

Theological Education Administration and the Challenge of School fee Payment

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1. Introduction

The payment of student school fees promptly is one of the challenging issues affecting Theological Education Administration in Nigeria. A perennial issue affect most evangelical protestant theological institutions in Nigeria. The issue has become endemic that it is affecting the administration of Theological institutions. The areas adversely affected are academic and finance sections of Theological education administration. This issue is not the only issue affecting theological institution administration today. Several scholars like J A Ilori drew attention to the following challenges: threat of secularism, temptation to compromise standard in the area of academic and spirituality, staff integrity, lifestyle expected of staff and student, institution governance, and inadequate funding [1].

Olusayo Oladejo also called attention to these challenges facing theological institutions: Leadership, accreditation, affiliation and partnership with other theological institutions, contextualization of both intents and contents of ministerial and theological training, Information and Communication compliance, slow decision making process, doctrinal illiteracy and communication deficit, as well as insufficient call for students who completed their ministerial and theological training successfully [2]. Other scholars who wrote on the subject of theological institution challenges like the ones highlighted did not address the issue of school fee as a challenge. Instead, school fee charge and payment is identified as vital to the success of theological institution administration.

This paper explored issue of student school fee payment as a challenge in the wheel of progress of theological education administration in Nigeria. This paper admits that student fee payment is a problem in theological education administration that must be wholistically addressed in order to stem it effect on theological education administration. The method adopted for this work is the historical survey method and the study population is two theological institutions in two south west states of Nigeria. The states are Lagos and Oyo states; and the institutions are Baptist College of Theology, Lagos and Baptist College of Theology, Oyo. Their staff and students were observed and interacted with for the

study. The relevancy of the work lies in educating readers on the problems student failure or inability to pay school fee constitute to theological education administration and proffering solution to the problem. In order to do justice to the work attempt is made to explain theological education as well as theological administration; and student school fee. Key terms/phrases: Theological Education, Theological Administration, Student fee.

1.1. Exposition on Theological Education and Theological

1.1.1. Institution Administration

Theological Education is a process of helping learners engage in a search for meaning, value, and purpose in life. It involves both the exploration of beliefs and values and study of how such beliefs and values are expressed. it is an education that has its primary focus mainly on spiritual doctrinal topics such as: God, human, work, salvation, sin, christ, church, etc. Theological education prepared persons for Christian service inside and outside of Christian faith community (www.igi-global.com>dictionarytheology accessed 23/2/2024) [3]. Theological education equips Christian ministers with the necessary knowledge, skills, and spiritual foundation to lead their congregations and to address the challenges they face on the field of service [4]. Theological education involved both classroom and practical field learning. The field learning is tagged Supervised Theological Field Education. It is the formal learning process that a student undertakes to gain practical experience in churches under a trained, qualified, certificated, and ordained serving minister in churches [5].

Theological Education explanation given above will not be meaningful without stating the values of theological education. The value of theological education include among several: Loving God, Knowing Christ, godliness or godly living, use of Holy Bible defending the truth, preaching/teaching the gospel. Theological education is indispensable to training for life and ministry; indispensable for equipping men and women to engage more deeply and effectively serve God and human [6]. Jiri Moskala added to the values of theological education by saying that theological education give preference to Christian worldview, absoluteness of truth, Moral life, God's sovereignty, and Christ Kingship [7].

Theological education cannot be offered or executed formally without an enabling administrative structure on ground. Thus, there is need for effective theological administration structure to propel virile, impactful, and result oriented theological education. Theological education administration implies way and manner theological educational institution is administered by the governing council and management of each theological institution. It refers to daily governance of each institution by those assigned to govern it. Marcos Orison de Almeida submitted that theological institutions need administrative systems to function maximally. Administrative system is defined as set of detailed method, procedure and routine standard established to help theological institutions attain its mission and goal [8]. Thus, administration is formed to carry out a specific activity; perform a duty, or solve a problem.

Administration is further explained as an organized, purposeful structure that consist of interrelated and interdependent elements; the elements continuously influence one another directly or indirectly to maintain their activity and the existence of the institution in order to achieve the goal of the institution (Almeida). Almeida postulated two types of theological school administration. They are closed and opened systems of administration. Closed system is theoretical because it does not allow for interaction with the world outside its institution. It does not interact with its environment and does not allow for influence by its surroundings; only the components within the system are significant and interact with one another. Open system is real-world administrative system whose boundaries allow exchanges of energy, material and information with the larger external environment it exists.

Five administrative structures are particularly important in theological institutions for effective administration. They are: Academic, Finance, Donor Engagement, Personnel, and Facility. Each of the aforementioned has its own characteristics and can stand alone. However, they are dependent and related to each other for effective administration of the school. In addition, they are to be continuously measured in line with stated objectives; they are to be evaluated, revised, renewed or reaffirmed in changing and challenging times (Almeida).

1.1.2. School Fee in Theological Institution Context

Prompt payment of School fee is one of the vital sources of income for theological institutions. School fee is the money charged each applicant admitted to school at every level of schooling. School fee comprised of tuition and other charges such as IT, library use, medical, power utility, book, seminar, facility, game, etc charged student by theological institution. Most theological institutions prepared their budget vis-a-vis expected income and proposed expenditure in term of capital and recurrent expenditure on the strength that students at every level of study will pay their fees promptly and correctly ('studentfees' www.education.gov.za>schoofees accessed on 24/4/2024) [9]. Tuition fee is not the same as school fee; Tuition fee is an aspect of schoolfee and it is the money charge student for the main purpose of student having access

to to academic instruction but schoolfee payment guarantee student access to all the resources and facilities needful for a well-rounded education [11].

School fee is critical in facilitating the smooth running of each institution and funding of some critical projects such as books, government leveies, infrastructure maintainance, staff salaries, and school development. Payment of schoolfee instills a sense of responsibility and value in students as well as their sponsor toward theological education [12]. However, the reality now is that some students are finding it hard to pay school fee in most protestant evangelical institutions in Africa especially Nigeria. The situation is made worse by the fact that the number of those sponsoring the training of students financially has reduced drastically thereby reducing the number of sponsored students in theological training institutions. The effect of this is drastic reduction of income in the institutions.

The writer had informal interactions with some students of two theological institutions he visited while writing this article on the issue of school fee payment in theological institutions. Their responses are summarised below:

- Poor Economic situation of the state/nation is a factor affecting affecting payment of school fee. The poor economy has caused several to lose their job; several have their business/trade adversely affected; several small business enterprises; as well as big business enterprise have folded up due to the unfriendly economic climate or environment. Several who desire to work could not get job to do; and the few who got employed are poorly remunerated. The implication of the stated fact is the lack of money for individual to use in support of God's work, other persons in need of financial support and for self development. Rather than have financial concern for other due to scarcity of fund many now concentrate on self-family to the detriment of God's work and support for others especially those called to pastoral vocation. The need for economic restoration / resuscitation of most African nations where theological institutions are situated is vital to financial buoyancy of citizens, organisations, institutions and the state at-large. When members are financially stable and balance churches will be supported as well as related institutions and their stakeholders. Moreover, money will be available for payment of school fee and other financial commitment as at when due [12].
- Political crisis that pitched farmer and herder against each other resulting in low production of agriculture produce, incessant raiding, killing, violence, kidnapping and displacement of farmers from their farm and herders from their location. The implication of this political crisis is scarcity of food and high cost of available foodstuff because most farmers could not go to work on their farm for fear of attack, abuse, assault, and killing. Presently, food is expensive and is beyond the reach of many Nigerians; some find it difficult to feed self and family, while several used up their savings to feed to the detriment of having sufficient fund for God's work and support for other who are in need of financial aid. Government need to stem this incessant crisis of farmer and herder clash in other to create the enabling environment

for people to work and earn a living that will be adequate to serve God, Humanity, and self at family, church, and community levels. Those who farm or engage in agricultural business to support their theological education could not do so due to the political crisis discussed. Similarly, those whose theological education is been finance by their family who are farmers are having difficult time supporting them due to unfavourable political climate.

- The devaluation of Nigeria money value that has reduced its purchasing power is affecting people, organisations, and institutions in Nigeria. The effect of this is that many are unable to meet up with their basic obligations at home, church, school and society. There is need for Government continue intervention on dollar and naira value in other to ease the hardship and pain many are experiencing financially today.
- Some students felt the cost of training is high and exorbitant beyond their reach and should be reduced or subsidised beyond the present percentage of subsidy to enable majority of student the ability to pay their fee promptly without default. Those who felt the cost of theological training is high forgot that prevailing market forces as well as the economic and political situation affecting all who are operating under it determine computation of school fees to be paid by each student.
- Uche Enyioha noted that several parents and potential sponsors of men and women called to theological and ministerial training are developing cold feet due to the erroneous belief that there is no quick gain from those sponsored for theological and ministerial training after the completion of their training because trained pastors and ministers are not highly paid. Their service to God and human is basically sacrificial. Thus, some are not ready to invest in theological education training because of it sacrificial nature [13]. This fact is collaborated by some of the student interracted with who said it is becoming difficult to get sponsor.

Theological institutions administration are adversely affected when students are unable to pay their fee as at when due. The day to day running of the institution is affected. The issue of late payment or failure to pay within the designated period usually cast aspersion on defaulting student integrity; and create doubt upon their call to ministry. This experience discourages and saddens the heart of affected student. The questions that usually confront such student are why are they not able to pay school fee? Or get sponsor if indeed God called them to train for ministry? Is the institution fair and just charging fee that is difficult to pay? Are those called and selected for training supposed to pay fee? Is training not suppose to be free or highly subsidised? The issue of school fee in theological institution sometimes breed hatred and hostility among students and institution administrators. Some students sometime feel the institution does not have interest in their wellbeing; the institution is only interested in them paying their school fee. This feeling sometimes made some to develop apathy and non-challant attitude to the institution during and even after training or after successful completion of their study.

The problem of paying school fee also has moral, psychological, and spiritual effects on some students. In order to

meet up with the payment some usually go out of the way to compromise spiritual and academic standard. The quest to meet up with School fee payment sometimes affects the academic performance of some students; specifically students who have been performing above average academically suddenly drop to below average due to school fee disturbance. This problem of school fee has led some students to abandon their training, some absent themselves from school/class and from spiritual enriching programme in search of school fee; some other deferred their study due to pressure of not been able to pay school fee at the expected time. Some students go to the extent of going to borrow money from money lenders at exhorbitant interest rate. Worse still some go to non-christian charity organisation to request for financial help or loan for school fee payment. This action has strong implication for Christian apologetism.

Another problem associated with the issue of school fee payment is the sending out of school of students who failed to pay their school fees at the expected time. This action to some student is embarrassing, disgraceful, discouraging and shameful to them anytime they are asked to leave school and go home to their family and love ones to look for school fee. The action call to question their call to ministry and it also make them doubt their call to pastoral ministry. This action also bring to fore the issue of truthfulness and honesty on the part of some students. It is a known fact that some students for reasons known to them withheld fee meant to be paid to institution that admit them for training until drastic action is taken by the institution before payment is effected. It is also observed that some students given school fee divert it to other thing personal to them at the detriment of their training and institution administration. The reason for not paying fee promptly by some students even when the money is available to them is surprising; could it be said that those engaged in such act are ignorance of the importance of prompt payment of school fee in the administration of the instution that admit them? Or perhaps, they are showing themselves as unprofitable and unfaithful servant of the triune God. The statistic record of student school fee payment gotten from one of our theological colleges revealed that several students usually delay school fee payment till when drastic decision like asking student to vacate school facilities or premise before paying their school fee. Statistic of payment showed that the college did not attain above 50% school fee payment until the last month of the semester when institution administrators are constrained to take drastic action regarding fee payment (Tuition fee payment pattern, August, 2023-May, 2024).

Instution academic calender is also adversely affected when student who do not pay school fee promptly are asked to vacate school; scheduled classes /seminar presentation are cancelled or posponed or haphardzardly done because of student absence from class or school for non-payment of school fee. A class that is scheduled to meet for twelve weeks may end up meeting less than the number of weeks it is expected to meet. The lost hours or days are scarcely regained or make up within the semester duration.

Another problem inherent in school fee payment default is obstacle it constitutes to institution administrators. When money the institution expected to come into her coffer from students through payment of school fee does not come in as expected and promptly some basic administrative functions are adversely affected. Some of the administrative functions that may be affected are payment of staff salary, maintainance of institution infrastructure, vehicle maintainance, fueling of vehicles and power Generating plant, stationary purchase, and other needful administrative functions that require money. When fee payment is delayed by student administrative work is delayed; staff motivation to work is reduced, loyalty and commitment to work are affected too.

The challenge of school fee in theological institutions is impacting negatively on the motive for Christian ministry which is sacrificial love. Some are not ready to sacrifice as expected for God's work instead they are ready to work for money like hireling in order to recoup the money expended to train as certificated minister.

1.1.3. Some Administrative Remedy for School Fee Challenges

There is no problem emanating from human that solution cannot be found. Similarly, the problem of school fee payment in theological institutions in Africa especially Nigeria can be solved. Some administrative suggestions postulated are enumerated below:

- The administrator of each theological institution may devise means of getting letter of commitment to support or sponsor eligible candidate for theological training either fully or partially from churches or associations or organisation recommending such candidate for training. This letter of commitment to support or sponsor may also apply to individual such as parent or spouse or others who recommend the candidate for training. This suggestion will reduce drastically pressure on the candidate and it will also help the college keep track on student fee coming from sponsor from time to time.
- The administrator of each institution may intensify increase effort in sourcing for scholarship for more students from donor agency, religious institutions such as churches, schools, charity organisations, financial organisations as well as social organisations, families and societies [14]. This step will help reduce the number of students who may have problem with the issue of school fee payment from time to time. However, the onus is on the institution to draw parameter for student eligibility for available scholarship session per session or semester per semester [15].
- The administrator of each institution can create student revolving loan with little or zero interest for student with potential and certainty of repaying back the loan during and possibly after their training, having been called to pastorate within two years of training. This revolving loan will help to reduce the pain and disgrace of sending student out of school in search of school fee. The government already has this loan programme in place for students in secular higher institution of learning in Nigeria. It is not out of place for theological institutions in Africa to have such programme in place too.

- Another thing administrator of theological institutions can do in Africa is to create avenue for work for indigent students who may be having difficulty in paying school fee. Opportunity for work in the College may be made available for such students without any effect on their academic work. Some hours of service may be made available for such students in their skill area or in the area of service available in the college. The money for service rendered to the college will be commuted to their school fee payment thereby reducing the problem of not paying school fee as at when due. Moreover, the moral problem of sending student out of school for non-payment of school fee will be reduced drastically.

- Another solution to the problem of school fee in theological institution in Africa especially Nigeria is for theological institution leaders to lead their institution to continually pray for the government to act rightly by putting in place good political and economic policies that will promote the financial and social wellbeing of their citizens from time to time. Apart from prayer, they need to constantly counsel political and economic leaders of our nations to do what is right by revamping the country economic and financial fortune; and more importantly help to stem the continue fall of the naira value. The living condition in most African countries especially Nigeria is tough and harsh. The cost of education is high; likewise, transportation, housing, feeding and medical care. The harsh economic condition is what is affecting majority from fulfilling their obligations as at when due especially students in higher institution of learning.

- Theological institution administrator can also help to reduce the burden of school fee on student by improvising some of the resources needed for facilitating learning at zero or minimal cost. Volunteer facilitators who are willing to facilitate learning free can be recruited. Similarly, space and classroom closer to the learner at zero or minimal cost can be secured for the use of learners in order to reduce the cost of learning placed on the student. Moreover, institution administrator may introduce incentive such as rebate, commendation or recognition for student who pays their school fee promptly and correctly in order to motivate such student and to serve as encouragement for other.

- Therefore, there is need for theological institution to serve as conscience of the nation or as pressure group through her teaching, seminar, colloquium, discourse, and writing; by doing so pressure will be put on the government to govern the people justly and fairly; and to create avenue for economic and political stability wherein there will be work and business opportunities for all who are eligible to do. When the government put in place a humane and conducive atmosphere for all citizens the country will enjoy peace and progress; and there will be political, social and economic stability for everyone to thrive and excel in all area of human endeavour such as economy, finance, trade/commerce, industry, education, religion, sport, hospitality, tourism, etc.

2. Conclusion

There is no denying the fact that payment of school fee by student in theological institutions in Africa especially Nigeria has become socio-ethical issue that cannot be glossed over or ignored today. This work has carefully and systematically

explored the issue by detailing what the problem is, factors responsible for it, implications it has on theological administration and things theological administrators can do to ameliorate or stem the problem of school fee in theological institution. The suggestions given will help theological institution administrators to overcome the problem if the suggestions are acted upon without reservation of any kind. Some theological institutions that have started implementing some of the suggestions or remedy enumerated above are better than what they were in the past and they have positive news to share of their success.

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