
Revitalizing Higher Education for Sustainable National Development in Nigeria

IMMACULATA NGOZI ONWULIRI

*Department of Educational Management,
Faculty of Education,
Rivers State University, Port Harcourt*

And

DR. BLESSING WEY-AMAEWHULE

*Department of Educational Management,
Faculty of Education,
Rivers State University, Port Harcourt*

Abstract

The purpose of this paper was to analyze the revitalizing of higher education for sustainable national development in Nigeria. Specifically, the objectives were to examine the meaning of higher education, historical development of higher education in Nigeria, forms of higher education in Nigeria, goals of higher education in Nigeria, challenges facing higher education in Nigeria, meaning of national development, and revitalizing higher education for sustainable national development in Nigeria. The paper concluded that going by the goals of higher education, Nigeria as a country needed to use higher education as a fulcrum of development through the production of manpower who are not only capable of causing economic, political, cultural, social technological, material prosperity and their sustainability but also ensure global competitiveness in all ramifications. Thus, higher institutions need to put in place structures, through policy designs that are geared at enhancing the revitalizing of higher education for national development. It therefore, becomes imperative for relevant stakeholders of education to be involved in the pursuit of renewing and promoting higher education with a view to achieving national development in the country. It was suggested among others that the regulatory bodies of HEIs should be strengthened by legislation to have strong presence in monitoring the development of these institutions, government should intensify effort in the provision of infrastructural facilities in higher institutions across the country, government should ensure that ICT policies are translated into reality, government and labour unions should abide by outcomes of bargaining in order to minimize strike actions in the country.

Keywords: Revitalizing, Higher Education, Sustainable National Development, Goals of Higher Education, Forms of Higher Education, Challenges of Higher Education.

The United Nations Economic, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has over the years engineered substantial sustainability initiatives, through reform policy designs and direct support efforts in ensuring that higher education is placed in the right perspective. It is in the light of the above that governments need to put in place structures, through policy designs that are geared at enhancing the revitalizing of higher education in Nigeria (Abali & Suanukordo, 2015). Globally, higher education is acknowledged as an important aspect of sustainable development goals that are related to the transforming and empowering the citizens with relevant skills, knowledge and attitudes to enable them become productive members of the society (Chankseliani & McCowan 2021). The higher level of education, constituting the universities, polytechnics, colleges of education and others, provides the Nigerian economy educated individuals with varying level of skills, competencies, knowledge and attitudes in the form of political leaders, policy makers, planners, administrators and an enlightened citizenry who become the change agents of cultural, political and socio-economic transformation (Abali & Nwapi, 2017).

In this 21st century, the developing countries in Africa, Asia and South America are striving to be in tandem with the advanced economies of the world, as they have in the present circumstance, come to grip with the reality that higher education is an indispensable tool for economic growth and sustainable national development. In the light of the above facts therefore, countries in dire need of advancement should give priority attention to higher education in order to attain the level of development so far attained by the developed countries of the world. Abali (2014) averred that governments commit immense resources to ensuring the provision of higher education for their citizens, and also tailor their policies towards ensuring that it is made accessible to the generality of the citizenry. The society's demand for higher education, therefore, stipulates that government provides to the citizenry higher education suitable to individuals' abilities and desires.

It is an established fact that higher education enable individuals live and functions as productive members of society, earning a living and contributing to societal progress. It has also been proven through empirical studies that the attainment of rapid national development can only be achieved only when the citizens are well educated (Abali, 2018). Thus, the crucial roles that higher education plays in the cultural, political and socio-economic development of nations in the 21st century cannot be over-emphasized.

Purpose of the Paper

The main purpose of this paper is to analyze the revitalizing of higher education for national development in Nigeria. Specifically, the objectives are to examine:

1. Meaning of higher education.
2. Historical development of higher education in Nigeria.
3. Forms of higher education in Nigeria.
4. Goals of higher education in Nigeria for sustainable development
5. Challenges facing higher education in Nigeria.
6. Meaning of national development.
7. Revitalizing higher education for sustainable national development in Nigeria.

Meaning of Higher Education

In Nigeria, higher education is acquired in tertiary institutions of learning. According to the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004), higher education is the education given after secondary education in universities, colleges of education, polytechnics, monotechnics including those institutions offering correspondence courses. The Federal Republic of Nigeria (2008) posited that higher education is the education given in institutions such as universities and inter-university centers such as the Nigerian French Language Village, Nigerian Arabic Language Village, National Institutes for Nigerian Languages, Innovation Enterprise Institutions (IEIs), and Colleges of Education, Polytechnics, and Monotechnics. Wikipedia (n.d) opined that higher education is tertiary education leading to award of an academic degree. It is an optional final stage of formal learning that occurs after completion of secondary education.

The Encyclopaedia Britannica (n.d) averred that higher education is any of various types of education given in post-secondary institutions of learning and usually affording, at the end of a course of study, a named degree, diploma, or certificate of higher studies. Alemu (2018) affirmed that higher education is an organized tertiary learning and training activities and institutions that include conventional universities such as arts, humanities, and science faculties and more specialized university institutions in agriculture, engineering, science, and technology. The concept of higher education also includes such post-secondary institutions like universities, polytechnics, colleges of education, and others.

Historical Development of Higher Education in Nigeria

In Nigeria, the development of higher education stemmed from the background already created by the agitations of the Nigerian nationalists, and political leaders Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Belewa and others. The establishment of Yaba Higher College in 1934 after the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates in 1914 became the beginning of higher education in Nigeria (Abali, 2018). The Phelps-Stoke Commission report of 1920 prompted the then Federal Colonial Government under Britain to establish Yaba Higher College. This institution remained the only higher institution of learning in the country until 1943 when the British colonial government set-up the Elliot Commission.

Yaba Higher College was established to provide “well qualified assistants” in medical, engineering, and other vocations as well as teachers for secondary schools then known as “higher middle schools”. With the passage of time, the college offered sub-degree courses in engineering, medicine, agriculture and teacher training to fill specific vacancies in the colonial administration (Adekeye, 2018). The restricted scope of Yaba Higher College generated greater pressures on the colonial administration to expand the opportunities for higher education. The British government responded by establishing the Elliot Commission. In its report, the commission recommended the establishment of the University College, Ibadan in 1948, which later became the University of Ibadan in 1962.

According to Fafunwa in Project Writers Ng (2015), Higher education in Nigeria moved into its second phase of development with the setting up of the Ashby Commission. The report of the Ashby Commission of 1959 led to the establishment of

the University of Nigeria, Nsukka in 1960; the University of Ife, Ile-Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University) in 1962; the University of Lagos, Lagos in 1962; and the Mid-West Institute of Science and Technology (now University of Benin) in 1970 (Ebong in Abali, 2018). In 1975 the federal government decided to take over the regional universities at Zaria, Ile-Ife, and Nsukka as well as establish new ones the universities of Calabar, Jos and Maiduguri, with University Colleges at Ilorin, Port Harcourt and Kano, all of which became fully fledged universities in 1977 (Adekeye, 2018).

As the federal universities grew in number, state universities started emerging in 1979. Similarly, the emergence of private providers of higher education in Nigeria became a reality when the first three private universities, namely, Igbinedion University, Okada; Babcock University, Ilishan-Remo; and Madonna University, Okija were licensed to operate in 1999 (Adekeye, 2018). As at the year 2016, Nigeria has recorded the establishment of 152 universities, 76 polytechnics, 100 colleges of education, 100 approved Vocational education institutes/Institutes of education (VEIs/IEIs), 50 colleges of health technology and allied institutions, 132 technical colleges, and 47 monotronics and specialized institutions. Indeed, the Nigerian higher educational system has experienced quantitative expansion from one higher institution in 1934 to about 657 public and private higher institutions of learning in the country.

Forms of Higher Education in Nigeria

Abali (2011) posited that the federal structure and constitutional provision in Nigeria has placed higher education on the concurrent legislative list, which means that the federal government and component states that make up the Nigerian federation legislate on higher educational matters. It is on this premise that higher education is provided by both the federal and state governments, although, private providers are increasing in number in the country in recent times. Teacher education, technology education and university education are forms of higher education which are provided for citizens who are qualified and request for higher education in Nigeria.

Teacher Education

Teacher education is the type of higher education given to would be professionals in colleges of education, faculties of education, institutes of education, national teachers' institutes, schools of education in Polytechnics, etc (FRN, 2004). Colleges of education and the other institutions mentioned above are established to train and produce quality teachers and school administrators. In Nigeria, colleges of education provide teacher education for those who teach or will teach in our educational institutions. Okafor in Ogbonnaya (2010) asserted that teacher education is that form of education which is properly planned and systematically tailored and applied for the teacher, particularly, but not exclusively, in primary and post-primary levels of schooling.

Technology Education

Technology education is the type of higher education offered in universities, polytechnics, monotronics and colleges of education (technical). Polytechnics and monotronics are technology education institutions. The objectives and mode of operation of monotronics and polytechnics in providing technology education are the

same. The Federal Republic of Nigeria (2008, p. 58) specified the goals of technology education to include:

1. Providing courses of instruction and training in engineering, other technologies, applied science, business and management, leading to the production of trained manpower;
2. Providing the technical knowledge and skills necessary for agricultural, industrial, commercial, and economic development of Nigerians;
3. Giving training that imparts the necessary skills for the production of technicians, technologists and other skilled personnel who shall be enterprising and self-reliant.
4. Training people who can apply scientific knowledge to solve environmental problems for the convenience of man; and
5. Giving exposure on professional studies in the technologies.

University Education

Education provided in universities is centered on the development of the country because of the nature of courses offered in such institutions. The Federal Republic of Nigeria (2008, p. 53) stated that university education shall make optimum contribution to national development by:

1. Intensifying and diversifying its programmes for the development of high level manpower within the context of the needs of the nation;
2. Making professional course contents reflect our national requirements;
3. Making all students part of a general programme of all round improvement in university education, to offer general study courses such as history of ideas, philosophy of knowledge and nationalism.

Goals of Higher Education in Nigeria for Sustainable Development

Goals are things that are hoped to be achieved (Hornby, 2010). Thus, the goals of higher education for possible sustainability as stipulated by the federal government in her national policy on education (FRN, 2008 pp. 50 – 51) include:

1. Contributing to national development through high level manpower training;
2. Providing accessible and affordable quality learning opportunities in formal and informal education in response to the needs and interest of all Nigerians;
3. Providing high quality career counseling and lifelong learning programmes that prepare students with the knowledge and skills for self-reliance and the world of work.
4. Reducing skill shortages through the production of skilled manpower relevant to the needs of the labour market;
5. Promoting and encouraging scholarship, entrepreneurship and community service;
6. Forging and cementing national unity; and
7. Promoting national and international understanding and interaction.

The Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2008 p. 51 – 52) stated that higher institutions shall pursue these goals through:

1. Quality teaching;
2. Research and development;

3. High standards in the quality of facilities, services and resources;
4. Staff development programmes;
5. Provision of a more practical based curriculum relevant to the needs of the labour market;
6. Generation and dissemination of knowledge, skills and competencies that contribute to national and local economic goals which enable students to succeed in a knowledge-based economy;
7. A variety of models of programmes including full-time, part-time, block-release, day-release, sandwich, etc;
8. Access to training funds such as those provided by the Industrial Training Fund (ITF);
9. Students Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES);
10. Maintenance of educational standards through appropriate agencies;
11. Supporting affordable, equitable access to tertiary education through scholarship and students loans;
12. Inter-institutional cooperation and linkages; and
13. Dedicated services to the community through extramural and extension services.

Challenges Facing Higher Education in Nigeria

Higher education in Nigeria is faced with numerous challenges amongst which are the following addressed below:

Education Politics

Education politics has been identified as a major challenge facing higher education in Nigeria. Akpotu (2005) asserted that the major obstacles to increased access to higher education in Nigeria are not prices but the reform policies of quota system in school placement. The declared objectives of JAMB at inception were to develop machinery for streamlining university admission on a uniform and fair basis. This is not the case as a quota based system of non-academic consideration predominates. JAMB examinations became a political tool to be used for equalizing educational opportunities between the advantaged states in the South and disadvantaged states in the North of Nigeria. Ukertor (2010) declared that the general operations of JAMB indicates a political tool by government to equalize educational development between the North and South and by implication decelerating higher education development in advanced southern states in Nigeria. Using the quota system to guide and regulate enrolment to universities has an inequitable effect (Akpan & Undie in Ukertor, 2010).

Inadequate Funding

Funding of higher education has remained a major issue in that sector. The sector relies heavily on government for funding. Funds are often insufficient compared to the mission of the sector (Agi, 2017). The issue of funding has remained a source of concern in higher education institutions that do not have viable investments to compliment whatever pittance received as government subvention, grants or allocation. Abali and Nwapi (2017) revealed that the funding of the Nigerian educational system has been haphazard. The year 1971 has the lowest (0.53%) budgetary allocation while

the highest allocation (17.59%) of funds was in 1997. The federal government has not allocated more than 17.59% of her annual budget to education. The effect of funding can be seen on quality of staff, facilities, research, programme expansion, access, community service, staff training and development, etc. Underfunding higher institutions in Nigeria is a key challenge to sustainable National Development.

Political Instability

Frequent changes in government in Nigeria have rendered most laudable higher education programmes useless. Programmes initiated by one government are abandoned by another which has led to inconsistency in programmes implementation in higher institutions of learning in Nigeria. According to Maduagwu and Nwogu (2006), the lack of continuity of projects and programmes in the educational system and changes in the school calendar over the years resulting from too many strikes have reduced educational efforts to a zero level.

Academic Corruption

Bretag in Agi (2017) noted that academic fraud and corruption is monumental and constitutes fatal infringement to academic integrity, competence and relevance. Examination malpractice is very wide spread among students and staff. This is a serious dilemma for administrators who often prevaricate on dealing frontally with culprits for several obvious reasons among which are ethnic factor, religious affiliation, friendship, political interference, economic inducement or lack of commitment.

Social Vices

Social vices such as cultism, alcoholism, rape, robbery, hooliganism, drug addition, examination malpractice, prostitution among others have been identified as key factors in poor academic performance of students, and extra cost for governance of higher education institutions (Whawo, 2015). These social vices have direct impact on both students and the institutions. The impacts according to Nwideduh in Agi (2017) are as follows:

1. It affects both the perpetrators and the victims psychologically, physically and academically;
2. It affects the image and rating of the various institutions negatively;
3. It affects academic achievement;
4. Often when fatal situations are recorded, authorities are forced to close down schools leading to loss of time, waste of resources and lives and property.

Incessant Strikes

Strike is a great hindrance militating against the provision of unhindered quality higher education (Vanguard, 2020). With the gradual reopening of the education sector after nearly six months of closure due to the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic, students in higher institutions in Nigeria may still spend some time at home doing nothing, due to ongoing strike and threats of strike by different staff unions.

Meaning of Sustainable National Development

Sustainable National development as a term is very broad and comprehensive. It includes all aspects of the development of a nation namely, political, social, economic, and technological etc. So it is a dynamic and revolutionary development of the society (Fundamentals of Education, 2018). According to John Vaizey in Fundamentals of Education (2018), national development is the total effect of all citizens, forces and addition to stock of physical, human resources, knowledge and skills. Abali and Nwapi (2017) opined that national development depicts a favourable advancement in the moral, cultural, social, economic and political spheres in the lives of the citizenry. Ikwuegbu and Nwaneri (2014) posited that sustainable national development refers to the growth, changes and improvements occurring in a given economy, with the aim of promoting and sustaining the quality of life among the populace.

National development is the change in growth and development, which includes social, cultural and economic change. It is the ability of a country to improve the social welfare of the people. It would be the expansion and growth of people in a defined territory or government (Fundamentals of Education, 2018). It could be seen as the development that transcends the sectors of the economy and contributes to a greater sense of self-esteem for the country (Abali & Nwapi, 2017).

Revitalizing Higher Education for National Development in Nigeria

To revitalize, is to restore the decline standard of a programme (Amadi & Ajie, 2020). It is to make something stronger, more active or more healthy (Hornby, 2010). Across the globe, nations are pursuing vigorously the process of renewing and promoting higher education for national development. This is so because higher education remains one of the key ways to transform the society for economic, social, political, scientific, cultural, and material prosperity. It is in recognition of this, that the vice chancellors of Nigerian universities and key stakeholders in the education sector called on the federal government to purposively increase the level of higher education funding to 4 percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). They also called for amendment and coordination of the laws on higher education institutions leading to a comprehensive Act on higher education in Nigeria (Idoko, 2016). This involves amendment of the Acts of JAMB, NUC, NBTE and the NCCE, among others, so as to address the current challenges of policy conflicts and institutional autonomy.

The following are some recommendations on how to revitalize higher education system in Nigeria as contained in the communiqué issued at the end of the 2016 Nigeria Higher Education Summit (Idoko, 2016):

1. All parties involved in the negotiations on Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) should abide by outcomes of collective bargaining in order to stem the tide of strikes, which have become a negative hallmark of higher education system.
2. Differentiation of HEIs should be encouraged because it will lead to beneficial specialization in HEIs. Hence, a clear-cut legal instrument guiding the process should be developed.
3. Diversification and differentiation in the higher education system must be comprehensive, inclusive, sustainable, and transparent and have the trust of stakeholders. The model of classification should be non-hierarchical, descriptive and prescriptive.

4. There is need to leverage Information and Communication Technology (ICT) as an enabler of the relevance of HEIs, and hence driver of national transformation and sustainable development.
5. Government must deliberately ensure that ICT policies are translated into reality.
6. There is need to provide facilities and infrastructure to sustain Open and Distance Learning (ODL) adoption through the embrace/engagement of private public partnerships at both the national and international levels.
7. The 10 African Centres of Excellence in Nigeria should be deliberately funded, developed and sustained beyond their current World Bank funding and designated as critical assets for innovation and development.
8. Government should actively support institutions with clear research and innovation focus, and work in partnership with the private sector to generate positive and practical outcomes and products.

Conclusion

Going by the goals of higher education, Nigeria as a country needed to use higher education as a fulcrum of development through the production of manpower who are not only capable of causing economic, political, cultural, social, technological, and material prosperity but also ensure global competitiveness in all ramifications. Thus, higher institutions need to put in place structures, through policy designs that are geared at enhancing the revitalizing of higher education for sustainable national development. It therefore, becomes imperative for relevant stakeholders of education to be involved in the pursuit of renewing and promoting higher education with a view to achieving sustainable national development in the country.

Suggestions

The place of higher education in the development of the Nigerian society cannot be underestimated. The following suggestions are made as ways forward:

1. The regulatory bodies of HEIs should be strengthened by legislation to have strong presence in monitoring the development of these institutions.
2. Government should intensify effort in the provision of infrastructural facilities in higher institutions across the country.
3. Government and private providers of higher education should provide adequate funding for the survival and accomplishment of missions of higher education institutions.
4. Government should ensure that ICT policies are translated into reality.
5. Government should support higher institutions with clear research and innovation focus, and work in partnership with the private sector to overcome the challenges facing higher education in the country.
6. Higher education institutions administrators should minimize conditions for social vices.
7. Government and labour unions should abide by outcomes of bargaining in order to minimize conditions for strike actions in the country.

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