

TOWARDS TRANSFORMATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: THE PRACTICAL REALITY

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Abstract

Nigeria's best university in 2015 (University of Ibadan) is ranked 8th in Africa and not listed among the 1000 best universities worldwide. Also, recently graduates of higher institutions in Nigeria were not only derided, but were described as lacking in quality, low in perception, unfit in skills and unemployable . These graduates are subjected to fresh training and examination in an attempt to recruit them. This conception and understanding is worrisome hence, radical transformation steps have to be taken in order to restore confidence to higher institutions as learning citadel of excellence. This paper therefore examines general status of education in Nigeria, factors affecting higher education in Nigeria, highlights some transformation initiatives taken by the Dr. Goodluck Jonathan's Government and makes recommendations on the practical realities on how to transform the higher Education sub-sector in Nigeria to meet the current global trends.

The section eight (8) of the National Policy on Education is concerned mainly on Higher Education otherwise referred to as Tertiary education. It is the education given after secondary education in universities, colleges of Education, Polytechnics and Monotechnics including those institutions offering correspondence courses (FGN, 2004).

The goals of higher education in Nigeria include 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 society;
- (c) develop the intellectual capacity 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; and
- (g) promote national and international understanding and interaction.

In the pursuance of these goals, higher education institutions (HEI) are suppose to engage in teaching, research and development, virile staff development programmes, generation and dissemination of knowledge, access to training funds such as those provided by Industrial Training Fund (ITF), Students Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES) programmes, maintenance of minimum standards through appropriate agencies, inter-institutional cooperation, and dedicated services to the community through extra-mural and extension services.

Higher education is critical to economic success and long term development of a nation, facing several challenges of growth and development on many fronts. Higher education provides economic and social benefits both to individual and the public, produces qualified human capital, adapts and generates knowledge, promotes international cooperation and improves competitiveness in the global knowledge based economy (Teshome, 2008). Onah (2012) posited that if education particularly higher education is well positioned, the challenges of unemployment would be a thing of the past, because there will be poverty reduction, employment generation, wealth creation and economic growth leading to job creation. A country which is unable to develop the skills and knowledge of its people to utilize them effectively in the national economy will be unable to develop anything else (Harbison, 1973). On the other hand, Drucker (1961) has contended that an abundance of highly educated people is a precondition of national survival, an indispensable instrument of economic and social development and a source of military strength. According to Psacharopoulos (1988) education particularly, higher education, is widely regarded as the route to economic prosperity, the key to scientific and technological advancement, the means to combat

unemployment, the foundation of social equality and the spearhead of political socialization and cultural vitality.

Ifenkwe (2013) posited that any country that is desirous of raising her manpower must show strong commitment toward educational development at the tertiary level.

State of Education in Nigeria

The world today is knowledge driven. The Holy Bible stated thus: “my people perish for lack of knowledge”. It is the acquisition of knowledge that makes rich and adds no sorrow. It is education that makes powerful and removes discrimination. Also, it is education that makes for popularity and removes minority status etc. This knowledge which is the acquisition of information or understanding or skill is gained through higher education particularly. On the state of education in Nigeria, comparing it with a few countries in Africa, it is on record that of the 56 million out of school children globally, Nigeria alone has a staggering record of 10.5 million children and youth. The female enrolment in schools is put at about 45%, placing the country on the lower crossbar of the ladder in the world (Onah, 2012). Studies have also shown that there is shortage of classrooms, non functional laboratories and libraries. Infact, Nigeria is recorded among the countries that are leading in examination malpractices and cult-related activities (Onah, 2012). It has been observed that South Africa spends about 5.5% of her GDP on education while Nigeria spends only about 1.0%. Ghana spends about 26% of her national budget on education, Botswana - 21%, Kenya-20% while Nigeria only spends between 14% and 18% the highest ever (Onah, 2012).

The world standard as recommended by UNESCO is 26%. In general, it could be said and rightly too, that education is an orphan in Nigeria even though it fathers all other professions; the consequence is that what is produced from the higher institutions are parboiled products (half cooked products). (Onah, 2012).

Factors Affecting Higher Education in Nigeria

Many factors have affected the smooth operation of higher education institutions in Nigeria negatively thereby, hindering the attainment of their goals. Some of these factors are:

- i. shortage of funds
- ii. cultural domination
- iii. curriculum relevance
- iv. non implementation of vision and mission of institutions.
- v. weak research capabilities and many others.

- i. Owing to shortage of funds, higher education in Nigeria lack the required numbers of quality lecturers and researchers. Those recruited may not be the best hands to be engaged in meaningful work. Those who are qualified seek greener pastures. Left behind them are the newly graduated who lack experience or old professors whose effectiveness has declined. The few good scholars are weighed down by heavy teaching loads and rely on yellow notes as they do not have time to upgrade their materials. (Mosha, 1986).
- ii. There are fears that western education serves as a major instrument of cultural domination and intellectual servitude. For instance, Carnoy (1974) contends that there is strong link between western formal education and imperialist domination designed to maintain inequality between and within countries. Nyerere (1974) suspects that a major purpose of higher education particularly in Africa is to transform Africans into black Europeans or black Americans. This view is corroborated by Ayandele (1982) who points out that African higher education institutions remain centers for the diffusion of Western culture; culturally, a class of Africans with English, French or American veneer are raised.
- iii. **Curriculum relevance:** There is a widespread concern in the relevance of curricula as expressed by the overall mismatch between programs of study and labor market requirements (Teshome, 2008). Institutions are generally ineffective at preparing students with applicable skills and reflecting the needs of the employment market. For example, agricultural education and training is often out of synch with labor market demands in terms of knowledge and practical competencies especially in agribusiness, basic management and problem solving.

Also, most of the higher education institutions in Nigeria use a structure and curricula based on European or American models which lack the necessary accompaniments as adequate buildings, facilities, maintenance and funds. (Goldschmidt, 1987). In addition, students and parents still believe in the present curricula which emphasize academic subjects as key to prosperity and wealth. Pupils are reluctant to pursue subjects like metalwork and rural science as they are seen as reserved for the less intelligent and uneducated.

- iv. **Non implementation of vision and mission of institutions:** The vision and mission of institutions in most cases are not clearly stated, or if they are, the necessary resources to implement them are directed elsewhere. Leadership and management are not committed to tackling the problems identified.

v. **Weak Research Capacities**

Higher education institutions in Nigeria do not yet possess adequate research capacities to make them active beneficiaries of global knowledge. The talent for creative research is scarce and does not increase proportionately with the supply of academic institution and faculty appointments (Streeteen, 1988). Also, most of today's learners are so scared of learning, believing only in pleasure, hoping that manna must come by hook or crook, and not from committed studies. Manical (1988) pointed that students interest is an important factor that makes the students perform well since interest is a stimulant.

Other factors that have impacted negatively on higher education include lack of access, bribery, embezzlement, corruption, acute shortage of infrastructures and facilities, lack of political will, policy inconsistencies, incessant industrial strikes, shortage of quality teachers and unfriendly learning environment. The resulting effects of these include the exodus of Nigeria students and academic staff to other countries. Sanusi cited in Orgu (2012) states that a revelation by the Network of Migration Research on Africa (NOMRA) shows that Nigerians immigrating in 2009 who were granted visas into United Kingdom numbered about 10,090 and they paid not less than \$42 billion to their host nation. Sanusi stressed that Nigeria was ranked third on the list of countries with the highest number of students studying overseas. Statistics also showed that over 71,000 Nigerian students in Ghana in 2010 paid about \$155 billion annually as against Nigeria's Annual budget of ₦121 billions for all federal universities in the same year. (Orgu, 2012).

The question now is how do Nigeria as a country get the higher education sub-sector on the right path, particularly towards the attainment of the goals? Dare to say that the answer lies in a transformational higher education system.

Dr. Goodluck Jonathan's Transformation of the Higher Education Sector

Dr. Goodluck Jonathan is the first president of Nigeria to have been educated to the level of a doctorate degree. Incidentally, he was a lecturer at the Rivers State College of Education before going into politics. It could, therefore be said that Jonathan knows the value of education for the development of society and that he is fully aware that, without education, there can be no meaningful development in such areas as physical infrastructure, power, agriculture, intellectual skills and such other attributes, generally referred to as society's human capitals. (Ekpo and Is-haq, 2011).

Indeed, there has never been any government in Nigeria that is as committed to the development of education as that of Jonathan. At the Higher education level, the Federal Government has established twelve (12) new universities (9 in the north, 3 in the south) to enhance access for thousands of candidates who seek admission into

Nigeria universities annually. Goodluck Jonathan deserves commendation for other interventions such as the Book fund, the Presidential Special Scholarships for Innovation and Development, (PRESSID) in which 101 beneficiaries are now undergoing training in 25 top universities in the world, and the sponsorship of over 7,000 lecturers of federal and state tertiary institutions for post graduate (mostly Ph.D). Another area of Jonathan's Transformation of Nigeria tertiary institution is his success on upgrading their modes of learning, through facilities, including a video conferencing system, centralized in the National University Commission (NUC), which is capable of connecting all the universities. Currently, 27 Federal universities have been hooked to the system and connected to the wider world. It enables lecturers and students from all over the world share information and academic resources. It is worth mentioning too that the Jonathan administration recently ear-marked the injection of ₦1.3 trillion into the Nigerian university system in the next six years to fund the revitalization of infrastructure and key programmes that would revolutionize the nation's universities (Udumbraye, 2014).

The Federal Government under Jonathan also established a scheme of High impact Fund to support all tertiary institutions and have also made available the provision of #1 billion to each of the nation's polytechnics and colleges of education. Since 2011, the number of National Certificate of Education (NCE) awarding institutions has increased from 96 to 124 and student enrolment from 620,000 in 2011 to 750,000 in 2013 (Udumbraye, 2014).

Udumbraye (2014) have also observed that budgetary allocation to education has almost tripled from #224 billion to ₦634 billion between 2007 and 2013. As an indication that the Nigerian tertiary education is being successfully transformed, the World Bank recently designated 10 public and private universities (out of the 18 African centre's that competed) as centre's of Excellence for outstanding Research Programme in the areas of societal development.

Conclusion

If higher education institutions in Nigeria must be taken to the next level, the transformations already initiated by Jonathan should be continued. Successive governments should be prepared to invest heavily in the training and updating of the knowledge, skills and professional competence of teachers. Also there should be adequate funding to create conducive and enabling learning environment. Adequate provision of infrastructure and instructional material to aid practical experience in teaching and learning is also very necessary.

Recommendations

In an attempt to make the Nigeria's Higher Education a pride of place that will compete favorably with world class institutions, the following practical steps are recommended:

1. Higher institutions should be provided with the necessary capacities in terms of manpower, infrastructure and equipment for effective teaching and learning and the production of high quality graduates. This will place emphasis on practical rather than theoretical work.
2. The Nigerian intellectual community both at home and in Diaspora should come up with a credible and formidable advocacy group to make a case for better funding of science, technology and innovation as a critical factor for development.
3. TetFund intervention should be continued and increased to cover private owned institutions.
4. Curriculum transformation should include new knowledge social issues as those pertaining to HIV/AIDS and introduction of new technologies ICT should be stressed.
5. Government should be ready and willing to implement in full agreements entered into with education unions and stakeholders for transformation of the education sector.
6. Government should be more pro-active in the implementation of education policies and demonstrate high sense of dynamism on the sector, which is seen as key component to achieving and sustaining the goals of the Nigerian society.
7. Education should not be politicized. Paper certificate should be de-emphasized, and appointment into educational offices should be based on merit.
8. Government should take giant strides to tackle the menace of corruption, policy inconsistencies and examination malpractice during internal and external examinations. Those not qualified for admission into institution should not be admitted in the first place. They should be encouraged to embark on other trades and vocations.
9. Sincerity and honesty between government and her employees in the education sector is paramount; to avoid incessant industrial strikes. Alternatives to strike actions should be sought in solving problems with government.

10. Training on a regular basis for all lecturers and Instructors on entrepreneurship education. They should be sponsored to attend local and international conferences to acquire more knowledge so that they can effectively transfer entrepreneurial skills into the students.

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