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FROM THE DESK OF LEAD EDITOR

The Centre for General Nigerian Studies had the second summit held from 4th – 7th December, 2024. The theme of the summit was aptly coined, Fostering Integrity and Peace: Tackling Corruption and Promoting Ethical Leadership in African Education. The summit attracted participants drawn from universities within and outside Nigeria. The summit was declared open by the management team of Lagos State University, ably led by the Vice Chancellor, Prof Ibiyemi Ibilola Olatunji Bello mni NPOM GCGNS inside the main bowl of the Makanjuola Lecture Theatre, Lagos State University, Ojo, Lagos State, Nigeria. It was a 4 day of academic and cutting-edge activities. Scholarly papers were presented, and thereafter, the papers were subjected to peer review. In all, more than 52 presentations were made, but only 20 articles scaled through the hurdles. Ladies and gentlemen, the volume 4 of the journal of Contemporary Issues in Nigerian Economy (JCINE) is highly recommended to scholars, researchers, policy makers, and other stakeholders in the field of education.

Prof. M.O.B Mohammed FNAEAP
Lead Editor

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FROM BURDEN TO OPPORTUNITY: TACKLING ELECTRICITY COSTS IN NIGERIAN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS THROUGH INNOVATION AND REFORM

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Abstract

This paper examined tactical and multifaceted solutions to tackle the electricity challenges faced by tertiary institutions. By considering aspects like social fairness, economic viability, environmental protection, and technological progress, it suggested practical strategies that met certain requirements while also adhering to global standards. Nigerian tertiary institutions have the chance to turn a significant challenge into an opportunity for lasting growth and development by addressing this issue directly. By combining technology, innovation, and strategic partnerships, the goal was to show how sustainable, reliable, and cost-effective energy systems can be achieved for educational centres across the nation. This perspective emphasized practical models and strategies that enable institutions to succeed in the energy transformation.

Keywords: Electricity costs, Tertiary institutions, Energy efficiency, Education funding, Policy reform, Nigeria

Introduction

Access to energy is not just essential, it is the foundation of contemporary education, driving innovation, teamwork, and exploration. For higher education institutions, this access shapes their capacity to develop leaders, engage in innovative research, and make meaningful contributions to society. Okafor (2020) states that many higher education institutions around the globe struggle with inconsistent or insufficient energy supplies, hindering their potential and restricting their influence.

This issue goes beyond just power outages or restricted grid connectivity. Aremu (2019) pointed that it is a complex issue that touches on economic viability, environmental sustainability, technological progress, and the strength of institutions. Tackling this requires a comprehensive strategy that combines renewable energy options, effective resource management, and innovative policies designed to meet the specific needs of these academic environments.

Joseph (2014) affirmed that electricity plays a vital role in tertiary institutions, energizing the infrastructure that underpins academic activities, research, and administration. In Nigeria, tertiary institutions are grappling with the twin issues of insufficient power supply and high electricity costs, putting additional pressure on their already tight budgets. This problem impacts the quality of education and also obstructs the overall development of human capital, which is crucial for

national growth. The issue is made worse by ongoing inefficiencies in the energy sector, the steep prices of privatized electricity, and the absence of customized solutions for educational institutions. As these institutions face challenges in managing their energy expenses, crucial investments in infrastructure, research, and student welfare are frequently compromised. Access to energy is essential for a tertiary institution to operate effectively, grow, and adapt. Energy plays a crucial role in everything from supporting everyday classroom activities to powering innovative research in today's higher education landscape. This essential role covers the important areas listed below:

Learning Environments

A supportive learning atmosphere is crucial for successful teaching and understanding of knowledge. Energy is essential for establishing an environment with proper lighting. Bright classrooms and lecture halls help minimize eye strain and improve concentration, especially in areas where natural light might be lacking because of building design or weather factors. Moreover, energy drives heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems, maintaining a pleasant indoor environment no matter what the weather is like outside. A classroom that lacks proper ventilation or is too hot or cold can make it difficult to focus and be productive. Interactive tools like smart boards, projectors, and audio systems depend on electricity, turning static lectures into lively, engaging sessions. This is particularly important in big lecture halls where technology connects instructors and students effectively. Lack of dependable energy affects the quality of these learning environments, resulting in less than ideal educational results. Numerous experiments need specific conditions, like exact humidity and temperature levels, which rely on energy-driven systems. Interruptions in energy supply can lead to delays in experiments, potential data loss, compromised results, and increased operational expenses.

Incorporating technology

The shift towards digital education has significantly enhanced the importance of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in both academic and administrative areas. Dependable energy is essential for:

Computers and Servers: Computers and servers, whether in student laboratories or administrative data centres, need a constant power supply to keep running smoothly. When servers go down, it can really hinder access to learning management systems, student records, and online resources.

Internet connectivity: Wireless networks and broadband access are essential for research, virtual learning, and international collaboration. Powered network infrastructure makes these things possible.

Digital Learning Platforms: As e-learning and hybrid models become more prevalent, having a reliable energy source is essential for ensuring access to virtual classrooms, video conferencing tools, and cloud-based education systems. The unreliable power supply threatens technological progress, hindering both academic and operational effectiveness.

Research and Innovation: Tertiary institutions serve as centres for research and innovation, requiring significant and steady energy to operate specialized facilities. High-tech research instruments like spectrometers, electron microscopes, and centrifuges use a lot of energy and need a consistent power supply to deliver precise outcomes. Supercomputers and data clusters are

essential for computational research in areas such as genomics, climate science, and artificial intelligence, but they consume a significant amount of energy.

Sustainability Goals

Universities and colleges are now rethinking how they manage energy in light of the growing emphasis on sustainability. More and more institutions are putting their money into solar panels, wind turbines, and bioenergy systems to lessen their reliance on fossil fuels. These systems provide both cost savings and reduced carbon footprints. Tertiary institutions are adopting various strategies, such as LED lighting and energy-efficient HVAC systems, to enhance energy efficiency and reduce waste. Innovations in energy place institutions at the forefront of sustainability, motivating students and local communities and aligning with worldwide environmental objectives. Using renewable energy systems allows institutions to improve their ability to withstand grid outages, while also saving money in the long run and supporting environmental care. Absolutely, tackling the problem of high electricity bills for tertiary institutions in Nigeria can be examined from various angles, including social, economic, environmental, and technological viewpoints, such as:

1. Social Perspective: Rising electricity costs will ultimately limit institutions' capacity to offer affordable and quality education. This will affect students, particularly those from low-income backgrounds, since funds intended for scholarships, infrastructure, and facilities are being shifted to pay for electricity bills. Moreover, it might impact the well-being of both students and staff. Regular power outages or high bills create challenging study conditions, interrupting learning, research, and teaching.

Differential Tariffs for Universities in Nigeria

Universities should lead by example in sustainable management, striving to create a positive impact on society. Leaders in higher education have significant duties when it comes to managing financial, social and environmental goals, as these aspects are frequently interconnected. It is important for them to realise that the objectives of universities, such as educating students and sharing knowledge, require significant resources. As a result, various types of higher education institutions need to focus on lowering energy use and minimizing expenses.

Nigerian universities are facing challenges due to high electricity tariffs set by electricity distribution companies (DISCOs). A recent report from Punch Newspaper points out that the ten universities with the largest budgets this year could spend more than ₦75 billion just on electricity. This huge sum of money could be put to better use by enhancing infrastructure, research facilities, and student services. Nigerian universities need to focus on energy efficiency and look into alternative power sources like solar or wind energy to tackle this issue. By lowering their expenses and cutting costs, higher education institutions can direct more resources towards their primary goals of educating students and promoting knowledge. The total budget for these universities in 2024 is ₦247.6 billion, but the increasing cost of electricity poses a serious risk to a large part of their finances.

According to Odeyemi (2024), the ten public universities with the highest budgets for 2024 are reported in table 1.1 below

Table 1.: Public Universities with highest budget

University	Amount (₦)
University of Nigeria, Nsukka	36.6bn
University of Calabar, Calabar	29.5bn
Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria	29.2bn
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka	26.3bn
University of Benin, Benin City	24.2bn
University of Ibadan, Ibadan	23.4bn
University of Maiduguri, Maiduguri	22.3bn
University of Port Harcourt, Port Harcourt	19.6bn
University of Lagos, Akoka	19.4bn
Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife	17.1bn

Source: to Odeyemi (2024)

These institutions are having a tough time dealing with high electricity tariffs, as they have been placed in “Band A” but are not getting the power supply they need. The University of Lagos (UNILAG) experienced a jump in its monthly electricity bill, rising from ₦180 million to ₦300 million. In a similar vein, Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) has to deal with a monthly expense of ₦300 million.

A Dialectical Analysis

The humongous electricity bills imposed on tertiary institutions in Nigeria from the standpoint of dialectical materialism require an analysis of the material conditions and contradictions within the socioeconomic system that create such burdens. Dialectical materialism, rooted in Marxist thought, emphasizes the dynamic interplay of material conditions, social relations, and economic structures in shaping societal realities. The exorbitant electricity bills for tertiary institutions in Nigeria are a symptom of deeper systemic contradictions. Egbetokun (2009) opines that addressing this issue requires challenging the capitalist logic that prioritises profit over public welfare and reorienting material resources toward the development of education as a foundation for societal progress. Only through such structural changes can the needs of tertiary institutions be adequately met.

Tertiary institutions are critical to the reproduction of skilled labour necessary for sustaining the Nigerian economy. However, their ability to perform this role is constrained by exorbitant electricity bills that drain scarce resources. When these bills become unaffordable, it reflects a contradiction between the infrastructure needed to support education and the profit-orientated practices of electricity providers.

Nigeria's electricity sector operates largely within a capitalist framework, driven by profit maximization. The high bills reflect the commodification of a basic utility, subordinating the needs of educational institutions to the logic of profit. This contradiction highlights how the neoliberal policies that shaped the privatization of electricity have failed to address the needs of key societal sectors like education, exacerbating inequality and underdevelopment.

Furthermore, the high electricity bills can also be seen as an indirect form of exploitation, where institutions are forced to divert funds meant for educational purposes (such as research, infrastructure development, and student welfare) to pay for overpriced electricity. According to Aminu and Peterside (2014), the exploitation is twofold: first, the workers and students bear the brunt of poor services due to misallocated resources; second, the long-term development of society is undermined by stifling the growth of a knowledgeable and skilled workforce. In addition, students, educators, and administrators experience alienation when they see their resources being drained by systemic inefficiencies and corruption in the energy sector. This alienation disrupts the educational process and fosters discontent. Dialectical materialism predicts that such contradictions will provoke resistance. Protests and advocacy for subsidized electricity for tertiary institutions are manifestations of class struggle, demanding that the state prioritize human development over corporate profits.

Baath (2023) explains that for over a hundred years, sociologists focused on pricing have been establishing their perspectives about economists. Pricing is a fundamental concept in economics, and the notion that markets coordinate through prices came about in the late 19th century. Since the 1970s, microeconomics has explored pricing from new angles, emphasizing factors like informational asymmetries and competitive dynamics among economic agents. Economists analyze how various market structures—such as perfect or imperfect competition, oligopolies, and monopolies—affect prices. Despite market imperfections, prices are still viewed as dependent variables that serve as signals guiding actors' decisions and economic outcomes. Normatively, economics hinges on two key assumptions: market efficiency and profit maximization, which shape economists' views on what constitutes a fair price. Although, and according to Çalışkan, (2009), Austrian school, represented by figures like Hayek, has theoretical differences with neoclassical economics, it shares a liberal perspective on economic functioning and supports the idea of market prices facilitating coordination. Both schools of thought agreed that a properly organized market, characterized by competition, enables a just allocation of resources guided by the price mechanism.

Many economists argue that free markets, perfect competition, and the price mechanism ensure efficient outcomes and enhance social welfare. In contrast, sociologists view this perspective as too narrow, emphasizing that pricing is influenced by societal concepts of fairness, culture, politics, and power dynamics among economic actors.

Finally, from a dialectical materialist perspective, resolving this issue requires a transformation of the material base. This could include the under listed solutions.

Mitigating against the Impact of High Electricity Costs for Higher Education

Addressing electricity expenses for Nigerian higher education institutions needs a comprehensive strategy that blends fairness, economic effectiveness, environmental care, and technological advancements. Solutions should fit the local context while incorporating effective strategies from around the world to achieve a comprehensive and meaningful outcome. This will not be a situation where there is a single solution for everyone. Some universities have multiple campuses, while others only have one. Here are a few steps that could be considered:

We might want to take another look at the privatization of the electricity sector to introduce reforms that guarantee affordability and efficiency for tertiary institutions. This includes

promoting renewable energy solutions designed for the specific needs of universities and colleges, helping to lessen dependence on expensive grid electricity.

- **Economic Models for Energy:** Organisations can explore various business approaches like leasing solar equipment, implementing power-as-a-service models, or utilising crowdfunding for renewable energy initiatives.
- Investing in renewable energy projects on campuses can generate job opportunities in the energy sector for both students and the local community.

1. Environmental Perspective

Lowering Carbon Footprint: Moving away from grid electricity, which often relies on fossil fuels, to renewable energy sources such as solar or wind can greatly decrease greenhouse gas emissions. Besides switching to renewable energy sources, people can lower their carbon footprint by using energy-efficient appliances and vehicles, cutting down on water use, and recycling. Companies can make a big difference in lowering their carbon footprint by adopting sustainable practices, like minimizing waste and opting for eco-friendly materials. With these adjustments, we can collaborate to tackle climate change and build a more sustainable future for the generations ahead.

Environmental Leadership: Tertiary institutions have the opportunity to lead by example in sustainability by embracing green practices, other public institutions to do the same. Tertiary institutions can take the lead in building a more sustainable future by using renewable energy sources, adopting waste reduction programmes, and encouraging environmental education. By leading by example, these institutions can motivate others to step up and contribute to lowering their carbon footprint. By coming together and dedicating ourselves to sustainability, we can strive for a healthier planet for those who come after us.

Conservation Practices: Institutions can launch initiatives to reduce unnecessary energy consumption, making energy conservation a part of the campus culture. They can also put their money into renewable energy options like solar panels and wind turbines to lessen their dependence on fossil fuels. Moreover, putting recycling initiatives into action and encouraging the use of reusable items can greatly reduce the volume of waste that ends up in landfills. By integrating conservation practices into their daily activities, colleges and universities can show their commitment to caring for the environment and inspire others to do the same. By coming together, we can strive for a future that is sustainable for everyone.

2. Technological Perspective

Smart Energy Management Systems: Utilize technologies such as smart meters, energy monitoring systems, and automated controls to enhance energy efficiency and lower costs. These systems monitor energy use as it happens, helping users spot where energy might be wasted and make necessary changes. Using smart energy management systems allows businesses and homeowners to save on energy costs while also lowering their carbon footprint, helping to create a more sustainable future. Moreover, these technologies offer important insights and data that can guide future energy efficiency strategies and investments.

Consider investing in battery storage systems to capture renewable energy throughout the day, allowing you to utilize it during peak demand times or in case of outages. Battery storage systems play an essential role in an effective energy management strategy. Storing extra renewable energy

produced during the day allows businesses and homeowners to depend less on the grid during busy hours, which can lead to savings on their energy bills. Moreover, battery storage systems offer a dependable backup power source during outages, guaranteeing a continuous power supply when it is needed the most. Putting money into energy storage solutions is a clever approach to boost energy efficiency, cut costs, and improve resilience against unpredictable energy challenges.

Institutions that have engineering or technology faculties can focus on innovation and create local renewable energy technologies to meet their specific needs. This helps create a culture of research and innovation at the institution while also advancing the renewable energy sector as a whole. Investing in these technologies allows institutions to lower their carbon footprint and play a part in creating a more sustainable future. Additionally, creating homegrown solutions can open doors for teamwork with industry partners and government bodies, boosting innovation and growth in the renewable energy field (Sepehr, 2013).

3. Political and Policy Perspective

Advocacy for Reform: Universities can act as policy advocates, using research to influence government policies on energy pricing and subsidies for educational institutions. By partnering with policymakers and conducting studies on the economic and environmental impacts of current policies, universities can provide valuable insights that support the case for reform (Amadi, 2019). Additionally, universities can leverage their expertise and resources to educate the public and raise awareness about the need for change in energy pricing and subsidies. Through these efforts, universities can play a crucial role in shaping more sustainable and equitable policies that benefit both educational institutions and society as a whole.

Stakeholder Collaboration: Institutions can work with energy providers, regulatory agencies, and the government to create a framework for affordable and reliable electricity. By collaborating with these stakeholders, universities can help design and implement policies that promote renewable energy sources and reduce reliance on fossil fuels. This can lead to lower energy costs for both universities and consumers, as well as a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. By working together, stakeholders can create a more sustainable and resilient energy system that will benefit future generations.

Accountability and Transparency: Institutions should advocate for transparency in electricity billing and explore alternatives if discrepancies are found. In addition, universities should hold themselves accountable for their own energy consumption and actively seek ways to reduce their carbon footprint. This can involve investing in energy-efficient technologies, conducting regular energy audits, and setting clear sustainability goals. By ensuring transparency in their electricity billing practices and taking responsibility for their energy usage, universities can set a positive example for their students and the broader community. Ultimately, by prioritizing accountability and transparency in their energy practices, universities can make significant strides towards a more sustainable future.

4. Ethical Perspective

Moral Obligation of the State: The government has a responsibility to support institutions that influence the future of the nation. By subsidizing energy costs, it can promote education effectively (Ekeocha, Ezeani, & Agu, 2018). For instance, state funding for schools and universities ensures that students can access affordable education, fostering a well-educated

workforce. Furthermore, subsidizing energy expenses for these institutions can lower operational costs, enabling them to invest more in academic programmes and student services.

Corporate Responsibility: Energy providers ought to take social responsibility into account and offer educational institutions affordable rates as a way to contribute to the development of society. A utility company might provide reduced electricity rates to a nearby university, helping them cut down on operational expenses and allowing for greater investment in research and student scholarships (Okolie, 2015). This collaboration is advantageous for the institution and showcases the company's dedication to enhancing education and nurturing a talented workforce.

Energy Justice: It is crucial to distribute energy resources and tariffs fairly so that education, which is vital for national advancement, remains protected. A solar energy company might offer discounted solar panels to low-income communities, making it easier for them to access clean and affordable energy options. This initiative supports fairness in energy access by making sure everyone in society has the same chances to enjoy the advantages of sustainable energy solutions.

5. Cultural Perspective

Institutions have the opportunity to embrace the electricity challenge as a way to foster a culture of environmental and energy awareness among both students and staff (Madigan, Neimeier, Spiegel, 2015). For example, a university could implement a campus-wide initiative to reduce energy consumption by installing energy-efficient lighting and appliances in all buildings, while also organizing educational workshops and events to raise awareness about the importance of sustainable practices. This holistic approach not only reduces the institution's carbon footprint but also empowers individuals to make more environmentally conscious choices in their daily lives. Integrating energy management and sustainability topics into academic programmes is essential for preparing students to face future challenges in the energy sector. For example, a university could implement a programme where students majoring in engineering are required to take courses on renewable energy and energy efficiency. This hands-on approach equips students with the knowledge and skills needed to design and implement sustainable solutions in their future careers.

The following are some practical solutions to tackle the problem of high electricity bills for tertiary institutions in Nigeria:

- **Programmes for Improving: Energy Efficiency:** Carry out energy audits in higher education institutions to pinpoint areas where energy is being wasted and suggest more efficient appliances and practices. Put in energy-saving lighting, like LED bulbs, along with appliances and equipment to cut down on electricity use.
- **Embrace Sustainable Energy Options:** Institutions can invest in solar power installations to lessen their dependence on the national grid. Solar panels can be set up on rooftops or integrated into specialised solar farms. Merge solar energy with grid electricity or other renewable sources to guarantee reliability. Collaborate with government entities to seek grants or establish public-private partnerships that can support renewable energy initiatives.

- **Discussing Subsidised Tariffs:** Tertiary institutions should reach out to the Nigerian government to advocate for subsidised electricity tariffs specifically for educational facilities. Push for the establishment of a specific electricity billing category for educational institutions that offers reduced rates. **Direct Power Purchase Agreements (PPAs):** Collaborate directly with Independent Power Producers (IPPs) to secure a more cost-effective and dependable electricity supply.
- **Investment by Institutions in Power Infrastructure:** Create mini-grids or independent power plants (IPPs) for campuses to lessen reliance on the national grid. Improve the internal electrical setup to reduce losses caused by old wiring and ineffective systems.
- **Improving Financial Independence:** Look into other ways to generate income, such as alumni donations, endowments, or research grants, to help meet energy requirements. Create energy savings funds to gather resources for sustainable investments in infrastructure and renewable energy over the long term.
- **Changes to Policies and Regulations:** Support changes in regulations that focus on making energy more affordable for public institutions, particularly in the education sector. Advocate for government action in the electricity sector to limit high tariffs for educational and research institutions.
- **Working Together across Institutions:** Join forces with other universities to negotiate improved electricity rates or invest in shared energy solutions such as regional solar farms or independent energy systems.
- **Enhancing Skills and Knowledge:** Educate staff and students about energy-saving habits, like switching off equipment that is not in use and making the most of electricity during off-peak times. Create sustainability committees in organisations to monitor energy consumption and suggest ongoing enhancements.
- **Funding and initiatives supported by the government:** Encourage the Federal Government and State Government to set aside dedicated funding for energy expenses in higher education institutions. Advocate for participation in national renewable energy initiatives, including financial support for solar panels and opportunities for green energy loans.
- **Research and Development:** Promote research at universities to create innovative energy solutions that meet the specific needs of higher education institutions. Collaborate with various industries to test renewable energy initiatives and distribute both the expenses and advantages. Collaborate with various industries to test renewable energy initiatives and distribute both the expenses and advantages.

Implementation

For these solutions to lower electricity costs while maintaining a steady supply of energy for high-quality education, cooperation between tertiary institutions, governmental agencies, businesses, and the academic community is needed.

Conclusion

Energy access is clearly essential for the foundation of tertiary institutions, acting as a driving force for learning, innovation, and sustainability. Without dependable and sustainable energy, the essential physical and technological resources needed for academic success would struggle (Oyedepo, 2016). Therefore, building strong and future-orientated energy systems is not just a practical need but a crucial strategy for organisations aiming to thrive in the 21st century. By investing in renewable energy sources and efficient technologies, tertiary institutions can ensure a reliable energy supply while also reducing their carbon footprint. This not only the benefits of the environment, but also prepares students for a future where sustainability is increasingly important. By prioritizing energy access and sustainability, tertiary institutions can position themselves as leaders in both education and environmental stewardship.

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