

**HOSTEL ACCOMMODATION IN TERTIARY EDUCATIONAL
INSTITUTIONS IN NIGERIA: TO BE OR NOT TO BE**

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Abstract

Housing being one of the basic human needs is an aspect of development economics and therefore of topical interest to all sectors of all societies. Although it is regarded as an aspect of pupil personnel management in education and thus not directly in the primary assignments of educational administrators with respect to instruction, it is basically true that academic performance must necessarily be influenced by the quality and quantity of the residential accommodation (an aspect of the learning environment) of students. The Federal Government of Nigeria recently directed Heads of Tertiary Educational Institutions (TEIs) in the country to hand over hostels in campuses to private managers and also encourage private investors to build hostels for students. This paper reviews the pros and cons of this plan and submits that there are too many outstanding issues and doubts on this case and that as in law, where there is doubt, the accused (assumed in this case to be the students, and in fact the TEIs), should take the benefit, at least until outstanding issues are sorted out.

Introduction

It is apparent from the paucity of literature on hostel accommodation for students in tertiary educational institutions (TEIs) in Nigeria that not much attention has been given to the problem in the past in spite of its enormity and sensitivity. Ubong (2001), had observed that hostel accommodation has not been receiving adequate attention in Nigeria although it is an important component of pupil personnel management (Ukeje, Akabogu, & Ndu, 1992; Husen & Postlethwaite, 1985). This might be due to the national indifference arising from the people being used to general poor performance of social services. For instance Olotuah (2000), in a study of the suburban housing situation in Akure, Ondo State of Nigeria, indicated that in spite of the evident poor housing conditions in some areas of that capital city, residents did not complain because of their low expectations with respect public social services.

Accommodation of students in hostels in TEIs in Nigeria became a topical issue following the decision of the Federal Government in 2003 to increase hostel fees from the rate of N90.00 (less than \$1.00) per academic year to N10, 000.00 (about \$73.43 at the parallel market rate of N140.00 to \$1.00). Widespread demonstration by students followed the announcement. Although the Federal Government backed down, many of

the institutions have revised their rates upwards with the University of Nigeria and the Federal University of Technology, Owerri charging N5, 000.00.

Unfortunately, the institutions have over the years, not been able to keep the hostels even in minimum residential conditions because of paucity of funds. Akpan (1998), declares, “The student population is rapidly increasing, while the infrastructural amenities are declining in supply and their stock depreciating... hostel facilities are in deplorable states and are overcrowded” (p.293). The question therefore is, should the institutions continue to run the hostels at the current level of fees or should economic rates be charged, or alternatively, should hostels come under Federal Government’s privatization arrangements?

The knotty problem of maintaining good hostels at ‘near zero’ (Okoh, 2004), charge to the users or charging realistic fees to enable the institutions maintain the hostels and risking violent demonstrations by students and possibly the Nigeria Labour Congress must have informed the directive by the Federal Minister of Education, Prof Fabian Osuji to the TEIs in 2004. He directed that TEIs must immediately withdraw from the management of students’ hostels and hand them over to private operators who will determine the rent to charge to those who are willing to pay. The thinking apparently is that if the rates are high, and the services are low, the students will confront the operators rather than the Management of the institutions and the governments that own the institutions. Whether this is true beyond the legal angle has not been thought out. However, the opinion of the Honourable Minister and by extension the Federal Government is that a private management arrangement will free the administrators from the problems associated with hostel accommodation so that they can concentrate their efforts in managing other aspects of institutional life. This paper briefly surveys the issue of hostel accommodation in TEIs in Nigeria and raises some fundamental issues for consideration.

Given the fact that Government thinking appears to point in the direction of use of residential houses in the immediate community of the institutions as well as private participation in the provision and running of students’ hostels, this paper also briefly reviews housing problems in societies at a global level. The thrust is that if residential accommodation is adequate in quantity and quality in communities, then students can as

well make use of them. If inadequate, then probably the need for on-campus accommodation is established.

Residential Housing – A Global Problem?

Handler (2001), observes, “Every society is faced with the problem of producing human habitation in sufficient quantity, and obtaining the kind of quality desired, at prices that individuals and families can afford” (p.481). Based apparently on this definition that can be described as a working definition of the ideal residential housing, Handler declares, “The problem of housing exists in countries throughout the world” (p.482). In the United States of America (USA), one modern approach that the governments have been emphasizing according to Handler, is joint financing of large housing programmes by the governments and large private investors.

In Russia, Buckley and Gurenko (1997), state that although as much as 20 million apartments were built in 80 years of the post-Stalin era, the housing condition in Russia is still poor. As shown in Table 1, average floor space per person per square metre, an index of overcrowding used by the World Bank, was 17.3 in 1993 in Moscow the capital city. This is a far cry from the 34.0 in Cologne, Germany, and 41.1 in Toronto, Canada, although by far ahead of Lagos, Nigeria at 5.5 square metres and the level of 3.5 square metres in Bombay, India (The World Bank, 1999).

Generally speaking, housing is a problem in most countries of the world as earlier noted. The problem arises from the phenomenal increase in populations in many countries particularly in the developing ones, vis-à-vis availability of resources, rising cost of building and competition with existing and emerging needs in areas such as health, education, the environment, the economy and security among others. Table 1 shows the cases of selected countries of the world with respect to crowding in residential houses. It shows a range of 1.2 square metres in Lahore, Pakistan to a high 44.0 in Copenhagen, Denmark. In Africa, Accra in Ghana has a figure of 6.2 square metres while Kano, Ibadan and Onitsha in Nigeria have 2.8, 9.0 and 12.0 square metres respectively.

Table 1
 'Crowding' in Residential Homes in Selected Countries

Country	City	Average Floor Space/Square Metre Per Person in 1993
Brazil:	Rio de Janeiro	18.9
	Brasilia	17.3
Cameroon	Yaounde	12.6
Canada	Toronto	41.1
Denmark	Copenhagen	44.0
France	Paris	30.0
Germany	Cologne	34.0
Ghana:	Accra	6.2
	Kumasi	5.8
India:	Bombay	3.5
	Delhi	6.9
Nigeria:	Bhwandi	2.4
	Ibadan	9.0
	Kano	2.8
	Lagos	5.5
Pakistan	Onitsha	12.0
	Lahore	1.2
Russia	Moscow	19.2

Source: The World Bank, *World Development Report*. Washington, DC: International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank, 1999. pp. 160-162.

The housing situation in Nigeria has been well documented by way of various studies on major Nigerian cities. The studies have however been concentrated on the quality of the houses in terms of age, quality of building materials used, services available (electricity, water, sanitation, kitchen, and so on). The level of crowding has not received much attention in terms of surveys.

Government attention to housing and housing conditions in Nigeria are not encouraging. Olotuah (2000), deposes with respect to the situation in Akure, Ondo State, "The dreary housing conditions of the core area of Akure are reflective of the inability of

the government as well as the private sector to meet the housing needs of the population” (p.172). He reports the same unsatisfactory conditions in Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State. In Ikot Ekpene, Akwa Ibom State, Akpan (2001), reports that environmental conditions are not considered in housing development in the city. Since housing in terms of sufficiency and quality is a problem the world over as deposed by Handler (2001), and given the few cases in Nigeria mentioned above, it is evident that residential houses are not enough in Nigeria and so would affect the requirement by students if the plan by the Federal Government to stop further construction and operation of hostels in TEIs is carried out.

Hostels in Schools – The Rationale

Those who have lived in hostels provided by schools will attest to the usefulness of the facility for students. Some of the benefits of hostel accommodation include but are not limited to the following:

1. Facilitating Reading/Learning – at any level of education (primary, secondary, university including postgraduate work), staying in the hall of residence or hostel does enhance the desire to read. There are fewer distractions, there can be control (as in forced ‘prep’ classes in secondary schools), and the activities of studious colleagues can force less serious ones to read. It is also easier to relate colleagues who are close by or teachers where a student has a difficulty on a subject matter. Akpan has showed quantitatively that a more optimal policy option in funding education is increased student income support (as in bursary payments) going along with improved facilities if academic performance is to be enhanced. According to him, the time that students are willing to put into studies depends on the level of income support, expected income gains upon employment (psychic income), as well as on the level of development of the study environment, which includes the library, laboratory, classrooms, hostel facilities, recreational and health facilities among other things.
2. Co-curricular Activities – students in hostels have a greater opportunity of participating in sports, games, club, and social activities that are expected to make

- them more rounded individuals and citizens than those living off-campus who may find themselves forced into domestic activities once they are at home.
3. Security – Students are indeed more secure on campus than off-campus in spite of the menace of cult activities in TEIs in Nigeria. This is because institutions maintain security personnel on campus and do monitor the activities of students. Some private Universities are known to lock their gates early and to insist on students obtaining exit permits before they travel home.
 4. Moral Training – persons from TEIs are graduated based on satisfactory performance ‘in character and in learning’. Moral training includes individual behaviour in group situations as in hostels. All institutions have Codes of Conduct that guide and regulate student behaviour in hostels.
 5. National Integration – it is one of the desires of the Federal Government of Nigeria to use education as a means of attaining national integration. This is stated in the National Policy on Education (FRN, 1998). Unfortunately and unwittingly, policies such as the quota system and federal character are to some extent anti-integration. The principle of catchment area in admissions is such that parents advise their wards to select institutions in which their states fall so as to make it easier for them to secure admission. Thus a child could go through education up the doctorate level within his or her state of origin and thereafter lobby for posting to a neighboring State for the National Youth Service Corps Scheme (say between Bayelsa and Rivers States!). Where then would the young Nigerian meet fellow Nigerians from other tribes? Is it in the Civil Service of his State of origin where he may end up working?
 6. Private Relationships – private relations in hostel rooms could blossom into live-time positive relationships that would be beneficial to both parties.
 7. Pupil Personnel Management (PPM) – housing of students is one of the aspects of PPM, which is indeed a statutory function of schools (Ukeje, et al, 1992; Husen, et al, 1985). Not only parents but also the society at large expect the administrations of schools to provide this service to students.

Hostel Accommodation in TEIs – A Case Study

Some TEIs have witnessed construction of hotels in the recent past. Some have not. In the second group is the Federal College of Education (Technical), Omoku in Rivers State. Probably because the College has been operating from a temporary site since its inception in 1988, no new hostel has been constructed since the College took over the facilities of the then Teacher Training College in that year. The accommodation capacities of the four hostels are as follows:

Female : Abuja	-	344	students
Lagos	-	<u>270</u>	“
		614	
Male: Port Harcourt	-	195	students
Enugu	-	<u>230</u>	“
		<u>429</u>	
Total		<u>1039</u>	

The rooms occupy between two and six persons while the halls occupy between 18 and 72 persons. However, with ‘squatters’, the rooms and halls could take two times the official number. While the College continues to charge the students N90.00, some of the bed spaces could be sold for as high as N10, 000.00 each.

While the bed spaces have remained constant for a period of 16 years, the student population has been increasing yearly. Table 2 shows the population of the students over the years and the proportion of those accommodated to the number of students in the College. The number of students in the hostels vis-à-vis the designed capacity has implied considerable stress on facilities including beds and toilets. There are indeed plans to put up hostels at the permanent site; for now, the situation with respect to students accommodation is still deplorable.

Table 2
Registered Students in FCE (T), Omoku – 1988/89-2003/2004

Year	Male	Female	Total
1988/1989	38	21	59
1989/1990	126	58	184
1990/1991	334	199	553
1999/2000	784	1123	1904
2000/2001	887	1229	2116
2001/2002	1181	1457	2638
2002/2003	1285	1573	2858
2003/2004	1276	1537	2813

Source: Examinations & Records Department, Registry, FCE (T), Omoku

Hostel Accommodation in TEI's in Nigeria: To Be or not to Be

Hostel accommodation for students particularly those that are on-campus are desirable as earlier argued. Proponents of greater funding of education by government which includes accommodation argue, according to Okoh (2001), that tertiary education aims at meeting the manpower needs of the country aside from being beneficial to the learner; that high fees would be discriminatory and would limit access to education for the poorer citizens; that uneducated citizens could pose a problem to national security; and that if misappropriated funds were put in the education sector, there would be less need for high fees.

Those who believe that appropriate fees should be charged argue that many parents are paying high fees in private schools; that charging appropriate fees would make resources available for purchase of more and better quality facilities and for research; that students who pay high fees are likely to be more serious with their studies; and that government revenue from crude oil will dry up one day, among other arguments. Specifically on hostel accommodation, Okoh states that the near-zero accommodation fee that attracts resale by students is exploitative and fraudulent on the part of students and should be stopped. Meanwhile, the students could as well be living with their parents or be accommodated by them as a filial responsibility.

Can the use of privately owned houses in the communities that TEIs are located generate benefits to the communities? Although Okwor (2001), in a study of the impact of the University of Nigeria on the Nsukka community mentioned the economic effects, the study did not highlight the effect of rents on personal houses occupied by staff and students of the University on personal incomes of the indigenes of Nsukka. Rather, it is stated that the indigenes expect the University to build houses for the people of the community. One can however not doubt the fact a large student and staff population can have an impact on rental income from houses in the community in which a TEI is located.

Government is apparently aware that a few TEIs are already benefiting from the 'freedom' and peace associated with private arrangements for hostel accommodation for students. A good case is that of Imo State University where there is a gigantic structure contiguous to the institution owned by a private developer. The building was evidently constructed with students in mind. The University does not own hostels and is not involved in the running of the hostels owned by private persons.

Even where there is hostel accommodation on-campus and the institution is to run it, Okoh (2004), argues for adoption of one of the funding paradigms in other countries. According to him, the four paradigms in funding education are cost sharing between the government, students, and private organizations; full cost recovery that involves charging economic or commercial rates with respect to board, lodging and utilities even if tuition is free; students loans programmes; and financial diversification in which the institutions seek several sources of funding for its operations. A fifth paradigm is indeed the free education option that very few countries go for. Australia, Austria, China, Chile, Japan, Netherlands, South Africa, Vietnam and Portugal practice full cost recovery. The Nordic countries of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Denmark practice free higher education but students bear the full cost of room and board which are said to be high in those countries.

The scenario is clear: hostels in TEIs in Nigeria are in short supply; demand far outstrips supply, reason there is overcrowding, collapsing facilities in the hostels and fraudulent sale of bed space by students to fellow students; the governments that own the public TEIs indicate that they are financially unable to increase the stock of hostels and cannot fund maintenance of existing ones; any attempt to increase charges for bed space

by government or the institutions so as to raise funds to maintain the hostels meet stiff opposition from students. The best option or best way out of the imbroglio in the opinion of the Federal Government is to hand over the hostels to private managers who will maintain them and charge appropriate fees to those who accept their offer. Government would thus know peace, turn attention to other aspects of education funding that cannot be privatized (such as staff salaries, research by the Lecturers, and provision of teaching/learning facilities cum materials). Certain issues remain controversial, which can be put in question form thus:

- i) Assuming that private estate agents take over the hostels by December 2004 as directed by the Federal Minister of Education, rehabilitate the hostels (hopefully), and charge ‘appropriate’ fees, what happens to indigent students from communities outside that which the institution is based and who can thus not live with members of his/her family?
- ii) Will the private operators permit ‘attachments’ by those have paid and would want to assist a less privileged colleague?
- iii) Where students decide to seek accommodation in cheaper locations that are far away from the institution, how will they commute to and from school and what impacts will that make on their performance?
- iv) Can the hostels on campus be sold to private operators; if yes, how will such transaction be legally handled (this is one of the perceived problems in the quest for ‘monetization’ of benefits in which residential houses within the premises of government-owned institutions are expected to be sold to the current occupiers?)
- v) Is there a possibility of joint ownership of hostels - including those off-campus – by private developers and TEIs when the Honourable Minister is totally against any direct involvement of the institutions in the management of hostels?
- vi) Who manages the social problems that are often found in hostels – cultism, keeping of hostel rules such as duration of stay of visitors of the opposite sex, fighting, and others? In essence, who manages and enforces sanctions associated with Code of Conduct of students in halls of residence?

- vii) Will there be any governmental input or control on charges?
- viii) Will the institutions be allowed to ensure that a minimum level of services such as sanitation, electricity, water supply, and security are provided to students?
- ix) Are the institutions expected to earn fees from the managers and how will that be determined?
- x) Generally, where does the power or authority of the institution and the managers begin and where do they end? Who is accountable to parents and guardians for the safety and general well being of the students?
- xi) Will allowance be made for local conditions to take care of the peculiarities of each institution and each locality?
- xii) Will there be need for legislation on the matter so that issues and relationships can be streamlined and made fairly uniform?

Conclusion

The arguments for or against government involvement in the management of halls of residence in TEIs are persuasive. However, many questions remain unanswered. There is no doubt that one Nigeria's biggest problem has been that of institutionalized individual and group self-deception over decades. Nigerians have deluded themselves with the fact that the good things of life should be given free of charge just because there is a wasting asset called crude oil and because many people in public office embezzle public funds which the public feels should have been enough to give every citizen free everything. As a result of such misconceptions, citizens are highly sensitive to charges on things perceived to be public good that should be doled out free to citizens as of right. Thus the Nigeria Labour Congress, and several unions go on strike whenever charges are imposed or prices of certain items go up no matter how realistic such are.

This is apparently the basis for resistance to increase in hostel fees in tertiary educational institutions that has led to the directive by the Federal Government that federal tertiary educational institutions should withdraw from the management of students' hostels and hand over same to private managers. The managers are expected to run the hostels and charge appropriate fees. This raises several questions that require

appropriate answers before the directives implemented. This paper therefore cautions, *festina lente* – let us hasten slowly. To the opponents of any kind of reform, they are advised to inject realism into their lives, for Nigeria of the 1980s when N90.00 per bed space was introduced, is not the Nigeria of today, and the Nigeria of the 21st century generally.

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