

# LECTURERS' ACCESS TO RESEARCH FUND IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES: CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

**Charles P. Akpan**

University of Calabar, Nigeria

**Ijeoma A. Archibong**

Cross River University of Technology,  
Calabar, Nigeria

**John A. Undie**

Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University

Bauchi, Nigeria

jaundie4u@yahoo.com

## **Abstract**

*The study investigated the sources of research funding available to lecturers in Nigerian Universities, the challenges faced by lecturers in accessing them and possible strategies for improvement. Five research questions were posed to guide the study. A survey design was adopted and the study sample comprised 310 lecturers selected from 3 Nigerian Universities using purposive sampling technique. Data were collected using a researcher-designed questionnaire called "Lecturers' Access to Research Funding Questionnaire (LARFQ)". Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics-means, standard deviations and simple percentages. Result of the study revealed self-funding as major source of research funding in Nigerian Universities, followed by government sector and foreign agencies. Self-funding was also identified as the most potent source of research funding accessed by University lecturers. The study showed that a greater percentage of lecturers, 246 (76.35%), had not benefited from research grants for many years. Inadequate funding of research and stringent conditions attached to research grants were identified as two major constraints to accessing research funds by lecturers. Based on these findings, it was recommended among other things that government should increase the funding of universities and research substantially and management of universities should develop modalities for identifying and disseminating information to lecturers on research funding opportunities and the requirements for accessing them.*

**Keywords:** *lecturer, strategy, improvement, research, funding*

## **Background to the study**

The Nigerian Tertiary Institutions, Universities inclusive, have three statutory functions to perform and these include teaching, research and community service. While much attention is given to teaching, not much effort is committed to research. The Nigerian Universities which should exist as centres for knowledge dissemination, research and knowledge creation have not maintained their full savour. Donwa (2006) describes them as teaching centres due to their focus on knowledge dissemination and insignificant contribution to knowledge creation through research. Research is one important function of

Universities that has a wider linkage with teaching and community service. Apart from enriching teaching and learning, it also promotes the process of national development.

Regrettably, research in Nigerian Universities is not given the priority it deserves because of poor funding of the education sector. Okujagu (1998) points out that research is not well funded so as to have the impact it should. Funding of universities generally and research in particular is inadequate. This condition accounts for part of the reasons why University lecturers are unable to access research funding. As a result, giant strides have not been recorded from research efforts of the Universities. Thus, the bulk of University research in Nigeria is driven by the demand for publication toward career advancement (Egwunyenga, 2008). Saint, Harnett and Strassner (2003) report that Nigeria's low research output is probably a reflection of the low priority accorded research and development by government decision-makers and that Nigeria's federal University System spends only 1.3% of its budget on research. This indicates that research funding in Nigerian Universities is directly linked with government allocation to education and the priority accorded it in policy. Donwa (2006) reports that the average annual allocation to federal universities for recurrent expenditure is 0.4% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and 5% of this allocation, is to be used for research. This report shows that research funding by government is less than 1% GDP and this is grossly inadequate for meaningful research. Thus, the amount of research funding by government is a function of the total funding for recurrent expenditure in the Universities.

Adesomoju (2008) identifies government and the organized private sectors as two sources of research funding in Universities. According to him, funding from the private sector include consultancy, commissioned research and intellectual property (IP). Similarly, Donwa (2006) reports that University research in Nigeria is funded mainly from government purse with no industry support and in few cases funds have been obtained from foreign agencies. These foreign supports are not enjoyed by all Universities and where they are obtained, it is not a regular annual event. Bako (2005) in his study indicates that the bulk of University research has been self funded by graduate students, staff-in-training and academic staff and over 80% has been from salaries and parents. This is supported by the work of Akpochafo (2009) who reports that currently, research in the Universities is funded by graduate students, staff-in-training and academic staff who are poorly paid.

Research funding is capital intensive. Unfortunately not much funds have been provided for research in Nigeria by the government compared to other countries of the world. Aluede and Igbineweka (2001) in their study report that in the University of Benin, for the 1994/95 and 1995/96, ₦8, 399,874.00 and ₦9, 327,852.00 were respectively released as research grants for the institution with 750 academic staff on roll. Assuming that each staff had a right to the allocation, then each lecturer in 1994/95 would have received a paltry sum of approximately ₦ 11, 866.50, while in 1995/96 each academic staff would have received ₦12,437.14 for research (Aluede & Igbineweka, 2001). This shows clearly the situation of research funding in Nigerian Universities. The scenario is similar in other Universities in the country and the situation has not change substantially. It is to this end that Fatunde (2007) reports that Juluis Okejie, the NUC executive secretary in a workshop organized by the West African Association of Research and Innovation regrets that Nigerian Government since independence has not made a priority of allocating substantial funds for research in the country's Universities. According to him without proper funding from government University-based researchers and scientists can not undertake meaningful

research and without research, the country cannot make substantial economic and industrial progress.

Zeleny (1992) asserts that the world over, funds for research come primarily from governments and business firms. Others include foundations and professional societies. In some countries, funding of research is a collaboration effort with governments, bilateral and multilateral agencies and tertiary institutions working together in projects of interest. Adesomoju (2008) reports that the U.S. Federal Government alone spends 2.284 billion dollars to support research in U.S. Colleges and Universities, while industries provides about 2.188 billion dollars in one year to support research.

Millar and Senker (2000) in their study discover that in many countries, over 50% of research funding comes from industries. According to the report, Belgium, Germany, Ireland Sweden and U.S.A record industry funding of over 60%; Japan and Korea over 70%. The average spending on research and development in Organization for European Economic Co-operation (OECD) countries is currently 8% GDP (OECD, 1999).

Study shows that France has a higher percentage of 9-10% and Japan 6-7% (Miller & Senker, 2000). In these countries the aim is to attain world class excellence in University research and providing enough funding for this purpose is a priority to the governments (Donwa, 2006). With funding of less than 1% GDP, Nigerian is well behind many countries of the world in its provision for research.

Bako (2005) reports that less than 10% of the University based research is funded externally by foreign bodies and the same percentage by the University research Board. A study by Donwa (2006) reveals that funding University research in Nigerian is done by the Federal Government (98.81%) and foreign agencies (1.19%). The study also reveals that the sources of research fundings are not regular and therefore, not dependable. This in part contributes to the difficulties in accessing research funds by lecturers. Egwunyenga (2008) in his study reports that ignorance of existing foreign research funding agencies is a limiting factor to accessing research funds. With the advent of the information highway, not all Nigerian Universities have been hooked to the website, thus, limiting the access of Nigerian researchers to information from the global website village. He also identifies lack of incentives to encourage University lecturers to go into research. They are left to operate in pitiable conditions with unreliable infrastructure of transport, power and energy. This dampens their interest to source for research funds. Okebukola (2002) identifies difficulty in accessing research funds and diminishing scope of mentory junior researchers by seasoned and senior researchers due to brain drain as factors contributing to the decline in research interest of lecturers in recent time. Inadequate funds/research grants constitute challenges to lecturers in accessing research funds (Okebukola, 2004, Egwunyenga 2008). Okebukola (2004) regrettably remarked that the amount given for research by government amount to "nothing". But he blames the Universities for the low quality research output and lack of creativity and innovation to source research fund from industry and other sources in order to move Nigeria towards crossing the threshold to technological development. Premised on the above background, this study seeks to investigate lecturers' access to research funding in Nigerian Universities with a focus on the challenges and effective measures for enhancing their access to research funding.

## **Problem of the Study**

Knowledge creation through University based research has been recognized globally as a means for progress and national development and Nigeria as a developing country shares in this view. Unfortunately, research in Nigerian Universities has assumed a crises dimension because of poor funding of University based research. There are many brilliant University lecturers who have spent well over ten years without receiving a single research grant either from within or outside. They make use of their meagre salaries in funding their research (Nworgu, 2006). The government on her part wants the universities to harness external grants and embark on contracted research, thus avoiding her responsibilities to fund research. Okebukola (2002) states that University academic staff have difficulty in accessing research grants. It then becomes pertinent to find out the sources of research funding available to lecturers in Nigerian Universities, the challenges faced by them in accessing research funds and possible strategies for improvement.

## **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to:

1. Find out the sources of research funding available for academic staff in Nigerian Universities.
2. Identify the sources of research funding accessed by academic staff.
3. Determine the number of academic staff that have benefited from research grants.
4. Identify possible challenges faced by University lecturers in accessing research grants.
5. Identify strategies that can be adopted to improve lecturers' access to research funding.

## **Research Questions**

1. What are the sources of research funding available for academic staff of Nigerian Universities?
2. Which are the sources of research funding accessed by academic staff?
3. What percentage of academic staff has carried out research funded by research grant?
4. What are the challenges faced by University lecturers in accessing research funds?
5. What are the effective strategies for improving lecturers' access to research funding.

## **Research Method**

The survey design was adopted for this study which covered three Universities namely, University of Calabar (UNICAL), Cross River University of Technology (CRUTECH) and University of Uyo (UNIUYO). The population of the study comprised all the academic staff in the three institutions. Purposive sampling technique was used to select 104 lecturers from University of Calabar, 103 from Cross River University of Technology and 103 from University of Uyo. This gave a total sample size of 310 respondents.

Data for the study were collected using a researcher designed instrument called Lecturers' Access to Research Funding Questionnaire (LARFQ) which was face-validated

by an expert in educational research. The instrument consisted of three sections. Section A sought personal data of the respondents such as gender, age, years of research experience, qualification and rank/status. Section B consisted of 9 items. Eight of them had 5 response options each, where one (1) was the least score and 5 the highest score. The respondents were required to indicate their awareness of sources of research funding and the sources accessed. The 9<sup>th</sup> item required the respondents to indicate “Yes or “No” if they have carried out any research funded by research grant. Section C was made up of eleven items, ten of them had 5 response options each.

The respondents were required to rate the challenges to accessing research grants by ticking one of the 5 options against each item. The 11<sup>th</sup> item was an open ended question which required the respondents to suggest one possible strategy for improving lecturers’ access to research grants.

The instrument was administered to the respondents in their various institutions by the researchers. Copies of the questionnaire were filled and returned on the spot. All the 310 copies of the questionnaire were retrieved, edited and found valid for analysis. The response rate achieved was 100 percent. Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) were used for data analysis. An item with a mean rating of 3.0 was regarded as significant while a mean rating below 3.0 was regarded as not significant.

## Results

### Research Question 1

What are the sources of research funding available for academic staff in Nigerian Universities?

The result of the data analysis for this research question is presented in Table 1.

Table 1.  
Mean scores and Rank order of Academic Staff Knowledge of Sources of Research Funding (n=310)

Items	Mean ( $\bar{X}$ )	SD	Rank Order
Self-funding	4.43	1.01	1 <sup>st</sup>
Government Sector	2.53	1.54	2 <sup>nd</sup>
Foreign Agencies	2.35	1.47	3 <sup>rd</sup>
Non-governmental Organizations	2.23	1.44	4 <sup>th</sup>
Professional Associations	2.21	1.45	5 <sup>th</sup>
Industrial/Private Sector	2.09	1.27	6 <sup>th</sup>
Consultancy	1.95	1.21	7 <sup>th</sup>
Local Agencies	1.85	1.11	8 <sup>th</sup>

Table 1 shows that the major source of research funding in Nigerian Universities is self-funding with a mean score of 4.43 and standard deviation of 1.01. This is followed by government ( $X=2.53$ ;  $SD 1.54$ ) and foreign agencies ( $X=2.35$ ;  $SD=1.47$ ), while the least source of research funding is local agencies which is ranked 8<sup>th</sup> position.

### Research Question 2

Which are the sources of research funding accessed by academic staff?

The result of data analysis that provides answer to this question is presented in Table 2.

Table 2.

Mean scores and Rank order of Research Funding Accessed by Academic Staff (n=310)

Items	Mean ( $\bar{X}$ )	SD	Rank Order
Self-funding	4.22	1.17	1 <sup>st</sup>
Foreign Agencies	1.80	1.34	2 <sup>nd</sup>
Industrial/Private Sector	1.67	1.16	3 <sup>rd</sup>
Non-governmental Organizations	1.66	1.20	4 <sup>th</sup>
Professional Associations	1.59	1.19	5 <sup>th</sup>
Industrial/Private Sector	1.58	1.06	6 <sup>th</sup>
Consultancy	1.56	1.15	7 <sup>th</sup>
Local Agencies	1.54	0.89	8 <sup>th</sup>

Table 2 reveals that self funding has a mean rating of 4.22 which is greater than the acceptable mean score of 3.00 indicating that the respondents agreed that the most potent source of research funding accessed by University lecturers is self-funding. All other items in table 2 have means scores less than the acceptable mean of 3.0. This depicts that these sources of research funding are not significantly accessed by University lecturers.

### Research Question 3

What percentage of academic staff have carried out research funded by research grant?

The answer to this question is provided in Table 3.

Table 3.

Respondents' opinions on carrying out Research Sponsored by Research Grants (n=310)

Yes	No
64 (20.65%)	246 (76.35%)

Table 3 shows that 64 respondents representing 20.65% answers "Yes" while 246 representing 76.35% say "No" to the question "Have you ever carry out research funded by research grant?". This depicts that majority of academic staff in Nigerian Universities do not benefit from research grants.

### Research Question 4

What are the challenges faced by University lecturers in accessing research funds?

The answer to this question are presented in Table 4.

Table 4.  
Lecturers' rating of the challenges to Accessing Research funds (n=310)

Items	Mean ( $\bar{X}$ )	SD	Position
Inadequate funding of research generally	3.68	1.52	1 <sup>st</sup>
Stringent conditions attached to research grants	3.17	1.47	2 <sup>nd</sup>
Lack of information on research grants	2.91	1.53	3 <sup>rd</sup>
Limited research grant in my discipline	2.78	1.49	4 <sup>th</sup>
Time frame for fulfilling the requirements for research grants	2.49	1.39	5 <sup>th</sup>
Difficulty in the retirement process for research grants.	2.37	1.41	6 <sup>th</sup>
Lack of training on writing research proposals that attract grants	2.34	1.21	7 <sup>th</sup>
Inability to meet eligibility criteria	2.25	1.11	8 <sup>th</sup>
Inability to write acceptable proposals	1.96	1.22	9 <sup>th</sup>
Lack of interest in research grants.	1.80	1.18	10 <sup>th</sup>

Table 4 reveals that inadequate funding of research ( $\bar{X}=3.68$ ;  $SD=1.52$ ) is ranked first indicating that it is the most significant challenge faced by lecturers in accessing research funds. This is followed by stringent conditions attached to research grants ( $\bar{X}=3.17$ ;  $SD= 1.47$ ), while the least challenge is lack of interest in research grant ( $\bar{X}=1.80$ ;  $SD=1.18$ ).

Equally viewed as challenges are lack of information on research grants, limited grants in certain disciplines, time frame to fulfill needed requirements, difficulty in the retirement process for grants and lack of training on research proposal writing that attracts grants. Although these are viewed as challenges, they are not significant constraint because their mean scores are less than the acceptable mean score of 3.0.

### Research Question 5

What are the effective strategies for improving lecturers' access to research funding?

The answer to this question is presented in Table 5.

Table 5.  
Respondents' submission on strategies for improving Lecturers' access to research grants.

- Government should compulsorily increase funding of Universities especially research.
- Easing the criteria/conditions for accessing research grants.
- The University management should provide information on research grants.
- Academic staff should use the internet/websites for information on research funding agencies.

- ASUU should create awareness about research among members.
  - Linkages and collaboration among Universities/industries should be established.
  - Researchers should reach out to relevant industries for funding
  - Faculty/Departments should organize training workshop on writing quality research grant proposals.
  - The heads of department should actively seek information on research grants and publicize any available grants to academic staff.
  - The University should give research grants to departments for easier access.
  - Faculty/University research committees should create awareness/provide information to staff.
  - A research grant bulletin-quarterly should be established by NUC.
  - The graduate school should produce a list of institutions/agencies award research grants, annually and circulate to academic staff.
- 

### **Discussion of Findings**

The finding that self funding in ranked highest depicts that it is the primary source of research funding for University academics in Nigeria, while government sector and foreign agencies are not very popular as revealed in this study. The explanation for this is not far fetched. In Nigeria, funding of Universities generally and research in particular is inadequate. As a result majority of University academics make use of personal money to fund their research rather than wait for grants from government or foreign agencies which may not be regular and dependable. Therefore, self-funding becomes their major source of research funding. This finding agrees with the works of Bako (2005) and Akpochafo (2009) who report that the bulk of University research in Nigeria has been self-funded by graduate students, staff-in-training and academic staff who are poorly paid and that over 80% of research funding has been from salaries. However, the finding is at variance with the report of Donwa (2006) that University research in Nigeria is funded mainly from government purse with no industry support. Although he argues that in few cases funds have been obtained from foreign agencies, but where they are obtained it is not a regular annual event.

The study also reveals that self-funding is ranked highest among sources of research funding accessed by academic staff in Nigerian Universities. This finding could be attributed to the publish or perish syndrome that characterizes the university system in Nigeria. Lecturers are spurred to raise money individually to fund research in order to satisfy the need to publish instead of perishing or stagnating. Therefore academic staff find personal funding as a potent source of research funding to be accessed in order to meet up the demand for promotion and professional growth. This is evident in the use of such publications for assessment of academic staff for promotion. Fatunde (2007) points out that the Nigerian government since independence has not made a priority of allocating substantial funds for research in the country's Universities. This means that for academic staff to wait for government grants before carrying out research would like pursuing a mirage.

Another finding of the study shows that 64 (20.65%) of the respondents say "Yes" and 246 (76.35%) say "No" to the question "Have you ever carried out a research funded by research grant?" This finding reveals that very few academic staff in Nigerian Universities benefit from research grants, while majority do not. This finding attest to the



fact that many bright University academics spend many years in the system without getting a single research grant either from within or outside. They use their meagre salaries to fund their research (Nworgu, 2006). This is attributed to the poor funding of University based research in Nigeria such that not all academic staff can obtain grants for research purposes.

The study shows that the respondents rate inadequate funding of research generally as the major challenge to accessing research grants. This particular challenge is a major one because if adequate funds are not provided, University lecturers can not access substantial amount for research. This finding is support all by Okujagu (1998) who reports that research in Nigerian Universities is not well funded so as to have the impact it should and this constitute a serious constraints to accessing research grants by academic staff. Also indicated as constraint to assessing research funds are stringent conditions attached to research grants. Thus, probably accounts for some lecturers' lack of interest in accessing research funds.

Table 5 shows that respondents have suggested a wide range of strategies that can be adopted to enhance lecturers' access to research funding. It is interesting to note that the submission as suggested strategies include increase funding of Universities, especially research grants, and provision of adequate information on research grant's by University management. These strategies have been listed as being prominence among others Fatunde (2007) points out that without proper funding of University education and research, University based researchers and scientists cannot undertake meaningful research. In support of this fact, Egwunyenga (2007) avers that proprietors of tertiary institutions particularly the federal and state governments should devote substantial amount of their national and state budgets to research that add value to the national economy.

On the provision of information on research grants, Adesomoju (2008) reports that it is important for University management to assist lecturers to know where these funds are available and the conditions to be fulfilled in accessing them. The easiest way to facilitate information on research grants is for Universities to hook up to the global website/internet. Access to research grants most major funding agencies can be accessed on-line. Collaborative research can be facilitated and enhanced through on-line communication.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

In the light of the findings of this study it could be concluded that the major source of research funding in Nigerian Universities is self-funding, followed by government sector and foreign agencies. Self-funding is also identified as the most potent source of research funding accessed by academic staff. Majority of academic staff do not benefit from research grants for several years because of inadequate funding of research generally and stringent conditions attached to research grants. These are two major challenges faced by University lecturers in accessing research funds. It is therefore, recommended that:

1. The Government should appreciate the importance of research in national development and increase the funding of Universities and research substantially.
2. Management of Universities should develop modalities for identifying and disseminating information to lecturers on research funding opportunities and the conditions for accessing them.
3. Adequate incentives should be given to lecturers to encourage them to actively participate in research activities.

4. In this age of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), management of universities should be more aggressive in providing internet services in lecturers' offices and ensuring connectivity.

#### References:

- Adesomoju, A. (2008). Attracting Grants from the organized Private Sector in Postgraduate Research and Development. A paper presented at the 4<sup>th</sup> National Workshop of Committee of Deans of Postgraduate Schools in Nigerian Universities on Involvement of Industries and the organized Private Sector in Postgraduate Research for National Development. Abuja, 16-17 April, 2008.
- Akpochafo, W. P. (2009). Revitalizing research in Nigerian Universities for National Development. *Educational Research and Review*. 4(5), 247-251. Retrieved from <http://academicjournals.org/ERR>, July, 2009.
- Aluede, O. & Igbineweka, V. O. (2001). An Analysis of research grant utilization on Research Publications in Nigerian Universities: A case study of University of Benin. *African Journal of Education*. 5, 115.
- Bako, S. (2005). Universities, Research and Development in Nigeria: Time for a paradigmatic Shift. A paper presented at the 11<sup>th</sup> Assembly of CODESRIA, On Rethinking African Development: Beyond Impasse: Towards Alternatives Maputo, Mozambique, 6<sup>th</sup> - 8<sup>th</sup> December, 2005.
- Donwa, P. A. (2006). Funding of Academic Research in Nigerian Universities. A paper presented at the UNESCO forum on Higher Education Research and Knowledge creation. November 29-December 1, 2006. Retrieved from <http://portal.unesco.org/education/fr/files>, July, 2009.
- Egwunyenga, E. J. (2008). Dystrophies and Associated Crisis in Research and Academic Publication in Nigerian Universities. *Anthropologist* 10(4), 245-250.
- Fatunde, T. (2007). Nigeria: Researchers want more funding. Retrieved from <http://www.universityworldnews.com/article>, July, 2009.
- Millan, J., Senker, J. (2000). International Approaches to Research Policy and Funding: University Research Policy in Different national Context. University of Sussex: SPRU Science and Technology Policy Research.
- Nworgu, B. G. (2006). Educational Research. Basic Issues and Methodology. Ibadan: Wisdom.
- Okebukola, P. (2002). The State of University Education in Nigeria. National Universities Commission, Abuja: Nigeria
- Okebukola, P. (2004). Strategies for Stimulating Researches and Development in Nigerian Universities. *Nigerian University Chronicles* 12 (2), 17-18.
- Okujagu, T. N. (1998). Research paradigms and trends in Sociology and education. Port Harcourt: Minson.
- Organization for European Economic Cooperation (1999). OECD Science, Technology & Industry Scoreboard 1999: benchmarking knowledge based Economics. Paris. OECD

- Saint, W., Harnett, T. A., Strassner, E. (2003). Higher Education in Nigeria: A status Report. *Higher Education Policy*, 16, 259-281.
- Zeleny, R. O. (1992). *The World Book Encyclopedia*, 16, (pp. 233-234). London: World Book Inc.