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## Issues in Tertiary Education and Economic Development of African States: The Situation and Challenges in Nigeria

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By

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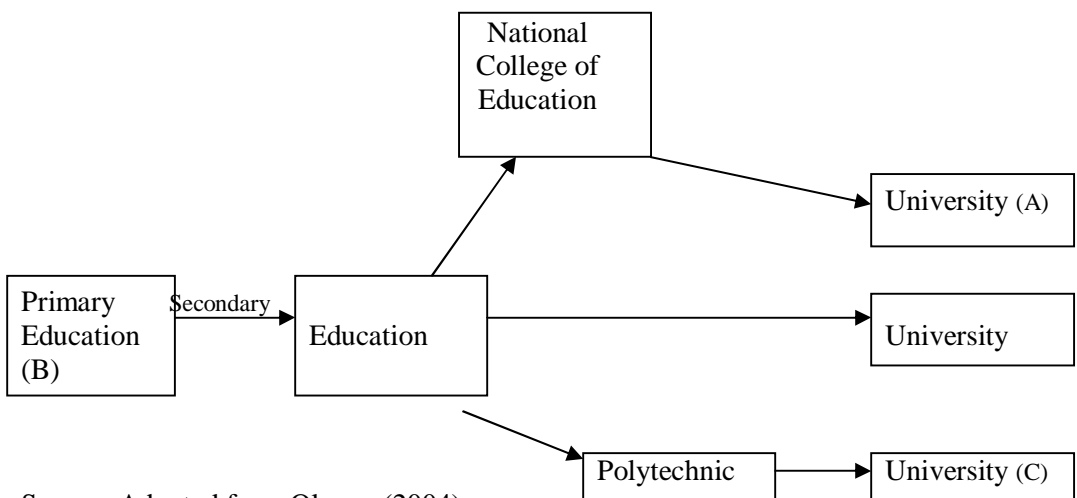
### Abstract

*Education is seen as an instrument of change and national development which fosters the worth and development of one individual, for each individual's sake and for the general development of the society (FRN, 2004). Tertiary education attainment is not only a goal in itself for a better quality of life but also its positive impact on the economic development of a country is far reaching. The provision of higher education is a key element of a policy to promote broad-based economic growth. Education is considered a major remedy for many problems faced by developing countries. From the global perspective, economic and social development is increasingly driven by the advancement and application of knowledge and technology. Africa scores the lowest higher education participation in the world (UNESCO, 2010). However, African universities are unable to absorb the increasing demand for tertiary education. This excess of demand, coupled with lack of resources resulted in overcrowded classrooms, limited student-access to basic equipment, deterioration of facilities, less support for research etc. The deterioration of tertiary education institutions has a dramatic effect. Students and academic staff leave for other more promising countries. The paper discussed the importance of tertiary education to African states, the challenges confronting education sector, the burning issues in tertiary institutions like strike actions, cult activities; the implications of incessant disruption activities etc. Conclusion was drawn and recommendations made such as improved funding, to education, student-teacher ratio, motivation of staff among others.*

Education is said to be the greatest hope and light of any nation and is quite indispensable in the growth and development of a nation. Education is an instrument for sustaining and developing the life of people, an instrument of stability, change and cultural values in a child to grow to the full status of a man sound in mind and body; to acquire the knowledge and skill that will enable him to live a useful life; to have high standard of conduct and be an honourable man trusted by his fellows as well as to be a man of peace, courage and sound judgement. To Eze (2011), education is an organized and sustained instruction designed to communicate a combination of knowledge, skills and understanding valuable for all the activities of life.

Tertiary education in this paper, is used to mean the education given after secondary education in universities, colleges of education, monotechnics, polytechnics including those institutions offering correspondence courses in African countries. They are often called tertiary institutions of learning. These institutions are owned by either the Federal or State governments, voluntary agencies, religious organization or private individuals. Tertiary education are established to carry out tripartite roles of teaching, research and community services thereby, contributing meaningfully to the social and economic development of the nation. In Nigeria, formal education has primary, secondary and tertiary levels or stages. According to Hornby (2000), tertiary means third in order, rank or importance. The Nigerian possible channels to tertiary education is illustrated in the figure below. The channel assumes that a graduate went through NCE (National Certificate on Education or Polytechnic and then to University. The common one represent those who went straight from secondary school to University.

Figure 1: Possible channels to tertiary education in present Nigeria



Source: Adopted from Okuwa (2004)

One of the African countries, Nigeria has her tertiary education goals as follows: To

- a. contribute to national development through high level relevant manpower training;
- b. development and inculcate proper values for the survival of the individual and society;
- c. develop the intellectual capability of individuals to understand and appreciate their local and external environment;
- d. acquire both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to be self-reliant and useful members of the society;
- e. promote and encourage scholarship and community service;
- f. forge and cement national; and
- g. promote national and international understanding and interaction.

The Nigerian tertiary educational institutions shall pursue the above goals through: teaching; research and development; staff development programmes; generation and dissemination of knowledge; students-industrial work experience scheme (SIWES); maintenance of minimum educational standards through appropriate agencies, inter-institutional co-operation; dedicated services to the community through extra-mural and extension services etc (FRN 2004: 36).

### **The Importance of Tertiary Education in African Countries**

Tertiary education is essential to promoting sustainable human development and economic growth. It contributes to the advancement of democracy by fostering open and critical debate, a vibrant civil society and increases the possibility of participating in decision making. Through its ability to deliver appropriate programmes of study, it promotes a critical citizenry, creates the opportunity for social advancement and enhances equity and social justice. Tertiary education in African is at the forefront of developing social policy, monitoring and evaluating the implementation of such policies. It pursues the twin objectives of contributing to the development of social policies by engaging with the actual problems of a country as well as functioning as a social critic. Thus through its research, critical thinking and community service, tertiary education contributes to the consolidation of democracy and the promotion of prosperity.

In the globalised world, the growth of knowledge complemented by the diffusion of information and communication technologies has been the catalyst for social and economic development. As opined by Amadi (2011: 381), “if knowledge is the electricity of the new international economy, then institutions of higher education are the power sources on which a new development process must rely.” Tertiary

education also contribute meaningfully to improving the quality of schooling, health care, welfare and other public services at national, provincial and local levels. This requires the active promotion of continuing education, the upgrading of professional knowledge and skills and creating flexible opportunities for lifelong learning for practical education, health, social services and other public sector personnel.

Tertiary education is crucial to the resolution of the complex problems and the development challenges that face the African continent. While the ability to access and apply knowledge and technologies will remain a central feature of Africa's renewal and rejuvenation, the African renaissance will not be possible without tertiary education producing sensitive and committed intellectuals, scholars, writers, dramatists, artists, musicians and critics (Amadi 2011).

Tertiary education is a vital tool for helping African developing countries to benefit from globalization. It also helps countries attract foreign investment and participate more effectively in international affairs given the technical demands of diplomacy, international commerce and global governance. To David (2002), tertiary education can help developing countries use the economic transformation being wrought by globalization to leapfrog stages of development. The term globalization as mentioned above represent the international system that that is shaping most societies today. It is a process that is "super charging" the interaction and integration of cultures, politics, business and intellectual elements around the world. Driven by technology, information and finance, a full spectrum of views exist, some praising, some disparaging as to the value of globalization. However, most observers like David (2002) stated that the ability to harness the good from globalization and avoid the bad lies in the cultivation of knowledge.

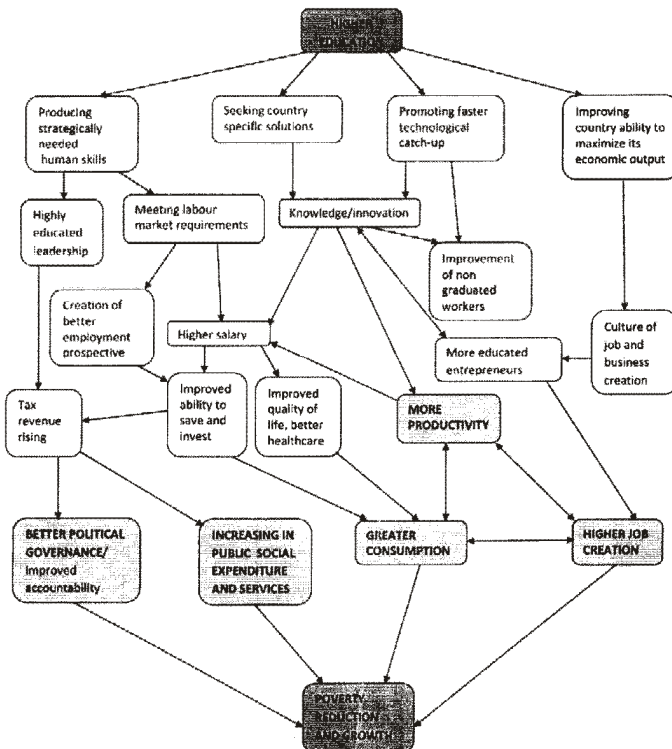
The importance and benefits of tertiary education to African countries according to Bloom, Canning and Chan (2005: 12) maintained that:

*when university is able to identify the hard and soft skills required by the market and the technical expertise to address the country problems, the increased human capital, through innovation, can accelerate technological catch-up and boost science technology and innovation dissemination. More skilled workers, managed by more skilled entrepreneurs, increase productivity rates rewarded with higher salaries. At private level getting a higher salary means improving the quality of life and most of all, increasing the capacity of saving and investing, making consumption growth. At the same time, at a public level, higher incomes have a positive effects on tax revenues which increment social expenditure and services. Quality higher education develops entrepreneurship and leadership, fostering and encouraging the creation of new business.*

The researches by Bloom’s team have also demonstrated that higher education has an impact on governance and business management as educated leadership seems to be more transparent and more equipped with ethics, principles and diminishing the risk of corruption. Bloom’s research finding, further proved that higher education in developing countries can reduce ethnic tensions and support a better management of diversity. Nevertheless, the majority of the econometric studies, agreed in asserting that it is vital that the social, political and economic structures and the technological level of the society to which the educational system belongs are such that graduates can actually make use of their accumulated knowledge. As Bloom argues, higher education will not make a difference in Africa if other barriers to development play a determinative and negative role (Bloom, Canning and Ctian 2005).

Major benefits of higher education according to Bloom’s findings are summarized and demonstrated in the diagram below.

**Major benefit of higher education according to Bloom's findings**



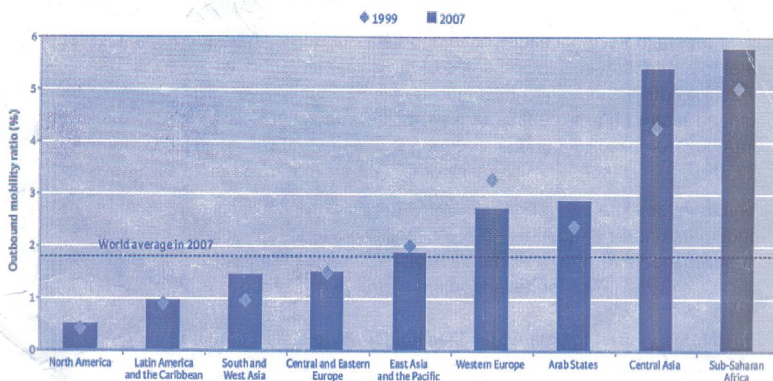
Source: Author elaboration

### **Challenges in African Education**

The deterioration of tertiary education institutions has a dramatic effect; students and academic staff leave for other, more promising countries. The capacity of retention of African universities decreases with quality worsening. According to the international organization of migration, between 1990 and 2004, Africa lost about 20,000 professionals a year (Tebeje IDRC) In the same vein, in 2008, about 223,000 students from sub-saharan Africa were enrolled in tertiary education institutions outside their home countries.

According to the World Bank data base, emigration rate of tertiary educated students (% total tertiary educated population) in Sub-saharan Africa was 12.6% in 2010. Brain drain makes the replenishing of academic and professional functions extremely difficult and represents an enormous economic loss (40% of African wealth), even if its in part compensated by remittances (Ndulu, 2010). Africa stands tallest when compared in world average of number of mobile students from a given region as a percentage of tertiary enrolment in that region. This is highlighted in the diagram below.

**Number of mobile students from a given region as a percentage of tertiary enrolment in that region (outbound mobility ratio), 1999 and 2007**



Source: P. Okebukola, Quality Assurance in Higher Education: The African Story of Achievements and Outstanding Needs, Global University Network for Innovation (GUN), Africa, CHEA-2012

To Ogakwu (2011), the challenges facing education in Nigeria as well as other African states are as follows:

1. lack of effective leadership, co-ordination and control;
2. political leadership struggle and tribal sentiments;

3. shortage of trained teachers;
4. lack of essential facilities such as water, electricity, toilets;
5. poorly equipped libraries;
6. indiscipline and decayed moral decadence;
7. lack of proper inspection and supervision;
8. inadequate financing of education;
9. examination malpractice;
10. ill equipped science and technical laboratories and workshops;
11. lack of school facilities – furniture, hostel classrooms;

Ogakwu further stated that education is a very complex industry which must be managed properly with adequate provision of necessary resources. Tertiary education is seen as a hub that drives economic development of a country. This is because its successful implementation and realization meant improvement in standard of living, reduction in poverty level, improved healthcare and abundant employment opportunities for all.

In the same vein, Efed (2009) from a research study carried out in Delta State Nigeria found the problems facing higher education teaching as follows:

- a. Resources where lack of fund has actually led to institutions' inability to acquire current and modern equipment and facilities for effective teaching and even the payment of staff salaries which most often results to poor productivity.
- b. **Manpower:** Due to retirement and brain-drain, many institutions are filled with new and inexperienced lectures.
- c. **Teacher-students ratio:** In most African countries such as Nigeria and Imo State in particular, the tertiary institutions have large and overcrowded classrooms which posed serious problems of management, distribution, marking of scripts and tests, effective and meaningful teaching, thus resulting to low academic output, problem of examination malpractices and poor evaluation system as it becomes imperatively impossible for lecturers to give individual attention, administer periodic assignments as to effect necessary corrections. Some they say dubiously engage personal assistant (PAs) to mark for them just to meet the deadline given for the submission of results.
- d. **Facilities:** Inadequate facilities in terms of space and equipments have been acknowledged in many as a big problem plaguing most tertiary institutions in Africa.
- e. **Lack of fund for research development:** The cardinal objectives of tertiary education, universities and other tertiary institutions are teaching, research and development but institution in some African countries are not given discretionary funding for research and development to help the society as it is done in

developed countries. The consequence is that most tertiary institutions are turned basically to teaching thus making academic staff non creative and productive.

- f. **Programme explosion:** In a bid to make money, many tertiary institutions since the mid of twentieth century, till date have mounted an extra different academic programmes. That of Nigeria include:
  - i. Associate Certificate in Education (ACE);
  - ii. Sandwich holiday programme;
  - iii. Weekend programmes;
  - iv. Evening programme; and,
  - v. Other professional certificate programmes mainly to attract students who pay exorbitantly. These posed serious problems on management and teaching as well as lecturers/teachers who work round the clock.

### **Issues in African Tertiary Education**

The burning issue in African tertiary education with reference to Nigeria, is the issues associated with disruption of academic activities in tertiary educational institutions. Since the 1970s, tertiary institutions in Nigeria have experienced recurring instances of disruption of their activities. A number of issues are directly and indirectly associated with this. The issues which are traceable to staff, students, government and the management of institutions are highlighted as follows:

- a. **Workers' strikes:** Strike in this context is a situation in which workers refuse to work as a protest. In the words of Eze (2011), strike is a legitimate weapon in the hands of workers for seeking redress whenever they feel aggrieved. Though strikes are legitimate, they should not be allowed to work against the overall wellbeing of society. When there are protracted strikes, man-hours are lost, work environment becomes uncondusive, total outputs and incomes dwindle, ill-winds blow, and loss of economic and manpower ensues.

Presently, it was stated that the federal government of Nigeria (FGN) and academic staff union of universities (ASUU) reached an agreement over a range of important issues in October, 2009. After about four years of the agreement, the following vital provisions of the agreement remain unimplemented:

- i. The funding requirements for revitalization of the Nigerian universities.
- ii. Federal assistance to state universities.
- iii. Progressive increase of annual budgetary allocation to education to 266.
- iv. Transfer of federal government landed property to universities and
- v. Setting up of research and development units by companies operating in Nigeria and provision of teaching and research equipment for our laboratories and classrooms (Nwadiaro, 2013).



“Why ASUU is on strike” is only the failure to honour on agreement and this has crippled academic activities in all Nigerian universities to a halt. The decay situation has left the youth, the tomorrow’s future of the nation roaming the street.

- b. **Student’s Protests:** Students in tertiary institutions are usually youths who have completed their secondary school levels of education. They resort to protests due to fee increase, lack of essential amenities like water and electricity. They may also be provoked by such issues as threat to life (poor security), intra-campus transport arrangement, service charges demanded by school or business operators on campus.
  
- c. **Students cult activities:** One reason for a series of insecurity in many tertiary institutions is the existence of students cults. Campus cult activities is worst during examination period which manifest in the forms of inter-group confrontation, attack on members of staff, attack on students, non-members etc. Evidence abound on students killed or maimed during or through cult activities. As reported by NTA (2011), the shooting incident on 14<sup>th</sup> February, 2011, on the campus of University of Lagos (UNILAG), left many dead and several others injured. Following the incident, panic and fear gripped members of the campus community especially students. Other recent incidents show that campus cult heinous activities are still a reality in our tertiary institutions.
  
- d. **Corruption:** Corruption can manifest in the form of misappropriation of funds, disregard for rules and guidelines, use of one’s office to enrich oneself illegally etc. Corruption refers to dishonest and illegal behaviour, especially if people in authority (Hornby, 2000). Philips (2009) reported the remarks by United States Secretary of State, Hilary Clinton on this issue as she remarked that “corruption had robbed Nigeria of the opportunity to lead Africa and indeed the world... without good governance, even oil wealth cannot guarantee development.” This remark applies to tertiary education as well.
  
- e. **Conflict dimensions:** Conflict appears to have become prevalent in various tertiary institutions of learning to the detriment of the national economy and development. As such, it has serious adverse consequences on the development of education vis-à-vis production of the high level needed manpower, as such conflicts results to closure of institutions and dislocation of the academic calendar.

Evidence abound that multiplicity of labour unions on campus do breed conflicts. In the case of university are:

- (ASUU) - Academic Staff Union of Universities
- (NASU) - Non-academic Staff Union of Universities

- (SSANU) - Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities  
(ASUTON) - Association of University Technologists of Nigeria

In Polytechnics, there are:

- ASUP - Academic Staff Union of Polytechnics;  
NASU - Non-academic Staff Union  
POSSA - Polytechnic Senior Staff Association.

In the Colleges of Education equally exist are:

- COESU - College of Education Academic Staff Union  
NASU - Non-academic Staff Union and  
COESSA - College of Education Senior Staff Association

According to Anyaogu (2007: 51) “Effects of conflicts from the unions are injuries to the system; it’s effects is most on the quality of the products (graduates) of the system, who lack necessary skills required in the global market, knowledge, technology and economic developmental growth.”

### **Implications of Incessant Disruption of Activities in Tertiary Institutions of Learning**

The pace of development would usually be slow in an environment that is always engulfed in one form of crisis after another. This can be explained by the fact that, there is hardly enough time for rehabilitation, reconstruction and catching up on lost time. Some specific implications are:

- i. **Inability to retain highly specialized manpower.** Countries which have better conditions of service often attract our specialized manpower. The quest for greener pastures tends to encourage the exit of high level manpower from tertiary institutions otherwise termed “brain drain.”
- ii. **Preference for foreign universities by parents:** A lot of Nigerians and other African parents prefer to send their wards to universities outside their country. As Amadi (2011) argued those who send their wards abroad quietly pass a vote of no confidence on other country’s universities. Those who cannot afford the fees in Britain and United States of America such as Nigerian parents send their wards to Ghana. The major attraction to universities in Ghana is the stability of the educational system and the predictability of duration of academic programmes.
- iii. **Degeneration of the rate of tertiary education:** The adverse effects of dilapidated and obsolete institutional infrastructural facilities in universities; lack or poor power supply; incessant disruption of activities; top class professionals

preferences to overseas; the political lip service to education sector; corruption etcetra on the quality of teaching, learning and research contributes to lowering of the standard of tertiary education in some African states.

## **Conclusion**

Tertiary education with its tripartite roles of teaching, research and community services have a paramount effect in the reproduction of social structures, economic and technological development which means that as places of knowledge transmission they play a transformative role. Tertiary institutions remain great national storehouses of trained, informed, inquiring and critical intellects and the indispensable means of replenishing national talent. Despite all difficulties and alarming conditions (finances, brain drain, political governance, impoverished, frustrated, dilapidated and overcrowded as they may be) tertiary institutions are still centers of intellectual production and have no substitutes for economic development in African states. A successful improvement, implantation and realization of tertiary education meant improvement in standard of living; reduction in poverty level; improved health care, abundant employment opportunities for all; technological and economic development and expunging of some African countries from the list of underdeveloped 3<sup>rd</sup> world countries in the world.

## **Recommendations**

For the advancement of tertiary education in African states with particular reference to Imo State Nigeria, all forms of setback should be addressed squarely. A number of recommendations are hereby proffered in that regard,

- a. **Increased funding:** Government should allocate sufficient funds to education sector so as to take care of all levels, programmes and projects. Education should be treated as a priority area in development planning. At least 26% of government budget should to the education sector as recommended by UNESCO.
- b. **Timely intervention to foreseen crisis:** Tertiary institutions administrators (Vice-Chancellors, Provosts, Rectors); state and federal government should nip on bud any crisis that will degenerate to disruption of academic activities or closure of the ivory tower gate (universities).
- c. **Provision of facilities:** Priority attention should be given to providing education equipments, facilities and infrastructures in quality and quantity.
- d. **Motivation:** Staff in tertiary institution should be motivated with whatever it will take to attract and retain them both academic and non-academic as such, the brain-drain will be minimized.

- e. **Student-teacher ratio:** Students' admission into faculties in the tertiary institutions of learning should be based on the available infrastructures, space and personnel. Infrastructure has a corresponding impact on students' achievement as well as the student-teacher ratio.

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