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# School Plant Management in Public Universities in Nigeria: Challenges and the Way Forward

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**Abstract:** *Quality education cannot be guaranteed in the absence of adequate and well-managed educational facilities. However, Nigerian public universities face numerous challenges in terms of school plant management. This paper examines school plant management in public universities in Nigeria: challenges and way forward. Secondary data were sourced online to buttress points raised in this paper. The paper identified the following as some of the challenges facing school plant management in public universities in Nigeria: poor attitude of staff and students toward maintenance of school facilities, pressure on school facilities due to over-enrolment of students, inadequate funding of public universities, among others. Strategic policies to foster positive attitudes among staff and students in order to instil the habit of ownership mentality among staff and students in all educational institutions with regard to school plant management, expansion of school facilities, increased educational funding, and so on were among the suggestions made as to the way forward.*

**Keywords:** *Public Universities, School Plant, Management, Challenges, Nigeria*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Education remains a major factor for individuals and societal development. Globally, countries of the world continually seek to improve the quality of her education particularly the developing countries (Mosha, 1986). Nigeria is not left out; there has been radical shift towards achieving quality education for its citizens. Nigeria, like other nations of the world, has an obligation to prepare her children and youth for life as adults in a world characterized by rapid social, economic and technological changes. The development, maintenance and operation of these institutions are an important aspect of public school administration in the country. The extent to which this important function is effectively performed will determine the extent to



which the country will meet its educational goals and aspirations for the young ones. Effective and efficient management of institutions of learning in the country is as important as building the structures.

Education in Nigeria is divided into the 6-3-3-4 system. The tertiary institution handles the last 4 years of an individual's education in that system. It prepares a child for useful living in the society (FRN, 2013). Ogunode and Lawan, (2020) assert that the history of University education is dated back to 1948 when the first higher institution, University of Ibadan was established then followed by the second generation universities from 1960 – 1962 and the third and fourth generation universities from 1975 to 1980 and from 1980 to 1990 the fourth generation universities. Over the years, there has been a proliferation of universities including those established by state government and privately owned. A public university is one that is in state ownership or receives significant public funds through a national or sub-national government. Public universities therefore, can say to be those universities that are owned and financed by government whether state or federal government. It exists within the ambits of the law and is supervised by the National University Commission (NUC) and other agencies.

Table 1 Number of public universities in Nigeria

<b>Ownership status</b>	<b>Number of universities</b>
Federal Government	49
State Government	57
<b>Total</b>	<b>106</b>

Source: NUC (2022)

School plant, however, is important to the administration of the school activities and heads of these schools always ensure proper management of the available resources to achieve administrative success. School plant is a vital instrument for implementing educational programmes. Knezevich (1975) posits that school plant is the space interpretation of the school curriculum. According to him, the curriculum finds its physical expression in the construction and arrangements of the school plant. The number and types of equipment and materials available, the sizes of learning spaces within the school building, their relations to each other and nature of the learning environment, all have an influence on the methods and quality of teaching and learning. In the view of Asiegbu (2014), it includes the site, buildings, equipment, utilities, permanent and semi-permanent facilities like machines. This implies that the term 'school plant' is more than the school building and the piece of land on which it is situated. School plant plays an immeasurable role in the promotion of teaching and learning in the school system. It plays a major role in determining the type of relationship between the school and community, hence, making the education sector a huge area of investment for both the individuals and various levels of government. It is on this note that adequate management of the school plant is fundamentally reckoned within the educational sectors.

The term management has been defined in various ways by different authors. Griffin (2003) defines it as a set of functions directed at effective utilization of resources in the pursuit of organizational goal. Terry and Franklin (2003) are more specific about the activities involved in the performance of this function. According to them, management is a specific process



consisting of the activities of planning, organizing, actuating and controlling, performed to determine and accomplish stated objectives with the use of human beings and other resources. A common idea in these and many other definitions is that management is goal directed. All these ideas and terms are applicable to the management of school plant.

School plant management entails the making and carrying out series of decisions by individuals and groups in building school a plant according to need, operating and using it effectively and efficiently and ensuring that it is a functional state as the educational programme is being implemented. School plant management involves a number of ongoing and related activities. School plant management ensures that school buildings and grounds, equipment, materials, technical and other service systems, facilitate and support the provision of education by a school (Fenker, 2004). The goal of school plant management and maintenance is to keep school facilities in good enough condition to meet the needs of education programmes (Chika, 2019).

School plants are a vital component of quality education and require effective management from school administrators and other education stakeholders; however, in Nigerian public universities, school plant management faces numerous challenges. So, what are these challenges? This paper examines the challenges facing school plant management in public universities in Nigeria and the way forward.

### **Challenges Of School Plant Management In Public Universities In Nigeria**

The management of school plants in public universities is beset by a slew of issues, including the following:

**1. Poor Attitude of Staff and students toward Maintenance of School Facilities:** school plant management is not a one-man business; it is the responsibility of all education stakeholders (school administrators, staff, and students) however non-chalant attitudes of staff and students towards facility management in public universities have aggravated the challenges of the school plant management in Nigerian public universities. Chika (2019) argued that negative attitudes of staff toward maintenance culture, improper handling of facilities by students, insufficient records of damages in the school, and insufficient on-the-job training of staff on maintenance techniques among others are some of the challenges facing school plant management in schools. Odhier (2019) argued that some students are irresponsible and destructive, and as a result, school facilities are destroyed.

### **2. Pressure on School Facilities Due to Over Enrolment of Students:**

School plant management in Nigerian universities suffers some setbacks as a result of pressure on school facilities caused by over-enrolment of students and overutilization of school facilities. Classes that were designed to hold 250 students end up containing 400 or more students. Odhier (2019); Chika (2019) observed that a large student population puts a strain on the limited facilities, necessitating frequent repairs.

**3. Inadequate Funding of Public Universities:** School plant management necessitates adequate funding for effective renovation, repairs, and replacement of worn-out parts of machines, equipment, and so on; however, public universities are underfunded. The



government was unable to meet UNESCO's 26 percent of national budget allocation to education funding as recommended for developing countries like Nigeria. According to Omolola and Ogunode (2021), adequate funding is essential for the management of public universities. No higher education institution can exist without adequate funding; however, inadequate funding continues to be a major impediment to the effective management of Nigeria's public universities. Odhier (2019) is also of the view that inadequate funding is a major threat to school plant management.

**4. Insecurity:** The country's security challenges have diverted government spending to security, which will undoubtedly result in inadequate funding for educational institutions. Furthermore, the Boko haram insurgency has been targeting educational institutions and destroying school facilities, making school plant management extremely difficult. Omolola and Ogunode (2021) have put forward that the Boko haram insurgency has attacked and destroyed many public universities, particularly in northern Nigeria. Ogunode and Musa (2020) opined that insecurity in Nigeria, particularly in the northeast, has wreaked havoc on educational infrastructure. The insurgents have destroyed many school facilities, from elementary to higher education.

**5. Corruption:** In Nigeria, public administration has become synonymous with corruption and the university system is no exception. Money intended for routine school facility maintenance is sometimes diverted to private pockets by school administrators, resulting in the abandonment of facilities that require immediate attention. In some cases, low-quality products are purchased for school facility maintenance, resulting in poor work quality. Ogunode and Musa (2020) are of the view that corruption has infiltrated Nigeria's higher education institutions. The government's limited funds for programmes, research, and infrastructure facilities either end up in private hands or diverted.

**6. Incessant Strike Action:** Nigerian public universities are characterized by frequent strike actions, which not only affect education programmes but also school plant management, particularly plants (flowers, grasses, and trees) that require frequent watering by school gardeners who are sometimes on strike. Omolola and Ogunode (2021) opined that strikes by unions in Nigerian universities are preventing the effective management of the country's public universities.

**7. Poor School Plant Management Skills of Vice-Chancellors:** School plant management necessarily requires effective management skills on the part of school administrators, which are frequently lacking among vice-chancellors. This is due to the fact that vice-chancellors are typically appointed based on political connections rather than merit, especially in state-owned universities. Asiabaka (2008) submitted that several individuals occupying managerial positions in schools lack knowledge of management processes, and some who possess the knowledge fail to put them into practical use in the management of the school plants.



**8. Political Meddling in Internal Administration of Universities:** Politicians frequently intervene in the administration of public universities, particularly in the awarding of contracts. These politicians, who are usually awarded school plant construction contracts, typically perform poor quality work that necessitates frequent maintenance, posing a significant challenge to school facility management. Another major issue affecting the effective management of Nigeria's public universities is political interference (Omolola & Ogunode, 2021).

**9. Poor Power Supply:** Some school materials, such as perishable consumables used in practical lessons in universities, require a stable power supply for effective management; however, the power supply in Nigeria has been unstable. This was supported by Chika (2019) who posited that inadequate power supply is a barrier to the management and maintenance of school facilities, affecting the preservation and storage of consumables for practical lessons in schools.

### **Way Forward**

In light of the aforementioned challenges in the management of school plants in Nigerian public universities, the paper suggests the following:

1. School administrators should develop strategic policies to foster positive attitudes among staff and students in order to instill the habit of ownership mentality among staff and students in all educational institutions with regard to school plant management.
2. Expansion of school facilities: Because of the high demand for admission, the government should expand school facilities to adequately accommodate students enrolled in public universities.
3. The government should increase funding for education in general, and for public universities in particular, in order to meet the UNESCO recommendation of 26%.
4. The government should ensure that the safe school initiative programme, which was launched in 2014 in response to the kidnapping of the Chibok schoolgirls in Nigeria, is fully implemented to ensure school safety in all educational institutions, thereby preventing school facilities from being destroyed by insurgency.
5. Corruption fighting should be institutionalized in public universities in order to reduce corrupt practices that impede effective school plant management practices.
6. To avoid further strike actions in the university system, the government should meet all of the demands of the various unions in public universities.
7. Vice-chancellors should take some courses to improve their understanding of school plant management.
8. To ensure effective school plant management, vice-chancellors should be appointed based on merit rather than political connections. Politicians should avoid interference in public universities' internal administration.
9. The government should work with educational funding agencies such as the Tertiary Education Trust Fund to provide solar energy sources of power to all of the country's public universities.



## 2. CONCLUSION

In a nutshell, school plant management in public universities faces numerous challenges that must be overcome by all educational stakeholders in order for school plant management to run smoothly and effectively. These obstacles can be overcome with adequate funding and political will on the part of all stakeholders in the education sector.

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