

HIGHER EDUCATION AND RESEARCH IN NIGERIA: THE MISSING LINK FOR SUSTAINABLE FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

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Education, no matter how succinctly or elaborately defined is aimed at improving the quality of human life in all its ramifications. As one of the major catalysts of development, there is a strong positive correlation between good education and the level of wealth and economic growth of nations and the best means of developing human capital is through education. In accepting this scenario, we could further argue that higher education possesses a higher capacity to train the human mind to make dormant and latent resources active and bring some utilitarian values to an otherwise neglected apparatus of development. These values are not possible if the content and quality of higher education are suspect.

It is against this requirement that the theme of this conference is very apt and topical more so in this country, Nigeria, where the quality of higher education is calling for re-invigoration and a properly defined trajectory. A deluge of criticisms has been flowing questioning if the products of higher education in Nigeria will be able to hold the forth for sustainable development. The essence of this keynote address is to provide a discussion format which the conference will deliberate upon and come out with suggestions to improve the present situation which will hopefully provide the basis for sustainable development. In doing this simple job, the paper will discuss in brief and in a general tone the nature of higher education in Nigeria, the place of research and development (R&D) in the development paradigm, and the lapses which are currently observed in our higher education efforts. The paper will conclude by emphasizing once again that our higher

education should aim at training creative minds that will meet the challenges of the Millennium. Development Goals (MDG), Vision 20-2020, and the current wind of Globalization (See Reports on Higher Education in Nigeria 1992 and 2004)

Higher Education in Nigeria: The Growth and Decay

The growth of higher education in Nigeria over the years is not in doubt. The number of Universities, Polytechnics, Colleges of Education and similar post-secondary institutions of higher learning has multiplied. The multiplication is in response to the number of candidates seeking admission in such institutions. For example, about 1.7 million candidates sat for 2013 Joint Admission and Matriculation Boards Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) where only 520,000 could be admitted into the tertiary institutions, leaving the bulk of over 1.2 million hanging. The available institutions submit a list of their requirements and woes which include, poor funding, dilapidated buildings, poor or non-availability of basic infrastructures, poor and absence of teaching/research equipment, lack of adequate libraries. To compound these inadequacies are other man-made maladies such as poor re-numeration, industrial unrest, brain drain, indiscipline and violence manifested in endemic secret cult activities.

These inadequacies are translated into the inability of these higher institutions of learning to perform their required functions of transmission and generation of new knowledge, training of mind and character and contribution to national development.

The growth in the number of higher institutions has not been matched by any substantial increase in funding. The recommended UNESCO funding minimum of 26 percent of the National Budget for education has been set aside in Nigeria over the years. When also we consider that Higher Education gets only a fraction of the Education Budget, we will appreciate the level of neglect being suffered and why several excellent brains and great minds have fled the shores of this country to develop the educational system in Europe, America and some parts of Africa.

Some private institutions of higher learning have sprung up in several parts of the country but the motives for these institutions have not been well defined. Government has therefore refused to give their additional support despite the tenable argument that these institutions are training manpower for the same Nigerian market.

These physical, infrastructural and funding inadequacies would have been mitigated if the operators are a crop of quality administrators and operators. Regrettably, our temples of learning have been desecrated and the intellectual citadels have been turned to political market arena. These institutions established for the generation and propagation of knowledge have been a haven of anti-intellectualism demonstrated through admission irregularities, ethnicity, nepotism and flagrant illegality. In order to extricate the higher institutions from this quagmire a number of issues have to be examined.

Teachers and their Methodology

The teacher factor has been identified as a very crucial element in all educational programmes. In fact, it is a sine-qua-non. It should therefore be properly managed for productivity. Therefore, the extent to which school managers, be they governments or private organizations, develop their staff will

determine to a large extent the degree of efficiency and consequently the level of effectiveness and productivity of the staff. The professional growth of teachers would be achieved through the following incentives.

- a) Study leave with pay
- b) Training leave
- c) Study leave without pay
- d) Sabbatical leave
- e) Examination leave
- f) Teachers' induction course
- g) Teachers' orientation course
- h) In-service training
- i) Workshops
- j) Conferences
- k) Seminars
- l) Symposia

From these practices there seems to be no one way to the issue of professional growth of teachers. Some have suggested some techniques of developing teachers while some still approach it through human and motivational dimensions such as:

- a) Recognition of excellence
- b) Equity of treatment
- c) Provision of leadership opportunities
- d) Good communication links and
- e) Co-operative involvement

These hints listed for developing the teacher leave him with a challenge of improving his methodology. The teacher should grow with time and advancing technology. In summary, the role of the teacher is to develop individuals who are to effect changes in people that will constructively meet the complexities of a world in which problems spawn much faster than their answers. The teachers' methodology should be dynamic and proactive.

Setting Students on a Research Path

The cardinal motive of a teacher is to come out with a product that could solve the day-

to-day problems of life. Realizing this goal is subject to having the right materials which are the students. The student is clay left in the hands of the teacher to give him a shape. However, the shape depends on whether the clay is malleable. The current crop of students in our institutions of higher learning is far from encouraging. The vices are legion and the readiness by the students to absorb new ideas is becoming a Herculean task. Students declare holiday by themselves, absent themselves from lectures and prefer remote sensing techniques to receive lectures.

The assignments are haphazardly handled and examination halls have turned into theatres of war. Some of the students have perfected different devices for cheating in examinations. Under these circumstances, setting students on a research path becomes very difficult. The unpleasant result is that some of the graduates from Nigerian higher institutions find it difficult to be accepted for further studies in foreign institutions. Some are subjected to qualifying examinations which unfortunately many do not scale through. Even here at home the number of students aspiring for higher qualifications is not matching the growing needs for qualified teachers in our higher institutions. The National Universities Commission has decried the yawning gap existing in our higher institutions for holders of masters and doctorate degrees. This is not good enough for the country's quest for sustainable development.

The rest of this address will concentrate on what the higher institutions need to do to define the route to sustainable development.

The University and Its Products

The University as the apex of higher education in Nigeria should play a leadership role in the country. It should provide people of special qualification and motivation. University education should not merely be a means to earn a living. It should rather equip the individual, to

the highest level of his ability, with the intellectual and physical skill which he requires to be an innovative, creative and self-reliant member of the society, able to cope with the social, economic and cultural demands of his immediate and encompassing environment.

There are some key issues that are required of our Universities and indeed other higher educational institutions. The training of the mind seems upper most in the function of higher institutions of learning. The primary and secondary schools are preparatory grounds for nurturing the minds of individuals. Higher education is therefore expected to prepare the individual for the challenges of the world and for the world of work.

Higher Education for Entrepreneurship

While several definitions of entrepreneurship abound, the central idea of the concept incorporates uncertainty and risk taking, innovation, perception and change. Entrepreneur and entrepreneurship are more often associated with small and medium scale enterprises even though not restricted to them. This is because entrepreneurial endeavors are often given expressions through small and medium scale enterprises. If properly initiated and handled, the following advantages are likely to accrue.

- (1) Employment generation
- (2) Increased productivity through innovation
- (3) Transfer and adaptation of technology
- (4) Increased resources utilization
- (5) Stimulation of growth in the supply market
- (6) Encouragement and sustenance of economic dynamism that gives a leverage to sustainable growth.

Many higher institutions have embraced entrepreneurial training as a core requirement for obtaining the graduating certificate of such institutions. However, problems of different dimensions abound which frustrate commendable achievements. Many institutions

do not have the manpower to train the students in entrepreneurial skills. Some do not have the equipment needed to train the students. More seriously, students are not sufficiently exposed to internship training before they are discharged to the world of work.

Concluding Remarks

The main theme of this conference is well chosen because the current level of *overt unemployment, under-employment and disguised unemployment* in Nigeria is worrisome. The onus is on higher education to find a solution and not to compound the problem by churning out in an uncontrollable stream unemployable graduates. If higher education in Nigeria is to deliver its mandate, there is the need for a total re-engineering which will involve the teachers and the taught and more importantly the concepts of higher education in the country from a holistic perspective.

References

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