

The Nigerian Education Loan Fund (NELFUND): Perspectives from the University of Ibadan

By Olabanji Olaniyan

The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), in a press release dated September 23, 2024, issued a 14-day ultimatum to the Nigerian government to address issues raised during their recent meeting. A major demand by ASUU is the increased funding for revitalising the public universities, of which the University of Ibadan is one. ASUU has employed various strike actions to make demands for its members and the university system.

The growing economic crisis in the country has led to an increase in the running costs of universities. This increase has necessitated an upward review of school fees across the universities in Nigeria. This increase was deemed necessary by the administration of the universities to maintain the standards of teaching and research as well as the maintenance of crucial university infrastructure.

There have been different arguments regarding who should fund public education in Nigeria. Universities being public institutions means the federal government should allocate funds for the effective running of these institutions.

The sudden increase in university fees from the tens of thousands to the mid-hundreds of thousands left many students scampering around for money to continue their dream of being a graduate and improving their lives. The cries of increased funding for universities appear to have fallen on deaf ears once again, as the response of the federal government was to introduce the Nigerian Education Loan Fund (NELFUND).

The University of Ibadan

The Premier University, University of Ibadan (UI), established in 1948, has built a reputation as arguably the best university in Nigeria. However, the rich history of the University of Ibadan does not exempt it from the realities of Nigeria.

Many UI students, popularly called 'uites', were left shocked as they logged into their student portals and came across the revised fees for the 2023/2024 session. The shock sparked student-led protests for a reversal in the fees. The protest has since fizzed out as the university cracked down on protesters.

UI began its first semester examinations on September 23, 2024, after the university issued a three-week break and a registration deadline. Students were left with no other option but to raise the fees through alternate means to meet the registration deadline. The university through an internal memorandum, announced that NELFUND had approved the loan applications of 3,284 students.

3,284 Students, 17 Faculties, 78 Departments

3,284 students across the 78 departments and 17 faculties benefitted from the loan. Unsurprisingly, all departments and faculties had at least one recipient of the loan. I present an analysis of the beneficiaries

to highlight how students benefitted from the loans.

ANALYSIS BY FACULTY

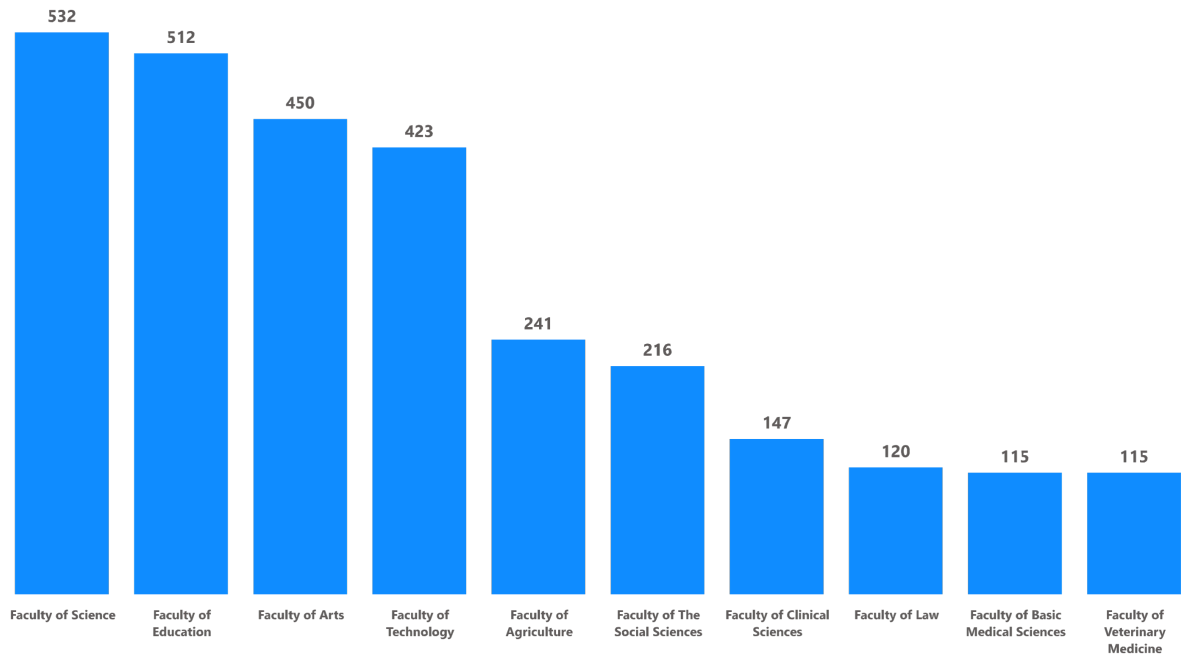


Figure 1. Faculties with Highest Beneficiaries

The Faculty of Science emerges as the top beneficiary, as 532 students benefit from the fund with the Faculty of Education following closely with 512 students. The Faculty of Veterinary Medicine rounds up the top ten faculties.

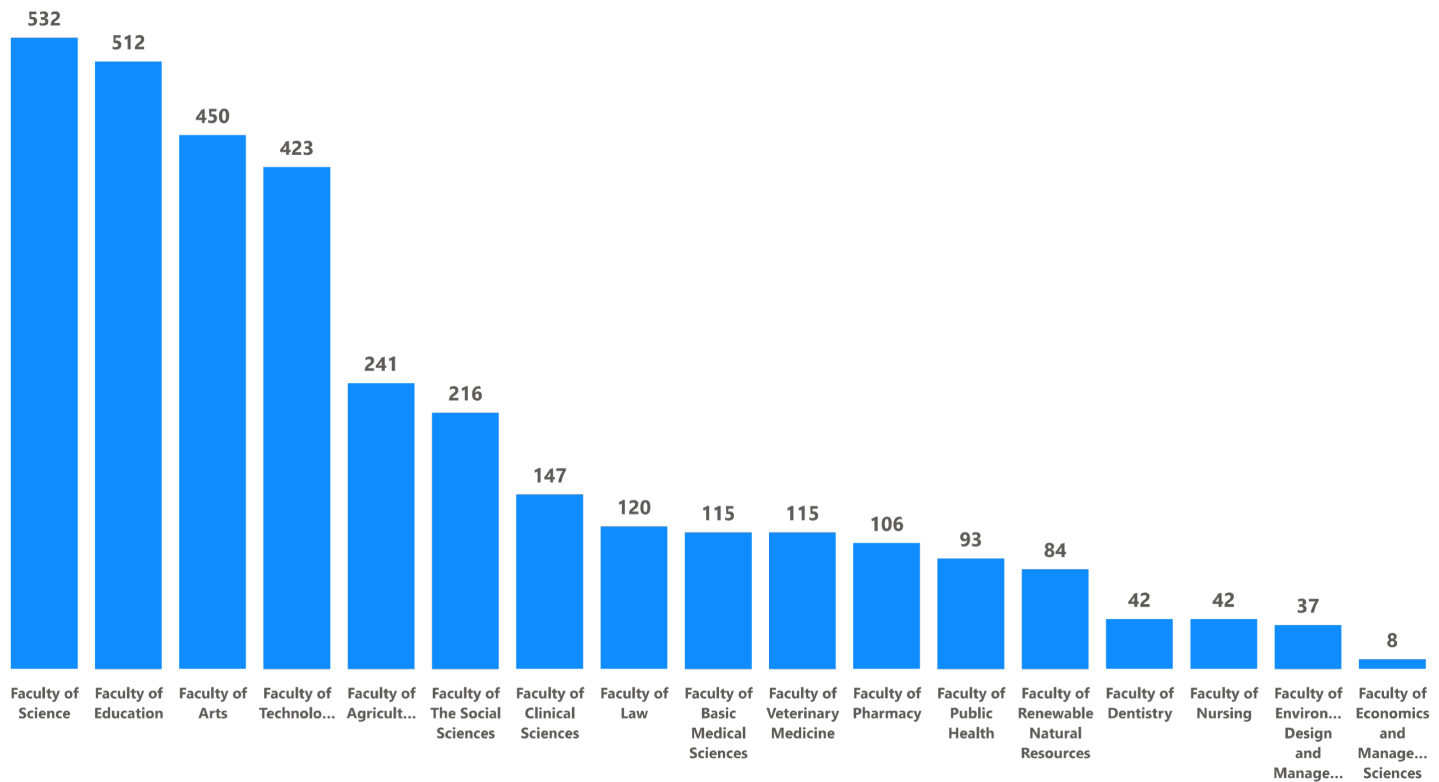


Figure 2. Beneficiaries by Faculty

ANALYSIS BY DEPARTMENT AND LEVEL

The number of departments in the University of Ibadan (78) makes it cumbersome to attach a visual displaying 78 categories. However, we can still draw some useful insights from analysing the top 10 beneficiary departments and an analysis by the level of study.

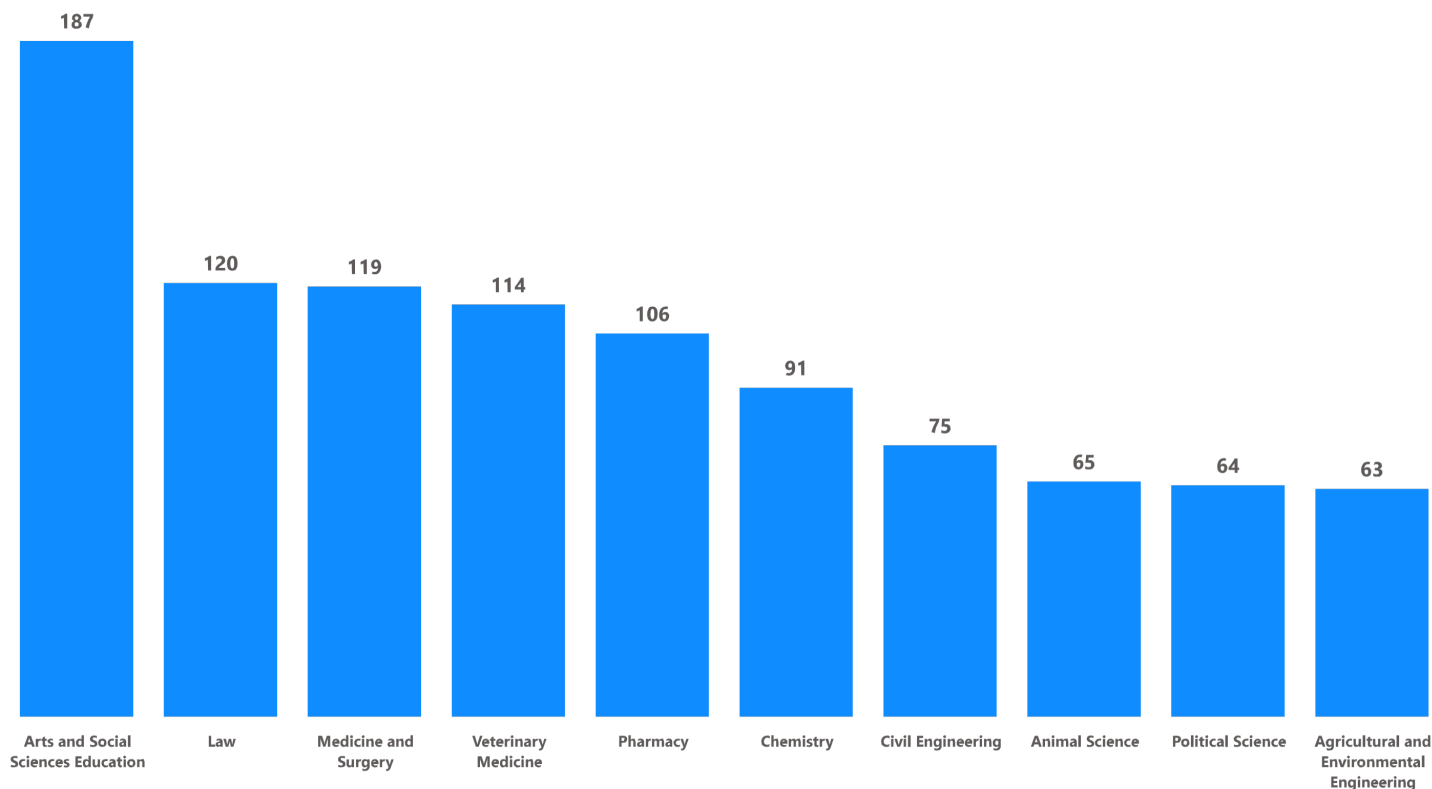


Figure 3. Departments with Highest Beneficiaries

The Faculty of Technology, although ranked 4th by number of beneficiaries by faculty, has two departments in the top 10: the departments of Civil Engineering and Agricultural & Environmental Engineering. The top-ranked faculty, the Faculty of Education, has just one department, the Department of Arts and Social Science. Interestingly, the third-ranked faculty of arts has no department in the top 10.

The university has six levels of study from (100 - 600). A closer look at beneficiaries by level of study gives us an understanding of how students approached the loan. The analysis shows something interesting as early-level students benefited from the loan as more than 50% of the beneficiaries were either 200-level or 300-level students.

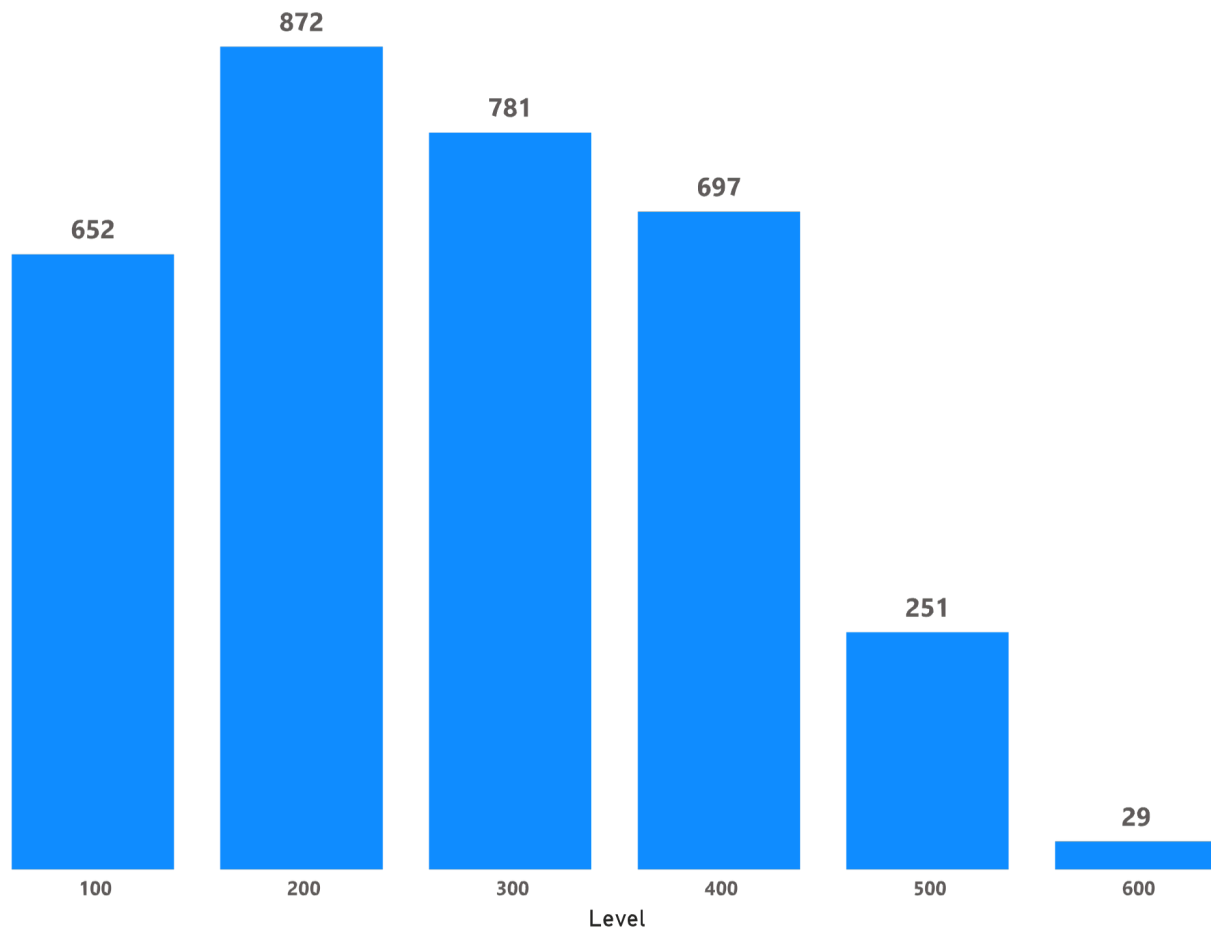


Figure 4. Beneficiaries by Level

200-level students were ranked highest, with 872 recipients and 600-level having 29 recipients. 600-level students who benefitted from this loan are from departments that have 600-level, Department of Dental Surgery, Medicine & Surgery, and Veterinary Medicine.

- Medicine and Surgery – 8 students
- Dental Surgery – 9 students
- Veterinary Medicine – 12 students

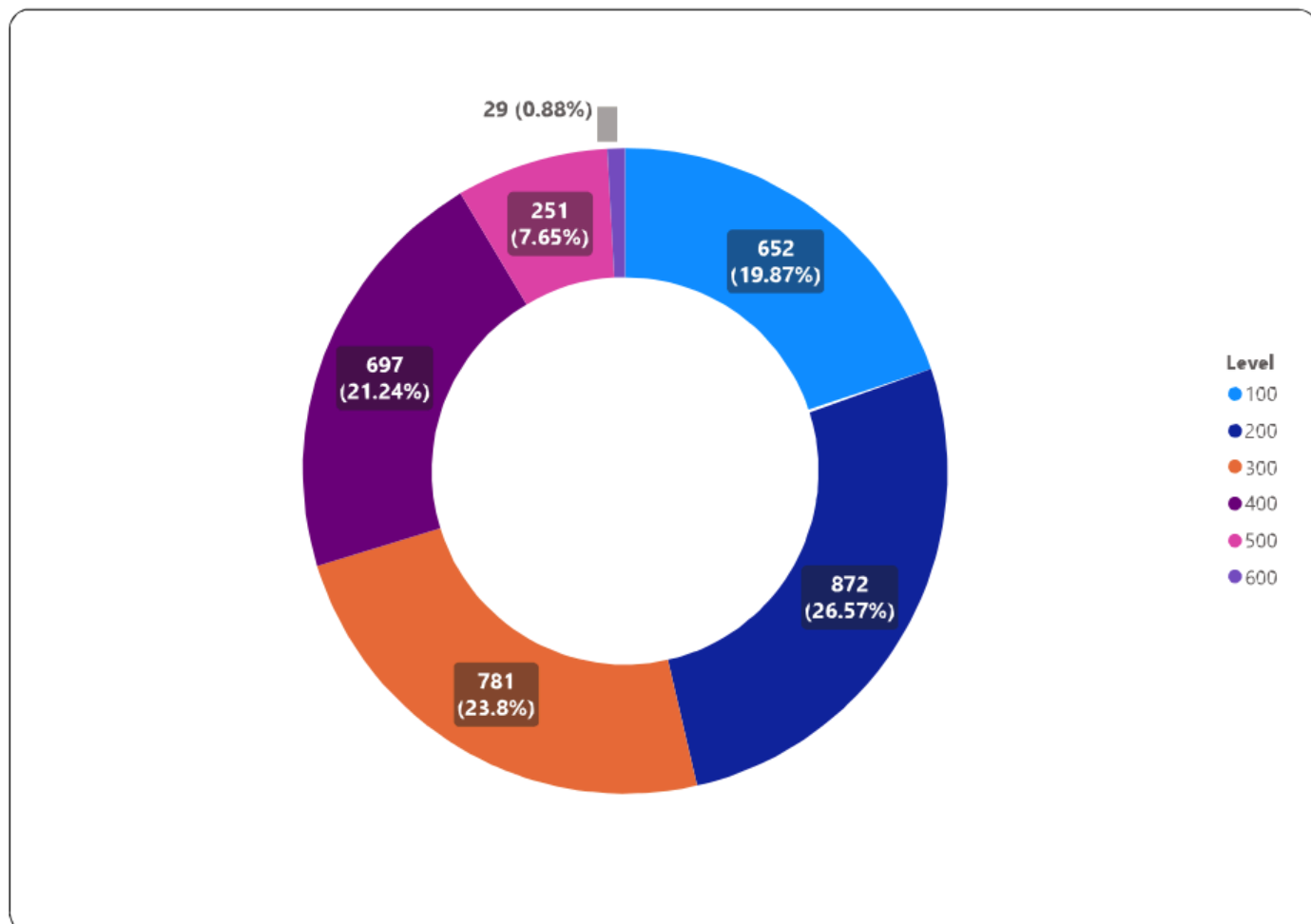


Figure 5. Distribution of Beneficiaries by Level

As noted before, more than 50% of the beneficiaries are 200-level and 300-level students. This probably indicates the willingness of students in their final year of studies (usually 400-600 level students) to apply for the loan and consider other options.

CONCLUSION

The hike in fees across universities in Nigeria has been a topic across social media. There have been many takes on who should fund public education in Nigeria. A few Nigerians argue that the money for the loan should have been summed up into an education fund and disbursed to the universities. In a section of the previously mentioned press release by ASUU, the union noted that since the subsidy on Premium Motor Spirit, also referred to as fuel, was removed more money is available to the government and should be used to fund the education sector.

The limited funding of the Education sector has led to the commercialisation of education in Nigeria. This commercialisation in an already poor country such as Nigeria hampers our ability to achieve the fourth Sustainable Development Goal of ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education for all. It is evident that NELFUND is here to stay, and that seems the only option for poor Nigerians who want quality education.