October 2006

Blazing the Trail in Poverty Alleviation among University Students in Nigeria: the Federal University of Technology, Yola

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Introduction

In Nigeria, poverty is widespread and severe. Using the most recent poverty indicators such as illiteracy, access to safe water, and the number of poor people, Nigeria ranks below other Sub-Saharan African countries such as Kenya and Zambia. Nigeria 's GNP per capita is also lower, while purchasing power continues to decline with high inflation and increasing income inequality. Access to education and other social services is inadequate, with urban poverty becoming an increasing concern coupled with a worsening trend in urban welfare indicators. (The World Bank, 1998).

In a related development, Anya (2000) affirmed that unless Nigeria pursues an aggressive programme of competitive industrialization, government's poverty alleviation programme (PAP) may be an exercise in futility. He noted further that the dwindling fortunes of manufacturing companies have concomitantly worsened the poverty level in Nigeria in the last twenty years such that the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita of Nigerians has dropped from a level of about 1000 US Dollars, that is the equivalent of N100,000 in today's depreciated money to the current level of less than 300 US Dollars, that is the current equivalent of N30,000. In other words, the average Nigerian is three times poorer today than he was 20 years ago. What is more, whereas in 1964, the average Nigerian was better off than the average Korean, Malaysian or Taiwanese, each of these countries now boasts of a GDP per capita of between $10,000 and $20,000, the current equivalent of between N1 million and N2 million, a dramatic illustration of the benefits of industrialization.

The seriousness of poverty among Nigerian University students is succinctly expressed by Dawodu (2000), president of the Union of Lagos State Students who lamented that the Lagos State government has not responded to the needs of students for financial assistance, leading to the increase in failure rate among them. He remarked that bursary awards would reduce the incessant examination resists. The scenario painted by Dawodu (2000) pervades the Nigerian tertiary education system. No wonder that to make ends meet some students these days engage in armed robbery as a survival strategy. This extreme position is as a result of the critical level of poverty in Nigeria. Most students go for lectures on an empty stomach because they are desperate for certificates. The gloomy picture of poverty among students reported in the Nigerian Books Sector study by Read (1990) is a child's play to

"Blazing the Trail in Poverty Alleviation among University Students in Nigeria: the Federal University of Technology Yola," Baba L. Ndagana, *Library Philosophy and Practice*, Vol. 9, no. 1 (Fall 2006)

1

the situation today. This must have accounted for the high incidence of cultism and other anti-social vices that are engulfing Nigerian tertiary institutions, particularly universities, like wild fire.

Objective of the Study

Although academic libraries in Europe and the United states have long been engaging students to perform some vital functions in their day-to-day operations, the idea of a study and work programme for students is a new phenomenon in Nigeria. The role of the student worker in the university library, can, however, be considered from a wider perspective, one that includes the contribution that library and campus-wide employment makes to the university's large concerns. In particular, there is evidence that part-time, on-campus jobs tend to increase retention rates among students by alleviating their poverty.

Against the above background, this study (through institution-specific) is aimed at reporting the innovative study and work programme for students at the Federal University of Technology Yola (FUTY). In particular, the use of the student part-time workers in the University's library will be discussed in terms of its benefit to both the Library and students.

Methodology

Documentary sources on the origin and execution of the poverty alleviation programme at FUTY branded Study and Work Programme for Students are used for relevant data. In addition, student part-time workers in the library are interviewed as well as the University Librarian to ascertain the benefits of the programme to both of them.

Discussion

Profile of Federal University of Technology, Yola (FUTY)

As a background to the study, Table 1 presents the profile of the Federal University of Technology Yola (FUTY) in Adamawa State of Nigeria .

Table 1: Profile of FUTY

Name:	Federal University of Technology, Yola
Location:	Mubi Road, Girei Local Government, Yola Adamawa State, Nigeria
Year Established	1981
Specialization	Science and Technology
Student Population:	20,000
Academic State Population:	700
Schools (Faculties):	: Agriculture (1990)
: Engineering (1989)	
: Environmental Sciences (1988)	
: Pure & Applied Science Education (1986)	
: Management & Information Technology (1989/99)	
: Postgraduate School (1991)	
Library Stock	: Book/Monographs – 30,000 volumes
: Journals – 2,500 Titles	
: Special Collections – 2,683 Volumes	
Library State	: Auxiliary (Library Assistants janitorial staff and drivers) – 24

"Blazing the Trail in Poverty Alleviation among University Students in Nigeria: the Federal University of Technology Yola,"
Baba L. Ndagana, *Library Philosophy and Practice*, Vol. 9, no. 1 (Fall 2006)

2

: Para-professions Library Officers – 02	
: Administrative/Secretarial/Technical – 07	
: Professional/Academic Librarians - 09	

The Federal University of technology Yola (FUTY) was established in 1981 to accelerate the technological development of Nigeria and its Library was named in honour of General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida, Nigeria 's head of state from 1984 to 1993. The dates in parentheses are the year the Schools (Faculties) were established.

Genesis of Study and Work Scheme in FUTY

Upon the Vice-Chancellor's appointment as the chief executive of the Federal University of Technology, Yola (FUTY), he met with the students in May 1999. The meeting afforded the students the opportunity to seek for avenues for the alleviation of poverty among them. Consequently, the Vice-Chancellor promised to introduce Study and Work Scheme for the purpose of assisting indigent students. In addition, he saw that the scheme would go a long way in reinforcing the dignity of labour, particularly in University of Technology setting like FUTY.

An implementation committee was set up with the following charge:

• Examine the possibility of introducing such a poverty alleviation scheme in the Federal University of Technology, Yola.

• Identify such works on the campus, the period to be covered, and when the scheme could begin.

• Determine the category of students to benefit from such a scheme and the suitable time for them to be engaged.

• Calculate the number of hours and appropriate wages

• Find out the total cost of the scheme per semester

• Suggest any other requirements for success.

Feasibility Study

The committee set at work by sending job request forms (see Appendix 1) to all departments as an advertisement. Eleven departments comprising four schools (Faculties) and the Library, namely: Agriculture, Engineering, Pure and Applied Sciences and Science Education/Technology and two non-academic units: Student Affairs Division and Works returned duly filled forms indicating areas of jobs and number of part-time students' workers required. Table 2 presents the departments interest in the scheme and the jobs identified.

Table 2: Departments Interested in Study & Work Scheme and Jobs Identified

Departments	Distribution of Volunteers	Jobs Identified
A. Academic Departments		
1. Animal Science	07 (7%)	Cleaning, Poultry/Livestock Management
2. Civil Engineering	02 (2%)	Roadwork, Landscaping

"Blazing the Trail in Poverty Alleviation among University Students in Nigeria: the Federal University of Technology Yola," Baba L. Ndagana, *Library Philosophy and Practice*, Vol. 9, no. 1 (Fall 2006)

3

3. Computer Science	09 (9%)	Cleaning, Landscaping
4. Geology	03	Cleaning, Laboratory work
5. Forestry	03	Nursery/Forest Management
6. Mechanical Engineering	20	Welding, Metalwork, Cleaning
7. Microbiology	05	Laboratory work, Cleaning
8. Library	04	Cleaning, Book-Shelving
9. Technology Education	15	Cleaning
B. Non-Academic Department		
10. Student Affairs	30	Cleaning
11. Works	02	Landscaping Roadwork
Total	100	

Objectives of the Scheme

The following objectives were outlined by the Committee for the scheme:

• to assist students financially to augment their living expenses

• to inculcate into the students the respect for the dignity of labour

• to help the University maintain some of its facilities promptly especially where there are inadequate regular staff to carry out such maintenance services.

Areas of Jobs Defined

As much as possible, participating students should execute jobs compatible/relevant to their areas of training. However, students may wish to take part in unskilled jobs regardless of their areas of training. Jobs from which students can be engaged include: landscaping and related services crop production and allied farm jobs, maintenance of drainage, roads, sewage, etc. carpentry and metal works, poultry/livestock management, book shelving and related library jobs, catering and allied jobs in the University's commercial guest house, etc., cleaning jobs.

Beneficiaries

The Scheme is open to all students in the 100-500 level study. The scheme will take off fully during the first semester of the 1999/2000.

Analysis of Requirements of the Departments

From the requirements of the department, in Table 2, ten types of job were identified. They are: cleaning, carpentry, laboratory work, landscaping, metal work, nursery management/forestry plantation establishment, poultry/livestock management, road-work, welding and wood work.

Advertisement of Scheme Among Students

The Committee gave the study and work scheme the widest publicity on campus to which the students responded with enthusiasm resulting in the receipt of 529 applications for the ten jobs identified from the user departments. Of this number, 100 or 19% were short-listed as successful candidates.

Commencement of the Scheme

Upon the approval of the feasibility study by the University management in August 1999, the Scheme commenced on February 17, 2000 with a take-off grant of N300,000.00 for the 1999/2000 academic session. The 100 lucky students part-time workers worked for two months in the first semester, that is up to April 17, 2000 . Each week, every student beneficiary of the scheme filled a log book and payment was on weekly basis at the rate of two hundred (N200.00) naira). The sum of N135,056 was expended o the students poverty alleviation scheme (stipends and stationeries) in the first semester of 1999/2000 session.

Evaluation of the Scheme

After running the Scheme for two months in the first semester of the 1999/2000 session, it was evaluated to ascertain its usefulness to both the students workers and the user departments in terms of:

• The commitment of students, to the programme

• Whether or not the amount paid to the students is justified, i.e. whether the user-departments get value for the money

To elicit information on the usefulness of the scheme, questionnaires were administered to all the participating departments/units.

Results

As shown in Table 3, the participating departments and units affirmed that every student on the scheme was committed to the job and the two hundred Naira (N200.00) remuneration per student per week is justified.

Table 3: **Evaluation of Study and Work Scheme to Determine its Usefulness**

Department	Nature of Work Done	No. of Students	No. Committee	Amount Paid Justified	Amount Paid Not Justified
Civil Engineering	Cleaning of the Laboratory and sample preparation	02	02	Yes	-
Computer Science	Cleaning and Construction of Shade	09	09	Yes	-
Forestry	Raising of Seedlings	03	03	Yes	-
Geology	Cleaning	02	02	Yes	-
Library	Cleaning	04	04	Yes	-
Mechanical Engineering	Woodwork and Fitting, Cleaning/Welding/Fabrication	17	17	Yes	-
Microbiology	Cleaning	05	05	Yes	-
Technology Education	General Cleaning	16	16	Yes	-
Student Affairs	Cleaning of premises and gutters in and outside the halls (residential) and the student centre	22	22	Yes	-

"Blazing the Trail in Poverty Alleviation among University Students in Nigeria: the Federal University of Technology Yola,"
Baba L. Ndagana, *Library Philosophy and Practice*, Vol. 9, no. 1 (Fall 2006)

5

Students Reaction to the Scheme

A lot of students showed their enthusiasm and willingness to participate in the scheme. However, the analysis of the placement showed that only 19% of the applicants were absorbed into the scheme. A good number of those not placed have been thronging the Student Affairs Office. Consequently, the committee superintending the scheme and the Student Affairs Officer recommended expanding its scope and making it self-reliant. The areas of expansion recommended are laundry, car wash, catering, farming, hairdresser, bakery, production of pure water, and yoghurt production to generate revenue and make the scheme self-sustaining.

Library jobs and Student Retention

Wilder (1990) notes that concern over the role of the student worker in the academic library has traditionally focused on a set of narrowly defined objectives, topics such as productivity, turnover, and absenteeism. This is natural in an environment that is very much dependent on students to execute vital functions in its daily operations. Though part-time, on-campus jobs tend to increase retention rates among indigent students, this study and work phenomenon is very alien to the Nigerian university system, let alone university libraries.

Having blazed the trail in this poverty alleviation scheme, library administrators need to be aware of the follow-up benefits that the provision of jobs for students provide the university with a view to "globalizing" it in the Nigerian university library system to prevent possible student attrition occasioned by budget cuts.

Increasing student retention is an economic concern for the university because enrollment figures and retention are closely linked to the level of support for tertiary educational institutions in Nigeria. Moreover, retention rates are one basic measure of the degree to which the university satisfies the needs of students.

Which Students are at Risks

For Nigeria, it is not possible to create a definite profile of students "at risk" to drop out, but the literature consistently identifies broad groups of students with high attrition rates (Lonabocker, 1982):

- Minority students. Students from academically disadvantaged states, especially most northern states of Nigeria fall into this category,
- Low-income students. Mostly students of northern origin as confirmed by the World Bank (1998)
- Academically unprepared students. Also typified by most northern states, Callaway (1981) describes these as students with uncertain goals and students with full-time jobs.

Tinto (1975) affirmed that though most retention study points out that financial considerations cannot be the main cause for dropping out. "Low income students" were cited because primarily they tend to receive inadequate training in primary and secondary schools (Wider, 1990; World Bank, 1998; Callaway, 1981).

The central theme of the retention literature (Terkla, 1985) is that students who avail themselves of the means to be become socialized to their new academic environment are more likely to persist in school. This model presupposes that they any campus mechanism which tends to bring about a good "accord" between student and institution will improve retention rates.

Advantages of the Library Job

"Blazing the Trail in Poverty Alleviation among University Students in Nigeria: the Federal University of Technology Yola,"
Baba L. Ndagana, *Library Philosophy and Practice*, Vol. 9, no. 1 (Fall 2006)

6

It is noteworthy that where on-campus jobs are concerned, the part-time library job has the potential to encourage retention of students in ways that other on-campus jobs cannot. Without any deliberate effort on the part of the librarians, part-time student workers in the library benefits from certain "natural" academic advantages.

• Library work exposes students naturally to materials which can be useful in completing course work. This observation tallies with the evidence adduced by the student workers interviewed.

• Library jobs demystify the library. For student who would otherwise feel intimidated by the library, daily contact reduced anxiety and predisposes to further use. The four student workers also confirmed that not only do they use the library more frequently, they have the opportunity to get useful books to augment their notes as they browse through the shelves during cleaning exercises.

• Placing at-risk students in a study-related environment, in close contact with good academic role models grants then great benefits. The study and work scheme affords the students the opportunity for social relationship with library staff who from time to time help them with their papers and projects, resulting in improvement in their grades.

The librarians in FUTY confirmed the usefulness of the student workers to the Library in these ways:

• The student workers carry out the cleaning job promptly because they execute this assignment far ahead (between 6:30 and 7:00 a.m. daily) of the opening hours, which is 8:00 a.m. This ensures that users are not delayed as is the case with full-time junior staff.

• It is cost-effective compared with employing full-time staff because the study and work scheme is without extra benefit costs such as pension and gratuity.

• The student workers do not need any prompting before they do their work.

• The scheme has exposed the weakness of the regular staff as far as the cleanliness of the library is concerned.

Conclusions and Recommendation

The study revealed that the study and work scheme is a poverty-alleviating programme among the students of the FUTY. The scheme is beneficial to both the student part-time workers and the user departments.

This FUTY initiative aimed at alleviating the suffering of students, especially, the indigent ones, as well as inculcating the dignity of labour, should be embraced on other Nigerian university campuses and the libraries in particular. The federal government should incorporate the study and work scheme into the country-wide Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP) of the Obasanjo administration.

It is recommended that the library should determine that all student workers, regardless of their jobs, be trained in basic library skills such as that the location of materials in the library and using reference materials (indexes, abstracts, etc).

Training helps student assistants to help others who may approach them in the stacks, thereby increasing the overall level of service in the library. As a socializing agent, the library should foster in the student workers a goal of lifelong education as well as a leadership role in contributing to a

"Blazing the Trail in Poverty Alleviation among University Students in Nigeria: the Federal University of Technology Yola,"
Baba L. Ndagana, *Library Philosophy and Practice*, Vol. 9, no. 1 (Fall 2006)

7

campus-wide approach to student retention. The library should agree to take on students that the university has identified as being "at-risk", i.e. very academically weak students as a result of their poor financial background. In return, these students should be paid from the University budget, rather than the library budget allocation.

Finally, to ensure that this novel initiative in FUTY does not die prematurely due to a financial crunch, the scope of the "poverty alleviation" scheme should be expanded to encompass ventures that would be self-sustaining.

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"Blazing the Trail in Poverty Alleviation among University Students in Nigeria: the Federal University of Technology Yola," Baba L. Ndagana, *Library Philosophy and Practice*, Vol. 9, no. 1 (Fall 2006)

8