completion of school fees, I was prevented from writing the exams. In fact, it was like a dream because, I couldn't believe what happened. (IDI, Male, Undergraduate Student, Akungba-Akoko, August, 2022)

One of the informants who is an undergraduate student also alluded to the fact that the attitude of the management of some higher educational institutions in Nigeria has left much to be desired. According to her:

The idea of 'no school fee, no examination' for students was introduced in my school, in about two years ago. Since then, students who could not afford to pay their school fees in time, have been severally denied access to writing examinations. When this policy was first introduced, the student body of my school kicked against it, we protested, and we were sent home for some months. When the school management, in conjunction with the state government finally reopened the school, the policy was retained. Let me not deceive you, since then, things have been so difficult for students on campus. (IDI, Female, Undergraduate Student, Okitipupa, August, 2022)

Establishing that the hike in school fees correlates with the current economic situation in the country as said by the management of the educational institutions without a corresponding increase in workers' salaries is not justifiable.

This is captured below:

When I was admitted into this institution, the school fees was Twenty-three thousand naira (#23,000.00), when I completed the first year examinations, preparing to resume for the second year activities, the State government did an upward review of the school fees, and it was increase to One hundred and fifty thousand naira (#150,000.00). Reasons for the increase as giving by the State government range from infrastructural development, payment of workers' salaries etc. These reasons are not justifiable because, since the increase was made, there has not been any meaningful infrastructural development within the university, and neither are workers salaries paid regularly. (IDI, Female, Undergraduate Student, Ayegunle-Oka, August, 2022)

It was also confirmed by another undergraduate student that despite the increase in tuition fees in higher institutions, both the management and the government still left many things undone. This situation is well summed up thus:

Personally, I have not seen the justification for the incessant increase in tuition fees, as we currently have in Nigeria. All the buildings in my school are dilapidated, there are no hostel accommodation for students to stay within the campus, school management cannot afford to provide 4-hour electricity per day, there is no pipe-borne water for staff and students, no adequate lecture room - instead, what you see is One thousand five hundred students occupying a four hundred and fifty capacity lecture hall. Yet, school management in conjunction with government still justify the increase in tuition fee. this is terribly bad (IDI, Male, Undergraduate Student, Akungba-Akoko, August, 2022)

## Discussion:

It was found in the study that the management of both secondary and higher institutions of learning in Nigeria has consistently been increasing students' school fees, and the increase is always anchored on the dwindling economy of the nation. They have failed to consider the parents and guidance of these students who for over a decade have their salaries static, not only this, with irregularity in payment of salaries.

Many of the informants mentioned that their income has remained static for over ten years, and this has made their salaries not sufficient enough to face the current economic hardship and the hike in school fees. They also showed their grievance at the unpleasant attitudes of the management of the higher institutions of learning



who sometimes refuse to allow students who have not completed or those who have not paid their school fees from participating in Computer Based Examinations. Also, the negligence of the government at both state and federal levels was not overlooked. The summation of these responses affirmed that the school fees we currently have in most of the educational institutions in Nigeria are not affordable, and this has been a serious concern to the parents and students.

These findings validate the study of Chandel (2014), who notes that parents went through the tedious and unwanted process of admission to get their children admitted into schools and after some time they realize this is their nightmare because of incessant school fee hikes and other school expenses, also, all their efforts to meet up are not just enough to fulfill their dreams.

The study also found that the hike in school fees in Nigeria has pushed students into engaging in crime. When the increase was announced in some institutions, children of parents who could not afford the new fees dropped out of school. Some of the students, at the beginning of the hike, thought they would be able to complement their parents' efforts, and this they did by staying away from school for three out of five working days. These three days they engage in menial jobs but with the economic situation of Nigeria, what they get from these menial jobs could not actually sustain them, at the end, they dropped out of school and venture into crime.

An excerpt from one of the IDIs sheds light on this as he averred that:

When the increase in school fees was announced by the governor of Ondo State, I never believed it would come to stay. This was because, the announcement was met with protests, from students and parents. The State government insisted there would be no reversal and at last, the increase came to be. I must tell you, since then, it has become difficult for my parents to pay my school fee, and this has forced me out of school. I must confess to you, I found it difficult to go back home, as you see me now, I am here learning 'yahoo-yahoo,' internet fraud, 'bet naija' and some other dirty jobs, which I can't even disclose to you. (IDI, Male, Undergraduate Student, Supare-Akoko, July, 2022).

One undergraduate student in Okitipupa stated that:

I am in school as if am not. This is because, it is increasingly becoming difficult for my parents to pay my school fees. They knew before sending me here, it was just that, they desired an higher education for me. To be able to cope with school's demands, I need to engage in whatever can fetch me money, legally or illegally. I operate a betting business, and this center attracts other students who also need money. You know, anywhere youths gather, one cannot but see violent crime. Severally, I have involved in violent crime - this happened when some students came to bet and at the end they lose. They did not want to give me my money, and I have to engage some guys around to attack them and get the money out of them. (IDI, Male, Undergraduate Student, Okitipupa, August, 2022)

Female students are not left out of this challenge. Some of them confessed to having been engaging in crime, such as cybercrime, prostitution, etc., so as to meet the school's demand. According to them, even though their parents never asked them to drop out of school, they noticed it has become difficult for them to pay their school fees, and what they give them for upkeep is too poor. To get more money to take care of themselves, therefore, they registered both in hotels that are within and outside the university environment as commercial sex workers, and they also participate in cybercrime.

Drawing from the IDIs, an excerpt illuminates this thus:

The exorbitant school fees has made me consider what I wouldn't have considered under normal situation. As a female, I need to be educated at least to first degree level. And now that higher education is no longer within the reach of our parents, one needs to do everything possible to salvage the situation. I currently work as a sex worker in two of the nearby hotels to my university, and this is fetching me money to pay my school fees before my parents would send money. (IDI, Female, Undergraduate Student, Akungba-Akoko, July, 2022).

This study also showed that the hike in school fees has negatively affected the students of higher institutions of learning; this has occasioned some of these youths involving in criminal acts. Many of the informants said they are into crime because they wanted to help their parents and also complement their efforts. This is because school fees have become unaffordable for their parents. Both males and females confessed to involve in internet fraud, betting and violent crime while the female students are into prostitution. They opine that they use a part of the proceeds they realize from these acts to pay or complement whatever their parents could afford. Unfortunately, some of the informants said what they realize from crime that it has not been sufficient enough to pay their school fees, and this has made them drop out of schools. Azubuike and Nwosu (2017) supports this finding, as they assert that rising cost of higher Education in Nigeria has negatively affected the youth as it has produced dynasty of illiterates, high school drop-out of undergraduates, increase in crime rates, increase in violent crimes, increase in IT crimes, and prostitution etc.

## Conclusion:

The study shows that the exorbitant and unaffordable cost of Higher Education in Nigeria is now a growing concern for both parents and students. The economic condition of Nigerian parents vis-a-vis their income has made the parents economically handicapped, and this has resulted into many youth who are supposed to be in

school pursuing higher degrees dropping out of schools immediately after their secondary education. This denial as occasioned by hikes in school fees has stripped the youths from the low-economic family background of the opportunities to acquire higher Education. Most of these youths either dropout of school and go into crime or be in school and still be involved in criminal activities. This study is only a snapshot in time. It was therefore suggested that research tracking Nigerian parents' general socio-economic conditions as it affects criminal activities among the children could also yield important insight to guide the development of public policy tools.

### Recommendations:

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are imperative:

- There is need for government at both federal and state levels to consider a reduction in school fees of public higher institutions of learning in Nigeria.
- Government also needs to do an upward review of salaries for both civil and public servants in Nigeria.
- Both federal and state government should consider a revisit of scholarship and bursary schemes for the generality of undergraduate students, and in particular the indigent ones.
- Finally, whatever will take both the state and the federal governments to keep the youth out of crime should be taken seriously.

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