

## Review

# Higher education for sustainable development in Nigeria; Challenges and the way forward

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### Abstract

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Higher education in Nigeria is the education given after secondary education in universities, colleges of education, polytechnics, and monotechnics including those institutions offering correspondence courses. The University system serves as a magnet for students from neighbouring countries. The goals are in consonance with those envisioned by the World Conference on Higher Education held in Paris from 5th to 9th October 1998. Undoubtedly, higher education is a specialized form of human capital serving as an engine of development in Nigeria by producing men and women with professional skills. This attainment has been stimulated, in part, by interest among educators and trainers in the use of new internet-based information technologies. Indeed, higher education in Nigeria is considered in relation to global economic, social and cultural development. In this connection, the Federal Government of Nigeria has problems. The governments have not been able to provide the financial resources necessary to maintain educational quality in the midst of enrolment explosion. The paper sees the need for universities to create a niche for themselves by specializing in areas of comparative advantage and encourages specialized universities of agriculture, technology, education and business studies. Additionally, the paper advocates the establishment of more private universities in Nigeria.

**Keyword:** Development, Education, Problems, Sustainability, Tertiary Education.

## INTRODUCTION

Generally, school is established by the society to transmit a cultural heritage including the knowledge, beliefs, values and pattern of behaviour that are cherished by the society. Hopkins in Ogoji (2006) submits that the curriculum of a school system organized for dynamic society represents the balanced selection and organization of a body of the common and specialized experiences of life which will lead pupils to develop those habits or skills knowledge or understandings and attitudes or appreciations which is necessary to maintain group solidarity and to direct the future development of the social order.

Education has a formative impact on the mind, character, and physical ability of the learner in the course

of deliberate transmission of societal values, ethos, knowledge and skills from one generation to another. Effective skills formation constitutes a criterion for our productivity, long-term growth and development. In doing so, education develops to the full the personality of an individual in all fields and aspects making him intelligent, learned, bold, courageous and possessing strong, good character. It is through education that moral ideal and spiritual values, the aspiration of the nation and its cultural heritage are transferred from one generation to another for preservation, purification and sublimation into higher and higher achievements (Singh, 2007). In other words, with the growth and development of the individual, the society develops to higher and higher levels of

attainment. Education at all levels is expected to enrich the individual through:

- (i) enculturation: Progressively equipping the individual with the socio-cultural skills that should enable one to fit neatly into one's immediate society.
- (ii) acculturation: Progressive exposure to outside influence from which one can intelligently borrow to expand the horizons provided by one's immediate society.
- (iii) intellectual skills acquisition for the pursuit of self-development through the acquisition of knowledge in a variety of forms and by a variety of means.
- (iv) affective traits development, progressively improving on the capacity to imbibe attitude, values and other behaviour traits that facilitate one's relationship with fellow human beings as well as one's capacity for continuous self-employment.
- (v) manipulative and psychomotor skills of development, progressively awakening the physical prowess of the individual, and progressively working towards a perfect coordination of the activities of the body with those of the mind.
- (vi) inculcation of lifelong learning skills, also called learning-to-learn skills, a constellation of activities, habits, mind-set; etc that predispose one to develop the spirit of enquiry and a perpetual thirst for knowledge (Ojo, 2007). Thus, the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004) in the National Policy on Education prescribes that the goals of tertiary education shall be to:
  - (a) contribute to national development through high level relevant manpower training;
  - (b) develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of the individual and the society;
  - (c) develop the intellectual capability of individuals to understand and appreciate their local and external environments;
  - (d) acquire both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to be self-reliant and useful members of the society;
  - (e) promote and encourage scholarship and community service;
  - (f) forge and cement national unity;
  - (g) promote national and international understanding and interaction. (p.36).

### Tertiary Education in Nigeria

The Federal Republic of Nigeria in National Policy on Education segmented education into: early childhood/pre-primary education, basic education, primary education, secondary education, mass literacy, adult non-formal education, science, technical and vocational education; tertiary education, open and distance education and special education. Tertiary education, according to the National Policy on Education is the education given after secondary education in universities, colleges of

education, polytechnics, and monotechnics including institutions offering correspondence courses. Nigeria is in a process of national reconstruction in which education is the backbone. The country needs a system that produces advanced scientific, technological and cultural-humanistic knowledge on the basis of which she will be transformed into a truly humane society that satisfies adequately the material, moral and socio-cultural needs of her peoples.

Nigeria had over 75 universities as at 2005 about 41 polytechnics and 62 colleges of education as at 1998 (Adedepe, 2005). In less than 50 years of tertiary education in Nigeria, the enrolment which was 210 in 1948 increased to 392, 683 in 1966 (UNESCO, 2000). Today, Nigeria boasts of its educated labour force. Each of the universities has the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) with the following goals:

- (a) Building a free and just Nigeria
- (b) A sound educational system
- (c) A productive, autonomous university system where academic freedom reigns
- (d) Defence and promotion of the socio-economic and cultural interests of the nation
- (e) Defence of trade union rights of all Nigerian workers
- (f) Promotion of research and knowledge
- (g) Opposition to all injustices and all unjust discrimination: class, gender, ethnic and religious.
- (h) Building solidarity in the trade union movement
- (i) Respecting International Conventions/declarations on academic freedom, human rights and labour rights.
- (j) Promoting democratic values through participation in popular struggles; and
- (k) Encouragement and contribution to affirmative action to redress historical and contemporary inequalities based on gender, nationality or any social disadvantage (Fashina, 2007).

Nigerian universities are under the auspices of a National Universities Commission (NUC) set up to be a channel through which funds are made available to the universities. Government is to continue to support higher education in Federal institutions, but, this is not to prejudice the initiative of communities, organizations and individuals who wish to contribute to financing higher education. In the case of non-Federal institutions, the Federal Government uses the N.U.C. as the channel through which its contributions would be made wherever the Federal Government decides to make such contributions (Fafunwa, 1991). The goals of higher education in Nigeria are in consonance with those envisioned by the World Declaration on Higher Education at the World Conference on Higher Education held in Paris 5 - 9, October 1998. Planning and evolution of the structure of Higher Education takes into consideration the existing policies of Government both written and unwritten (Ojedele and Ilusanya, 2006).

In response to the global call contained in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for poverty

**Table 1: Enrolment in Nigerian Universities 1980/81 – 2001/2002**

Year	No. of Universities	Total Enrolment	% Increase in Enrolment
1980/81	17	77,791	-
1981/82	19	90,751	16.7
1982/83	22	104,774	15.5
1983/84	23	116,822	11.5
1984/85	23	126,285	8.1
1985/86	24	135,783	7.5
1986/87	24	151,961	11.9
1987/88	29	160,767	5.8
1988/89	29	160,174	5.2
1989/90	30	180,871	6.9
1990/91	31	200,774	11.0
1991/92	33	232,482	15.8
1992/93	38	264,684	13.9
1993/94	39	292,097	10.4
1994/95	38	-	-
1995/96	38	335,790	15.0
1996/97	38	245,699	(-26.8)
1997/98	38	374,494	53.2
1998/99	38	399,812	6.2
1999/2000	38	448,230	12.1
2000/2001	47	502,770	12.2
2001/2002	47	95,199	81.1 (% decrease)

Source: Adapted from Oyebade (2005) and Oyebade et al (2007) p. 45.

alleviation to enhance welfare of majority of the world population, the Obasanjo administration developed a "Poverty Paper" known as the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) to improve the quality of life of Nigerians significantly by attacking poverty through empowerment of the poor and other vulnerable groups. NEEDS focused on university sub-sector without much attention to other tertiary education. It therefore specified the following goals of tertiary education between 2004 and 2007:

- Strict adherence to the University Autonomy Act
- Diversification of funding, including attracting private sector and hostel accommodation
- Being up-to-date and restructuring the curricula to meet the demands of the national economy
- Mainstreaming of science and technical education especially Information Communication Technology, (ICT)
- Effective monitoring of universities and adherence to standards

(t) Developing innovative approaches to ensure continuing re-training and capacity-building of lecturers in order to operate at the cutting edge of their disciplines

(g) Increasingly moving towards decentralized and competitive wage bargaining system among the tertiary institutions, thereby promoting performance-based reward system.

Higher education contributes to human resource development in many ways. Investment in higher education is a key contributor to Nigeria's economic growth. Higher institutions in the country have been saddled with the main responsibility for training the nation's professional personnel such as managers, scientists, engineers and technicians who participate in the development, adaptation and diffusion of innovation in the country. The development of higher education in the country is correlated with economic development, (see table 1 above):

Okoro (1993) succinctly submits that education is an

instrument is an investment in human capital. By spending huge resources in education, society is forgoing present consumption in order to group its citizens with knowledge and skills which would make them more productive in future. It is assumed that the future gains that would result from having more skilled and better informed citizens are of greater significance than the present consumption that would have been possible without the investment (Okoro, 1993).

### **The Concept of Sustainable Development**

Development means different things to different scholars. Some of these include growth, westernization, modernization, welfare, divide and rule, reform effectiveness, success etc (Sanda and Tijani - Alawe, 2008). Todaro and Smith (2003) define development as the process of improving the quality of all human lives. Three equally important aspects of development according to them are:

\* Raising people's living level (their incomes and consumption levels of food, medical services, education, etc), through relevant economic growth process.

\* Creating condition conducive to the growth of peoples' self esteem through the establishment of social, political and economic systems and institutions that promote human dignity and respect.

\* Increasing people's freedom by enlarging the range of their choice variables, as by increasing varieties of consumer goods and services. The common denominator in any definition of development is change and the engineering of progress. Development may therefore mean change for the better. Development objectives are open-ended attributes that denote future desired results or outcomes.

According to Fan (2014) economic development is the optimal utilization of resources which is expected to result in a higher standard of living for the citizens and that social development occurs when there are changes in the people's living style as a result of a higher level of education, availability of improved health services, and other social amenities like transport and communication. According to this author indicators of development in a country include Gross National Product (GNP) or per capita income provided there is an even spread of the income in a country's population, industrialization, nutritional status of the citizens, rate of employment, average life expectancy, ratio of doctors and nurses per thousand of the population, infant/child mortality rate, level of literacy, availability of infrastructure and number of telephones, radio and television sets, newspapers etc per thousand of the population.

The Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004) clearly distinguishes the traditional university education and other types of higher education. Nigeria expects the university system to contribute optimally to the

development of high level manpower within the context of the needs of the nation by increasing and diversifying its programmers, making professional course contents to reflect national requirement, inculcating community spirit in student through team projects and action research and by making all students offer liberal or general study courses. Moreover, according to Babalola (2007) technically-based professional courses should have as components, exposure to practical work experience. The author adds that Nigeria adopts a binary model of organizing higher education by distinguishing between the traditional universities and other tertiary institutions such as polytechnics and monotechnics (single-subject technological institutions for specialized programmes such as agriculture, nursing, etc). Specifically, the Nigerian government requires that the polytechnics as well as the monotechnics provide technical knowledge and skills, instruction and training as well as professional studies in engineering, technologies, applied science, business and management leading to the production of trained and self-reliant manpower (such as technician and technologists).

It is customary to think of the benefits of higher education in terms of improved socio-economic positions and enhanced earning. This according to Ojo (2007) is a myopic view which neglects all other short, medium and long-term benefits of education. Higher education is substantially useful in eradicating social inequalities in Nigerian society which Fan (2003) posits are in the areas of differential nutritional status, access to formal education, securing employment, differential wealth, social roles differentiation or specification based on gender and differential wealth.

### **Problems Confronting Higher Education in Nigeria**

(1) In Nigeria, there is a clear mismatch between labour market demand for degree - based professional skills and supply of graduates produced by the universities (Saint et al., 2004),

(2) The intimidating prevalence of severe shortage of qualified academic staff provides a weak launch - pad for responsive actions aimed at introducing new curricula, reformed content and different approaches to pedagogy required for competitive performance in the 21st century.

(3) The current educational system, which was inherited from the colonial period, is inadequate in several respects. The defects include the philosophy of education, the structure and content of curricula at the various levels of the educational system, the objective and goals of education, access to education in term of space, financial resources and funding.

(4) The quota system which comprises important elements such as academic merit determined by University Matriculation Examination (UME) score allotted 45%; Educationally Less Developed States (LDS) with

20%, catchment areas with 25% and 10% to the discretion of the Vice Chancellor (NUC, 1999), has created inequality in the provision of university education in which equity has been sacrificed.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The paper finds the following suggestions apposite:

\* The acquisition of management skills in various skills of vocational education coupled with the opportunities given to these people to utilize those skills in the management of the country's resources, both human and materials, goes a long way to facilitate national development (Adebayo and Komolafe, 2005). There should be adequate funding of the polytechnic education so as to make allowance for research and development because without it the essence of polytechnic education in Nigeria would have been lost.

\* Adequate classroom accommodation will-equip librarians, laboratories and lecture rooms should be provided. Government should improve on tools and equipment for teaching sciences and engineering courses but not neglecting other management courses.

\* Both government and the organized private sector must create research challenges for higher institutions.

To meet the needs of material development, the educational system must accomplish the following goals:

(i) build a knowledge - based society that accepts the primary of intellectual capital.

(ii) enable Nigeria to attain a high level of scientific and technological development within the shortest possible time.

(iii) incorporate indigenous civilizations, though systems and mode of development that will replace the current values of corruption, integrity, family and communities.

(iv) generate within the shortest possible time the quantum of human capital that would serve the total developmental needs of Nigeria.

(v) maximize the usage of existing educational facilities.

(vi) formally incorporate and develop the pre-primary level in the educational system; and

(vii) develop quaternary educational sector as a tool for effective socio- economic advancement in Nigeria.

\* The present system of admission and teaching can be restructured to double /quadruple intakes, with a twenty-three-week lecture followed by a vacation /work study period (twenty-six-weeks) and examination thereafter.

\*The emerging of Colleges of Education and Polytechnics required changes in academic calendar and pattern of examination as well as increase in the number of academic staff and improvement of facilities, among others.

Higher education in Sub-Saharan African countries is mainly funded by the state. It is reported that something like 90-95 percent of the total operating budgets of higher education in the region is met out of government grants while the remaining comes from students' fees (Teferra and Altbach, 2003). Combs (1968), posits that money is an absolutely crucial input of any education system. It provides the essential purchasing power with which education acquires its human and material inputs. With too little money, education can be helpless. With an ample supply, its problems become more manageable even though they do not vanish. Of all the problems plaguing Nigerian private universities, the problem of funding appears to be most potent. The funding of private universities is the responsibility of the "proprietors". Inadequate funding can seriously destabilize the system. If lectures are not well remunerated and their entitlements not paid as at when due, they will not be motivated to contribute maximally to the enhancement and promotion of quality education, Adesina (1990) and Ojedele (1998) agree that the standard and quality of the educational facilities available within an educational system have positive relationships with the standard and quality of the educational system.

\* Universities should promote innovation, inter-disciplinarily and intra-disciplinarily and reinforce programmes with a direct bearing on sustainable human development. Thus, universities should be committed to internal and external evaluation.

\* New areas of university training and research purposely designed to meet the needs of the modern society include molecular biology and biotechnology, advanced materials science, micro-electronics, information systems, robotics, intelligent systems and neuroscience, and environmental science and technology (Babalola, 2007). Training and research in these fields require the integration of a number of disciplines that were previously regarded as separate and distinct. There is need to re-engineer the traditional departmental approach and re-organize research and training around the search for solution to complex socio-economic problems of our immediate community.

\* Policy makers, government, the media, teaching staff, researchers, students and their families, the world of work and community groups are required to introduce in-depth reform and renewal of university education.

\* About 80% of total funds required by tertiary institutions should be met by government and the rest through institution's income-generating activities.

\* Services in tertiary institutions such as food, transport, housing, cleaning security and maintenance should be privatized.

\* There is need for mass mobilization and value re-orientation among students to emphasize diligence, discipline and selfless service (Babalola, 2007).

\*The size of the public resources devoted to higher education should be increased and the efficiency in the use of these resources improved (Tilak, 2009)

## CONCLUSION

The major conclusion in this paper is that higher education has, in Nigeria, been seen as an instrument "par excellence" for effecting national development. The several maladies of higher education in Nigeria can be attributed to long colonial rule and myopic national policies on higher education which do not provide for comprehensive long term plans for development of higher education. Managers of Nigeria's higher institutions must ensure that educational institutions are well equipped and funded. This will produce better-trained professionals and personnel to meet the challenges of globalization.

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