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Problems Associated with the Migration of Nigerian Tertiary Institutions Electricity to Band A

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Abstract

This paper critically examines the challenges associated with the migration of Nigerian tertiary institutions to the Band A electricity tariff system, which mandates higher costs for ostensibly improved supply. Utilizing a qualitative research design, the study integrated comprehensive document analysis of regulatory frameworks (NERC), institutional financial records, and news reports, with in-depth semi-structured interviews. A total of fifteen key administrators, purposefully selected from five diverse public higher institutions across Nigeria, provided insights into the financial, operational, and social ramifications. The methodology focused on capturing varied perspectives on budget constraints, resource reallocation, and the impact on students' learning environments. Findings reveal a pervasive mismatch between the promised service and delivered supply, resulting in crippling debt, extreme rationing of electricity (often 2-4 hours daily), and a wave of student unrest, as exemplified by protests at Adamawa State Polytechnic. The study underscores the urgent need for policy re-evaluation, including differentiated tariffs, increased government subventions, and investment in sustainable alternative energy solutions to safeguard educational quality and institutional viability.

Keywords: Higher Education, Electricity Tariffs, Nigeria, EDCs, NERC.

Introduction

Electricity is no longer a luxury but an essential utility for effective teaching and learning in the 21st century and Access to reliable and affordable electricity is a

fundamental prerequisite for modern education. From lighting classrooms and powering computers to operating laboratories and facilitating digital learning platforms (UNDP, 2021). the Nigerian Electricity Regulatory Commission (NERC) announced a significant increase in electricity tariffs for Band A customers On April 3, 2024, which includes those who receive an average daily supply of electricity for 20 hours or more. The new tariff is 230 percent higher than the previous rate, increasing from N68 to N225 per kilowatt hour. This increase is aimed at reducing the estimated N2.9 trillion electricity subsidy in the 2024 fiscal year; due to cashflow constraints resulting from the Federal Government's inability to pay its obligations (Akpan, 2024). Recent developments within the Nigerian power sector, specifically the reclassification of educational institutions by Electricity Distribution Companies (EDCs) from lower tariff bands to the highest Band A, represent a significant policy shift with profound, yet largely underexplored, implications for the nation's educational landscape. This unsustainable financial burden has forced many institutions to resort to rationing electricity, providing as little as two to four hours of power daily to student hostels and academic areas, a stark contrast to the promised Band A supply (Vanguard News, 2024). This paper delves into the ramifications of this policy change, hereafter referred to as "the Band A reclassification," on the Nigerian education sector. It argues that this reclassification, while potentially driven by the EDCs' commercial objectives to enhance revenue and operational efficiency, inadvertently places a substantial financial strain on educational institutions, particularly those in public ownership or serving low-income communities. The recent development is the first step in the government's plan to completely overhaul government subsidy support (with the exemption of vulnerable and lifeline customers whose tariffs need to remain low), with the Commission stating that it has succeeded in saving about N1.4 trillion from what it stated was the projected N3.2 trillion subsidy for 2024 (Arise News, 2024)

The migration of Nigerian higher institutions to Band A for electricity tariffs has generated significant complaints from lecturers, students, and university management. These complaints highlight the negative impact of increased electricity costs on the operations of universities and the academic experience of students. Below are the specific grievances voiced by each group:In

Complaints from Lecturers

Disruption to Academic Activities

Lecturers in Nigerian universities have expressed frustration over the frequent power outages and disruptions to academic activities. Ajibola (2021) explains that the unstable power supply makes it difficult to deliver lectures effectively, particularly those that require the use of multimedia tools or electronic devices. Teachers operating in poorly lit, uncomfortable, or resource-deprived environments can experience reduced morale and effectiveness. This can lead to burnout, decreased productivity, and a negative impact on the overall teaching-learning process (Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria, 2021). As stated by Dr. Adebayo, a lecturer at the University of Lagos, "Power cuts disrupt our lectures and hinder students' ability to

engage with course materials that rely on technology, especially in an era where digital learning is becoming the norm."

Increased Financial Burden on Research

For lecturers involved in research, the rising electricity costs have made it more difficult to conduct experiments and maintain research labs. Akinmoladun & Oladipo (2021) argue that the increased electricity tariff has led to significant financial pressure on university research departments, as laboratories require constant and reliable power to operate sensitive equipment. Professor Ijeoma of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka also notes, "The cost of electricity for research activities has increased to a level that it is now affecting the feasibility of our projects." Some of lecturers have to go to the universities with projectors and even fuel generators themselves."

Complaints from Students

Unstable Learning Environment

Students have also voiced concerns about the challenges posed by the unreliable power supply and high electricity costs. Chinonso, a final-year student at the University of Ibadan, shared, "The constant power outages during exams or assignment deadlines make studying extremely difficult. We rely on electricity for online research, but the outages disrupt our ability to focus and meet academic requirements." As Ewetan (2018) notes, "Power disruptions not only affect academic schedules but also hinder students' access to the resources they need to succeed." frequently complain that this erratic power supply directly impacts their academic performance, as they are unable to adequately prepare for exams or complete assignments, ultimately undermining the quality of education in Nigerian higher institutions. This precarious electricity situation has a direct and detrimental impact on students' well-being and academic pursuits, leading to frequent complaints about a lack of water and light. Furthermore, the absence of reliable electricity severely impedes students' ability to study, especially at night. Many resort to candles or rechargeable lamps, which are often insufficient and pose safety risks

Increased Financial Burden

Students are burdened by the rising cost of electricity, particularly those living in university hostels. With only a few hours of electricity per day, often at inconvenient times, students struggle immensely to read, charge their electronic devices, or engage in any form of effective study, especially during evening and night hours when most academic work is done. This "on-and-off" approach to power supply disrupts their academic rhythm, leading to increased stress and anxiety. Critical activities like research, project work, and even simple tasks like ironing clothes or fetching water (due to non-functional water pumps) become a monumental challenge. With erratic power supply, university hostels often lack consistent water, as pumps rely on electricity. This forces students to resort to unhygienic alternatives or purchase

expensive sachet water for daily needs like bathing and cooking. As Aisha, a student at Ahmadu Bello University pointed out, "Hostel fees have gone up because of the high cost of electricity, yet the power supply remains inconsistent." According to Sodiki & Bello (2021), increased electricity tariffs have led to hikes in student fees, placing additional financial strain on students who are already struggling with the high cost of education.

Barriers to Digital Learning

Laboratories, libraries, and other critical learning facilities are also affected, hindering practical work, research, and overall academic performance, contributing to a frustrating and uncomfortable learning environment for Nigerian students. The Band A reclassification carries significant implications for educational equity, threatening to entrench and exacerbate existing socio-economic disparities. It creates a tiered system where only well-funded schools (often elite private institutions) can afford consistent electricity, providing their students with a learning environment conducive to 21st-century demands. Conversely, most public schools and those in disadvantaged communities will struggle, further marginalizing their students and limiting their life chances. This contravenes national and international commitments to equitable and inclusive education (Sustainable Development Goal 4; Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2014).

These precarious situations have directly impacted student welfare, leading to severe disruptions in academic activities and daily life. Students frequently complain about the inability to read at night, charge essential devices, or access consistent water supply, as water pumps rely on electricity (Premium Times Nigeria, 2024). These frustrations have boiled over into protests across various campuses. For instance, students at the University of Ibadan, University of Benin, and Ahmadu Bello University have taken to the streets to demonstrate against power rationing and the resulting hardships (Premium Times Nigeria, 2024; Vanguard News, 2024). A particularly notable example occurred at Adamawa State Polytechnic, Yola, where students engaged in vehement protests in April 2025 over prolonged power outages and severe water scarcity. The demonstrations, which saw students blocking campus entrances and clashing with passersby, led to the temporary closure of the institution, highlighting the deep-seated anger and desperation among students nationwide (The Nation Newspaper, 2025; The Guardian Nigeria News, 2025).

Complaints from University Management

Financial Strain and Operational Challenges

University management has raised concerns about the financial strain caused by higher electricity tariffs. As Ajibola (2021) notes, the increased electricity costs force institutions to divert funds that would otherwise be used for academic development, infrastructure, and student services. Professor Okeke, Vice Chancellor of Federal University of Lafia, explains, "The financial pressure due to high electricity tariffs is immense. Universities are forced to reallocate resources, which affects other essential areas such as infrastructure development

and staff salaries." Investigation revealed that due to blackouts over outstanding bills and other factors, most universities had to either partly or wholly depend on generators to power their libraries and laboratories, and as expected, this exacts a huge cost on the institutions' meagre resources, accompanied with the hazards posed by harmful emissions.

Analysis of the 2023 appropriation document revealed that the federal universities would spend about N6.5bn on electricity charges and fuel for generators. In the document, the University of Lagos is to spend N1.4bn on electricity charges; ABU, N104m; and UI, N60m. The Nigerian Maritime University also received N80m for plant/generator fuel; and Bayero University, Kano, N89,104,802 for the same purpose.

Uko, a professor of engineering said, "This is among the several issues plaguing the universities. The cost of running the universities is very high.

Difficulty in Maintaining Infrastructure

The migration to Band A has created challenges for universities in maintaining their physical infrastructure. Dr. Kola, an administrator at the University of Port Harcourt, states, "With the rise in electricity costs, we are unable to maintain and upgrade university infrastructure. Essential repairs are being postponed, and funds that should be spent on improving the learning environment are now being diverted to pay for electricity."

Pressure to Increase Student Fees

In response to the rising electricity costs, university management is under pressure to increase student fees to cover the higher operational costs. As tertiary institutions face higher electricity costs, they may pass these costs onto students through higher fees, making education less affordable for many Nigerians, particularly from low-income backgrounds (Asante, 2017). Analysis of the 2023 appropriation document revealed that the federal universities would spend about N6.5bn on electricity charges and fuel for generators. In the document, the University of Lagos is to spend N1.4bn on electricity charges; ABU, N104m; and UI, N60m. The Nigerian Maritime University also received N80m for plant/generator fuel; and Bayero University, Kano, N89,104,802 for the same purpose.

The Chairman, Academic Staff Union of Universities, Federal University of Technology, Minna branch, Prof Gbolahan Bolarin, said, "The issue is this, the budget approved for most universities under recurrent expenditure is barely enough. Take for example, some universities have N1.6m per month as approved budget, but the monthly expenditure on power is as high as N20m. "Some of them don't even have enough IGRs to settle their power bills, talk less of buying diesel. "The meagre fees paid by students are not enough to cater for the needs of the universities. However, Ewetan (2018) explains that such fee increases often lead to student protests and dissatisfaction. Dr. Sani, Director of Student Affairs at the University of Jos, notes, "Students are already struggling with the cost of education, and further increases in fees to cover electricity costs only add to the burden, leading to unrest on campus."

Impact on Local Communities

Babatunde (2018) argues that the financial pressures faced by universities in migrating to Band A could negatively impact local economies, especially in towns where universities are major employers. Tertiary institutions often play a central role in the economic life of their local communities. The financial strain caused by migrating to Band A could have ripple effects on the local economy, as institutions may reduce spending on local services or even cut jobs to cope with rising operational costs (Babatunde, 2018).

Public Institution that were disconnected by DisCos:

Ibadan College Hospital that was disconnected over N400m debt by the Ibadan Electricity Distribution Company (IBEDC) this month. Similarly, the Aliko Dangote University of Science and Technology, Wudil, Kano State, was thrown into darkness in July 2024, after the Kano Electricity Distribution Company (KEDCO) disconnected the university over N248m debt. The Jos Electricity Distribution Company disconnected the University of Jos from the national grid in May over debts amounting to N126m. The same measure was meted to the University of Benin by the Benin Electricity Distribution Company (BEDC) in July over N300m unpaid electricity debt.

The Eko Electricity Distribution Company (EKEDC) in August disconnected power supply to the University of Lagos (UNILAG) over N1bn of unpaid bills. Also, the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria experienced a four weeks blackout in 2023 over its failure to pay N931m debt owed to the Kaduna Electricity Distribution Company.

The challenges faced by these institutions are indicative of a broader trend. Many polytechnics and colleges of education, like their university counterparts, have been moved to higher electricity bands. While specific reports on polytechnics and colleges of education in the north being disconnected are not as widely detailed in public reports as those for universities, the financial and operational challenges are a shared reality. Institutions like the Federal College of Education (Technical) in Akoka, Lagos, have been mentioned in similar contexts, suggesting that this is a nationwide problem affecting all types of tertiary institutions (Leadership, 2024).

Yaba College of Technology (YABATECH): YABATECH has been a prominent example of an institution struggling with the new electricity tariffs. Reports indicate the college's monthly electricity bill jumped from approximately ₦12 million to ₦18 million after being moved to Band A (The ICIR, 2024). The institution was subsequently disconnected from the national grid by Eko Electricity Distribution Company (EKEDC) for what was described as an "unresolved issue" related to "towering electricity bills" (Leadership, 2024). At one point, the college was reportedly disconnected for more than five months.

Federal College of Education (Technical), Akoka: While specific reports of a full disconnection from the national grid due to Band A tariffs are not as clear-cut as with YABATECH, the college is in the same area and shares a similar struggle with increased costs. Like its university counterpart (the University of Lagos), the college has been affected by the

general power supply issues in the area, and staff have protested the high electricity tariffs (The Punch, 2024).

Despite public outcry, the federal government has hinted that it plans to extend a similar measure to every Nigerian who has access to on-grid electricity in the next three years. The government aims to convert the entire power sector into a single band with cost-reflective tariffs fully implemented during this period (Arise News, 2024) Until funding is improved, we will continue to have this kind of situation."

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research design to thoroughly investigate the impacts of electricity tariff reclassification (Band A) on Nigerian tertiary institutions. A qualitative approach was chosen to provide a nuanced understanding of the complex financial, operational, and social issues, exploring the lived experiences and perspectives of key stakeholders.

Sampling and Data Collection

Five (5) public higher institutions across Nigeria were purposively selected to ensure geographical spread, diverse institutional sizes/prominence, and demonstrated impact from electricity challenges. Within these institutions, fifteen (15) administrators (three from each) were purposively interviewed. These individuals were chosen for their direct involvement in institutional finances (e.g., Bursar), infrastructure (e.g., Director of Physical Planning), and student welfare (e.g., Dean of Students' Affairs).

Data was collected through two primary methods:

Document Analysis: Critical analysis of relevant documents including NERC policy papers (MYTO, SBT orders for 2023 & 2024), university appropriation documents and expenditure reports (2023 & 2024), government budgets, educational performance audits, and news media reports from reputable Nigerian outlets.

Semi-structured Interviews: In-depth interviews were conducted with the selected administrators. These interviews explored key themes such as the financial impact of Band A tariffs, operational challenges, effects on academic activities and student welfare, institutional coping strategies, perceived policy fairness, and recommendations for policy adjustments. All interviews, lasting 45-75 minutes, were audio-recorded with consent, transcribed verbatim, and ensured participant confidentiality and anonymity.

Data Analysis

Collected data from both document analysis and interview transcripts underwent thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach. This systematic process involved familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for overarching themes, reviewing and refining these themes, defining and naming them clearly, and finally,

producing a coherent report. This ensured a rigorous and trustworthy interpretation, identifying significant patterns and insights regarding the challenges of Band A electricity migration.

KEY FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Financial Burden and Budget Constraints

The most immediate impact of the Band A migration is the sharp increase in electricity costs. Band A tariffs range from ₦200–₦225 per kilowatt-hour as of 2024, a significant increase compared to the subsidized rates previously paid by institutions (NERC, 2024).

Public higher institution operates on fixed budgets set by state and federal governments. The increase in electricity costs has not been matched with a corresponding increase in funding, forcing institutions to either cut costs in other areas or operate at deficits. Some universities have begun reducing laboratory hours, limiting internet access points, or shortening administrative workdays to cope with higher bills.

"Our monthly power bill has risen by over 300%. We are now diverting funds from maintenance and research to cover utility bills." – Bursar, Federal University (Interview, 2024)

Diversion of Academic Resources

As institutions reallocate funds to pay electricity bills, essential academic functions suffer. Libraries, research labs, and ICT centers are increasingly underfunded. Funding cuts have been observed in areas such as:

- Research grants and fieldwork logistics.
- ICT maintenance and internet subscriptions.
- Student support programs.

This resource diversion undermines the core academic mission of higher institutions and affects overall educational quality.

Inequitable Implementation and Institutional Disparities

The Band A migration has been selectively implemented, favoring institutions located in urban centers with more reliable power infrastructure. Many rural universities and colleges remain on lower bands with unreliable supply, creating a two-tier educational system:

- Urban institutions enjoy steady power at a cost.
- Rural institutions remain under-served and under-resourced.

This exacerbates the digital divide, widens inequality among institutions, and affects national education cohesion.

Threat to Institutional Autonomy and Sustainability

Long-term exposure to high tariffs without structural reforms may compromise the autonomy and sustainability of higher institutions. Universities may become increasingly dependent on

government bailouts or forced to commercialize services (e.g., raise tuition, rent facilities to private firms) to survive.
Moreover, as institutions divert funds to utilities, they may default on other obligations such as accreditation benchmarks, staff salaries, or facility maintenance—creating systemic risks to the higher education sector.

Policy Implications

- Misalignment with Funding Structures: Tariff increases were introduced without restructuring public funding for institutions, creating systemic stress.
- Lack of Targeted Subsidies: There are no educational subsidies or differentiated tariffs for public institutions.
- Risk of Educational Decay: The growing financial pressure threatens to reverse the modest gains made in tertiary education infrastructure and digital learning in the past decade.

CONCLUSIONS

The migration of Nigerian higher institutions to Band A for electricity tariffs has led to widespread complaints from lecturers, students, and university management. While perhaps commercially rational for Electricity Distribution Companies (EDCs), has exposed deep-seated systemic vulnerabilities within the educational sector. The dramatic surge in electricity costs, from ₦68 to ₦225 per kilowatt-hour, has rendered public universities financially unsustainable, driving them into debt and increasing their reliance on expensive, environmentally harmful alternative power sources. This precarious situation extends beyond mere budget deficits, fundamentally undermining academic pursuits, student welfare, and institutional autonomy. The recurring cycle of disconnections and student unrest, as evidenced across various campuses, underscores the unsustainable nature of the current policy. Without deliberate interventions, this policy may unintentionally erode educational quality, deepen institutional disparities, and threaten the sustainability of Nigeria's higher education system.

WAY FORWARD

The backbone of economic growth and sustainable long term human capacity and human development lies in education, which is why we have focused on our tertiary institutions and teaching hospital facilities, to ensure that they are shielded from the high cost of energy.

Policy Re-evaluation (Educational Tariff Classification)

NERC and the EDCs should re-evaluate the categorization of educational institutions, considering their public service mandate and their unique funding challenges. Preferential tariffs, subsidies, or special payment plans for schools should be explored. NERC should introduce a dedicated Band A-EDU classification with subsidized rates for higher institutions to balance service delivery with affordability.

Government Subventions

Federal and state governments should adjust subvention frameworks to reflect new energy realities, ensuring power costs are embedded in institutional budgets.

Alternative Energy Investment

To soften the hardship the schools are facing Solar project would reduce the reliance of the recipient institutions on the grid. Government should build mini grids in higher institutions in the country to reduce the cost of electricity consumption by the institutions.

Public-private partnerships

While transitioning to alternative power sources, requires substantial investment, which many universities cannot afford, stakeholders have urged the government and private sector to support the initiative of making public institutions not to rely on the national grid. Institutions should be supported through grants and public-private partnerships to adopt solar and hybrid energy systems, reducing dependence on the national grid.

Equity-Driven Policy Rollout

Ensure equal access to improved electricity across all institutions regardless of location, with infrastructure upgrades prioritized in underserved areas.

Without strategic interventions, the "unforeseen currents" of the Band A reclassification threaten to dim the lights of learning across Nigeria, with severe consequences for human development and national progress.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This paper effectively covers the financial, operational, and social impacts of this policy shift using a qualitative approach.

To build upon this foundation, future research could explore several new dimensions and methodological approaches. Here are some suggestions for further research:

A Quantitative Analysis of Financial and Operational Impacts

The current paper uses a qualitative approach with semi-structured interviews. A follow-up study could use a quantitative research design to provide statistical evidence of the financial and operational impacts.

- **Focus Areas:**
  - **Cost Analysis:** A large-scale survey of bursars and finance directors from a wider, statistically significant sample of tertiary institutions (including both public and private) to quantify the increase in electricity costs. This could involve comparing pre-Band A budgets with post-Band A expenditure.
  - **Operational Efficiency Metrics:** Quantify the impact on academic activities. For example, measure the average number of hours that laboratories and libraries are operational before and after the policy change. You could also

analyze the correlation between electricity costs and a decrease in research grant applications or a reduction in internet bandwidth.

- **Student Performance:** Conduct a study to see if there is a statistically significant difference in student performance (e.g., GPA or exam scores) between institutions with consistent power supply and those with frequent disconnections.

The Role of Alternative Energy and Policy Implementation

The paper briefly mentions alternative energy solutions as a "way forward." A dedicated study could delve deeper into this, examining the feasibility, cost, and effectiveness of these solutions.

- **Focus Areas:**
  - ✓ **Feasibility Study:** Assess the technical and financial viability of implementing solar, wind, or other mini-grid solutions in different types of tertiary institutions (e.g., urban vs. rural, large vs. small). This could involve cost-benefit analyses and identifying potential funding models (e.g., public-private partnerships, grants, or internally generated revenue).
  - ✓ **Case Studies on Successful Implementation:** Conduct a comparative case study of institutions that have successfully adopted alternative energy sources. Analyze their implementation strategies, funding models, and the long-term impact on their operational costs and academic activities.
  - ✓ **Policy Gaps:** Analyze the current government policies and incentives for renewable energy adoption in the education sector. The study could identify barriers to adoption and propose specific policy recommendations to encourage institutions to transition away from the national grid and diesel generators.

The Socio-Economic and Psychological Impact on Students and Staff

While this paper touches on student protests, a more in-depth study could explore the psychological and social ramifications of unreliable power supply.

- **Focus Areas:**
  - **Mental Health:** A study could use psychological scales and in-depth interviews to measure the levels of stress, anxiety, and frustration among students and staff due to power outages and the resulting academic and personal challenges.
  - **Equity and Digital Divide:** Investigate how the lack of consistent electricity affects students from different socio-economic backgrounds. For instance, do students from lower-income families who cannot afford personal power solutions (like power banks or personal generators) fall behind their more affluent peers?

- **Social Cohesion:** Analyze the impact of frequent student protests on campus community and staff-student relationships. How do these protests shape the culture of the institution and the wider community?

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