Healthcare Access among Students in the Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria: Barriers and Solution

Likita Dauda

Department of Sociology, Federal University of Lafia, Nigeria

Danyawo Musa Adamu

Department of Criminology and Security Studies, Federal university of Lafia

Abstract: This paper aims to identify and analyze the barriers to healthcare access among students in the tertiary institutions in Nigeria. By conducting a thorough literature review, we have identified various factors that hinder students from seeking and receiving adequate healthcare services. These barriers include financial constraints, lack of awareness about available healthcare options, cultural and societal stigmas, and inadequate healthcare infrastructure. We also explore the impact of these barriers on the health and well-being of the student population and suggest potential solutions to address them. The findings suggest that addressing these barriers is crucial for promoting the overall health of students and ensuring their academic success. This research highlights the need for policymakers and healthcare providers to prioritize the unique healthcare needs of students in tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

Keywords: Healthcare Access, Students, Tertiary Institutions.

Introduction

Access to quality healthcare is a fundamental human right and a critical component of overall well-being, especially for young adults navigating the demands of higher education. Healthcare systems are designed to address the health needs of specific populations, requiring a robust funding mechanism, a skilled workforce, reliable information for decision-making and well-equipped facilities. Optimal health is essential for a productive social and economic life, making effective and safe healthcare services crucial (World Health Organization (WHO), 2018). University students' health services are crucial given the global increase in tertiary enrollment. High-quality health services explicitly enhance students' health and welfare, and implicitly improve academic success. In Nigeria, tertiary institutions are expected to provide basic health services to students through campus health centres and public healthcare partnerships to meet the needs of the school population (students and staff) and not merely to serve selected groups (Onumsinachi, & Chibuike, 2023). However, despite these provisions, many students face significant challenges when attempting to access the healthcare they need.

The period of tertiary education often coincides with a critical stage in physical, emotional, and psychological development. Students are vulnerable to a wide range of health issues, including infectious diseases, mental health challenges, sexual and reproductive health concerns, and lifestyle-related illnesses. Unfortunately, for many students in Nigeria, the health system within and around their institutions remains largely inaccessible due to a combination of financial, structural, institutional, and social barriers (Dauda, 2022).

High out-of-pocket expenses, long waiting times, poor infrastructure, unavailability of essential drugs, and negative attitudes of healthcare workers are just some of the commonly reported issues. Moreover, limited awareness of existing health insurance schemes like the Tertiary Institutions Social Health Insurance Programme (TISHIP), as well as the rising trend of self-medication, further complicates the landscape.

This research seeks to explore the barriers militating against access to quality health care in the Nigerian tertiary institutions. By understanding these challenges, the study aims to contribute to policy reforms and institutional improvements that will enhance student health and academic outcomes across the country.

Review of Literature

Concept of the students

Students are learners in educational institutions. Studentship started from the early child education to basic education to secondary school education and ends in the higher institutions. Higher institutions students are learners in the higher institutions. Higher institutions students are matured learners. Students in higher institutions are aged from 18 years and above. Students of higher institutions are ready for learning and research. Some of the students of higher institutions are dependent while others are independent (Ogunode,Audu, &Ahaotu, 2020).Students are the focal point of school administration. Therefore, the school head must take into account the students, their welfare, and other activities that affect their lives and stay in school.

Concept of Tertiary Education

Tertiary institutions as the educational institutions that provide education beyond the secondary level hence they are also known as post-secondary institutions. These institutions offer a wide range of academic, vocational, and professional programs that lead to certificates, diplomas and degrees (Obizue and Obizue 2018). The Universities, Polytechnics, Colleges of Education, School of Health, Technological and Technical Institutes, Vocational Schools are the various tertiary institutions in Nigeria (Udekamma and Nwafor, 2022). Tertiary institutions is an organized social institutions made up with stakeholders like the students, lecturers (academic staff), non-academic staff and researcher whose responsibilities are lecturing, organization of instructional resources, assessment of students, marking of students' scripts and projects supervision(Ogunode, & Adamu, 2021).

Tertiary education, also called post-secondary education, is any level of education pursued beyond high school, including undergraduate and graduate credentials. These credentials encompass certificates, diplomas or academic degrees. Tertiary education refers to specialized education in a specific field, taken on after finishing high school. Tertiary education is non-compulsory and provided in a specialist institution, usually a college, polytechnic or university. This form of education may be delivered virtually or at a distance (Top-hat, 2023). Tertiary education is an organized educational system that is consciously designed for manpower production, in-service training and national development. Tertiary education is an education that advances teaching, research and community services for national development. Tertiary education is an education industry that is meant for the production of manpower and national development via implementation of teaching, research and provision of community services (Ogunode, 2025). The realization of the tertiary institutions' goals depend on sound and healthy human resources. The health care services of the tertiary institutions is critical to effective implementation of the tertiary education programme.

Concept of Access to health-care

Access to health care refers to the ability of individuals to obtain health care services when they need them. It encompasses a variety of factors including financial barriers, geographic barriers, and cultural and linguistic barriers. Simply put, it is the opportunity for someone to seek and receive medical care when needed. This encompasses a wide range of services, from preventive

and primary care to specialized treatments and hospitalization. Access to health care is a crucial aspect of promoting and maintaining overall health and well-being. However, it remains a challenge for many individuals and communities, and there is a need for continued efforts to improve access to health care for all individuals and populations (Ogunode, & Nita, 2023; Abubakar, 2018).

As access to health care is becoming increasingly important, there are numerous policies and initiatives being implemented to improve it. One of the key components of access to health care is affordability, as many individuals struggle to afford necessary medical services. In addition, physical access to health care facilities can also be a major challenge, particularly in rural areas. Other factors that impact access to health care include insurance coverage, availability of healthcare providers, and cultural or linguistic barriers. In order to address these issues and improve access to health care, there is a need for continued research and policy development (Abubakar, 2018).

Method

The paper examine the barriers militating against access to quality health care in the Nigerian tertiary institutions.The paper is a position paper that adopted a systematic literature review-based method. The method allows to collect and review the related previous literature from various online sources. With the aid of digital platform, the researcher collected secondary information to generate knowledge on this topic from 2015-2025. The position paper followed qualitative narrative design method. The researcher has visited different online sites to collect the previous literature and analyze the literatures on thebarriers militating against access to quality health care in the Nigerian tertiary institutions. The previous findings are critically analyzed and presented in different themes as on the barriers militating against access to quality health care in the Nigerian tertiary institutions.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion

This output of the literatures on the barriers militating against access to quality health care in the Nigerian tertiary institutions presents an in-depth study and result that can infer conclusion on the topic. The study includes: online publication; conference paper, journals sorted from from reputable international journals such as CEON, Elsevier, Hindawi, JSTOR, IEEE, Learn Techlib, SAGE, Nebraska and Springer (Adapted from Ogunode, 2025).

Exclusion

Also, the literature review excludes information from edited books, preprints, monographs, information below 2015 and book chapters (Adapted from Ogunode, 2025).

Result and Discussion

Three are many barriers militating against access to quality health care in the Nigerian tertiary institutions. Some of these challenges include; financial constraints, lack of awareness about available healthcare options, cultural and societal stigmas, and inadequate healthcare infrastructure.

Financial constraints

Financial constraints are a major obstacle to healthcare access among students in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The rising costs of healthcare services and the prevalence of out-of-pocket payments severely limit students' ability to seek medical treatment. This leads to delayed or inadequate care, compromising their health and academic performance. Additionally, limited financial resources often force students to prioritize other essential needs, such as food and shelter, over healthcare expenses. This further exacerbates their lack of access to quality medical services. The impact of financial constraints on healthcare access among students in tertiary institutions is a critical issue that needs to be addressed in order to ensure their well-being and

academic success. Even though university health centres are meant to be affordable, many students say the cost of seeing a doctor or buying drugs is just too high. A study from the University of Calabar found that over 35% of students said services were "too expensive, and another 16% couldn't afford the prescribed drugs. On top of that, most students aren't even aware of the health insurance program (TISHIP) that's supposed to help them. So they end up paying out of pocket — or skipping care altogether (Olatunde, &Abioye, 2019).

Lack of awareness about available healthcare options

Lack of awareness about available healthcare options among students in tertiary institutions in Nigeria can greatly hinder their access to proper healthcare services. This lack of awareness can lead to a number of negative consequences, including delayed treatment, misdiagnosis, and overall poor health outcomes. Students who are not aware of their healthcare options may also be less likely to seek out necessary medical care, leading to a greater likelihood of developing chronic conditions or being unable to properly manage existing health conditions. Furthermore, this lack of awareness can also contribute to financial burdens, as students may end up paying more for healthcare services due to not knowing about available options for affordable or free care. Overall, addressing this issue of lack of awareness about available healthcare options is crucial in improving healthcare access among students in tertiary institutions in Nigeria (Abubakar, 2018).

Cultural and societal stigmas

The issue of healthcare accessibility among students in tertiary institutions in Nigeria is heavily influenced by cultural and societal stigmas. These stigmas lead to discrimination and exclusion of certain groups, making it difficult for them to access healthcare services. This can have serious repercussions on the physical and mental well-being of students. In this academic abstract, we explore the various ways in which cultural and societal stigmas impact healthcare access among students in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Through our analysis, we aim to shed light on the importance of addressing these stigmas in order to improve overall healthcare accessibility for students in Nigeria (Abu, & Ibrahim, 2019).

Inadequate healthcare infrastructure

The inadequate healthcare infrastructure in Nigerian tertiary institutions has a significant impact on the access to healthcare services for students. Due to limited resources and inadequate facilities, students often face challenges in seeking medical care when needed. This results in a lack of timely and effective treatment, which can have detrimental effects on their health and well-being. The lack of proper healthcare infrastructure also affects the quality of healthcare services provided to students. With insufficient resources, medical staff may not be able to provide the necessary level of care, leading to subpar treatment and potential complications. This can further hinder students' ability to access healthcare services and negatively impact their academic performance. The inadequate healthcare infrastructure can also lead to overcrowding and long waiting times, making it difficult for students to receive prompt and efficient care. This can be especially problematic for those with chronic illnesses or emergency cases that require immediate attention. The impact of inadequate healthcare infrastructure is not limited to physical health but also extends to mental health. Students may face challenges in accessing counseling or mental health services, which can significantly impact their overall well-being.

Poor Quality Health services

It's one thing to wait long hours; it's another to be treated with disrespect or indifference once you finally get to the front of the line. At one Nigerian university, nearly 67% of students said they had a negative view of campus health services, mostly due to how staff interacted with them. Complaints include rude attitudes, a lack of empathy, and staff not taking student complaints seriously. When you're already sick, the last thing you want is to feel like a burden. Because of all these challenges, many students simply choose to treat themselves. A study at the

University of Ibadan showed that over 50% of medical and nursing students self-medicate not because they don't know better, but because the waiting times at the clinic are too long. While convenient, self-medication can lead to serious health risks, like incorrect dosages or ignoring underlying conditions.

Shortage of Health care Workers

The shortage of healthcare workers in Nigerian tertiary institutions greatly impacts the access to healthcare services for students. This issue has a significant impact on the overall health and well-being of students, as they have limited access to necessary medical care and treatment. The lack of healthcare workers also leads to longer wait times for appointments and medical services, hindering students' timely access to care. Additionally, the quality of healthcare services may be compromised due to the strain on the limited healthcare workforce. This can create barriers to successful treatment for students and negatively impact their academic performance and overall quality of life. Moreover, the shortage of healthcare workers in Nigerian tertiary institutions can also result in higher healthcare costs for students, as they may need to seek care outside of their institution. This can lead to financial burdens and further hinder their ability to access necessary healthcare services. These problems don't exist in a vacuum. Nigeria's broader health system also affects what happens on campus. There are nationwide issues like poor funding, health worker shortages, and outdated infrastructure, which trickle down to university clinics. Even simple things like transport to a nearby hospital during emergencies can be a challenge — especially if there's no ambulance or backup plan in place.

Impact of poor access to quality healthcare by students on their academic performance in tertiary institutions

The lack of adequate access to quality healthcare services has become a growing concern in the academic community, especially among students attending tertiary institutions. This is due to the fact that poor access to healthcare can have a significant impact on the academic performance and overall well-being of students.Research has shown that students who do not have access to quality healthcare services may experience a decline in their academic performance. This could be due to the effects of untreated illnesses or injuries, which can lead to a decrease in concentration, productivity, and attendance. Furthermore, students who are constantly dealing with health issues may struggle to balance their academic workload, leading to poor grades and a lack of academic success (Alagoli, 2020)..

Moreover, the impact of poor access to healthcare services is not limited to academic performance alone. It can also have long-term effects on students' physical and mental health. Without proper healthcare, students may develop chronic health conditions or experience worsening symptoms of existing conditions, ultimately affecting their overall well-being and ability to succeed in their academic pursuits. The lack of quality healthcare access among students in tertiary institutions has a significant impact on their academic performance and overall well-being. It is crucial for universities and policymakers to address this issue and ensure that students have access to the necessary healthcare services for their academic success and well-being (Olatunde, &Abioye, 2019).

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper explored barriers militating against access to quality health care in the Nigerian tertiary institutions. The paper concluded thatfinancial constraints, lack of awareness about available healthcare options, cultural and societal stigmas, and inadequate healthcare infrastructure are some of the barriers militating against access to quality health care by students in the Nigerian tertiary institutions. Based on these challenges, the paper recommends the following:

1) Improve Infrastructure: One strategy to address the healthcare access problem among students in tertiary institutions in Nigeria is to focus on improving the infrastructure of

healthcare facilities. This could include constructing and equipping new healthcare centers, expanding existing ones, and implementing technology solutions to improve efficiency and accuracy.

2) Increase Funding: Another important strategy is to increase funding for healthcare in tertiary institutions. This could involve allocating more government funds to healthcare, but also encouraging private sector investment and donations. With more funding, healthcare facilities can afford to provide better services and resources for students.

3) Promote Health Education: Educating students about health and wellness can greatly improve their access to healthcare. By promoting health education, students can learn how to prevent common illnesses and take care of their own health. This can reduce the burden on healthcare facilities and allow them to better serve those who truly need medical attention.

4) Strengthen Health Policies: Strengthening health policies and regulations can also greatly impact healthcare access for students. By implementing policies that prioritize student health, such as mandatory health insurance for students, it can ensure that students have access to necessary healthcare services without financial burden.

5) Increase Collaboration: Collaboration between healthcare facilities and educational institutions can also improve healthcare access for students. By forging partnerships, healthcare providers can better understand the specific needs of students and tailor their services accordingly. This can also lead to more efficient and effective delivery of healthcare services.

6) Utilize Technology: The use of technology can greatly improve healthcare access for students in tertiary institutions. This could include telemedicine options, where students can consult with healthcare providers remotely, as well as utilizing electronic health records to streamline the process of accessing healthcare services. By embracing technology, healthcare facilities can better serve a larger number of students.

References

1. Abu, Y. & Ibrahim, A. O. (2019). Artificial Intelligence and provision of health services in Nigerian Universities. *International Journal of health Education*, 1(6), 242-255.

2. Abubakar, B.A (2018) Digitalisation of Health services in Nigerian tertiary education. *Journal of Science.* 4(2), 211-226

3. Alagoli, T.Y. (2020). Healthcare and information communication technologies in universities system in Nigeria. *Journal of Education and Human Development*, 10(1), 2611-2624

4. Dauda, L. (2022). Issues Affecting Female Students' Health on Nigerian Universities: A Sociological Perspective.

5. Guardian (2020). Universities-where-students-lack-access-to-health-centres-diagnoses-drugs education in Nigeria: Programme accreditation for quality assurance in Nigerian tertiary education. *Journal of African Research Scholars.* 4(2), 211-226

6. Ogunode N,. J,Audu E,. I &Ahaotu, G, N. (2020) Problems faced by Students in Public Universities in Nigeria and the Way Forward.*JurnalSinestesia*, 10 (2), 105-116

7. Ogunode, N, J (2025).Benefit of Digital Literacy for Academic staff and Students of Tertiary   Institutions in Nigeria.*American Journal of Alternative Education,*2,(2),43-53

8. Ogunode, N,. J & Nita, M (2023).Medical Education and Barriers to funding in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. *AMERICAN Journal of Pediatric Medicine and Health Sciences, 01(09),410-419.*

9. Ogunode, N. J. &Adamu, D. G. (2021). Shortage of Academic Staff in the Higher Institution of Learning in Nigeria. *Central Asian Journal of Social Sciences and History, 2*(3), 109-123.

10. Olatunde, O. T & Abioye, A.A (2019). Emerging technologies and Healthcare delivery learning in Nigerian universities: A survey. *Journal of medical health*, 21(2), 321-335

11. Onumsinachi, E. T. & Chibuike, N. F., (2023). Factors Affecting the Delivery of Healthcare Services to Students on the Campuses of Nigerian Universities: A Critical Review of Literature. Asian Journal of Sociological Research Volume 6, Issue 1, Page 1-8, 2023; Article no.AJSR.1215.

12. Top hat (2021). What is tertiary education? https://tophat.com/glossary/t/tertiary-education/

13. Udekamna, A. and Nwafor, A. O. (2022). Artificial Intelligence in Nigerian Education: Challenges and Opportunities. *Journal of Educational Computing Research*, 6(2), 1337-1349.

14. *World Health Organ. Organ. Economic co-operation Dev. World bank.* (2018). https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789241513906. Accessed 29 May 2023.

15. World-bank (2020). What is tertiary education.