

# Tertiary Education in Nigeria: the Issue of Overpopulation

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## Abstract:

Overpopulation is a major problem in the Nigerian educational system. This problem manifest itself, not only at the compulsory stages of the system- the primary and secondary schools, but also at the tertiary level, which is meant to provide academic excellence and specialization in various skills. The paper examined the issue of overpopulation in Nigerian tertiary education. In doing this it looked at the causes, effect and proffered some solutions. Some of the causes of overpopulation are high demand for education, inadequate number of tertiary schools, massive unemployment, brain drain. Some effect/problems of overpopulation are inadequate teaching-learning facilities, overcrowding, poor class management, indiscipline, poor standard of education, stress, unhealthy environment.

**Key words:** Overpopulation, Tertiary education, causes, problems.

## INTRODUCTION

Anyone going by any tertiary institution in Nigeria on a normal day would wonder what is happening in these schools. This is because there are usually a lot of students loitering the premises, sitting on pavements and under trees. Others can be seen peeking through windows trying to see or hear what is being taught in the classrooms and lecture theatres. From time-to-time students can be seen sprinting from one lecture hall to another. This is done to enable students get seats in the classrooms. This is caused by an increase in population of students without a corresponding increase in facilities. This scenario is not restricted to any particular school or part of the country. It can be seen in the length and breadth of the nation's public tertiary education.

## **TERTIARY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA**

Western education was first introduced into Nigeria in the 15<sup>th</sup> century by Portuguese traders. It was reintroduced by the missionaries in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. From this humble beginning, which started in the palaces of traditional leaders at the coast, the Nigerian education system has been established. This system is currently at 6 levels – the Early Child Care and Development Education (ECCDE), Pre-primary Education, Primary Education, Junior Secondary, Senior Secondary and Tertiary Education (FRN 2014).

Tertiary Education is the highest level of education in the Nigerian educational system. It is the education given after post basic education, which is the Senior Secondary School and its alternatives. Such education can be acquired in institutions such as universities, polytechnics, monotronics, colleges of education, colleges of agriculture, schools of health and technology, national teachers' institutes, institute of innovation enterprise and so on (FRN, 2014). Universities are the most popular and most attended of these institutions. They offer undergraduate which provide traditional four-year experiences for students. They are the only tertiary institutions that offer postgraduate degrees up to the master's and PhD levels. Polytechnics focus mainly on technical and vocational skills that enable students gain practical knowledge in fields like technology, engineering and applied sciences with students graduating with an Ordinary National Diploma (OND) or Higher National Diploma (HND), which has recently been made an equivalent of a university degree. Monotronics are equivalents of polytechnics that specialize in only one field of learning. Examples are Colleges of Agriculture, Health Sciences and so on. Colleges of Education are institutions whose main focus is training teachers who graduate with the Nigeria Certificate of Education (NCE). The focus of these institutions is to develop trained teachers for the country's Basic Education that goes from ECCDE to the Junior Secondary School (JSS).

Tertiary education in Nigeria has the following goals it is meant to achieve:

- a) Contribute to national development through high level manpower training
- b) Provide accessible and affordable quality learning opportunities in formal and informal education in response to the needs and interest of all Nigerians
- c) Provide high quality career counselling and lifelong learning programmes that prepare students with the knowledge and skills for self-reliance and the world of work
- d) Reduce skill shortages through the production of skilled manpower relevant to the needs of the labour market
- e) Promote and encourage scholarship, entrepreneurship and community service
- f) Forge and cement national unity
- g) Promote national and international understanding and interaction (FRN, 2014).

Tertiary education started in Nigeria with Yaba Higher College in 1934. This college, which still exists till date, became the nucleus of the first university, the University of Ibadan in 1948. The number of universities grew to 5 in 1970 with the University of Ibadan, University of Lagos, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, the Ahmadu Bello University and University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University) and with a population of One hundred and eight thousand, seven hundred and twenty students (Olatunji, 2018; Oranusi & Alaubi, 2004). These were all schools owned by the federal government. In 2024, the number of tertiary institutions has been increased to four hundred and eighty-nine (489) with 170 universities, 145 polytechnics and 174 colleges of education owned by the federal, state and private bodies. The population of students in these schools is about 2.5 million. Most of this population is in the public universities owned by the federal and state governments (Adekakun, 2021; Sasu, 2023; Asquare, 2024). These schools are autonomous to a

large extent. They have internal organisations and administrations that have the traditional areas of academic freedom which are to select their own students according to the prescribed laws; appoint, promote and discipline their own staff; teach and select areas of research; and determine the content of courses in line with minimum standards stipulated by regulatory agencies (FRN, 2014).

The Nigerian tertiary school system was a story of excellence at its onset as the best brains from all over the country were attracted to its campuses. In the 1960s the Saudi Royal family were patients at the University of Ibadan, a feat that no school in Nigeria can currently boast of. This is because the schools have been faced with a lot of issues over the decades. Some of these are Overpopulation, Limited/Inadequate Resources, Shortage of Teachers, Reduced Funding, Crumbling facilities, Political Instability, Corruption, Unstable Academic Calendar, Insecurity, Brain-drain, Weak Leadership and Poor Staff development, and so on (Ogunode & Musa, 2020; Republica, 2023). In this paper, however, the focus is the issue of overpopulation in these institutions

## **OVERPOPULATION**

To have a good understanding of the concept of overpopulation, it is important to have a knowledge of what population is. Population is the total number of a specie that inhabits a particular locality. In dealing with human beings, we can say the population is the total number of people that inhabit or live in a particular place. Thus, we can say the population of Nigeria, the population of Rivers State, the population of Port Harcourt. The population of a place can be small or large. However, the decision whether the population of a place is small or large is relative. This is because it is done in comparison to the resources of that particular place. A million people could live in a place and it will be said that the population of the place is small because they occupy a big landmass and have a lot of other resources that can sustain their existence. On the other hand, 50 people could live at a place and it would be said that the population is large because they occupy a small landmass and do not have enough food and other resources to sustain their existence. When this occurs, we say there is overpopulation.

Overpopulation is a situation in which the number of individuals of a given species exceed the number that its environment can sustain. It is a population that exceeds its sustainable size within a particular environment or habitat. This is a condition of having a population that is so dense that the available resources are not sufficient for them. Over population can happen to all living things, whether animals or plants. In animals generally, overpopulation can be caused by increased birth, reduced death rates, sudden decline in available resources and fewer predators which causes an imbalance in the ecosystem (BD Editors, 2019; Rafferty, 2024). Overpopulation affects the environment in various ways. Some of these are a decline in the quality of life, environmental deterioration, strain on resources and the ecosystem and population crash (Rafferty, 2024).

## **OVERPOPULATION IN NIGERIAN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS**

The population of the country is numerically large. With an estimated population of Two hundred and twenty-nine million people, two hundred and five thousand, three hundred and thirty-three (229, 205,333) as of 8<sup>th</sup> July, 2024 (UNFPA Nigeria, 2024; Worldmeter, 2024; Macrotrends, 2024). Nigeria is the most populous and densely populated country in Africa and the 6<sup>th</sup> most populated country in the world. Naturally, therefore, the size of the population translates itself into the school system. Thus, Nigeria's population is reflected in its tertiary institutions like is also the situation in all the other levels (Macrotrends, 2024). There is overpopulation in Nigeria's tertiary education. This can be seen in the complaints of shortage of facilities which is the constant cry by students, staff and school administrators. According to Olusola et al (2017), every year universities exceed their admission quota. Oguzvic (2022) says Nigerian tertiary institutions definitely have issues of overpopulation as the schools keep admitting more students than the resources, facilities and

personnel available to train these students. He says lecture halls are filled to the brim with students standing and sitting on the floor, while rooms meant for 4 students house as many as 24 students, with some living in open classrooms and others sleeping in open fields.



**Fig.1: Students' mattresses and belongings in a lecture hall of a university**



**Fig 2: Overpopulated Lecture halls in Nigeria's universities ([www.nairaland.com](http://www.nairaland.com))**

There are many causes of overpopulation in Nigerian Tertiary institutions. Some of these problems are caused by the government, others by the schools and still others by problems in the society. Some of these causes are discussed here:

There is a high demand for formal education in the Nigerian school system. There would not have been an issue of overpopulation in Nigerian tertiary education if the population was content with

looking for work or just content with looking for food to eat. If this were the case, then the country could have a large population but the school system would not suffer overpopulation, but this is not the case. There is a very high demand for formal education in Nigeria, especially in southern and central Nigeria. In these parts of the country tertiary education is seen as a must-have for the people. It is a thing of pride and those who do not go beyond secondary education are not regarded as being educated (IseOlorunkanmi et al, 2021; The Guardian, 2005). The high demand for higher education can be seen in the large number of candidates who register for the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) conducted by the Joint Admissions and Matriculations Board (JAMB) to fill few available spaces in the universities (JAMB, 2022; My School Gist, 2024).

**Table 1: Number of UTME candidates for 4 years**

| S/N | YEAR | CANDIDATES |
|-----|------|------------|
| 1   | 2021 | 1,134,424  |
| 2   | 2022 | 1,730,947  |
| 3   | 2023 | 1,595,779  |
| 4   | 2024 | 1,985,642  |

The high demand for higher education in Nigeria has been on for a long time. It was such demand that resulted in the 1948 establishment of the University College, Ibadan, which metamorphosed into a full-fledged university in 1962. This demand for higher education quickly outstripped the number which could be admitted and led to agitation for more universities. By 1970 there were 5 universities in the country and 11 by 1975. There are presently 489 tertiary institutions but when compared to the population of the country, this is grossly inadequate. Britain with a population of 67,961,439 had 295 of such school as of 2021 (Statista, 2022) and the United States of America with 341,814,420 has 4,000 institutions of higher learning (Macrotrends, 2024; PostGrad, 2024). The demand for education is high and will continue to be high because over sixty percent (60%) of the nearly 230 million population are within the active school age of 24 years and below (Macrotrends, 2024).

In Nigeria, the demand for higher education does not occur among young people who are hoping to get jobs or acquire advanced skills, but is also among people in their 50s and 60s who did not have the opportunity to attend such schools. Now such people have the opportunity through the establishment of mature students' programmes that give them some concession/waiver and part time programmes that allow them to attend classes after work. The demand for higher education in Nigeria is high (Okoli et al, 2016).

There are inadequate number of tertiary schools to cater for the high demand for tertiary education. The number of tertiary schools available in the country is not equal to the demand for such schools or the number admitted into the existing schools. From 2016-2020, only 26% of the 10 million candidates that wrote the university matriculation examination had placement in schools. The teeming population pressures the few available schools to offer more admission spaces than the schools are capable of. A place like Rivers State, Nigeria, for instance with a population of over Seven million, eight hundred and seventeen thousand, eight hundred and sixty-six (7,817,866) people as of 2023 has only 8 tertiary institutions to feed the thirst for education of its majority youth population ([www.citypopulation.de](http://www.citypopulation.de); Nigerian Investment Promotion Council, 2024), and only 3 of these are public degree awarding institutions that are affordable. This results in overpopulation because to meet the needs of its higher education hungry youth population, the schools are pressured to offer admission to more students than their facilities can sustain (The Guardian, 2004; The Guardian, 2005).

Examination malpractice is another cause of overpopulation in tertiary institutions in the Nigerian school system. Examination malpractice is the deliberate, fraudulent, improper and illegal conduct

that violates the rules and regulations of examinations. This is a deliberate wrong doing that is contrary to the rules of examinations which gives a candidate an unfair advantage. Some acts that can be referred to as examination malpractice are examination paper leakage, plagiarism, intimidation of colleagues and invigilators, collusion of candidates, impersonation, copying, giraffing, and so on (Wangare & Sinwa, 2023; Tambuwal, 2013; Tell Magazine, 2005). Examination malpractice can be carried out by the students, teachers, examiners and parents. This is a big problem in the Nigerian educational system. This is one of the causes of overpopulation in Nigerian higher education.

Higher institutions are supposed to be centres of excellence and so only those secondary school leavers that are academically able should qualify to be admitted into them, but this is not always the case in Nigeria. Widespread examination malpractice, which has plagued the West African Examination Council (WAEC) and the National Examination Council (NECO) examinations over the years has created a situation in which a lot of secondary school leavers who are otherwise not qualified to gain admission into higher institutions because they, somehow, find themselves with the necessary qualifications to go in and help overpopulate the schools. Also, a lot of students get into institutions of higher learning with fake certificates and admission letters. This has added to the overpopulation of these institutions.

There are a lot of unserious students in Nigerian higher institutions. These are regarded as unserious because they turn up only on examination days without attending classes, carrying out any academic related activities, doing assignments, tests, and so on. Such students turn up for examinations for courses they know nothing about and end up failing such examination. The effect of this is that they add up to the number of students that take the same course the next year because they have to repeat such courses.

Unemployment is also a cause of overpopulation in higher institutions in Nigeria. There is high unemployment in Nigeria, and this is worse with young people (Sodipo, 2014). A national statistic of unemployment taken from 1993-1998 by the Federal Office of Statistics in 1999 shows that 55% of the unemployed were young school leavers between the ages of 15-24. This was so in a national unemployment rate of 3.2% (Okala, 2005). The lack of jobs for these young people forces them into higher education with the hope of better chances after graduation (Sunday Sun, 2005). This is one of the causes of overpopulation in institutions of higher learning. The unemployment level force creates a situation whereby people have to compete to get the few available jobs. This results in a situation whereby to have an advantage over other people going in for jobs, one needs to have a qualification that is higher than what is required. To have this edge over others people keep going further on the educational ladder until they reach their peak. This leads to overpopulation of the tertiary level of education. If there was no problem of unemployment, people could opt for jobs instead of continuing with school after the secondary level of education, as is the situation with a lot of countries with low unemployment (Akello, 2024).

The fallen standard of education in Nigeria is another cause of overpopulation in institutions of higher learning. During the colonial era there were no institutions of higher learning in the country. The people who attained this level were few and they had to go outside the country to do so. Despite this, however, those who got their education at the primary and secondary levels had the skills that were necessary to function properly in the various where they found themselves. This is not the case in present day Nigeria. A lot of secondary school leavers cannot spell their names properly or speak a correct sentence of English language, which for most of them is their first and only language of communication. If this is the case in the language of communication, they speak everyday then it can be better imagined what knowledge of writing and other skills they are supposed to have learnt from school. Because the quality of a lot of students that come out of the secondary school is so bad, and in most cases unemployable, because of their lack of the most basic

skills, employers of labour demand for graduates even for the most basic clerical and secretarial duties, thereby forcing a lot of people to seek higher education and populating these schools (Tell, 2005; Sunday Sun, 2005).

Brain Drain is a cause of overpopulation in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Brain drain is very much attributed to movement of professional to other countries for better economic opportunities as is seen with the 'Japa' syndrome in Nigeria. However, brain drain goes beyond that. Brain drain is the substantial movement of talented professional out of a county, region or industry for economic opportunities, political stability, social security and freedom from persecution based on their beliefs, gender and sexuality (Young, 2024). There are 3 types of Brain drain. They are geographical, organisational and industrial. Geographical brain drain deals with movement of talented professional to another country or region of the same country. This happens in Nigeria when professionals move to other countries like is happening presently in Nigeria. This is happening because of the crash in the purchasing power of the Naira, which is Nigeria's currency. In 2011, the salary of a Senior Lecturer at N450,000 was equivalent to Three thousand dollars (\$3000) per month, but in 2024, the same amount is equivalent of Three hundred (\$300). Industrial brain drain is the movement of a lot of people out of a particular industry into another. The constant strikes in the Nigerian tertiary school system has caused this for academics. A lot of people have left academics for the Tech industry which is blossoming in the Nigerian environment. Organisational brain drain is also taking place as professionals are leaving public jobs for private practice in the same fields. These various and constant bleedings of the brains of professional in the country's tertiary educational institutions is leaving these schools with too many students and very few teachers. Brain drain is sometimes caused by frustrations about the poor environment in which lecturers work which does have the necessary facilities to engage students in the activities needed to develop the right skills (IseOhorunkanmi, 2021).

## **PROBLEMS OF OVERPOPULATION IN NIGERIAN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS**

Overpopulation affects the Nigerian tertiary institutions in various ways. Some of these are as follows:

Inadequate teaching and learning facilities is one of the major problems of overpopulation in tertiary institution of Nigeria. The large number of students result in a situation whereby teaching and learning facilities are not enough to cater for the number of learners. This includes Classrooms, Libraries, Workshops, Laboratories, Studio, Gymnasiums, Museums, Equipment, Materials, Water, and so on. This problem cuts across virtually all aspects and departments of tertiary institutions (Daminabo, 2020; Moji & Adeuga, 2020). Facilities are, sometimes, so stretched that they become inadequate and irrelevant. Facilities that are functioning become irrelevant because the students are so many that they teacher knows it is not possible for all the students to use them.



Shortage of water is a problem of overpopulation in a Nigerian university (www.guardian.ng.com)

Shortage of Classrooms is one of the effects of overpopulation in the Nigerian tertiary education system. The classroom is a place to promote teaching and learning under the guidance of a teacher. It is any place where teaching and learning takes place. It is the basic unit of the school system and is seen as the power house of formal education in which the success or failure of the educational system is generated and sustained. This is because all the lofty plans of the country's educational system are determined by what goes on in the classroom. This is the place where the learners for whom the educational system is planned and who have to participate in order to ensure the achievement or otherwise of the plans and the teacher who implements the plans, interact with the resources that have been planned for the achievement of the desired objectives or behaviour. Whether called classrooms or lecture halls/theatres, there are sometimes shortages, especially when there are more courses and departments created or established than the classes were originally meant for. When this happens teaching and learning in tertiary schools occur in spaces that were never intended for instructional purposes like lecturers' offices, storage areas, auditoriums and gymnasiums (Sneider, 2002). There are situations in which lecturers share the same classroom for two different courses or levels of students. In one of the universities in Rivers State, classrooms have been so short that the schools' auditorium has been used at the same time by five different lecturers.

Overcrowding is another impact of overpopulation in tertiary institutions in the Nigerian educational system. Overcrowding is a situation in which a place contains more people that is permissible, comfortable and safe. In the school system overcrowding refers to a situation in which the number of students enrolled in the learning environment is larger than the number of students it is designed or intended to accommodate. A place is said to be overcrowded when it exceeds 5% of the capacity of the space. Thus, if a class of students is meant to house 40 students and it has more than 5% of it which is 42 students, then that place is overcrowded. Overcrowding results in greater noise and distraction, less personalized instruction, increased disruptive behaviour and conflict among students, increased risk of illnesses, increased disciplinary problems (Walden University, 2024).

Overcrowding is a major problem of tertiary education in Nigeria as a result of overpopulation in this level of the educational system. There are many situations in which people are packed together and so cannot move freely in the classrooms. This occurs in classroom as well as during examinations. Classroom overcrowding, according to Meador (2019) has become a new normal. Learning environments, whether classrooms, laboratories, and examination halls get so crowded that students cannot sit or write comfortably. Lecture halls are filled to the brim with students sitting on the ground, standing and peeking through the windows.



Fig 3: Overpopulated Nigerian university classrooms (www.nairaland.com; www.researchgate.net)

Hostel rooms that were originally meant for two students are stretched to cater for about 10-12 students. This is the official number. The unofficial number is usually double or even triple this number as each bonafide student has someone he shares his bedspace with. In some situations, the population is so much that students sleep in classrooms as shown in the personal belongings of students in a lecture hall in the pictures below (Oguzvic, 2022; Wangare & Sinwa, 2023; Republica, 2023; Lynch, 2021; Schneider, 2002).



Fig.4: Students' personal belongings in a lecture hall of a tertiary institution in Nigeria

Lack of effective supervision of various activities in the school system is a problem of tertiary institutions in Nigeria. When there are too many people in a learning environment, like is the situation with overpopulated environments, there is usually a problem of supervision. This is the case with class activities, as well as during examinations (Walden University, 2024). In such situations the classrooms get so packed with learners that teachers cannot go round the class to see what learners are writing or doing. This is a big problem, especially in practical classes. This is because in learning practical skills close and individual supervision is required to ensure that students are learning the proper skills and the right way of applying these skills. For instance, in a typing class the teacher needs to go round to individual learners to ensure that they are sitting properly, have the right fingers on the proper keys as beginners, and so on.

Overpopulation results in poor classroom management. Classroom management is the planning, arranging and directing of the activities of variables in the classroom in order to achieve the objectives of the class in the school. The variables include the human and non-human resources. If the classroom is not properly managed and rid of such problems there is chaos and students resort to some behavioural problems such as absenteeism, noise making, inattentiveness, fighting, truancy, aggressiveness (verbal and non-verbal), non-compliance, failure to do one's class work and assignment and glorying in fragrant disobedience of the teacher. Thus, it is the ability of the teacher to check and prevent disruptive behaviour in the classroom. In ensuring classroom management the teachers see that he maintains all the roles of effective teaching, class participation, reinforcement and discipline (Omieibi-Davids, 2019).

Teachers teaching very large group of students are sometimes overwhelmed by the size of the class. A teacher may want to employ all the qualities of an effective teacher that he knows but when he tries to implement them, he is impeded by the large number of students. He might want to go round the classroom when he is teaching so that he can keep an eye on what the students are doing but in an overcrowded classroom where every available space is taken up by students this might not be

possible. A teacher might want to use an instructional material to teach his lesson but he, sometimes, cannot find one that is big enough to cater for his one thousand and more students, especially in the absence of projectors that would help him magnify visuals. A class with too many students is also difficult to control. Students, especially those seated at the back of the class, use the opportunity of the large crowd to make noise, insult teachers and carry out other anti-social behaviour. In a recent class witnessed in one of the southern universities, the first-year undergraduate students went into a fight over a seat.

Poor classroom management occasioned by overpopulation results easily in indiscipline among learners (Walden University, 2024; Meador, 2019). When there are too many people in a place it usually becomes more difficult to manage than when there are just a handful of people. This is so because people take advantage of the fact that it is difficult to pinpoint an offender in a large crowd. Also, when a place is overpopulated it brings about problems for the teacher and learner. These problems affect learning adversely and students react by being disruptive. When students stand through an entire lesson of 2-3 hours, they soon become tired and start dragging their feet on the ground, indicating they want the teacher to end the lesson. They also become noisy and rude when they cannot hear the teacher clearly or see what he writes on the board. It is common place in such environments to hear students shouting to the teacher to speak louder from the back of the class.

Overpopulation in the learning environment causes a lot of stress for teachers and students in tertiary institution in Nigeria. Stress is a state of worry or mental tension caused by a difficult situation. It is the natural reaction the body has when challenges occur. It is a phenomenon in which an individual tries to cope with pressure that is beyond his capacity. It occurs when people exceed their capacity to cope with prevailing issues. It is the natural human response that prompts us to address challenges and threats to our lives. Stress has a lot of impact on individuals. These problems can be physical, psychological or behavioural. Everyone has stress from time to time and to some degree, but the way an individual responds or reacts to it makes a big difference to their mental and physical well-being. The body's response to stress can be body pains of all kind, headaches, exhaustion and amnesia, anxiety, depression, sadness, substance abuse, and so on. This affects, also the response of teachers and students to their academic activities (Scott and Susman, 2024; World Health Organisation, 2023; Cleveland Clinic, 2024; Omieibi-Davids, 2005).

Teaching, generally, involves stress for the teacher because of the many functions he has to perform. This is, however, made worse when the problem of overpopulation is added to it. Teachers do not have to cope with a large number of students with the accompanying difficulties, they also have to deal with shortage of learning facilities. The effect of this on the classroom teacher is that he is always tired of do too much work; he gets ill easily and quite often, as a result of too many hours and no rest; he is also often frustrated because he cannot get the resources to teach his large class effectively, and he feels his students he is putting in so much work for do not appreciate his efforts as shown by the often unruly behaviour of large groups. A study on stress carried out by this researcher a few years ago showed that 90% of the teacher respondents blamed large class as a major source of stress on them (Meador, 2019; Omieibi-Davids, 2005).

Overpopulation causes poor unhealthy environment (Schneider, 2002; Walden University, 2024). Overpopulation causes facilities in the environment to be stretched beyond the maximum capacity they are made to take care of. This situation is made more complicated in institutions of higher learning because they incorporate boarding facilities. Too many students standing in a learning space that is not enough to contain them is bound to cause air-borne diseases because they breathe in each other's breathe. It also results in transfer of skin diseases because of close physical contact they have with each other. It is difficult to keep an environment with too many people clean especially when there are shortages of toilet facilities, water, and so on. The dirty bathrooms and toilets that result from shortage and too many people using these facilities makes students look for

alternative facilities to use to release themselves. The alternatives they provide for themselves sometimes come from using pavements and parking spaces as bathrooms and the surrounding gardens and bushes as toilets. Also, adequate places of convenience are not provided around classrooms, the environment is used. The effect of this is an environment that is filthy with human waste. This causes all kinds of diseases for the inhabitants of these schools.

Overpopulation in the learning environment brings about problems of effective evaluation. Effective evaluation is using the right evaluation instruments and having them achieve the right results. Evaluation is the process of obtaining data or information about the programme for the purpose of determining the success or otherwise, in order to make decision about whether to maintain the features of the programme or suggest a more effective alternative. Having evaluation problems mean that the right values cannot be ascribed to the learners' performance in various activities. There are many types of instruments that used to collect data and information. Whether the information we get is appropriate and useful depends on using the right instruments. When evaluation is not effective, students do not get the right marks for work done. The marks given by the teacher could be far less than what is deserved or more. Whichever of this is the situation, it is detrimental to the educational system and the students themselves. It is difficult grading assignments, tests and examinations when the class population is very large. The common evaluation problems that occur as a result of overpopulation are wrong evaluation techniques, inability to return students' continuous assessment scripts and examination malpractice Bolaji, 2023; Omieibi-Davids, 2024).

Use of wrong evaluation techniques or instruments is one of the problems of overpopulation in the tertiary schools. There is the tendency for teachers to use techniques that are not appropriate to the type of lesson or content. For instance, a shortage of equipment in an Auto Mechanics class could make a teacher ask students to discuss the problems of a jerking car rather than asking them to fix the jerking problems as should be the case in a course like this. This the teacher might ask the students to do because there are not enough cars or there are too many students and not enough time and examiners to supervise the examination.

The large number of students in tertiary education classes creates a situation whereby teachers find it difficult to return marked assignment or test scripts to the students. Returning tests or assignment scripts to students is important because it gives feedback of their performance. This occurs because the teachers do not finish marking such scripts by the time examinations crop up. This affects the teaching/learning situation a great deal. When teachers mark students' answer scripts, they usually make comments in the scripts. These could be spelling corrections, grammatical errors, wrongly explained points and examples, and so on. These help the students' learning a great deal when the scripts are returned to them. It helps them to understand their weaknesses and strengths, especially when they are not sure they have done the right thing. It helps them to know what is important in a lesson and what is expected from the teacher. The same is applicable in the supervision of practical courses. The large number of students in tertiary institutions, especially in general courses, makes it impossible for teachers to return scripts or give feedback of their students' performance. This is bad because students go on to examinations, and later to practicing their various professions to make the same mistakes that could have been corrected at the onset if they had seen their mistakes in returned continuous assessment scripts. This inability to return students' scripts leads to a situation whereby students believe that teachers do not mark their test and examination scripts but rather award marks arbitrarily.

Examination malpractice, which is a cause of overpopulation is also an effect of overpopulation. Overpopulation in a learning environment encourages examination malpractice. When there is overpopulation and overcrowding too many students are cramped into a particular hall because the schools do not have sufficient space for students to be spaced out for effective examination

conditions. There is the tendency that teachers set objective questions rather than essay questions where they are expected to express themselves and make arguments. It is easier to curb examination malpractice when questions are in essay form rather than objective or subjective questions. With objective, single answers or picking from alternatives is involved. Such answers are much easier to copy from the next person's paper than essays that require lengthy answers. It is also easy for students to involve themselves in other forms of examination malpractice such as whispering, passing around papers, and so on.

Shortage of hostel accommodation is one of the effects of overpopulation in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Accommodation, which is a basic need, is a pressing asset in tertiary institutions. Hostel accommodation, also known as university housing, halls of residence, students' housing or dormitory, is a place where students reside on school campuses while pursuing formal education away from home. These are necessary and important to students because tertiary institutions are not neighbourhood schools that students can stroll into. In a lot of situations students attend schools that are hundreds of kilometres away from home in places where they do not have any families or friends at the age of 16 to 20 years. These hostels provide affordable housing in socially conducive environments where they are ensured a good level of security, relatively constant supply of electricity and water by the university authorities (Appiah, 2016; Iftikhar and Ajmal, 2015; Utile, 2024). Apart from providing a place on campus for students from all over the country, it helps to expand their social circle and helps them learn to live with different types of people and increase their tolerance level of other people. In addition to this, reports from research shows that students who stay in campus hostels are more likely to achieve higher grade points than their counterparts who do not because they are spared the rigours of domestic work, farm work and errands that they would have been exposed to at home as young people (Kolawole and Boluwatife, 2016).

Overpopulation in the school system denies a lot of these young people of these benefits of the school system. When hostels are overpopulated, they become noisy overcrowded environments that lead to frequent frustration, conflicts, antagonism and open confrontations among roommates over the use of available facilities such as reading tables, electrical sockets, and so on (Utile, 2024). This is currently the picture in most public institutions of higher learning in Nigeria. Nigeria's premier and arguably best ranking university over several years, the University of Ibadan, has hostel accommodation for only 30% of its 41,000 students (Study Portal, 2023; Satis, 2024)). This is among the best the country as the situation is worse for other schools. As of 2020, the University of Abuja, which is located in the nation's capital, and the University of Calabar only provide three percent (3%) housing for their thirty thousand (30,000) and fifty thousand (50,000) students respectively. While the University of Abuja has One thousand (1000) bedspaces for 30,000 students, the University of Calabar has Two thousand (2000) bedspaces for its 50,000 students from all over the country and neighbouring countries (TETfund, 2020).



Fig 5: Hostel accommodation of a Nigerian university

Overpopulation is one of the factors that fuel the continued existence of cultism in Nigerian institutions of higher learning. Cultism is the membership and operation of a group whose activities are not open to the society and whose members do not behave in ways that are not acceptable. Since the introduction of the first known group by 7 undergraduate students of the University of Ibadan in 1952, there have been many more groups whose activities have become a menace in the Nigerian society, especially tertiary institutions. They are perceived as organized criminal groups that encourage the use of manipulation, control, intimidation and violence to attack targets who may be innocent citizens, perceived or real enemies, political opponents/rivals and established authority (Oyemwinmina and Aibieyi, 2015).

Overpopulation helps to encourage cultism in tertiary institutions in various ways. Students do not all usually have hostel accommodation in these schools. While students who are resident in the cities and towns which these schools are located can go for lectures from their houses, a lot of students attend school in places far away from home where they do not know anyone. The large number of students that do not have college accommodation put up with course mates, acquaintances, friends and sometimes, with total strangers, who are opportuned to have such. The effect of this is that students who are being put up by other students are usually influenced to support the activities of such persons and to imitate them, either due to peer pressure or a fear of losing such accommodation. In some cases, students join such cult activities with the belief that they can intimidate officers in charge of accommodation to allocate them much needed bed spaces. Another way in which overpopulation encourages cultism is by feeding on the tension that occurs as a result of the frustrations that are a natural part of misunderstandings and conflict in overcrowded spaces.

Overpopulation in the Nigerian tertiary school system makes the cost of education more expensive than it normally should be for a lot of students. This is particularly noticeable in the area of accommodation of students. Because the institutions of higher learning cannot give accommodation to all students, especially as the rapid increase in student population is not followed by a corresponding increase in the provision of facilities, students pay a lot of money to get accommodation in the vicinity of their schools or buy bed spaces from colleagues that are officially allotted bed space by the schools. Due to financial pressure or love of money, some students sell their officially allotted spaces to other students at incredible prices. In some institutions, the cost of a bed space is between N30,000 and N60,000 but students resell these spaces to as high as N80,000 and N120,000 to desperate students who are not lucky to have been officially allotted bed spaces.

The cumulative effect of all the problems of overpopulation is a poor standard of education/ poor academic performance. This is because it causes a situation where there are too many people and not enough teachers, classrooms, libraries, laboratories, instructional materials, and any other thing that makes teaching, learning and research possible. After spending several years in the tertiary institutions, the output is a group of people that do not have the basic skills that are supposed to have specialized in. Most of these graduates have to be retrained in those things they are supposed to have studied by employers before they are given positions of responsibility (Lynch, 2021; Osokoya, 1989). Students crowded in huge lecture halls without public address systems do not hear what the lecturer says so they fail; students who spend hours in the morning queuing up to get water for a bath are likely to miss the first lesson of each day; students who battle mosquito bites and heat throughout the night in an overcrowded room without a fan are likely to be too tired, sleepy and grumpy the next day to learn anything.

## **SOLUTIONS TO PROBLEMS OF OVERPOPULATION IN NIGERIAN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS**

The population increase in Nigeria's tertiary institutions can not be stopped because it reflects the increase in the population of the country. Overpopulation can, however, be controlled. This is

because overpopulation is not the presence of a large population but the inability for the available resources to sustain the population. Thus, in looking at the possible solutions to this problem, what is presented here is how to keep down the population of students in tertiary schools and how to ensure that there are resources for the learners. Some of the solutions are the following:

1. Placing less emphasis on paper qualification can reduce the drive for higher educational qualifications (Moji & Adeuga, 2020). The current overdrive for the possession of certificates is the demand of employers for these certificates even when they are not required for the job at hand. If the emphasis is reduced or totally removed and people are asked to practicalise skills they claim to have, people will look for ways of acquiring such skills without necessarily enrolling in institutions of higher learning.
2. Provision of employment opportunities would also curb the high demand for unnecessary higher education certificates. The reason many people enrol in higher education is to enhance their chances of employment in a society that seems to have more people than the jobs available. As long as this situation continues, institutions of higher education in Nigeria will be continuously packed full with people craving better employment opportunities than they have. There is also the need to encourage people to create jobs for themselves rather than looking for paid employment (Okala, 2005; Akello, 2024; Sodipo, 2014).
3. Government policies in admission and employment can prevent overpopulation in tertiary institutions. There are complaints of university administrators being compelled to admit more students than their schools can sustain. The hands of such administrators are tied because the funds that sustain the universities come from government coffers. The lifting of the embargo on employment into all tiers of government ensures that school leavers cannot gain employment even when their services are needed to fill in vacant positions, so they are all forced to enrol in higher education (Daminabo, 2020).
4. Provision of more facilities is the way to go in reducing overpopulation in our tertiary institutions. From our definition of overpopulation, we know that it is not the presence of a large student population that is referred to as overpopulation but the absence of the facilities required to sustain them. Thus, as more students are admitted, there should also be a commensurate increase in facilities to cope with the number. This should be done for classrooms, laboratories, libraries, hostels, and so on. Instead of waiting for the government to provide everything, the institutions can go into public-private partnerships to provide much needed resources, as is prescribed by the national policy on education (FRN, 2014). The Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, recently went into such partnership to provide 1,600 bedspace hostels for its students (TETFund, 2020; Daminabo, 2020; Moji & Adeuga).
5. Employment of more staff, which includes academic and non-academic staff, will tackle the issue of overpopulation. A situation where one lecturer teaches 3000 students in a class does not augur well for the educational system. This is more so when we take into consideration the fact that higher institutions are supposed to develop high level manpower that is intended to bring about the much-needed growth and development of the country. There is need for continuous employment to fill the vacancies created by retiring, resigning or migrating staff. There is also the need to increase the number continuously (Oyebade and Dike, 2024).
6. Brain drain can be stopped by regularly reviewing the emoluments of tertiary staff to ensure living wages which are comparable with professionals of their calibre in other sectors of the society, creating an enabling teaching-learning environment and strengthening research and development activities that would engage them meaningfully and enable them earn some extra money for their work. Brain drain is caused by the continuous refusal or failure of the government to keep its agreement with the unions (Famurewa, 2014)

7. Use of Innovative techniques/online learning is possible with the availability of improved and modern communication system and internet connectivity. Synchronous or asynchronous learning via Zoom, Skype or YouTube can be used for teaching general courses that do not have practical lessons (Daminabo, 2020).
8. Emphasis on vocational education as against the academic subjects only will reduce overpopulation in the tertiary school. This will create the situation whereby the population is shared evenly over several courses and departments. This is because while the arts, social sciences and general sciences are overpopulated, the vocational and technical education courses are usually grossly underpopulated. In statistics of schools and courses students register for the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) examinations for several years, it has been discovered that less than two percent (2%) of the candidates indicate Polytechnics that are the focus of vocational and technical skills (Olusola et al, 2017). This can be prevented by focusing on these areas and counselling of parents and students about their importance and employment opportunities.
9. Dividing large classes into smaller groups is a way to overcome overpopulation in tertiary schools. The implication is that a lecturer teaches more gives more time to teach the same content to different small groups. This takes more time than the lecturer is allocated to teach. The question is whether the lecturers are willing to put in the extra time and energy to do so.
10. Encouraging the public/private partnership clause in the national policy on education would go a long way to provide much needed facilities and funding in various areas. This could be individuals, the local community, Alumni bodies and private organisations (FRN, 2014). In situations whereby the institutions do not have the necessary person, they are required to pair with private artisans and factories to acquire the much-needed skills.
11. There should be a law requiring tertiary institution to spend a percentage of their internally generated income on continuously upgrading facilities in their schools. For instance, the money generated from hostel accommodations should be reinvested in providing more hostels and regularly maintaining the existing ones.

**CONCLUSION:** This paper has looked at the issue of overpopulation in institutions of higher learning in the Nigerian educational system. It started by discussing tertiary education which has the institutions of higher education, overpopulation, the causes and effect before looking at solutions that can be and are being proffered to solve the problem.

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