
POLYTECHNIC EDUCATION FOR ALL (PEFA): PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

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Abstract

The Nigerian higher education system including polytechnics has seen myriad of multi-faceted problems in recent times. Imagining the Polytechnic objectives as given in the Act establishing it, the invaluable roles and contributions of polytechnic education to the sociopolitical and economic development of Nigeria, nobody will dispute (the fact that it should be a national issue by making it "Polytechnic Education For All", This paper, which focuses on Problems and Prospects of Polytechnic Education for All(PEFA) has its objectives as examining the myriads of problems militating against and the prospects for Nigerian Polytechnics Education for all The paper employed descriptive research method in its analysis. It was found out that Nigerian Polytechnics were faced with such challenges as financial crisis, poor infrastructure, brain-drain, lack of Polytechnic commission, volatile and militant students' unionism, secret cults, examination malpractices and sexual harassment. The paper recommended that government should re-address the issue of funding of Polytechnics and review upwards the pay-package of academic staff. Also, that the government should look into the issues of Polytechnic Commission and Autonomy. The paper again, recommended that government should make plans on the nation's manpower needs, integrating them into the Polytechnic programmes and adequately training and re-training of all education managers.

Polytechnic education, which is part of technical education programme in tertiary education Level leads to the acquisition of practical and applied skills as well as fundamental scientific knowledge. To Ukpai (2008), this type of education was aimed initially at evolving an educational system based on work and training. Polytechnic educate future leaders and develop the middle-level technical capacities that underpin economic growth and development (Ekundayo and Ajayi, 2009) and stressing further that, the main purpose and relevance of polytechnic education in Nigeria is the provision of much needed manpower to accelerate the socio-economic development of the nation, making it an instrument of social change and economic

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development. To the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN)(2004, p.36), higher education is expected to:

- (i) Contribute to national development through high level relevant manpower training;
- (ii) Develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of the individual and society;
- (iii) Develop the intellectual capability of individuals to understand and appreciate their local and external environments;
- (iv) Acquire both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to be self-reliant and useful members of the society;
- (v) Promote and encourage scholarship and community service; and
- (vi) Forge and cement national unity; and promote national and international understanding and interaction.

Many countries including Nigeria take education as an instrument for the promotion of national development as well as effecting desirable social change (NPE, 2004). This perhaps, might be responsible for the continuous growing concern of all stakeholders in education Industry on changes that are likely to affect it as well as the implications such changes will have on the management and administration of education.

Considering the importance of polytechnic education, Ajayi and Ekundayo (2006) submitted that the funds allocated to the sector should not merely be considered as an expense but a long-term investment, of benefit to society as a whole, which are reflected on a societal level in terms of lower unemployment rates, better health, lower crime rates, more involvement in societal activities, higher tax returns and other trickledown effects. To Ekundayo and Ajayi (2009), despite the immense benefits of Polytechnic education to nation building, the potentials in fulfilling its responsibility is frequently thwarted by longstanding problems bedeviling the system.

Polytechnic education in Nigeria is in travail, as it is filled with crises of various dimensions and magnitude. A number of multi-faceted problems have inhibited goal attainment and are raising questions, doubts and fears, all of which combine to suggest that the system is at a crossroad.

There is therefore, the urgent need to really look into the effective management of the nation's education, discussing the militating challenges with a view to achieving effectiveness, quality and relevance in the entire system. In discussing the challenges and prospects, the nation's educational managers and administrators will be aware of their enormous responsibilities and be able to find lasting solution to the problem currently facing the educational sector and

threatening the system. The paper examines the myriads of challenges militating against and the prospects of Nigerian polytechnics.

Historical Development of Polytechnic Education in Nigeria

In pre-independent Nigeria, the training of technical personnel was largely a private arrangement by companies and organizations. This effort was augmented by the government in 1952 when it established the Yaba Higher College of Nigerian of Arts, Science and Technology, which had branches in Enugu, Ibadan and Zaria. Technical institutions were also established at Enugu and Kaduna in 1958, Ibadan in 1960 and Auchi in 1964. In 1987, the colleges became polytechnics.

Decree 33 of 1979, which gave legal power to the establishment of Polytechnics in Nigeria, among other things, states that the main purpose of polytechnic education is to produce middle-level manpower to manage the nation's economy. To Idoko (2005), these Polytechnics are to engage in researches suitable for developing human and material resources needed by the nation's industries and economy.

Meaning of Polytechnic Education

Ukpai (2008) noted that polytechnic education is a type of education resulting in the acquisition of practical and useful skills. This type of education, according to the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN), is given after the second six years of formal schooling, (it is the education at the tertiary level represented by 4 in the 6:3:3:4 system of education as stated in the National Policy on Education (NPE). There will be political stability, full employment and abundant wealth creation, void of cultism and violence as well as bribery and corruption.

Objectives of Technical/Polytechnic in Nigeria

The aims and objectives of technical education have been articulated by the National Policy on Education (1998 revised) as follows:

- (i) To provide trained manpower in applied science, technology and commerce particularly at sub-professional grade;
- (ii) To provide technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, industrial and economic development;
- (iii) To provide people who can apply scientific knowledge to the improvement and solution of environmental problems for the use and convenience of man;

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- (iv) To give an introduction to professional studies in engineering and other technologies;
- (v) To give training and impart the necessary skills leading to the production of craftsmen, technicians and other enterprising and self reliant; and
- (vi) To enable young men and women have an intelligent understanding of the increasing complexity of technology.

In line with the above objectives, the polytechnics were established to provide full-time and part-time courses in technology, applied science, commerce and management and in such fields of applied learning relevant to the needs for the development of Nigeria in the areas of industrial; agricultural production; distribution; research and development; and adaptation of techniques (Decree No. 33). From the foregoing, there is no doubt that the Polytechnics were established with a deliberate policy of enhancing the technological development of the country, which is a solid educational foundation.

Furthermore, the above objectives are pursued through teaching, learning and the dissemination of existing and new information. The desire to achieve them informed the establishment of the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE). To Idoko (2005), the board is established to advise the federal government on and to coordinate all aspects of technical and vocational education, outside the polytechnic and to make recommendations on national policy necessary for full development of technical and vocational education for the training of technicians and craftsmen and other middle and skilled manpower for the balanced and coordinated development of the Polytechnics and colleges of technology.

The founders of Polytechnic education in Nigeria appreciated the need for better conditions of living of the people and the overall development in line with the economics of the advanced nations built on solid educational foundation.

Ukpai (2008) believed so when he observed that "...the country's progress and prosperity will be principally determined by... the people's ability to understand and take optimum advantage of the potentialities for continued advances resulting from a dynamic and progressive technology to a solid educational foundation and stable system.

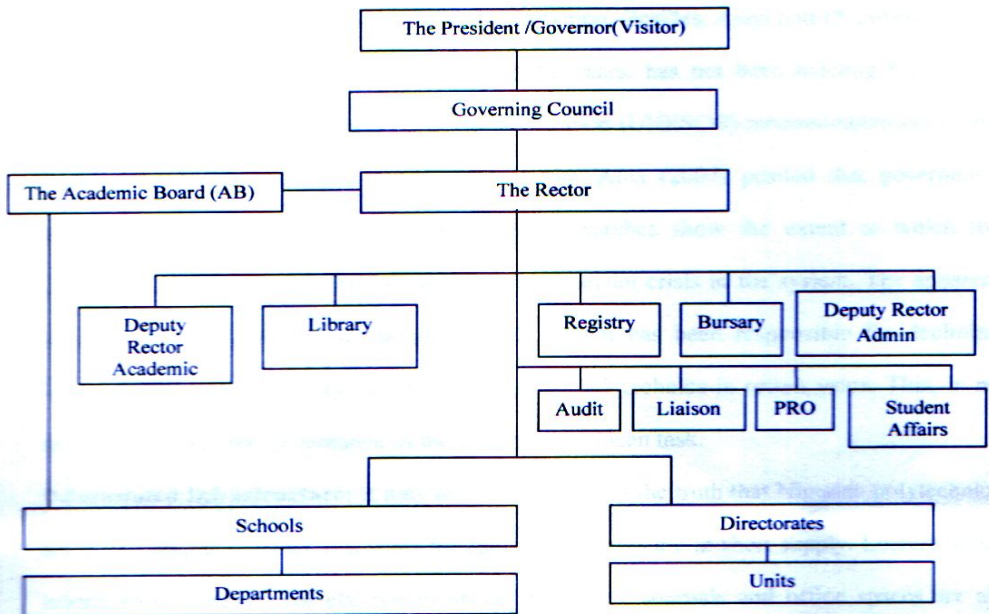
The Management of Nigerian Polytechnics

The Effective Management of Polytechnic education is both external and internal dimensions. At the external dimension, the federal government through the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) controls the polytechnics. NBTE is a body charged with the coordination of polytechnic education management in the country (Ukpai, 2012). To function, the NBTE undertakes certain activities to improve quality of polytechnic education in Nigeria, such as accreditation of courses; approval of courses and

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programmes; maintenance of minimum academic standards; monitoring of polytechnics; giving guidelines for setting up of polytechnics: monitoring of private polytechnics; prevention of the establishment of illegal campus; and implementing appropriate sanctions (NBTE, 2001).

Again, the internal management of each polytechnic could be given in a simple organogram. According to the Students' Handbook (2012), the first is the Visitor who is usually the Head of State or the Head of Government that established it (The President in case of federal polytechnic and the Governors in case of state polytechnics). The second is the Rector, the head of the polytechnic, the apex of the management structure within each polytechnic is the Governing Council, headed by the Chairman, charged with the administrative functions in the areas of goal setting, policy formulation, staff development, general discipline, budget approval and liaison activities with the government. In addition to this, there is the Academic Board (AB), headed by the Rector and the Registrar as the Secretary. The AB regulates the academic activities of the polytechnic following the general guidelines provided by the NBTE. In Nigeria, polytechnics are run through committee/board systems which are either responsible to the Governing Council or the Academic Board (AB). The above explanations can be represented in an organigram thus:



Source: Registry Unit, Akanu Ibiam Federal Polytechnic, Unwana (2013)

Problems of Polytechnic Education for All in Nigeria

Most of educational institutions in Nigeria today is faced with myriads of challenges, which have impacted negatively on the institutions, in making respectable impact on the sociopolitical and economic advancement of Nigeria. Ekundayo and Ajayi (2009), observed that polytechnic in Nigeria today is nothing but crises management. Polytechnics education is militated by such noticeable crises as:

Financial Crisis: Ibukun (1997) lamented that there is growing shortage of funds and learning resources in the polytechnic system. According to Oyeneye (2006) and Adegbite (2007), the major challenge facing the management of polytechnic system in Nigeria is inadequate funding, though Ajayi and Ayodele (2004) argued that there was an increase in the proportion of total expenditure devoted to education, but this has been considered to be rather grossly inadequate considering the phenomenal increase in student enrolment and increasing cost, which has been aggravated by inflation. Besides, Ajayi and Ekundayo (2006) remarked that the Nigerian government over the years, has not been meeting the United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) recommendation of 26% of the total budget allocation to education sector. Aina (2007) posited that government priority to education is still very low. These researches show the extent to which the government itself is a contributing factor to the financial crisis in the system. The apparent shortage of fund available to the polytechnic system has been responsible for declining library, social and laboratory facilities in Nigerian polytechnics in recent years. This, in no small way, makes the governance of the system a herculean task.

Deteriorated Infrastructure: It may not be too far from the truth that Nigerian polytechnics are fast decaying as all the resources for education process are in short supply. Lecture halls, laboratories, students' hostels, library space, books and journals and office spaces are all seriously inadequate (Ekundayo and Ajayi, 2009). This has left the equipment for leaching, research and learning either lacking, inadequate or in a bad shape to permit basic functions of academics.

Brain-drain Syndrome: According to Ekundayo and Ajayi (2009), Brain-drain refers to widespread migration of academic staff from either the universities or polytechnics in the country to overseas' universities or polytechnics where their services are better rewarded. One factor responsible has been the relatively small salaries level for polytechnics' academic staff during the past decade and the declining financial attractions of polytechnic employment in comparison to other opportunities. Another factor has been the rising workloads associated with deteriorating staff/student ratios. It must be emphasized that the best brains are leaving the educational system; the broad aim of

producing high level manpower from the system for national development cannot be achieved.

Lack of Polytechnic Commission: To Ukpai (2008), the polytechnic education has been the only sector of the tertiary education that is run by a parastatal. While the polytechnics' counterparts (that is. universities and colleges of education) are managed by commissions, the polytechnic system is managed by a board - The National Board for Technical Education (NBTE). The National Universities Commission (NUC) and National Commission of Colleges of Education (NCCOE) are entrusted with the day-to-day management and coordination of the affairs of these institutions, the polytechnic is managed by National Board for Technical Education (NBTE), Ukpai added that the effect is that the problems of polytechnic education are not seen from tertiary level but are considered along that of other technical schools, which includes secondary schools. The board too, is saddled with so many other responsibilities rather than concentrating on the problems and management of polytechnic education. Policy articulation and implementation are hampered by civil service bottlenecks. This has seriously affected development of polytechnic education.

Volatile and Militant Student Unionism: Ekundayo and Ajayi (2009) noted that one of the banes of effective polytechnic management in Nigeria in recent times is the unbridled student violent reaction to national issues and internal problems. The result of student militancy and violent unionism has been the frequent closure of polytechnics, removal of rectors among others.

Secret Cults: One of the challenges facing tertiary institutions in Nigeria today is how to handle the menace and aggressiveness of cult members (Ekundayo and Ajayi. 2009). Never before has the potential for the destruction of lives and property on campuses been so great or escalated and as fast and horrible as now (Ogunbameru, 2004). In the same vein, Adegbite (2007) remarked that the issue of cultism among the students has opened a new and very dangerous dimension to the situation of things in our educational institutions. Smah (2007) posited that where cults exist, there is no guarantee that academic programmes and activities would run normally. Hence, the polytechnic may run the risk of being constantly closed or disrupted. The results of these cult activities as submitted by Smah (2007) have been feeling of fear on campus, killings and deaths and campus disturbances.

Political Interference: It has been observed that polytechnics these days are not totally free from the hand of politics outside the institutions. Government of the day, most especially in the state-owned polytechnics, interfere a lot in terms of selection and choice of the chief executive, deans, departmental heads, directors of programmes and above all, the selection of rectors.

A situation whereby the staff of the polytechnics are not totally free to choose their leader without government intervention has not augur well for the system.

Some other problems in the management of the polytechnic system in Nigeria include rising cost of polytechnic education, the unmanageable social demand for admission (Mgbekem, 2007), sexual harassment, and examination malpractices (Odia and Omofonmwan, 2007: Mgbekem, 2007). The prospects of polytechnic education for all in Nigeria may include such areas as noted hereunder.

Prospects of Polytechnic Education for All in Nigeria

It is obvious that the main strategy for Nigeria's economic growth and solid educational foundation and stable system is the adaptation of technology for self sufficiency. It must be noted that education at all levels must help to accelerate technological growth. The relevance of polytechnic education as compared to other forms such as university education can be seen, according to Ukpai (2008), in the area of continuity in technical skill acquisition following the traditional apprenticeship, research potentials and manpower production. In this regard the paper proposes the following prospects.

Adequate Funding; The gross under-funding of the educational system in the country has been rendering the polytechnic system incapacitated. To Odia and Omofonmwan (2007), UNESCO recommended 26% of the total budget of a nation to be allocated to education but the Longe Commission of 1991 observed that the percentage of budgetary allocation to education has never exceeded 10%. Governments should therefore allocate more funds to the polytechnics so that they can be more effective in their day-to-day operations. The polytechnics should also seek alternative sources for revenue generation to argument what the government allocates to them. As a means of ensuring effective management of fund, Mgbekem (2007) suggested that reliable accounting system should be established in each Nigerian polytechnic to guarantee accountability, honesty and transparency. **Need to Improve the Infrastructural Base:** If quality is to be enhanced in the nation's polytechnics, the infrastructural base of the system needs to be improved upon. Governments should intensify efforts in providing more physical facilities in the polytechnics. Besides, corporate bodies, philanthropists and alumni associations should also assist in the provision of these facilities to aid effective teaching-learning activities in order to achieve the academic goals of polytechnic education for national development.

There is need for a serious expansion of physical facilities and equipment to meet the increasing student population. Moreover, there is the need to take serious look at the maintenance culture which is lacking in an average Nigerian, as this will go a long way to reduce the rate of decay of the existing facilities.

Upward Review of Pay-package for Academic Staff: In order to attract brains to the polytechnic system, the personal emoluments of polytechnic staff have to be revisited. According to Ibukun (1997), the situation where a young graduate who is fortunate to take up job outside the unified public service starts to earn salaries sometimes, twice a professor's annual income does not augur well for staff motivation and stability in the Nigerian polytechnic system. If education is well-funded, pay-package of academic staff reviewed upward and the conditions of service improved, academic staff would not have to go abroad looking for greener pasture.

National Commission for Polytechnics: The issue of National Commission for polytechnics is a matter of necessity if quality output is expected and uninterrupted academic calendar is to be guaranteed for an enabling teaching-learning environment and the incessant face-off between the Academic Staff Union of Polytechnics (ASUP) and the government to be put to rest. The National Commission for Polytechnics is relevant to the Nigerian polytechnic system for stability and a dynamic change in the administrative structure.

Volatile and Militant Student's Unionism: To reduce the extent of volatile and militant students' unionism in campus, it is advised that the students are involved in decision-making particularly on issues that borders on their welfare. Mgbekem (2007) suggested the following as means of curbing students' crises:

- (a) Polytechnic administrator should avoid being highhanded with students.
- (b) Rectors should make themselves accessible to students.
- (c) Polytechnic administrators should establish frequent forums for negotiation, dialoguing and exchanging of ideas between students and polytechnic administrators.

Combating Secret Cults: Eradicating cultism in Nigerian polytechnics should be joint effort of all the stakeholders - government, polytechnic authorities, religious leaders, students and parents. They should come together and decide on how cases of cultism should be dealt with as research evidences have shown that most cult members are children of the highly-placed citizens in the society.

Autonomy and De-politicization of the Polytechnic System: The National Commission for Polytechnics would help reduce the extent of political interference in the affairs of these polytechnics, most especially in the appointment/selection of key principal officials. The academics should be free to choose who their leader should be without the influence of the politicians. Where this situation is not free, then the governance of the system will still depend on external influence. According to Jaiyeoba (2006), the issues of tribalism, political interference, etc should be disregarded in the appointment. The polytechnic should be granted autonomy in all areas.

Conclusion and Recommendations

It has been seen that the polytechnic system, which is the bedrock of development in the country is faced with myriads of challenges. These include; financial crisis, deteriorated infrastructure, brain-drain, lack of national commission for polytechnics, volatile and militant students' unionism, secret cults, examination malpractices, sexual harassment and so on. However, for meaningful development to take place in the polytechnic system, the following recommendation must be pursued:

The government must be ready to address the issue of funding the system adequately to help solve the problem of infrastructure.

The government should as a matter of national importance review upward the pay-package for academics: give consent to the polytechnic autonomy being clamour for by the academics.

It is also recommended that there is the need to make plans on the nation's manpower needs in a bid to integrate into polytechnic programmes.

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