

THE CHALLENGES OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN NIGERIA TODAY: IMPLICATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Higher education is a vital arm of the education sector of any nation. It is an essential tool for attainment of the large goals of making society more stable, economically, socially and politically (UNESCO, 1998). This presentation deals with the topic: current challenges facing Higher Education in Nigeria. Secondary source data was used in analyzing some issue. The first section examines the background to the development of Higher Education in Nigeria. The second section presents a situation analysis on the state of Higher Education Institutions. The last reviews major challenges facing Higher Education Institutions and offers recommendations that may help to chart a way forward for more productive, sustainable development of young graduate. Perhaps the lessons and conclusions drawn here could well apply to similar situations in many developing countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Introduction

Onwuka (1996) opined that education is a means by which individuals or members of the society acquire knowledge, skills, habits, sentiments and values which will enable them to solve their day to day problems for the sake of survival.

Castle (1995) also defined education as the total experiences an individual acquires throughout his lifetime. From these definitions, one can say that education is all acceptable activities and experiences that enable a child or adult to develop positive knowledge, skills and attitude and transmit same to the next generation. It makes the child too to be adjusted, fulfilled and independent in the society.

Education is Provided in Nigeria at Eight Major Forms

- Early Childhood Care Education
- Junior Basic Education
- Senior Secondary Education
- Technical/Vocational Education
- Adult and Non-formal Education
- Technology and Science Education
- Teacher Education
- University Education, etc

The need to have adequate well trained and efficient high level manpower in the Nigerian economy necessitated the establishment of higher institutions. This dates back

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to pre-independence time when the colonial master realized that Nigerians are required to man certain strategic and sensitive positions. The history of higher education started with the establishment of Yaba Higher College where non – graduate teachers were trained (Akanbi, Asiru and Olayanju, 2003). University education in Nigeria started at Ibadan in 1948 with the establishment of the University College, Ibadan, and then an affiliate of the University of London.

University/Higher Education in Nigeria

Nigeria runs a three tier tertiary system of education which all award degrees namely, Polytechnics, Colleges of Education and Universities which take care of the high level manpower requirements. The National Open Universities of Nigeria, a Federal Government initiative is now revived and currently in full operation.

There are also a number of state and private universities in the country. Private sector involvement in higher education is an emerging and fast growing segment of higher education in many African countries, Nigeria inclusive. The federal government recently gave approval for new private universities to accommodate the upsurge in prospective student populations. Government has embarked on efforts to synchronize the university calendar to bring sanity to an otherwise untidy situation whereby all the universities have different calendars. This has been impossible because of Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) prolong strikes.

Table 1 No and ownership of Higher Education Institutions in Nigeria.

Category	University	Polytechnic	College of Education	Monotechnics	College of Agriculture
Federal	27	21	19	23	17
State	36	38	39	2	19
Private	41	12	4	2	
University centre (Open University)	38				
Colleges of Education (NTI Centres)	36 states including Abuja, all the local government, and in some towns				
Military University	1				

Colleges

Federal Colleges of Health & Allied Institutions	
Federal	9
State	40
Private	1

Sources: www.nuc.edu.ng, www.nbte.gov.ng, www.ncceonline.org

Rationale of Higher Education in Nigeria

According to the National Policy on Education (FGN, 1989; 2004 and 2006) higher education seeks to achieve the following aims.

- To contribute to national development through high level relevant manpower training
- To develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of individual and society
- To develop the intellectual capability of individuals to understand and appreciate their local and external environments
- To acquire both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to be self reliant and useful members of the society
- To promote and encourage scholarship and community service
- To forge and cement national unity and
- To promote national and intellectual understanding and interaction

The high level manpower which the higher institutions produce are supposed to be absorbed into the economy of the nation for high productivity, peace, love and sustainable development of the country.

The objectives of higher education that are so beautifully articulated especially as it concerns sustainable development in Nigeria, poverty alleviation and self reliance, is a worrisome situation since many of the graduates of higher institutions in Nigeria are unemployable. Then how can the country (Nigeria) be developed and how can the development be sustained through higher education?

Akerele (2000) described unemployment as a situation in which an employable individual is seeking for work but without success. This situation can be equated with what Hartley (1980) described as the “excess supply of labour at the ruling wage”. Although, the reason for the high unemployment rate is multidimensional and one of the reason in Nigeria is that “theoretical education has been emphasised over practical education and skill development. Ibor and Arikpo (2002) stated that most Nigerian graduates lack the requisite skills for self employment.

Notion of Sustainable Development in Nigeria

A good definition of sustainable development is provided in the article “UK Government and Sustainable Development” (Tell Magazine, 2002) as the simple idea of ensuring better quality of life for everyone and for generation to come. A widely used intentional definition is; development which meets the needs of the people today without comprising the ability of future generation to meet their won needs. The concept of sustainable development has been around for a number of decades, although the idea is simple but the task is substantial. It means meeting some objectives, which higher education can provide since education is seen as backbone to everything especially development. In the UK and the world as a whole, sustainable objective means:

- Social progress which recognise the needs for everyone
- Effective protection of the environment
- Prudent use of natural resources, and

➤ Maintenance of high and stable levels of economic growth and employment. Nigerians and Africans should see if the above four points are applicable and standard in comparison to them (Tell Nigeria, 2007).

For the layman, sustainable development relates to those infrastructural policies and behaviours that are conceptualized, instituted and maintained over a period of time. These infrastructures are concerned essential to the vitality, general welfare and continued existence of a people, the environment and may lie in broad categories as housing, family, religion, government, safety, retail stores and markets, sewage and waste removal, agriculture, air, water, roads, and highways, recreation, traffic flow, schools and universities, technology, mineral resources renewable and non renewable, transportation, industry and product distributions, etc.

Statistical Analysis of Higher Education in Nigeria: Impediment to Sustainable Development

Generally, the tripodal tasks of higher education institution are – Teaching Research and Community Service. They are also expected to extend the frontiers of knowledge through intense research and dissemination of the outcomes in order to help, develop and improve the standards of practice in all the sectors of national life and sustain all sectors for growth. But all the institutions are caught in a web of crises, which together, bring to bear very negative effect on their capacities and abilities to fulfil their mission and mandate. The problems they face are many, quoting Prof. Olufemi Bamiro, the Vice Chancellor of University of Ibadan in the Guardian newspaper of Friday, July 10th, 2009.

‘Nigeria Universities Laboratories, equipments and infrastructure are pointers to the fact that the higher educational sector is in a mess, efforts at revamping the sector would take time because it is like preparing and old woman for a beauty contest. The Nigerian higher education sector has collapsed, the signs are all there, we are in the process of resuscitation and transformation but I must say that it is not an easy task for sustainable development’. (Bamiro, 2009:14)

The following are identified problems facing Higher Education in Nigeria.

1. **Under – funding:** This challenges emanates largely from the inability of the owners or providers to keep track of the growth and expansion of these institutions and the need for more monetary resources. Without adequate funding, higher education cannot discharge their responsibility of teaching, research and community service to an optimum level. UNESCO has long recommended that at least 26% of total budgetary provisions should go to education and about 50% of that allocated to higher education. While most countries in Europe and America have committed more than the minimum and several developing countries have done the same, the reverse has been the case in Nigeria. This partly explains the constant and relentless struggles that the Academic Staff Union of University (ASUU) has had to wage war against the government.

2. **Shortage of qualified staff:** This is another problem bedevilling most higher education institutions in Nigeria today. It seems that every one staff of a higher education institution is doing the work of five who are not on post. This is especially so in the universities. In addition, lower level staffs are forced to carry on higher – level responsibilities and this practice breeds mediocrity and therefore, is a major cause of falling standards (Okebukola, 2000). Staffing of higher institutions with qualified specialists is a crucial determinant in the delivery of qualified educational services to learners and to society at large. Inadequate staffing is accentuated by lack of funds for staff further training and development. In the process, social mobility within educational institutions is affected adversely.

3. **Poor condition of service:** This is yet another lingering problem facing higher educational institutions. It affects all the types of institutions in Nigeria. As a result, one hears of constant industrial actions and disputes with providers. For instance, ASUU recently went on an industrial strike action that lasted for more than two months. However, one only needs to leave the borders of Nigeria to realize how legitimate the demands for improved condition of service are. In Niger, Ghana, Togo, Benin, the Gambia, Cameroon, which are around the corners of Nigeria, conditions of work and status of tertiary education workers are much better, for not just the academics but every sector. Similarly, Southern Africa and North African countries conditions of service are comparable to the best in other parts of the world. However, it should be clear that where conditions are poor, staff motivation and morale will remain low. Also, performance of assigned functions and responsibilities are adversely affected.

Table 2: The 2007 Consolidated Salary Structure Announced by the Federal Government

	Status	Salary per Annum in N	Salary per month in N
1. (i)	Least Public Official in the Presidency	1.7 million	140,000
(ii)	Highest Public Officer in the Presidency	4.8 million	400,000
2. (i)	An Army private	260,000	21,000
(ii)	Brigadier General	2.68 million	220,000
3	Police and other paramilitary		
(i)	Recruit	63,000	5250
(ii)	Constable	29,000	24,000
(iii)	AIG & its equivalent in other categories	2.46 million	200,000
4.	Non – academic staff of tertiary institutions, teaching hospitals		

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(i)	and research institute	152,000	12,600
(ii)	Least paid worker Highest paid worker	2.87 million	239,000
5.	Academic staff		
(i)	Least paid worker	694,000	57,800
(ii)	Highest paid worker	3.2 million	260,000
6.	Civil Servant		
(i)	Least Paid Worker	144,000	12,000
(ii)	Highest Paid Worker (A Director)	2.270	31,000

Source: Tell, February 5th 2007

4. **Brain-drain:** This is another crippling problem. It is common to find the staff in higher education institutions move out to other places in search of better conditions of service. Usually, the very best of the staff are the ones who move out. This leaves the institutions with the rest who remain increasingly de-motivated, or even frustrated. It is not uncommon to find many qualified Nigeria academics in numerous private sectors and development policy agencies within Nigeria. Several others have departed to foreign lands and institutions. But the only irony is that, while we lose the best, they become the gain of others, and while they help develop their new institutions, ours remain backward etc. The chains of the negative repercussions of these phenomena are only better imagined. Consequently, collective ability to achieve and excel remains limited as intellectual growth is stunted. The brains are just drained away.

The Challenges of Higher Institution in Nigeria

Having examined some of the problems, the challenges facing higher education institutions in Nigeria are also numerous and daunting while their effects remain negative and devastating on the sustainable development to the country.

According to Omolewa (2001), education challenges in Nigeria are:

“...its effective development to liberate the poor, empower the weak and give hope to the hopeless, encouraging all of these to acquire self – confidence and pride in themselves and their capabilities... (to)...produce a regenerated and profoundly revived people who would learn to live in harmony with one another, and share a common vision of greatness and revival; such education at all levels and all forms must be consistently geared towards the pursuit of excellence and high quality.”

- **Quality and standard:** The competences expected from young graduates are very much lacking because the minimum standards are very low. High academic standards are hardly attained nor maintained.
- **Relevance of Curricula to Community Aspirations:** Most Nigerian curricular lack what communities expect and what schools teach, possibly because of the colonial origin of our formal education system

- **Employability of school graduates:** Many educators have been concerned with the synergy or lack of it between school and work. Indeed, some tertiary institutions have mounted and taught courses with the title School to Work which has no effect on employment.
- **Staffing and staff development initiatives:** Most of the higher education institutions in Nigeria are understaffed. This is as a result of the huge expansion of annual student intake and rapid expansion of academic and service programmes being offered. Enrolment is very high, while the staff/students ratio is 1:21 as far back as 1994, far exceeding the Nigeria University Commission (NUC) ratio of 1:12. While this was happening, student's enrolment was growing at about 12 percent annually.
- **Reform of academic function:** Teaching, research and publications activities are not at their optimum in Nigeria's education institution. The method in teaching remains teacher – centred and authoritarian and where any research is done, it is done in order to fulfil requirements of gaining higher degree qualification. The methods of research are also largely the descriptive type that do not go far enough nor enrich knowledge or disciplinary discourse. They do not attempt to find solutions to any serious problem facing society, and where research is carried out, the government is not ready to use the recommendations.
- **Funding and infrastructure development:** Infrastructure could not be developed by way of expansion, or improved and maintained where available because of scarce resources. Just imagine what will be the situation of infrastructure in Nigeria's higher education institutions without the funds received from the Education Trust Fund (ETF) in the last ten years.
- **Generation and Utilization of Community Participation:** Not much community participation in higher educational institutions, even the most common modes of Alumni and Parents Teachers Associations (PTAs) have become rather spasmodic and ineffective. The community has to be encouraged to get involved in the life of the school in diverse ways, if they are to meet the changing challenges of time.
- **Information Communication Technologies for Teaching and Research:** Information Communication Technologies (ICT) has become essential tools for progress. As is well known, this is an information age, but the state of higher education institutions in this regard, leaves much to be desired. Not only that computer literacy is at its lowest level of development, connection of institutions to the internet has been so low. In many cases, this has never been contemplated, while some of the staff are yet to be computer literate.

Table 3: Teachers Questionnaire on Use of Internet and Awareness of Technology Facilities

S/N	Item Statement	Yes	%	No	%
1	I can work on internet	12	87.07	2	14.3
2	I usually browse to retrieve information for teaching	14	100	0	0
3	I only browse when I need personal information	0	0	14	100
4	I interact with my students through the internet	0	0	14	100
5	I have personal computer which is internet configured	0	0	14	100
6	I usually visit commercial centre to use internet	14	100	0	0
7	I am aware that the listed communication technology facilities could be used in teaching chemistry	14	100	0	0
8	I have computer that does not have internet facility	11	71.4	3	13

In Table 3 above, items arranged orderly show that lecturers browse on the internet in commercial centres to retrieve information for both personal use and also for teaching their students, 87.7% of the lecturers could work on the internet while 14.3% could not; but they consult experts when information is needed.

None of the lecturers have internet – configured computer although 28.6% have computer set for personal use, 71.4% does not have computer set. Therefore, none of them interacts with their students on the net.

Table 4: Table showing student’s familiarity with internet facilities

S/N	Item Statement	Yes	%	No	%
1	I can work on internet	78	78	22	22
2	I usually browse to retrieve information for teaching	56	56	44	44
3	I only browse when I need personal information	89	89	11	11
4	I interact with my students through the internet	0	0	100	100
5	I have personal computer which is internet configured	0	0	100	100

6	I usually visit commercial centre to use internet	89	89	11	11
7	I am aware that the listed communication technology facilities could be used in teaching chemistry	36	36	64	64

Data in Table 4 shows that 78% of the students could work on the net items arranged orderly show that 89% of the students browse on the internet in commercial centres, 56% retrieves information for learning purpose to do assignments mostly, while 89% browse for personal purposes. 11% sought assistance when there is need for it since they cannot operate it themselves.

- **Widening access to core sciences for disadvantaged groups:** Several indicators exist that show how precarious access to tertiary education programmes is to many disadvantaged groups in Nigeria. This is particularly noticeable in the area of entry into science and technology programmes where women are under represented largely due to the mistaken notion that the sciences are not for them.
- **Widening access through open and life-long learning methods:** Entry into tertiary education programmes is not denied only the socially or physically disadvantaged persons in society. Others like workers and those who do not have the “requirement” suffer some exclusion, yet different open and life long learning modes exist to cater for these types of clientele. For instance, the open and distance learning mode can serve all working persons, that do not have the time to enrol in regular educational programmes
- **Collaboration with Local and International Agencies:** In the past, many higher education institutions have collaborated with sister institution within and outside the country or with international agencies like UNESCO. However, this practice seems to be slowing down and this is the age of international partnership since we al are in one “global village”. The British Council, UNESCO, USAID, DFID, and other numerous agencies should be approached more regularly for more assistance.
- **Democratic Governance of Education Institutions:** It is noticeable that the mode of administering and managing our higher education institutions in Nigeria are anything but democratic, therefore, avoidable crises are generated constantly due to lack of consultation with staff, student and or support staff. Also, the democratic governance of the education institution are being engrossed by politicians for personal aggrandisement, sincerity has been deliberately removed to oblivion in their respect dictionaries to life. They no longer exercise patience to reap reward of their toiling at any future time, but largely craws to reap even where they did not sow simply because they want to

acquire all the paraphernalia of modern life. The governing councils and all administrators/managers are not left out of this.

Table 5: Nigeria six years corruption index as documented by Transparency International

Year	No of countries ranked	Country rank	Corruption perception index score
2001	91	90	1.0
2002	102	101	1.6
2003	133	132	1.4
2004	145	144	1.6
2005	158	154	1.9
2006	165	152	2.2
2007	179	147	2.2

Recommendation

For sustainable development, the following recommendations are made as strategies of overcoming identified problems and to ensure development of higher institutions in Nigeria.

- Higher education institutions should be fully funded by all those who own them
- Adequately trained and qualified staff should be recruited to match expansion in student intake and programme expansion
- Conditions of service of all personnel should be improved
- The “brain –drain” crises should be thoroughly studied and appropriate steps taken to stamp it out
- Vice chancellors, provosts, and rectors of institutions together with the management teams should always seek ways of finding lasting solutions to school – based problems
- Efforts should be intensified to raise and maintain the quality and standard of teaching, research and the school products
- The curricular of educational programmes should be renewed from time to time
- The students that graduate from the institutions should hold comparative and competitive competencies, which can only be gained through intense and interrupted teaching and supervision activities
- In order to meet the needs of higher education institutions, there should be a systematic recruitment procedure system.
- Staff development policy should be based on the necessity for training of any new staff recruited at a rank below the level of an assistant lecturer
- Opportunities for staff to undergo special refresher courses within or outside their institutions should be provided for
- International conference attendance at least three times per year, should be mandatory on all staff and the institutions should sponsor these fully

- Higher education administrators and managers should seek for internal and external means of funding and provision of infrastructure in their domains
- Ways of generating and sustaining active community participation in the life of educational institutions should be found
- Sufficient commitment must be made towards the enthronelement of a permanent culture of applying Information Communication Technologies (ICT) in all aspect of the higher education institution
- Access to higher education programmes and services should be opened more widely to the underserved groups, especially women in science and technology
- Partnership between institutions should explore and always utilize the path of consultation, openness, transparency and participatory governance of their institution.

Conclusion

Attempt has been made to examine from the background to the development of higher education in Nigeria and its sustainable development obstacle. It highlights some problems that the sector has faced over the years and indicated some of the major challenges that it faces. On the basis of the analysis made, recommendations were made on measures through which existing problems would be solved and developmental challenges of the future for sustainable development are tackled.

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