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TRENDS AND TRANSFORMATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

Category: Management, Leadership, Governance and Quality

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Abstract

This paper discussed the trends, challenges and transformation of higher education in Nigeria. The writers exposed the trends in the emergence and how increase in the number of higher education institutions in Nigeria have always followed closely increase in the number of political units. The paper also examined the goals of higher education in Nigeria as basis for describing their current status as weak and inadequate. The authors therefore present the need for transformation of higher education institutions in Nigeria with emphasis on access, funding, research, quality of products and synergy between the industry and higher education institutions. The discourse concluded the urgency to create a separate ministry for higher education different from other levels of education so that adequate attention can be focused on transforming the higher education institutions and make Nigeria achieve technological advancement as well as meet other lofty goals of being among the world powers.

Key Words: Trends, Transformation, Higher Education, Nigeria.

Introduction

Education is a world-wide phenomenon. It is present in all societies, all the time and cuts across all stages of human and national development. Thus, the adult educators believed that education of man starts from birth and ends at death. This implies that man must continue to learn through life either within the school system or outside it, either to complement or supplement the already acquired knowledge. In this direction, Adekola and Kumbe (2012) noted that education is one of the potent tools for human capital and societal development.

The general consensus among the educationists and development practitioners is that no nation can develop beyond the level of her education. Thus, the Nigerian government recognizing the importance of education set out specific philosophy and goals to be achieved through education. The Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN) (2004) in the National Policy on Education stated that education shall continue to be highly rated in the national development

plan because education is the most important instrument of change, any fundamental change in the intellectual and social outlook of the society has to be preceded by an educational revolution.

The formal education system of Nigeria had undergone series of reforms and revolutions. The country has been operating the 6-3-3-4 system of education, but in recent times introduced compulsory basic education which comprised of the six (6) years of primary education and the three (3) years of junior secondary totaling 9 years of basic education, the next three (3) is for the senior secondary education while the last four (4) years represents higher education in a university or a polytechnic. The FRN (2004) described higher (tertiary) education as the education given after secondary schooling years in colleges of education, polytechnics, monotechnics or even in universities, including those institutions offering correspondence courses.

While there is no effort to underplay the significance of primary and secondary education, since according to Jonathan (2010) experts argued that it is a better strategy for developing countries (like Nigeria) to invest in primary and secondary education rather than higher education. The fact that successes recorded at these levels would not be adequate to provide necessary knowledge and skills required for national development makes investments in higher education a worthwhile exercise. Harping on the significance of higher education in national development, International Task Force on Higher education in Jonathan (2010) claimed that primary and secondary education is essential but not sufficient to empower people and nations to compete successfully in the global economy. That chronic problem of poverty, ill-health and illiteracy will not be solved without effective programs from first grade all the way through graduate school.

Jonathan further expressed that higher education is central to development and democracy and further posited that university graduates earn 50 to 100% more money on the average than a person who stops at secondary school. Those with degrees are usually under better working conditions, helping them to enjoy better health, avoid disabling injuries and live longer. They are also more able to reason, communicate, plan, organize their life and manage their finances. Their self-esteem and confidence are higher than those of other people, their interest broader and their ambition greater. Persons with more education are likely to pay more in taxes and help increase productivity. University graduates also tends to have fewer children with lower maternal and child mortality rates. Jonathan (2010) finally emphasized that there is a direct and sustainable link between improvements in higher education and a rise in national prosperity and health.

Based on this obvious significance of higher education to national prosperity, the general goals of higher education according to Robbins reported in Anya (2013) should include:

- ◆ Instruction in skills;
- ◆ Promotion of the general power of the mind;
- ◆ Maintaining research in balance with teaching should not be divorced from the advancement of learning and the search for truth;and
- ◆ Transmitting a common culture and common standards of citizenship.

In relation to these general goals of higher education the FRN (2004) stated that the goals of higher education in Nigeria shall be to:

- (a) Contribute to the national development through high level relevant manpower training;
- (b) develop 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 unity and
- (g) promote national and international understanding and interaction.

Based on these national goals of higher education in Nigeria, institutions of higher education in Nigeria are generally focused of teaching, researching and community service, with the aim of promoting national unity, develop skilled manpower and advancement in science and technology that would not only improve the national economy but capable of putting the country in an advantageous position to compete favourably and benefit significantly in the competitive globalized economy.

Trends of Higher Education in Nigeria

The establishment and development of higher education in Nigeria has from the pre-independence era till today been an issue based on findings and recommendations of committees and commissions. Such commissions according to Osokoya (1989) include Asquith and Elliot Commissions of 1943, whose report led to the establishment of the first University in Nigeria in 1948- (the University of Ibadan) and the Ashby Commission of 1960 that led to the establishment of more universities. Osokoya (1989) noted that the recommendations of the Ashby Commission led to the expansion of the institutes in Enugu, Ibadan, Kaduna and Yaba. The commission also recommended the establishment of new institutes of Agriculture in Benin City, Port Harcourt and Kano respectively. In addition, the commission recommended the establishment of two more universities which were later established and located in Zaria in the present Kaduna State and Nsukka in Enugu.

According to Anya (2013) the first institution of higher learning in Nigeria was the Yaba Higher College founded in 1932. However, Kosemani and Okorosaye-Orubite (1995) called

attention to the fact that the school, in 1934, moved from its temporary site in Kings College Lagos to her permanent site in Yaba, Lagos when the first set of students had already reached year three. The Yaba College according to Kosemani and Okorosaye Orubite offered courses in engineering, medicine, agriculture, survey and teacher training. The entire courses led to the award of Diploma Certificates.

Emanating from the report of the Asquith commission, the Hamilton-Style delegation on higher education in West Africa was formed. Kosemani and Okorosaye-Orubite further noted that, on the acceptance of the report of the Hamilton-Fyfe delegate, machineries were put in place for the establishment of a university college in Ibadan. After the entrance examination in November, 1947, the University College of Ibadan, now University of Ibadan was formally opened on 18 January 1948. Jonathan (2013) revealed that the Yaba Higher College provided the rump of the first set of students of the University College Ibadan which offered first degrees in affiliation with the University of London.

Following independence in 1960, the first university to offer its own degree in Nigeria, The University of Nigeria Nsukka was established in 1960. This was followed by three other universities established in October 1962 in Zaria, Lagos and Ile-Ife. Osokoya (1989) noted that subsequent increases in the number of universities in Nigeria have followed closely increases in the number of political units. Thus, when Nigeria moved from regions to 12 states in 1967, there was a simultaneous increase in the number of universities. By 1977, the number of universities in Nigeria had increased to 13.

From the 1979 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to the current 1999 constitution as amended, education has remained in the concurrent list. This gives the state governments right to establish universities within their territories. As observed by Osokoya

(1989) by 1983 there were 8 state governments owned universities in Nigeria. As of today 2013, there are a total of 128 universities in Nigeria, made of 40 Federal Government Universities, 38 state government owned universities and 50 universities owned by individuals, private and organizations. Apart from the universities, current information on higher education institutions revealed that as at 2010, there were about 67 polytechnics and 92 Colleges of Education spread across the 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory in Nigeria.

Nigeria as a country, has a population of about 170 million out of which about 65% are youths that requires higher education. The Federal Minister of Education in her appraisal of the 2013 Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) observed that out of about 1.7 million candidates that sought for admission through the joint entrance examination only about 500,000 will be offered admission in the tertiary institutions. This includes all the federal, state and private universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education. This situation brings to the fore, the issue of access and carrying capacity of higher education institutions in Nigeria. According to the National University Commission (NUC) (2004) in Ogbenekohwo, Adekola and Iyunade (2007) while some universities in Nigeria are over-enrolled, some are under-enrolled. Table 1 below shows some of the overcrowded universities in Nigeria.

Table 1: Top 10 overcrowded/over carrying capacity in Nigeria: 2005

Universities	Excess carrying capacity
Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye	24,626+
Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma	20,226+
University of Nigerian, Nsukka	10,095+
Lagos State University, Ojo	15,749+
Nnamdi Azikwe University, Akwa	15,088+
Usman Dan Fodio University, Sokoto	14,186+
Delta State University, Abraka	13,998+
University of Abuja, Abuja	11,817+

Federal University of Technology, Owerri	10,541+
Rivers State University of Sci. & Tech, Port Harcourt.	10,471+

Source: NUC (2004), New Age (2005).

As observed by Utomi (2008) the demand for higher education in Nigeria has led to phenomenal expansion and tremendous growth in the number of universities and student population in the last two decades. This tremendous growth in the demand for higher education had resulted in serious stress in the human and infrastructural resources in the institutions and this has really taken a negative toll on the quality of services provided by the institutions and the comparative quality of the products. Anya (2013) observed that until the 1980s, the standards and performance of the Nigerian higher education (represented by the university system) compared favourably with those of the best universities in the world but since the 1980s, the universities have suffered multiple vicissitudes and neglect. This makes Obanya in Utomi (2008) to state categorically that “higher education in Nigeria has not yet produced a critical mass of persons with the requisite generic skills that can be associated with the development of the Nigeria state”.

The current situation of higher education in Nigeria can best be described as weak, and inadequate for the current challenges and future need of the country. The NUC Needs Assessment Report of the Nigerian University system as presented in Anya (2013) described the situation thus: physical facilities in teaching and learning in public universities were inadequate, dilapidated, over stressed and improvised. On manpower, the report revealed appalling staff/students ratio. Among the academic staff, only 43% hold Ph.D degrees in the entire system, only 7 of the over hundred universities have up to 60% academic staff with Ph.D qualifications. The number of the non-teaching staff has been described as mind-boggling. While there is about 37,504 academic staff, there is over 77,511 non-academic staff.

The unpleasant scenario presented in the Needs Assessment Report clearly established the need for a total overhaul of the Nigerian higher education system for a positive transformation of the education system into an instrument per excellence that can make Nigeria achieve her objective of becoming one of the twenty most developed economy in the world by the year 2020 (vision 20: 2020).

Transforming Higher Education in Nigeria.

Transforming the Nigerian higher education system will perform better if it starts from revisiting the extent of access to higher education by the Nigerian youths. In 2013, over 1.7 million candidates sat for the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) organized by the Joint Admission Matriculations Board to gain access to institutions of higher education in Nigeria. As observed by the Minister of Education, the capacity of all the tertiary institutions can accommodate barely 500,000+ candidates. Prof Rukkayat made this known while responding to questions from reporters after the 2013 UTME examination. In a bid to provide more accessibility to higher education, the Jonathan led administration established twelve (12) more federal universities in the country in 2012. Nine (9) out of these newly established twelve federal universities have taken off and will be admitting students 2013. This has made it possible to have at least one federal university in every state of the federation. The problem with access to higher education in Nigeria is not limited to the very narrow access but the variables that guide access also need to be revisited. The variables currently in use are: Merit, Catchment Area and Educationally Disadvantaged States. These variables make access very difficult for some candidates and give undue advantages to others. With this, the number of Nigerians seeking admission and studying in universities outside the country, even in smaller nations is increasing and the cost implication on our economy is unimaginable. With this development, Obanya (2007) identified the challenges of higher education in Nigeria to include: Expanding

access, thereby responding to increasing social demand; ensuring continuity in university work, as there have been many disruptions due to staff and student strikes; Going beyond mere academics by dwelling on students' personality development; eliminating cultism among students, thus ensuring peace on campuses.

To expand access to higher education in Nigeria therefore, efforts of the higher education administrators should be focused on re-directing the institutions to restructure and expand their programmes and introduce new ones that are relevant to the development of Nigeria. As observed by Obanya (2009)

Education in any society plays two major roles; conservation and transformation. Conservation is the society's mechanism for building up and preserving its culture while transformation involves getting society to the next level by taking advantages and advances in ideas, knowledge and technology (P.185).

Discussing the issue of expanding access to higher education, Oko (2011) observed that more universities are emerging, many colleges and other educational institutions are springing up but admission to government owned universities are becoming more complicated.

Furthermore, human resources of the higher education institutions need to be expanded and developed. As mentioned earlier, the NUC Needs Assessment Report presented an ugly situation. The need to improve the ugly situation in human resource development for transformation of higher education becomes a germane issue especially as none of the Nigerian universities appears among the first five hundred in the world. To improve and expand the human resources, efforts should be directed at training more hands and developing those that are not qualified to be qualified for teaching and administrative work in the higher institutions. This can be achieved by dedicating certain existing institutions and probably new ones that are newly established to concentrate on training of higher institution human resources. Government should

also employ more qualified hands to transform and expand the capacity of the institutions to handle bigger student population and conduct more researches.

The funding status of the higher institution especially those owned by government is another area that must be given attention in the process of transforming higher education in Nigeria. Presently, the budgetary allocation to education in general is less than the UNESCO standard of 26% of the total annual national budget. The poor funding status of higher education in Nigeria has negative effects on the level and quality of research in the institutions and also on the quality of the graduates of the institutions. Though, government claimed that in recent time, more funding is available to tertiary institutions through complementary efforts of agencies like the Tertiary Education Task Fund (Tetfund); Petroleum Trust Development Fund (PTDF) ; Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN); Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC); (USAID); JICA and DFID that provide facilities needed in the higher education sector existing situation and challenges confronting administrators of higher education institution in Nigeria confirms that such supports are not sufficient investment that can transform higher education in Nigeria. Government and other stakeholders in the education sector of Nigeria therefore need to increase the investment in education especially higher education. The administration and management of Tetfund need to be re-examined to eliminate corruption, mis-appropriation and mismanagement of the available slim fund. Increasing funding of higher education will expand and transform infrastructures, teacher development capacities, laboratories and workshops and ICT facilities to mention a few.

In recent times, access to global information through the Open Educational Resources (OER) has made more information available in tertiary institutions. In addition, Oko (2011) maintained that quality education cannot be achieved by only providing access to education; we

need to look into the content of the educational programs. We need to create a balance or equality between education for character and education for career. Quality education that will produce valuable citizens cannot be found by focusing only on external characteristics of intellect and entrepreneurship education. To this end, transformation of higher education should also focus on the area improving the contents of programmes in institutions of higher learning in Nigeria.

The products of higher education sector are expected to be provided with qualitative higher education that would make them worthy in character and in learning. However, most of the graduates do not fit adequately into positions in their chosen career. This is to the extent that employers of labour are now claiming that graduates from institutions of higher learning in Nigeria are not readily employable, they need to be retrained to measure up. To transform the products of higher education institutions from low to high quality suitable for career development in the work-world the role of private and corporate organizations, as well as professional associations needs to be revisited. Improvement in the synergy between the industries and the higher education institutions will make the higher institutions products more useful to the industries and more marketable upon graduation. Playing complementary role by the industry in providing facilities for instruction would make it possible for the institution to turn out graduates that can compete globally in the labour market. The universities also need to review their curriculum regularly as mandated by the National Universities Commission to align the school curriculum with innovations in the industry, the labour market and global trends in the society. In this direction, all universities in Nigeria are compelled to teach courses in entrepreneurship education to reduce the rate of unemployment among graduates in the country. Developing entrepreneurship skills has been identified as a means of providing employment, shunning violence and a powerful weapon for combating poverty in the country. Emphasis on

technical and vocational education in the polytechnics and universities of science and technology is highly desired for a positive transformation of higher education in Nigeria for achievement of technological advancement which is one of the goals of Nigeria development target (vision 20: 2020)

Conclusion

Nigeria as a leading economy in Africa is seeking to advance her technological advancement, reduce unemployment, improve on access to higher education and the quality of the graduates of the higher education institutions to make them employable and contribute more significantly to national progress. These lofty ideas cannot be achieved without a strong and well established higher education institution capable of conducting reliable teaching, research and community service. At the moment Andrew in Mark (2011) claimed that no Nigerian university is rated among the first five hundred universities in the world. This clearly shows the weaknesses and inadequacies in the Nigerian higher education system that makes transformation of the institutions a paramount and urgent matter. The paper therefore concludes that for Nigeria to achieve technological advancement and meet other lofty goals of being among the world powers, the country must put in place a sincere, reliable and workable process of transforming the higher education institutions in the country. Such transformation process should be devoid of political influences and capable of improving access, funding, research, quality of products and synergy between the industry and higher education institutions. This paper further concludes that there is an urgent need for Nigeria to create a separate ministry for higher education so that adequate attention can be focused on transforming the higher education institutions since it has been

clearly shown that the present arrangement of lumping higher education in the same ministry with other levels of education is not yielding the desired result.

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