RE-ENGINEERING UNIVERSITY EDUCATION FOR EMPLOYMENT AND SELF PRODUCTIVITY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The paper takes an overview of the philosophical basis of the University Education and the content provisions vis-à-vis the current demands of our time and the projection to the future. It further examines some critical social issues that should be addressed through efficient and functional University Education to meet the rising challenge of teaming unemployed University graduates in Nigeria. The paper suggests some content areas to be infused into and/or emphasized in the already existing, curriculum to make University Education more responsive to the needs of our contemporary society. The paper concludes that there is the need for re-ordering of our educational priorities to accommodate new knowledge and to emphasize neglected areas of knowledge to enable University graduates be self-productive and to also key in properly into today's world of work.

Education is a veritable means for socio-cultural, political and economic growth. It is the bedrock of any society and no society can grow beyond its level of educational attainment. All over the world, education is seen and assumed to be the most potent instrument of change, as any fundamental change in the intellectual and social outlook of any society has to be preceded by an educational revolution. The fulfillment of this role lies on an efficient education and education policies for which the university education has a great role to play.

In the words of Ojo (2006), Education generally is central to man because it is a visa to success, a passport to the unknown and a catalyst to great heights. It empowers, emboldens, refines, civilizes, enlightens, enriches and gives confidence to man.

The most fundamental way out of poverty is functional and qualitative education. It is a long life process which enables an individual to develop his potentials in order to give service not only to him but to the society at large (Nzerem, 2008). Every educational system must therefore be fashioned in such a way that beneficiaries fit into the world of work and also respond adequately to the needs of the society.

Some worrying and pertinent questions to ask are: How has the process of education at the University level been able to equip the graduates with knowledge and skills that are needed for self-productivity and employment in the society?

What conscious efforts are universities making towards reducing poverty in the society, to reorder their educational priorities to accommodate new knowledge and to emphasize neglected areas of knowledge to enable graduates meet the demands of labour market? Akinboye (2007) expressed his reservation about Nigeria Education system when he noted that our education system seems to have been reduced to a pattern of repeated practice, go to nursery, primary, secondary and tertiary institution to acquire certificates and start looking for job that is usually not available. In the same vein, Obike (2006) lamented the state of affairs of University Education thus:

There is increasing concern that University Education in Nigeria is merely focusing on knowledge acquisition with little understanding, and without useful skills that could lead graduates to self actualization … This practice has given rise to University graduates invariably alienated from their environment. They go into urban areas searching for non-existing jobs, for which they are in any case ill equipped (P. 71).

According to the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004) the goals of tertiary institutions shall be to:

i) Contribute to national develop 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;
vi) forge and cement national unity; and
vii) Promote national and international understanding and interaction.

The National Policy on Education further specifies very clearly that the University shall make optimum contribution to national development by:

i) Intensifying and diversifying its programmes for the development of high level manpower within the context of the needs of the nation.
ii) Making professional course content to reflect our national requirements.
iii) Making all students, as part of a general programme of all-round improvement in University Education to offer general study of knowledge and nationalism.

Undoubtedly, the goals of University Education are laudable and robust but seems to have been faced with many problems affecting implementation and realization of the national objectives of education in Nigeria (Omotayo, 2009). This fact was equally noted by Olutala (2006) when he noted that Nigeria's philosophy and policy formulation is not really deficient rather what is needed is a matching zeal and devotion to policy implementation. Unfortunately, this matching zeal appears to be lacking (Nzerem, 2008).

This paper therefore advocates for evolutionary imperatives for University Education and proper characterization of the social laboratory that higher educational institutions should become if they are to enhance their competitive advantages and to also fit in properly into the world of work.

Evolutionary Imperatives for University Education in the World of Work

According to Obanya (2012), the strong pull of the forces of rapid changes, the predominance of ICT and pervasive socio-economic uncertainty of the twenty-first century have cause serious survival challenges for University education. For these, he suggested that for higher Education to remain afloat or competitive in a world of work there is need to:

i) Transform from ivory tower to social laboratories.
ii) Respond effectively to the demands of the world of work of a knowledge economy.
iii) Compete forcefully with other competent structures for the generation and application of knowledge.

The transformation from ivory tower to social laboratories as indicated by Obanya (2012) is as shown in table 1.

Table 1: Transformation from Ivory Tower to Social Laboratories

Ivory tower orientation	**Desired social laboratory orientation**
Disconnect from practical concerns of every life.	Embedded in the practical concerns of every day life.
Esoteric and over specialized focus.	Easy to understand procedure, accessible to the average person
Not easy to use research (useless)	Usable research, applicable to genuine societal challenges.
Academic elitism	Participatory academic processes
Outright condensation	Ready acceptance of other knowledge practitioners
No lingua franca with laymen	Closer link and mutual intelligibility of

	'academic' and 'practical' language.
Living in intellectual isolation	Opening up society Working in concert with extra-academic actors.

Source: Obanya (2012), Transformation from ivory tower to social laboratories.

The social laboratory approach means that the society (of which the University is an integral part) should become the source from which relevant academic and intellectual engagements spring, and the theatre in which the practical applications of academic pursuits are translated into action for sustained development of society (Obanya, 2012). The new direction also requires University education to be more responsive to the demands of the knowledge economy. The notion of knowledge economy as explained by Drucker (2003) is the production of services based on knowledge-intensive activities that contribute to an accelerated pace of technical and scientific advancement. The key component of a knowledge economy is a greater reliance on intellectual capabilities than on physical inputs or natural resources. Knowledge economy presupposes that the university education places emphasis both on what the recipients of knowledge are and on who they are. Houghton and Sheeben (2002) x-rayed the characteristics of knowledge economy in the following perspectives:

i) Unlike physical goods, information is not destroyed in consumption. Its value in consumption can be enjoyed again and again.
ii) Bridges are built between various areas of competence.
iii) Learning is progressively central to both people and organizations.
iv) Learning involves both education and learning by-doing, learning-by-using and learning-by-interacting.
v) Initiative, creativity, problem-solving and openness to change are increasing important skills.
vi) Integration of 'thinking' and 'doing' and avoiding excessive specialization and compartmentalization by emphasizing multi-task job responsibilities.
vii) Whereas machines replaced labour in the industrial era, information technology has become the sources of codified knowledge in the knowledge economy, demanding uniquely human skills such as conceptual, interpersonal and communication skills.

Interestingly, knowledge generation and application have become the major components of human existence, social and corporate tool for productivity, wealth creation and sustainable development. In a world in which we are all knowledge workers, all human activities would rely on knowledge for its continuous growth, while enterprises of all manners and forms would have knowledge as the main feature that would bestow on them any measure of comparative advantage. It then follows that knowledge generation, knowledge transmission and knowledge application should become prime occupations of institutions and organizations outside the Universities and other higher institutions and infact, completely outside the formal education sector. This

point can be illustrated by examining some concrete examples from developments around us which include:

i) Continuous re-tooling and re-skilling of the work force in industries and commercial undertakings involving continuous inculcation of new knowledge for human resources.
ii) Intensive ICT-penetration in clinics, the public service, defense and security services, in banks, marketing outlets, publishing, journalism, air travel, hotel and catering concerns etc as a means of accessing and using knowledge to fast-track business activities.
iii) Professional organization with programmes of mandatory continuing professional development for practitioners as a means of ensuring continuous updating in knowledge and skills.
iv) Scientific and technical research laboratories and other specialized research activities in high performing industries generating and applying knowledge to ensure continued high performance.
v) Consultancy firms engaged in high level training for a wide variety of professions, all of which involve updating of knowledge and skills.
vi) The emphasis in all areas of human activity on international best practices imply continuous search for excellence.
vii) Public (academic/professional) lectures and related events now holding more in hotels and event centres than on campuses.
viii) Fellowships and other awards by professional bodies gaining increasing recognition than academic degrees.

All of these areas meant to emphasize the fact that modern society is filling with institutions outside the University education nexus that are also concerned with knowledge generation, transmission and application. There is a growing tendency for socio-economic operators to rely more on these institutions than on the universities. The reason is that programme of these institutions are considered as being of direct relevance to the needs of the labour market. Again, the work of these institutions rely more on the social laboratory methodology that uses the world of work as the main determinants of their curricula and pedagogy (Obanya, 2012).

Universities are therefore faced with the challenges of enhanced relevance and responsiveness in the context of labour market demand. They need a rapprochement strategy that would draw their curricula and pedagogy in alignment with the needs of the world of work if they are to remain afloat in a knowledge intensive environment in which a variety of social laboratory institutions are stoutly challenging the monopoly of the ivory tower (Obanya, 2012).

Implication of the Prevailing Trends for Universities Education Curricula

The uncertainty that has characterized the twenty-first century knowledge-intensive economy is posing serious challenges for education and more particularly for the curriculum of formal education and most particularly, for University Education.

The rising challenge of un-employability of university graduates is an indication of the lack of relevance and applicability of knowledge acquired in the university. Knowledge should not be acquired just for the sake of it.

There should be some considerable relationship between knowledge gained in the university and the demands of the world of work. Everywhere in the world, the world of work has been questioning the preparedness of universities and other higher institutions to fit into knowledge driven economic productive functions. The business world is now presenting generic employability skills for inclusion in the higher education curricula. For instance, the Australian chamber of commerce prescribes the following as guide for designing, the Australian Higher Education curricula:

i) Communication that contributes to productive harmonious relationship among employees and customers.
ii) Team work that contributes to productive working relationships and outcomes.
iii) Problem-solving that contributes to productive outcome.
iv) Initiatives and enterprise that contribute to innovative outcomes.
v) Planning and organization that contribute to short and long-term strategic planning.
vi) Self-management that contribute to employee satisfaction and growth.
vii) Learning that contributes to continuous self-improvement and expansion in company's operations and outcomes.
viii) Technology that contributes to effective execution of tasks.
ix) Personal attributes –loyalty, honesty, integrity and adaptability.

The emphasis is on what education, training and experience have made of the persons and not simply qualifications.

Personal qualities and attributes are the main requirements of today's knowledge worker in a workplace that places great emphasis on competitive advantage.

With a world of work that promotes the knowledge worker with a set of employability skills that value personal qualities much more than qualifications, skills are no longer seen as simply handling the hammer and fixing nuts and bolts. In its stead, there is now greater emphasis on a tripartite set of skills that define the knowledge, person and consequently an appropriate curriculum guide for persons who can fit neatly into the demands of the knowledge economy.

Examples of tripartite skills set that could guide the Higher Education curriculum as put forward by Obanya (2012) is shown this:

Table 2: Tripartite Skill Guide for Higher Education

Hand skills	**Soft skills**	**Go-getting skills**
Cognitive intelligence	Emotional intelligence	Imaginative intelligence
Self expression skills	Character formation skills (for strengthening the	

	total person)	
Logical reasoning skills (for analysis and problem solving)	Intra personal skills (for the individual to understand his/her strengths and weakness as well as his/her potentials. Interpersonal skills (for understanding and teaming with others)	Creative thinking skills
Computations skills (for mathematics reasoning)		Ideational fluency skills (proactive in generating novel ideas). Opportunity – grabbing skills (perceptivity in making the best of opportunities)
Design/manipulative skills (for purely technical reasoning and action)	Lifelong skills. (knowledge seeking skills)	Experiential learning skills (making the best use of the lessons of experience ever working on new idea).
Conception skills (for generating ideas and translating them into action maps)	Perseverance skills (for seeing ideas and projects to fruition)	Idea-to-product skills (ease and passion for turning ideas to products). Service skills (ability to apply head-hands-heart)

Obanya, 2012: A tripartite skills set guiding higher Education curricula.

The tripartite skill set is an attempt to illustrate the fact that education has to transform the total person. Current practices that focus mainly on intellectual learning results in a curriculum that is not just narrow but abysmally shallow as they do not cover the whole cognitive intelligence. In order words, merely acquiring knowledge from books doesn't make one readily acceptable to society. The book-learned person would also have to be some one whose behavior would meet accepted ethical and social standards. Emphasis now is placed on personal attributes not simply on qualification. This however, is not to say that the conventional courses and subject in the universities be jettisoned but continuous studying of these courses would always produce unemployable graduates. That is, graduates who would not qualify as knowledge workers and who therefore, cannot fit into the world of work. The orthodox courses offered in the universities become useful mainly when they serve as tools for transforming students along the tripartite skills set to enable them fit into the real world of work. Therefore, University education curricula must be justified on ground of utility and significance.

In other words, the content must be such that beneficiaries put into practice what they have learnt for economic growth and advancement of the society.

Conclusion

The demands of the twenty-first century world of work has brought a new dimension as to what type of knowledge that is most worth in the context of University education. The orthodox knowledge stuffing university curriculum is no longer valued

as there has been a paradigm shift from how much you know to how you have learnt to learn. Therefore, effect at reforms in University education must be geared towards developing total persons that will meet the demands of the world of work.

Recommendations

- University education curricula should progressively be re-ordered in keeping with the social laboratory paradigm to meet the demands of today's worlds of work.
- Knowledge generation, knowledge transmission and knowledge application/sharing should become prime occupation of all higher institutions. Specifically, Universities should make various dimensions of nation's aspirations the focus of knowledge generation, transmission and transfer/sharing. This could be done through:

i) Institutional research agenda anchored on societal needs with emphasis on participatory action research.

ii) Curricula anchored on society's development challenges, regularly fed by research findings and characterized by participatory hands-on/mind-on experiential learning.

iii) Out-reach activities involving the application of research result to address development challenges in which teachers and students learn from society in the same way as society learn from them.

- Systematic pedagogy training for universities teachers is needed to improve the quality of learning. Response to this demand would have to go beyond ad hoc and emergency arrangements where training is only restricted to newly recruited staff and those thought to be without formal training in education principle and practice.
- University teachers should strive more than ever before, to exert positive influence on students through systematic application of transformational pedagogy. Transformational pedagogy requires that the teacher:

i) Discards the lecture approach to teaching.

ii) Capitalizes on the knowledge/experience/values and attitudes that students bring to the programme.

iii) Practices resourcefulness by sourcing materials beyond conventional textbooks.

iv) Discourages dictation in favour of discovery.

v) Accepts that the learner is central and so plans and executes teaching activities with the learner in mind.

vi) Accepts that learning can be considered successful only after the learner has learnt.

vii) Realizes that successful learning begins when the student's capacity for continuous self-improvement has become a fully ingrained habit.

- Federal Government of Nigeria should increase financial allocation to education sectors. This gesture will enable the universities to expand educational facilities to cope with the high demand for higher education in the context of knowledge driven economy.

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