

## Higher Education in Developing Nations: Issues and Challenges in Nigeria

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### **Abstract**

*This paper looked at challenges and coping-initiatives of higher education in Nigeria. The paper noted education as the threshold of any country's development, such that it influences and moderates the level and dimensions of development in a nation. Also, it stressed higher education to include all types of studies or trainings at post-secondary level, provided by the Universities or other educational establishments that are approved as institutions of higher learning by competent state authorities. Such institutions include Universities, Colleges of Education, Polytechnics, Monotechnics, including those institutions offering correspondence courses. The paper looked at the roles of higher education among others as to contribute to national development through high level manpower training, developing the intellectual capability of individuals to understand and appreciate their local and external environments etc. Furthermore, the study identified some operational constraints to higher education as political interference, inadequate funding of higher education and brain-drain syndrome among others. Considering the complexity of man with respect to the fact that being either an extrovert (social) or introvert (withdrawn) primarily determines his behavior and in turn drives his choice for course of study, job fitness and marital stability. In conclusion, the paper stressed autonomy of higher institutions in Nigeria and improved staff welfare/remuneration to mention but few as the coping initiatives for higher education in Nigeria. The study recommended conducive environment and supportive atmosphere should be provided for staff and students in higher institutions.*

**Keywords:** Education, higher education and challenges

## Introduction

Education is the threshold of a country's development in that it influences and moderates the level and dimensions of development in a nation. Education is a process of acquiring knowledge, skills, attitude, and behaviour for the overall development of the individual and for the general good of the society. In the view of Adepoju, (2007) education is a tool for the acquisition of skills, relevant knowledge and habits for surviving in the changing world. As such in every society, the educational sector stands as a medium through which positive transformation could be achieved. Education has been noted and identified to be a national consumption, in that it dictates the bearings and positions of a nation in development and overall growth, Alam, et al, (2009). It is an undeniable fact that education is one of the indispensable tools for national development. Education is widely accepted as a major instrument for promoting socio-economic, political and cultural development in any country.

According to Wogu as cited in Eneh, (2015) this process transforms every aspect of man's personality, with a view to modifying, changing, developing, re-orientating it from its original crude or natural state. In the same vein, Emenu, et al., (2020) stressed that education involves the acquisition of fundamental knowledge and essential developmental skills needed for national and technological breakthrough which accelerates economic growth towards sustainable development. Education has been noted and identified to be a national consumption, in that it dictates the bearings and positions of a nation in development and overall growth, Alam, et al., (2010). At whatever level, the mandate of education is the continuous search for the improvement of social, political and economic circumstances of the society. This understanding clearly informs the overwhelming involvement of governments at all tiers in the policies, initiating and driving of programmes and plans in education.

Higher institutions as part of the educational institutions are purposely established to meet the educational manpower and development needs of the nation. Higher education in Nigeria implies the kind of education offered subsequent to secondary education in dedicated institutions such as universities, colleges of education, polytechnics, monotechnics and other allied and specialized institutions, Modebeluet al.,(2012). They further described higher education in terms of the goals it seek to attain and the function of it in national development. More so, National Policy on Education, (2014) described higher education as education given after secondary education in Universities, Colleges of Education, Polytechnics, Monotechnics, including those institutions offering correspondence courses. Higher education has the responsibility to interrogate the frontiers of knowledge, moral sovereignty and the development challenges that face society where they are located. Higher education in Nigeria naturally keys into that understanding that the education at that level bears enormous responsibility for cultural, socio-political, economic, technological and scientific development of the country.

Higher education as emphasized by the Federal Republic of Nigeria FRN, (2004), in her National policy on Education, is any education given to an individual after secondary education in formal institution (university, colleges of education, polytechnic and monotechnics) including those running correspondence courses. Tertiary education is an advanced place for the training of people for the work force and other societal engagements. Higher education in Nigeria and like any other country is mainly intended for the development of technocrat and the high-manpower that will be responsible for the operations of the wheels and machines of the economy. Higher education contributes to manpower training, local capacity development, intellectual development, advancement of scholarship and community development and promotion of interaction between national and international understanding. It is at this level that education most directly connects to society through invention, renovation, researches and their applications much more than other levels.

### **Roles of higher education in developing nation**

The role of higher education as essential to national development cannot be over emphasized. This is due to the contribution of higher education in producing higher-level skills and competencies as essential to national development particularly in the context of globalization and the shift towards knowledge economies. Higher education in Nigeria was established on the mandate of stretching the frontiers of knowledge, connecting knowledge to development challenges and to provide compass for the general direction of society. Higher education helps integrate learners into the global community where the educated workers are able to perceive technological change clearly and adapt to it more effectively through improved knowledge and skills. The role of higher education is essential to national development due to its contributions in producing higher-level skills and competencies among the populace. However, the roles of higher education in Nigeria as identified by the National Policy on Education (2014) include:

- ❖ Contribute to national development through high level manpower training
- ❖ Develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of the individual and society
- ❖ Develop the intellectual capability of individuals to understand and appreciate their local and external environments
- ❖ Acquire both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to be self-reliant and useful members of the society
- ❖ Promote and encourage scholarship and community service
- ❖ Forge and cement national unity
- ❖ Promote national and international understanding and interaction.

Higher education is believed to be unique and vital helping to illuminate the individual's mind through the knowledge acquired who in turn contributes meaningfully to the society. In light of the above, Williams and Anekwe, (2010) opined that the roles of higher education are to see the society as its "life" that requires continuous inquiry to get better, also to evolve and regulate its dynamics to always stretch society to its life situations. This tier of education is very important because of its contributions to national development.

According to the report of the Nigerian Technical Working Group on the Education Sector, (2009), the major thrust of higher education is the production of highly skilled, knowledgeable, competent, conscientious and globally competitive citizens. The report furthered that the core responsibilities of this tier of education are:

- Academic Teaching
- Research
- Community Development
- Economic Participation through Consultancy Services etc

### **Operational constraints to higher education in Nigeria**

Higher education in Nigeria is faced with the challenges of high demand for admission places leading to escalated enrolments, insufficient funds and physical facilities, inadequate qualified academic staff, and the unemployment of graduants.

#### **Poor management**

In tertiary institutions, it is noted that administration is not in proper place this has bothered administrators of universities, polytechnics and college of education, there are many incessant strike action as a result of students' root and others. Apart from students' unrest, the academic of the students are affected and this causes a lot of under achievement for students and caused staff, uncertainty of the work. The funding administrators has also had a consequential effect on quality assurance in the universities. This vital function has been largely reduced to the maintenance of the status quo. This unfortunate development significantly negates the concept of a university, particularly in a developing country like Nigeria. It seems certain that as long as management continues to play this nonchalant role, quality will continue to be jeopardized in the universities.

#### **Poor supervision and monitoring**

Their accreditation exercises are often stage-managed and no efforts are made to put the made-up facilities in place even after the exercise is completed.

#### **Inadequate staffing**

One of the reasons for the low level of quality assurance in Nigerian universities is a severe shortage of teaching staff. The report by the NUC, (2006) shows that only 16,856 out of 72,704 staff in the federal universities are academic staff. Many universities in Nigeria are bottom heavy in terms of academic staff mix.

#### **Social vices**

Most Nigerian tertiary institutions continually battle with social vices on their campuses. These vices are identified as key factors in poor academic performances of students and extra cost for governance. Whawo, (2015) common vices in tertiary institutions in Nigeria include cultism, alcoholism, rape, robbery, hooliganism, drug addition, examination malpractice, prostitution. In the light of the above, Adegbite, (2007) puts it that cultism amidst the students has opened a fresh and very dangerous element to the condition of things in the educational institutions. Smah, (2007) submitted that where this abound,

there is always feeling of fear on campus, killings and deaths, and in disturbances on campus.

### **Somersault of government policy**

Generally, we note some discontinuity in national policy between one political dispensation and the other. If one government starts an educational programme or project, another incoming government will abandon it and start a new one which it may also not complete. In some other cases lobbying and influences of political heavyweights and influential traditional rulers make government to backpedal on enunciated policies. This has made the Federal Government to lament policy inconsistency in the following words: ‘policies have not always been given the chance to prove their effectiveness (or failure to do so), as uncoordinated changes tend to be dropped in and out in a haphazard manner, dictated by moods in place of reason. This is a practice that shocks (instead of guiding stakeholders and policy implementers’ FRN, (2011).

### **Inadequate funding**

Adegbite, (2007) the major challenge facing the higher education in Nigeria is inadequate financing. According to him “inadequate funding means so much belt-tightening to the detriment of quality, ranking, international attention and mission accomplishment”. The issue of funding has remained a source of concern to higher education that does not have viable investments anywhere to compliment or augment whatever pittance received as government subvention, grants or allocation. That is why the authors lamented that in spite of the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) recommendation of twenty-six percent (26%) of the overall budget distribution to the education sector, Nigeria is yet to achieve this bench mark.

### **Brain-drain syndrome**

This means a widespread movement of the academic workforce from the institutions in the country to overseas institutions where their services are better remunerated compensated. Akindutire, (2004) stressed that institutional fall and compensation erosion during the previous era have prompted substantial “brain-drain” of the educational workforce and inhibited new workforce recruitment.

### **National University Commission imposes a carrying capacity rule**

This means that the regulator defines the number of students that a university could admit during each session based on the facilities available. This limits the number of students admissible with a large overflow of un-admitted candidates. The Committee of Vice Chancellors (CVC) has not been very helpful in this matter as members of the regulatory body with NUC.

### **Political interference**

It has been noted that higher institutions in Nigeria are not completely free of the hands of politicians in the State. No wonder Fabunmi, (2005) opined that political interference in educational affairs is one of the persistent challenges in higher education in Nigeria. The

government, most especially in the state-owned institutions, intervenes in terms of selection and choice of principal officers of these institutions.

### **Marketization and commercialization researches**

Millions of research works are decomposing in libraries of higher institutions throughout Africa and Nigeria in particular. Apart from being a veritable source to generating a stable revenue base, connection between academy and industry remains an impulsion to encourage impact researches. Such links and productive efforts would as well as create employment, further strengthen the institutions as centre of excellence, Singh et al.,(2005). Higher Institutions must encourage innovations and inventions to not only generate revenue and employment but to enhance the opportunity of being self-reliant in pursuit of national aspirations.

### **Dilapidated infrastructure**

Most infrastructures in higher institutions in Nigeria are dilapidated or deteriorated. It is obvious to state that Nigerian higher education is wildly declining. It is obvious that inadequate provision of infrastructural facilities is due to low levels of funding of educational institutions, particularly the higher education in Nigeria, and this makes it impossible to achieve the objectives of Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) as outlined in the Nigerian National Policy on Education Rufai, et al.,(2013). The state of physical facilities in many of the Nigerian universities is revealed by the NUC, (2006) report that facilities in Nigerian universities are in poor shape, the available physical facilities are severely overstretched and ill maintained. However, the equipment for teaching, research and learning are either lacking or inadequate and in a bad shape to enable the institutions to be independent to carry out the basic functions of academics.

### **Academic corruption**

Bretag, (2016) deposited that academic fraud and corruption is monumental and constitutes fatal infringement to academia integrity, competence and relevance. Examination malpractice is very wide spread among students and staff.

### **Poor motivation of academic staff**

For many decades, the working conditions and remuneration of teachers in Nigerian primary, secondary and tertiary institutions have been inadequate. Teachers and lecturers mostly are not paid salaries on time or paid at all. The effects of poor working conditions are seen in strike actions by the teachers and lecturers. Lack of adequate remuneration and rewards from the government reduce the enthusiasm and commitment of academic staff, thereby further lowering the standard of TVET and the quality of graduates Eze, (2013).

### **Aggressive student unionism**

Among the challenges of higher education in Nigeria in recent times is rampant student violent reaction to national issues and internal problems. According to Akindutire, (2004), in recent times, the result of students' militancy and violent unionism have been the recurrent closure of higher institutions across the nations among others before.

### **Coping initiatives of higher education in Nigeria**

Considering the complexity of man with respect to the fact that human either an extrovert (social) or introvert (withdrawn) primarily determines his behavior and in turn drives his choice for course of study, job fitness and marital stability. Therefore, it is pertinent to inculcate psychometrics studies education in higher education because it is increasingly obvious that at the complex personality lies our indomitable propensities and proclivities. As it brings a better understanding of the whom individual is, their abilities and potentials, where they are best fit and what is best for them at present and in the feature.

### **Coping theory**

The study linked on coping theory developed by Lazarus et al., (1984). Coping is a key concept for theory and research on adaptation. It refers to the person's cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the person's resources. The central components of coping theory are cognitive appraisals and coping processes. Through primary appraisal, the person evaluates whether a particular encounter with the environment possesses a threat to one's well-being, Folkman, et al; (1986). In secondary appraisal, the person evaluates, if anything can be done to overcome, prevent harm or restore a troubled person-environment relationship, Folkman et al; (1986). This implies that one makes such evaluation with respect to his/her coping resources and options and is usually perceived as the sense of control the person has over the situation and over self Carver et al; (1994). Coping processes can also be referred to as varying cognitive and behavioral efforts aimed at managing situational demands in order to restore a troubled person-environment relationship Lazarus et al.,(1984). Coping theorists assert that people use two strategies to deal with threatening situations: situation-focused strategies and emotion-focused strategies Folkman et al., (1980). Situation-focused strategies are geared towards changing or solving the problematic situation which includes direct action, planning problem-solving solutions and seeking social support Folkman et al, (1986), Pearlin et al (1978). Emotion-focused strategies, aim to reduce the negative emotional impact of the problem and increase the sense of well-being Folkman et al; (1980) which may include feelings of reinterpretation, distancing oneself and diverting attention away from the stressor. Thoits, (1991). This means that the coping initiative will boost the management of higher education in a developing nation like Nigeria.

### **Identity control theory (ICT)**

Interest in identity within organizational context has considerably increased over the last decade as it appears an important variable capable of explaining a range of organizational behavior. Identity theorists understand identities as internally stored information and meanings that provide contextually appropriate answers to 'who am I' and serves as a framework for interpreting experience. Burke, (2000). This theory explains internal dynamics that operates within the self when the person claims an identity. This means that the identity standard should be part of a dynamic self-regulating control system when an identity is activated. This implies the autonomy status of the higher education in a developing nation will help to regulate and control all that concerns the establishing and smooth running (managing both material and human resources) in the higher institutions of learning in Nigeria.

On this note, higher education in developing nations need to focus more on pushing for quality assurance in both input level and output level of higher education across the nations.

### **Autonomy of higher institutions**

The issue of autonomy to higher institutions is a matter of necessity if quality output is expected, uninterrupted academic calendar is to be guaranteed, an enabling teaching-learning environment is to be assured and the incessant face-off between the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) other labour union and the government will be put to rest.

### **Improved staff welfare**

In order to attract best brains to higher education system, the personal emoluments of higher education staff needed to be revisited. The plights and welfare of all staff in higher education should be given utmost attention.

### **Higher education curriculum reform**

Higher education in Nigeria today needs a total overhauling and restructuring. In order to improve the overall performance of the system to meet with the present day need of the society Ajayiet al; (2002) posited that a reform in higher education programme is highly necessary and long-overdue. Better training for higher education students should be vigorously pursued.

### **Work-study programme**

Higher education should continue to expand the work-study programme whereby some, especially indigent students, are given the opportunity to work in the university while schooling. This will help them generate money to pay their fees and meet other expenses. The student's academic standing must be considered and viewed in positive light for placement in this programme.

### **Compulsory entrepreneurship development training of students**

Considering the changes and dynamism in modern world, it is imperative to inculcate entrepreneurial skills in our young graduates in Nigeria. This will make them more self-reliant and economically active; hence, contribute to the nations' gross domestic product (GDP) upon graduation from higher institutions. To enhance the teaching-learning activity and improve student's learning and academic performance, the following things need to be put in place as part of students' academic services: lecture halls, good lecturers, well-furnished and wellequipped libraries, well-equipped laboratories (for sciences), technology workshops, mini-markets or supermarkets, business laboratories, (for economics, business education), agricultural demonstration centres and agricultural farms and practical entrepreneurial apprenticeship experience while in school. A higher institution should also provide an adequate medical centre for staff, students and catchment community.

### **Enhanced quality assurance**

Quality assurance is a key issue in the provision of higher education. The competence of manpower, impact of research and tenacity of community service are certainly factors of the quality measures of a given institution. A number of items are factored into quality assurance or quality exuded by institutions.

### **Conclusion**

The significance and contribution of higher education to the development of any society cannot be overemphasized. Higher education remains the fulcrum of national development in Nigeria. Despite the increase in governments' continuous expenditure the financial and physical facilities available have not been able to match the demand of Nigeria.

The paper concludes that Nigeria as an emergent nation must see adequate funding of higher education, provision of teaching and learning materials, adequate infrastructure as well as improved staff welfare as a priority if the goals of higher education must be achieved in the nation.

### **The way forward**

1. Periodic conferences, workshops and educative programmes should be organized out with a view toward improving tertiary institutions educational standards to make things work effectively in the setting.
2. To achieve the above laudable goals, there is need for the populace to have free access to higher education
3. Access to higher education. Access to tertiary education is viewed from the standpoint of the number of persons enrolled in the education system; thus should be open to access by qualified citizens.
4. The higher institution needs manpower and financial backing. Government should fund tertiary institutions in providing all the school facilities and paying of staff salary as at when due.
5. Conducive environment and supportive atmosphere should be provided for staff and students in higher institutions

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