

# MANAGING HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE ERA OF ECONOMIC RECESSION IN NIGERIA

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## **Abstract**

*The success of higher education in this period of economic recession in Nigeria depends upon the effectiveness of the management of higher education and their arrangement for governing the institutions to obtain maximum efficiency and effectiveness. This paper examined higher education management in an era of economic recession in Nigeria. It x-rayed the trend of challenges and causes of economic recession in Nigeria, its impact on higher education and strategies to curb the effect of recession which includes privatization of education efforts and investment, spending less on irrelevant projects and exploration of sources of funding etc. The paper concluded that management of higher education should co-ordinate the meager resources and funds available this period of economic recession in Nigeria to restore higher education from an unsatisfactory state to a satisfactory one.*

**Keywords:** Higher Education, Economic Recession, Management, Education, Strategy

Management is the art of getting things done through the use of resources such as materials and human resources. It deals with making systematic arrangements so that the purpose of an entire programme is achieved. It is the central activity in every educational business, a variety of sequential and related activities which was designed and carried out so that the goals of teaching and learning can be effectively and efficiently met in relation to the dynamic needs of the society. (Ogonor1998). The effectiveness of managing higher education depends on the capability of the management to detect emerging issues and take appropriate steps to nip the problems in the bud using available human and materials resources vis-a-vis accomplishing stated objectives, while management efficiency refers to the achievement of stated educational objectives at lowest possible cost.

According to Ogonor (2004), resources pose a considerable challenge to the management of higher institutions. Implementing policies, as the managerial function of any institution revolves on the acquisition of resources as well as the effective and efficient utilization of the resources to attain the desired objectives. Hence the managerial competence of managers in every educational institution rest on the effective and efficient utilization of human, material, financial and time resources to achieve educational goals.

### **Aspects of School Management**

Some important elements of school management apart from managing financial resources includes:

1. Management of Material Resources: This includes material things like furniture and equipment.
2. Management of School Plants/Equipment: This includes school building, laboratories, playground and library etc.
3. Management of Human Resource: This connotes the mobilization of all people who are involved and interested in the educational activities of the school, students, staff (academic & nonacademic), parents, experts and board of management. Higher education, postsecondary education or third level education is an optional and final stage of formal learning that occurs after the completion of secondary education. It is often delivered at universities, colleges, seminaries, conservatories and institute of technology. Higher education is also available through certain college-level institutions, including vocational schools, trade schools and other career colleges that award academic degrees or professional certifications. Thus, higher education in Nigeria is an important venture that requires frugal management of economic resources especially during this time of economic recession in the country by the government and private authorities.

Recession is a period of temporary economic decline during which trade and industrial activities are reduced, generally identified by a fall in GDP. A recession is a significant decline in activity across the economy, lasting longer than a few months. The technical indicator of a recession is two consecutive quarters of negative economic growth as measured by a country's gross domestic product (G.D.P.).

The business dictionary indicates that recession is a period of general economic decline, defined usually as a contraction in the GDP for six months (two consecutive quarters) or longer, marked by high unemployment, stagnant wages, and fall in retail sales. A recession generally does not last longer than one year as it is much milder than a depression. Although considered a normal part of a capitalist economy, there is no unanimity of economists on its causes. Recently, there are challenges in the trend of things in higher education as a result of pressure concerning or hinging on declining sources of income and rising costs in operating and funding higher education. Higher institutions are facing global financial crisis which tend to

affect teaching and learning, the enrolment numbers of students and philanthropy, including students increasing demands and expectations of their education experience. Higher education is recognized as a key force for modernization and development but presently is facing some obstacles in research and provision of educational services to citizens as higher educational institutions function in very strict conditions economically. This economic challenge facing higher education points accusing fingers at the economic recession affecting Nigeria.

Managing higher education this period has become a herculean task due to this economic challenge. This worrisome challenge posits the following questions: what could be the cause of economic recession in Nigeria? What are the available approaches or alternative strategy that could be adopted for a successful higher education management in Nigeria?

### **The Goals of Higher Education**

The National Policy on Education (2014, p39-41) described tertiary education (higher education) as the education given after post basic education in institutions such as universities and Inter-University centres such as Nigeria French Language Village, Nigeria Arabic Language Village, National Institute of Nigerian Languages, institutions, such as Innovation Enterprise Institutions (IEIs), and Colleges of Education, Monotechnics, Polytechnics, and other specialized institutions such as College of Agriculture, Schools of Health and Technology and the National Teachers' Institutes (NTI).

The goals of tertiary education shall be to:

- (a) Contribute to national development through high level relevant manpower training;
- (b) Provide accessible and affordable quality learning opportunities in formal and informal education in response to the needs and interests of all Nigerians;
- (c) Provide high quality career counseling and lifelong learning programmes that prepare students with the knowledge and skills for self-reliance and the world of work;
- (d) Reduce skill shortage through the production of skilled manpower relevant to the needs of the labour market;
- (e) Promote and encourage scholarship, entrepreneurship and community service;
- (f) Forge and cement national unity; and
- (g) Promote national and international understanding and interaction.

The National Policy went further to stipulate the methods which tertiary educational institutions shall use to pursue, these goals viz;

- (a) Quality student intake
- (b) Quality teaching and learning
- (c) Research and development;

- (d) High standards in the quality of facilities, services and resources;
- (e) Staff welfare and development programmes;
- (f) Provision of a more practical-based curriculum relevant to the needs of the labour market;
- (g) 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;
- (h) A variety of flexible learning modes including full-time, part-time, block-release, day-release, distance learning and sandwich programmes;
- (i) Access to training funds such as those provided by the Industrial Training Fund (ITF), Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund);
- (j) Students Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES) that is well structured, coordinated and supervised;
- (k) Maintenance of minimum educational standards through appropriate regulatory agencies;
- (l) An all-inclusive credible admissions policy for national units;
- (m) Support affordable, equitable access to tertiary education through scholarships and students' loans;
- (n) Inter-institutional co-operation and linkages; and
- (o) Dedicated services to the community through extra-mural and extension services.

All teachers in tertiary institutions shall be required to undergo training in the methods and techniques of teaching.

Tertiary institutions are encouraged to explore other sources of funding such as endowments, consultancy services and commercial ventures.

- a. the internal organization and administration of each institution shall be its own responsibility.
- b. The traditional areas of academic freedom for the institutions are to;
  - i. select their students, except where the law prescribes otherwise;
  - ii. appoint, promote and discipline their staff;
  - iii. teach and select areas of research; and
  - iv. determine the content of courses in line with minimum standards stipulated by regulatory agencies.

Government shall continue to respect this freedom.

To perform the above functions stipulated by the national policy on education, Nwafor (1998) opined that higher education management or administrators needs the services of various kinds of expertise and policy-makers who will draw the framework for action, a council and executive officer, and the academic staff with specialized knowledge and skill needed by the student, which will boil down to problem solving process. Therefore, every administrative measure should foster the achievement of the purpose of higher education. Thus, managers of higher education

must perform their role in a manner that will contribute to the complex task of nation building. By implication, administrators of higher education should possess the basic knowledge of how to co-ordinate activities, discern and influence goals, policies and programmes and how to procure and manage available resources so as to achieve the goals of higher education. The primary purpose of higher education administration is the coordination of materials and funds including the activities of persons to bring an unsatisfactory state of affairs to a state of satisfaction.

### **Principal Officers of Higher Education**

These are key management personnel of higher education institutions saddled with administrative roles to ensure effective and efficient running of the higher institutions. The principal officers of higher education according to Whawo (2003 p49-51) are as follows:

1. **The Chancellor:** The Chancellor is appointed by the visitor to the university for a period of five years and may be re-appointed for another tenure. This office is highly ceremonial. Whenever he is present at meetings of convocation or congregation for the conferment of degrees, he takes precedence over all other officers of the university and consequently, presides. The chancellor is the ceremonial head of the university. In Nigeria, elderly citizens who have distinguished themselves in the society are usually appointed to this post.

2. **The Pro-Chancellor:** The Pro-Chancellor is also appointed by the visitor, usually on the recommendation of the Minister or Commissioner of Education, for federal and state universities respectively. This principal officer is the chairman of council, the highest ruling body in the university. He is appointed to this office for a period of years. He takes precedence over all members of the university except the chancellor who acts particularly as chairman of the congregation or convocation.

3. **The Vice-Chancellor (VC):** The Vice Chancellor is the Chief Executive and Academic Officer of a university. He is appointed by the visitor after due recommendation from the university council and senate. The tenure of the vice-chancellor is five years. He is the Chairman of the day-to-day governance of the university. He is also Chairman of Appointments and Promotions Committee, especially for academic staff. The Vice-Chancellor caters for the welfare and interest of staff and students for the maintenance of order and discipline as may be conferred on him by the edict which established the university.

4. **The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC):** This officer is appointed by the Senate on the recommendation of the Vice-Chancellor. The correct trend in most universities is to appoint two DVCs, for administrative and academic matters

respectively. They are both responsible to the Vice-Chancellor for the daily administration of the University. They assist the Vice-Chancellor and act in his place when the office is vacant, when he is unable to perform his functions, for instance, as a result of incapacitation (or possible legal restriction).

5. **The Registrar:** The Registrar is the Chief Administrative Officer of a university. He is responsible to the Vice-Chancellor for the day-to-day general administration of the university. He is the secretary to the council, senate, congregation and convocation. The division under the Registrar include Academic Staff Training and Development, Council Division, Student Affairs, General Administration, Personnel Affairs, Planning.

6. **The Bursar:** The Chief Financial Officer of a university is the Bursar. He is responsible to the Vice-Chancellor for planning, administration and control of the financial affairs of the university.

7. **The Librarian:** The Librarian is the Chief Officer in-charge of a university library. He is responsible to the Vice-Chancellor for the administration and coordination of all library services in the university and its campuses, colleges, faculties, schools, departments and institutes.

### **Causes of Economic Recession in Nigeria**

The major cause of recession in Nigeria may not be different from the economic recession that have existed in any other given nation. The economic recession of a given country affects every facets and sectors of the country including the educational sector and whatever affects the educational sector, may likely affect the entire nation, just like the structural-functionalist theory believes that the human body as a system, is composed of a number of interrelated organs such as the heart, lungs, kidney, brains etc. which perform functions essential for the survival of the organism. Similarly, the society (Nigeria) is seen as a system made up of interrelated institutions (parts) such as the family, polity, religion, economy and education, which perform functions essential for the survival of the society, aimed at maintaining a state of equilibrium. These institutions of the society above are known together as the social structure of a society. (Okonkwo & Agada (ed.)1991) hence if there is a deformity in one system, or part of the body (society), it affects or slows down the entire functioning of the organism. Noko (2016) explained the causes of economic recession in Nigeria to be the following:

1. **Poor Economic Planning:** Lack of concrete implementation of economic planning connected with exchange rate policy and economic delay by Nigeria government in such areas as encouragement of foreign investments, raising of

agricultural output, improving mining sector and diversification of the economy without any concrete strategic plan.

2. **High Inflation Rate:** Government ban on the importation of agricultural products like rice, removal of fuel subsidy simultaneously with the banning of agricultural products, speculation in stock market due to budget delay, rise in domestic oil price due to subsidy removal, fall in the global crude oil price deteriorating Nigeria exchange rate, almost all the household price skyrocket daily.

3. **High Interest Rate:** Interest rate is between 26.77-27% as at 2016 which is extremely high for investors. This high interest rate is discouraging to investors. The poor investment culminates into high rate of unemployment in the country, reduction in aggregate demand especially from the households.

4. **High Taxation:** In Nigeria, government charge high-tax rate during economic recession, causing small businesses to go down or even close due to high interest rate. Both high interest and tax rate lowered Nigeria's aggregate demand.

5. **Policy Conflict:** The economic policies in Nigeria appear conflicting due to high interest rate. High tax rate and tight monetary measures, while the federal government assumed that the adopted and expansionary policy e.g. the Treasury Single Account (TSA) adopted by the Nigeria government which many citizens point accusing fingers to be the reason for low lending activities of Nigerian commercial banks Nwankwo (2017).

### **The Impact of Recession on Higher Education in Nigeria**

Recession has had a devastating effect on higher education in Nigeria. Every segment or sub system within higher education such as students, lecturers, researchers, library workers. Administrators, clerks and secretaries. Estate/maintenance have all been affected by recession. Agwu (2003) posits that economic recession have brought about a situation whereby academic activity is subjected to severe stress in various dimensions due to the fact that sources of income generation seem to fall. Education financing according to Imonivwerha, Philomena and Enaiibe (2008) have brought about the continues "down tools" of the members of the Labour union of the school system for some time now, of which higher education is inclusive. The increased restiveness among workers of Nigerian Labour congress a mother congress to the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) points accusing fingers at reduction in the real wages of workers in higher education as well as a reduction in the confidence of consumers for purchases of teaching and learning materials. Most students only know when they are admitted but cannot predict their period of graduation due to incessant economic strikes by ASUU.

Inadequate funding due to recession has manifested in dilapidated state of facilities in higher education institutions. Peter (2008) and Ayorinde (2016) asserts that these lacks of funds coupled with a disconnect in the budget proposals, approvals and funds released to universities leads to haphazard implementation of policies and

poor standard of achievement in our higher institutions. Inadequate funding has also resulted to shrinking endowments, declining charitable contributions and reductions in government support, inadequate provision of essential municipal services and ineffective administration. Sunday and Atueyi (2016) concludes that this economic recession has brought higher institutions into a dilemma with hard hitting economic malaise affecting every sphere of its plans and activities leading to poor quality service delivery in our higher institutions.

### **Strategies to Curb the Effect of Recession on Higher Education in Nigeria**

The strategies to curb the effect of recession on higher education in Nigeria includes:

1. Prioritization of Education efforts and Investment: Managers of higher education should give priority to educational ventures and expenditures that have the highest returns, i.e. maintaining the types of educational programs that will assist students and also increase college funds.
2. Students and parents should find more creative ways to raise money for their education such as taking loans, pleads for donations and scholarship from government, nongovernment organizations, oil companies, family and friends.
3. Higher education institutions should make plans to generate a policy to boost production within higher institution without relying on the government to solve college problems and invest on economic schemes such as transportation, food, shelter and agriculture.
4. Less spending on irrelevant projects: Management of higher education should reduce spending on things that do not bother on teaching and learning e.g. luxuries such as cars and purchase of guest houses.
5. Management of higher institutions should explore other sources of funding like the Industrial Training Fund (ITF) and the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) as prescribed by the National Policy on Education (2014) including sources such as endowment funds, consultancy services and engage in commercial ventures within the university.

### **Conclusion**

Higher education is a very expensive venture in Nigeria and all over the world, financed and funded by government. However, higher education is highly underfunded by the government in Nigeria leading to low research activities, inability of high institutions to pay reasonable salaries to workers and deterioration of school plants which appear to be getting worse at this time when government resources is diminishing as a result of mismanagement and economic recession. The sustainability of higher education in Nigeria requires enormous funds. Reliability on government revenue as a source of financing and funding higher education should be complemented by the higher institutions internal strategies to raise funds. However, underfunding of higher education by government in Nigeria has led to low research



activities, inability of higher institutions to pay reasonable salaries to workers, deterioration of school plants during the period of economic recessions. Therefore, the onus lies on the administrators of higher institution to harness the human, materials and economic resources available to bring about a satisfactory state.

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