MANAGING DIVERSIFICATION OF UNIVERSITY EDUCATION FOR POVERTY REDUCTION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract
The paper looked at managing diversification of university education for poverty reduction in Nigeria. Major concepts such as management, diversification, university education and poverty were theoretically defined in the context of this work. Issues such as diversification management, university education diversification and poverty reduction were explicitly discussed. The relevance a diversified university education curriculum has to university graduates in relation to reducing poverty as well as proper management of diversification of university education in Nigeria were discussed. It was recommended that Nigerian universities should build a linkage with the labour market which will enable university graduates become connected to these parastatals from where they can do business with or get absorbed after graduation, among others. The paper concluded that there is need for Nigerian
universities to diversify and strategize measures which will help empower university graduates to avoid the dreaded menace of poverty in Nigeria.

Key words: Management, diversification, university education and poverty

From time immemorial, Nigeria usually recorded high economic growth and development, first from agricultural production and second from crude oil. Regrettably, the nation’s interest shifted from agriculture as source of income to crude oil, soon after oil boom as a result of few hands which power rest on as in the case with Nigeria, mismanagement of the resources which could continue to thrive and boost the nation’s economy set in, thereby heightening poverty rate and exacting gross effect on economic growth and a fall in national income. In as much as these resources were not properly managed by the powers that be, the nation began to experience economic challenges and meltdown as well as high poverty rate which now places Nigeria in the list of under developed nations and poor economy nation.

Education/University Education
To ameliorate the challenge of poverty among university graduates, university education can be used as a tool to foster human capital development (HCD) which in turn contributes to economic growth, poverty reduction and the menace of unemployment in Nigeria. The role education plays in poverty reduction is very crucial, this is because education is the only social institution that reaches the largest segment of the population with the goal of guiding it through a systematic learning process. Increased access to education can contribute to reducing poverty through the acquisition of basic skills such as reading, writing and numeracy which helps an individual cross the margin of illiteracy to become a lettered or literate person. Education is the development of character, knowledge, ambition and the mental powers resulting from acquisition of skills and training. According to Afolabi and Alao (2009) Education is a form of investment in human capital development, which brings economic benefits and contributes significantly to the nation’s future wealth by increasing the productive capacity of its people. In recent times many Nigerians tend to look up to education for the realization of their aspirations, hopes, desires and ambitions in most aspects of life especially self-dependency and reliance to enable them get out of the shackles of poverty. These include acquisition of adequate entrepreneurial skills, getting a satisfying well-remunerated job, having enjoyable leisure, living a meaningful spiritual life and working towards self-actualization. This is why Aghenta (2000) and Fadipe (2000) separately maintained that education is the most powerful and dynamic instrument for social, economic, political, scientific, and technological development of nations. Without education, it will be difficult for a learner to acquire necessary knowledge, skills and competencies which will enable him fit into the 21st century world of work.
Investing in a functional university education system, is a pathway to meeting the obligations of a nation’s citizenry by improving opportunities for the educated youths and their families, strengthening their economies and keeping them in good health (Adebayo, 2012).

University education according to Ayo-Sobowale and Akinyemi (2011) is the type of education given to individuals after secondary level of education which consists of conventional universities offering courses in sciences and humanity and special universities for sciences, agriculture and engineering. In Nigeria, university education is the focal point of higher education. University education is expected to create needed human capital with enhanced skills that can lead to technological innovation, productivity and growth within the economy (Olaniyan, 2001). University education teaches and train individuals in the society to be good, law abiding and respectful citizens of the society. Without education especially that acquired in the university, It will be difficult to have a free society with empowered youths without the provision of a functional education that develops the cognitive, psychomotor and affective domains. With the role university education plays in the transformation of individuals and the development of nation’s human capital, there is a need to diversify university education in Nigeria for the enhancement of poverty reduction. Adebayo (2012) maintained that some of the reasons radicals are able to recruit young men for example to become armed robbers, assassins and suicide bombers is because of hopelessness after acquiring a rigid kind of university education void of productive area in the school curriculum which will enable them generate income and live above the stipulated poverty line of one dollar per day. Hence, one way to defeat hopelessness is through a diversified university education which gives people the fantastic hope that comes by being able to read, become skilled and realize their dreams.

In Nigeria, despite the government’s poverty eradication campaigns, national development plans and sessional papers, poverty is still a major challenge which has been globally recognized as a major threat to developing countries around the world and Nigeria in particular. This outcry made Olaitan (1996) and Adekoya (2010) to assert that despite the efforts of successive governments in Nigeria to tackle the issue of unemployment and the scourge of poverty by different approaches the issue of wealth creation and poverty still remain elusive. Verner (2004) reveals that breaking the inter-generational transmission of poverty requires extensive action in the education sector. Low-quality education leads to low income, which in turn perpetuates poverty. He concludes that educational attainment is the single most important poverty-reducing factor. All levels of education from primary to tertiary (university) level are significant and associated with the probability of Education, Job Satisfaction, Decision Making, Health, Income, Employment, Labor Force, Wellbeing, Economic Growth, Effective Social Network, Peace and Stability, Environment, Decision Making, Private Returns and Social well being. He suggests that improvements in the diversification of university
education in access and quality have been recognized as key to poverty reduction in Nigeria.

**Concept of Poverty**

It is becoming widely recognized that poverty takes various forms including the lack of income and productive resources sufficient to ensure sustainable livelihoods, hunger and malnutrition, ill-health, limited or no access to education, homelessness, inadequate housing, unsafe environments and social discrimination and exclusion (Adebayo, 2012). Olaitan, Ali, Onyemach and Christ (2000) defined poverty as a global phenomenon ravaging most countries in Africa like Nigeria. It is a state or situation where an individual or group cannot obtain the necessities of life because of low purchasing power and income. When human and natural resources of a nation are not sufficiently developed, poverty becomes the order of the day and the economic scenes will be bombarded with various problems to the extent that policy makers, practitioners and the general public will be in a state of confusion. Edoh in Ugwoke, Okenjom and Angela (2015) shed more light on what really constitutes poverty when he asserts that “Poverty has various manifestations, including lack of Income and productive resources sufficient to ensure sustainable livelihood; hunger and malnutrition, ill health; limited or lack of access to education and other basic services, increased morbidity and mortality from illness, homelessness and inadequate housing; unsafe environments, social discriminations and exclusion”. It is also characterized by a lack of participation in decision and in civil, social and cultural life. In the words of Sachs (2009), poverty can be defined in terms of three distinguishable degrees. These are: Extreme poverty, moderate poverty and relative poverty. Extreme poverty means the household cannot meet basic needs for survival. Such people are perpetually hungry, unable to access health care; they lack amenities of safe drinking water and sanitation. They cannot afford education for their children and cannot shelter their families. Moderate poverty on the other hand generally refers to conditions of life in which basic needs are met, but just barely. Relative poverty is construed as a household income level below a given proportion of average national income. In high income countries they lack access to cultural goods, entertainment, recreation, quality health care, education and other prerequisites for upward social mobility. The base line about many Nigerians living below the poverty level of one US dollar per day is that, many Nigerians live in poverty in its extreme nature manifesting itself in terms of lack of basic standard of health, nutrition, shelter, water and sanitations, and other minimum need for survival, well-being and participation in the society (Omoniyi, 2013).

**Causes of Poverty in Nigeria**

There are several factors that contribute to the menace of poverty in Nigeria. Akinola and Yusuf (2001) posited that the causes of poverty in the country had variously been traced to, among other factors: corruption, bad governance, debt overhang and
unemployment. Other authors like Olowa (2012) highlights the causes of poverty in Nigeria to include: low or negative economic growth, inappropriate macroeconomic policies, deficiencies in the labour market resulting in limited job growth, low productivity and low wages in the informal sector and a lag in human resource development. Other factors are; increase in crime and violence, environmental degradation and retrenchment of workers. Ucha (2010) identifies unemployment, corruption, non-diversification of the economy, income inequality, laziness and a poor education system as some of the key factors contributing to poverty in Nigeria. On the contrary, Ford (2007) links poverty in Nigeria to high crime rates especially in the Niger Delta region where there is a sharp contrast between the rich and the poor. Thus, the masses cause social unrest because the wealth obtained from their territory does not get to them. Furthermore, Garcia, Kohl, Ruengsorn and Zislin (2006) identified the causes of poverty in Nigeria to include: non-diversification of the economy from the oil and gas sector to more labour – intensive sectors, Lack of improvements in the health and education sector, instability of government revenue and crowding-out of agriculture. In this study, one of the major factors accentuating poverty in Nigeria is the rigid system of university education which allow students to study professional causes, graduate and get white collar jobs rather than diversifying the school curriculum in such a way that youths who graduate from the university will be able to be self-reliant and contribute to societal, economic and national development leading to poverty reduction.

Diversification of University System of Education in Nigeria for Poverty Reduction

In a bid to ameliorate this menace of poverty in the Nigerian society and boost economic development the need for the advocacy of managing the diversification of university education for poverty reduction becomes impeccable. Diversification presents the most competitive and strategic option for Nigerian university education system in the face of fighting against the challenge of poverty. Diversification of the university system of Nigerian has a lot of benefits for the Nigerian society to maximally utilize her abundant resource – base to rebuild the economy and enjoy the benefits of all the linkages, synergy, economies of scale, grow national technology and foreign investment profile, build human capital, exploit new opportunities, lessen averagely operational costs, increase national competitiveness and grow the standard of living and confidence of the citizens for national renaissance (Suberu, Ajala, Akande and Olure-Bank, 2015). According to Suberu et al, diversification does not occur in a vacuum. Which brings about using university education to fill the gap of ameliorating poverty in Nigeria. Diversification according to Teichler (2008) entails the process by which a system becomes more varied or diverse in its orientation and operations. It reflects a deviation from uniform and rigid system to a flexible system that can accommodate varying demand within a system from its providers. Varghese and Püttmann (2011) added that diversification is the process by which a system becomes more varied or diverse in its orientation and operations. It reflects a deviation from a uniform and rigid system to a
flexible system that can accommodate varying demand within a country from a multiplicity of providers. Managing the diversification of university education may result in differentiation (Neave, 2000). Differentiation implies the splitting up of units and the emergence of new units within an existing system like the university which will bring about spontaneous learning and development (van Vught, 1996).

There are diverse areas and aspects where university education in Nigeria can diversify the education system curriculum into what will influence university graduates through the acquisition of operational knowledge, professionalism, academic researches and equality of opportunities to enable them face the nation’s economic, political and societal changes and development. The university system is to make institutional investment through diversification, by increasing opportunities for students’ to improve interactions and consciously achieve employability skills for income generation and distribution (Ekanem & Emanghe, 2014). Particularly, this diversification can be through guaranteeing employment generation by acquiring employability skills, effective university labour market linkage, public private participation, university quality assurance, entrepreneurship education and information technology application. These will account for diversification in the productive capacity of university graduates to be relevant in the labour market and in the Nigerian society.

Harnessing all dimensions of diversification into an entrepreneurial kind of education, university students can be exposed to a wide range of Skills that will make them employers of labours rather than job seekers, adding to the menace of unemployment which usually leads to poverty and total dependence on government and white collar jobs which are usually a mirage. Thiese skills according to Balarabe (2012) are soap/detergent, tooth brushes and tooth paste making, cloth dying/textile, blocks making, food processing/packaging/preservation, vegetable oil and salt extractions, fisheries/aquaculture, bakery, leather tanning, photography, paper production, farming (crop), tailoring, interior decoration, printing, animal husbandry (poultry, piggery, goat, etc), book-keeping, bricks, nails, screws making, plumbing, glassware production/ceramic production, metal working/fabrication-steel aluminum doors and windows, refrigeration/air-conditioning, plastic making, domestic electrical wiring, radio/TV repairs, brick laying/making, iron welding, building drawing, carpentry, metal craft- blacksmith tinsmith, sanitary wares, vehicle maintenance, etc.

When these trades/skills are competently acquired in the university through entrepreneurship education, poverty in Nigeria will be reduced to the barest minimum and this will make university graduates self-reliant to contribute to the nation’s economy through the employment of other individuals into the enterprise.

Conclusion

The approval of establishing both private and public universities by the national universities commission (NUC) without measurable strategies that will engage the graduates to be produced in this schools will be effort in futility. This is because
Managing Diversification of …

when students are trained with a rigid type of curriculum that does not allow for diversification, it greatly affects the graduates produced because apart from gaining job opportunities in their area of study, they can no longer be useful to themselves and hence, this will bring about dependency on available meager resources, which then results to poverty. It is therefore important for Nigerian university to diversify and strategize measures which will help empower university graduates to avoid the dreaded menace of poverty in Nigeria.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made for the study.

1. Nigerian universities should build a linkage with the labour market which will enable university graduates become connected to these parastatals from where they can do business with or get absorbed after graduation.

2. Universities should also build public private participation (ppp), to enable those partners build a strong relationship between them and the school to build projects that will benefit both the school and for students welfare.

3. Government should provide adequate human and material resources required to implement diversified aspects and programmes infused into the school curriculum for effective teaching and learning.

4. Areas like quality assurance, entrepreneurship education and information technology should be held in high esteem and followed to the later to ensure academic excellence and poverty reduction.

References


