



Fundamental Challenges in the Administration of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Nigeria

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Abstract

Higher education or tertiary education is the education received after secondary education. Its importance has been realized over time, leading to enormous government and private investment to it. In this paper, some fundamental questions have been raised concerning the effective administration of higher education institutions in Nigeria. The issues are germane not only to the survival of these institutions but also to their international visibility and acceptance in accomplishing their missions. Issues raised include: quality, global impact factor, funding and what these institutions must do to achieve their mission were equally stated.

Keywords: Challenges, Higher education institutions, Administration.

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INTRODUCTION

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. The invitation extended to philanthropists and the private sector to collaborate with government is evident of the fate placed on education as a major platform for the development of society (Nwideaduh, 2003; FRN, 2014; Hasley, 2006).

The continuous evolution of key education policies, the hunt for international collaborations and intervention obviously point to the critical place of education in the development question of the nation. This is just as it is evident that the importance of education is well known to individuals who spend so much to educate their children and wards in fee paying institutions as well. Thus, the provision, access and delivery of 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. It is at this level that education most directly connects to society through invention, renovation, researches and their applications much more than other levels. Higher education has the responsibility to interrogate the frontiers of knowledge, moral sovereignty and the development challenges that face society where they are located. All these are achievable through the training and development of high level manpower.

What is Higher Education?

Higher education refers to tertiary education. 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.

According to the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2014), the goals of tertiary education include the following:

- 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; and
- Promote national and international understanding and interaction.

Going by the goals of tertiary education, the society or country needed to use tertiary education as a fulcrum of development through the production of manpower who are not only capable of causing economic prosperity, technological advancement, political stability internally but also ensure global competitiveness in all ramifications. Hasley (2006) suggested that “the scope and reach of higher education never ceases to unfold”. Higher education’s role therefore, is to see society as its ‘life’ that requires continuous inquiry to get better. Inquiry to better society becomes the ‘culture’ of higher institution that needs to be perpetuated, that has also to evolve and regulate its dynamics (Williams & Anekwe, 2010; Wokocha, 2003) to always stretch society to its life situations.

Provision of higher education in Nigeria

The importance attached to education because of its transformative power makes its sole control an exclusive prerogative of the government of Nigeria. Government through its numerous

policies determines what education the country requires in response to its developmental needs. Thus, it determines provision, access, content, context and quality. Furthermore, in response to its developmental needs, the government determines types of institutions relative to its population, economic strength and political arrangements.

However, Government in realizing it could not alone provide education, for obvious reasons of financial cost and rising population amidst other demands on it, had invited the private sectors and wealthy individuals to join in the provision of education in the country (FRN, 2014). This call for partnership is not limited to provision of education at primary and secondary school levels alone. Nigerians and probably their foreign collaborators have keyed into the system of education and providing education at all different levels.

At the tertiary level of education, provision has expanded since 1970s when the second generations of tertiary institutions were established. The expansion in provision is not limited to universities. It includes Colleges of Education, Schools of Nursing, Monotechnics, Polytechnics, Colleges of Arts and Sciences, Schools of Health Technology, etc. Thus to date, there are forty (40) federal universities and forty-four (44) state universities and at least sixty-eight (68) approved private universities in Nigeria. There are no less than forty-seven (47) federal and state owned polytechnics and not less than thirty federal and state owned Colleges of Education in Nigeria. There are about 20 privately owned polytechnics and 15 Colleges of Education throughout the country. There can also be found forty-three (43) federal and state owned Monotechnics and four approved private Monotechnics in Nigeria (National Board for Technical Education, 2016).

State of Availability

Going by the numbers of tertiary institutions in Nigeria it seem large enough to accommodate learning applicants who wish to have education at that level. However, this is not the case. Take for instance, a recent survey of 2016 UTME applications. JAMB statistics on its websites shows a total of 1,579,027 candidates sat for the UTME exam in 2016 and it was reported that the number of applicants exceeded the number of available university places by a ratio of two to one. It also indicated that in 2015, only 415,500 out of 1,428,379 applicants received admission to all universities.

Mandate of Higher Education

Tertiary institutions in Nigeria are 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. In other words, tertiary education is a gatekeeper of models for societal development through its researches, knowledge and moral bearing. The mandate of the tertiary institutions draws not only from accomplishing the goals set for it as contained in National Policy on Education, but also the fundamental resource of freedom it enjoys to ‘work out’ a ‘new earth’ for the nation (FRN, 2014).

Much like the beginning of universities and such institutions in Europe, tertiary education in Nigeria faces the arduous task of resolving the tensions inherited since independence. The nation inherited neocolonial political, economical and social structures and has ever since been struggling to hoist a nation state. The charge to “intensify and diversify its programmes for the development of high level manpower within the context of the needs of the nation” speaks to the

urgent need to rescue the nation from the vestiges of colonial past (FRN, 2004; Hasley, 2006; Smith, 2006). In response to this charge, tertiary education is also charged to do the following, namely, according to the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2014):

- Make professional course contents to reflect our national requirements; and
- Making all students, as part of a general programme of all-round improvement in university education, to offer general study courses as history of ideas, philosophy of knowledge and nationalism.

It is clear from the charges that, tertiary education must interrogate the hindrances, obstacles, drawbacks to nationhood. Like Europe and other parts of the world, open the vistas of effective development platform through knowledge, dissemination of research results and application of science to induce technological and industrial revolution in Nigeria (Aminigo, 2003; Hasley, 2006). Redwood-Sawyer's (2017) suggestion of the mandate of tertiary education is in line with the above view. Redwood-Sawyer (2017) pointed out that the mandate of the university just as other tertiary institutions is but not limited to driving and incubating of innovations, and capacity building capable of transforming society through revolutionizing the industries, acceptable democratization and social leverages.

Closer examination of the mandate of higher educational institutions in Africa will expose the high responsibilities before them (Redwood-Sawyer, 2017). Besides the tension between education and development questions, higher education as it stands in Africa, owes the debt of making education in Africa "live in the same room" as education elsewhere. It is expected that while tertiary education responds to the aspirations, needs and challenges of the immediate environment, it should be able to exhibit the competencies and capacities to answer to challenges outside the shores of Africa, work with issues such as globalization and intercontinental exchanges at numerous fronts.

While it should be seen that giant strides have been made in the provision of tertiary education in Nigeria, it should be noted that, tertiary or higher education in Nigeria has continued to be plagued by myriads of problems. Comparatively, higher education institutions in Nigeria have continued to experience low rating (Williams & Anekwe, 2010; Aminigo, 2003). Aminigo (2003) pointed out that the employment of higher education for national development has become a serious doubt in the light of acute "underfunding, crisis of quality, cut throat inter-ethnic and inter-state rivalry in the education industry". This is in addition to issues of "weak internal governance, external influence, poor academic preparation, enrolment explosion, decline in staff training and development, issues of unionism, harsh learning environment" as noted by Williams and Anekwe (2010). Combination of these issues have monumental effect on the achievement of the mandate of higher education in Nigeria. They have remained critical to quality of education provided at that level (Redwood-Sawyer, 2017). Furthermore, wren.wei.org identified academic corruption and fraud as a factor that place doubt on the quality of Nigeria's higher education. The combination of these factors obviously present challenges in the administration of the higher education in Nigeria in particular and the African continent in general.

Administrative Challenges in Providing Higher Education in Nigeria

Administrators of higher education in Nigeria have the most daunting task compared to others in other sectors of the economy. The job of leadership appears lucrative and envious as may be perceived by those who may not have prepared for it. However, like administrators of higher education all over the world, the task before administrators in making higher education institutions globally acceptable, ranked and referenced and functionally relevant to society and the individual includes though not limited to the following:

Quality assurance

Quality 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. Redwood-Sawyer (2017), Okandeji (2007) and Jaiyeoba and Atanda (2007) identify the following as critical factors in quality of any higher education, namely:

- Professionally qualified faculty;
- State of the art facilities;
- Regular accreditation of courses;
- Adequate funding; and
- Research publications

The challenge for the administrators of higher education is to ensure the presence of these factors if their institutions were to attract not only rating, but also both local and international students as well as partnership, and employers' reputation. The impediments, however, remain endemic corruption and economic recession, which affect availability of funds.

Relevance of the Curriculum

Relevance of the curriculum of higher education can be seen in its capacities to address or interrogate issues related to the needs and aspirations of the nation, employability of products of higher education, issues of innovative competencies, research in challenging tensions in health, economic, political, cultural and technological spheres are fundamental to the relevance of curriculum of higher education institutions (Ughamadu, 2006).

Recent discourse on the relevance of the curriculum of higher education has reopened the issue of interdisciplinary approach in most core courses to bear responsibility in connecting areas of knowledge for greater utility in society. Interdisciplinary curriculum, it has been argued enables problems and challenges to be examined centrally having common skills, concepts and ideas (Young, 2006).

The challenges before administrators of higher education therefore would be to ignite the zeal of the academia to fashion curriculum whose activities are in tandem with natural aspirations and a curriculum inspired interdisciplinary thinking and approach in solving society's problems.

Global Appeal

Most universities in Europe and America and lately now in Asia attract overseas students. In Africa, perhaps Ghanaian and South African universities are popular among parents and their children. Reason for students going overseas to study range from students perception of stability and orderliness of the system of higher education institutions to prestigious appropriate curricular that enhance their international visibility in the labour markets and entrepreneurship. Redwood-Sawyer (2017) clearly indicated that internationalizing curriculum of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) while not reducing national considerations, means taking into consideration issues that carry global impact. Curriculum then should therefore search deep to issues of common cores of humanity. Here, therefore lies the attraction and appeal to international consideration.

The challenge before administrators of Higher Education Institutions in Nigeria in particular, remains to bridge their curricula to reflect international demands of the 21st century world. Products of these institutions should be adjudged knowledgeable and accepted as fits for job locally and internationally. This is particularly noteworthy in a globalized knowledge economy where jobs are available in any part of the world to prospective applicants with the appropriate requirements (Guile, 2006; Kamat, Mir & Mathew, 2006; Brown & Lauder, 2006).

Gown to Town

Gown to town, an emerging idea in Africa especially Nigeria of 21st century, is a concept symbolizing the usefulness of Higher Education Institutions to community and society. It is interpreted here to mean concretizing knowledge to productive resources, meaningfulness of researches and their direct impact to society. This is when the concept and investment on higher education has justifications. The five main national goals of Nigeria as a nation are:

- A free and democratic society,
- A just and egalitarian society;
- A united, strong and self-reliant nation;
- A great and dynamic economy; and
- A land full of bright opportunities for all citizens.

These find expression and relevance in the concept of “Gown to Town” (FRN, 2014). Higher Education Institutions is what the society expects should transform it (Williams & Anekwe, 2010). Administrative issues arising here are the tasks to make programmes appropriate in responding to the yearning of the community.

Marketization and Commercialization

There are millions of research works rotting away in libraries of Higher Education Institutions throughout Africa and Nigeria in particular. Unlike other parts of the world, the notable or effective connection between the academia and industry is clearly lacking. Apart from being a veritable source to generating a stable revenue base, connection between academy and industry remains an impetus to encourage impact researches. Such links and productive efforts would as well as create employment further strengthen the universities as centres of excellence (Singh &

Singh, 2005). African Higher Education 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.

Funding

Funding of Higher Education Institutions in Nigeria has remained a major issue in that sector, especially of the public ones. It relies heavily on government for funding. Funds are often insufficient compared to the missions of these institutions.

The effect of funding can be seen on quantity and quality of staff, facilities/infrastructure, research, programme expansion, access, community service, staff training and development, etc. Inadequate funding means so much belt-tightening to the detriment of quality, ranking, students attraction, international attention and mission accomplishment. The issue of funding has remained a source of concern to Higher Education Institutions (HEI) who do not have viable investments anywhere to compliment or augment whatever pittance received as government subvention, grants or allocation. Underfunding is a key challenge. Funding has decreased to less than 10% this year 2017.

Academic Corruption

An Australian scholar, Bretag (2016) noted 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. This is a serious dilemma for administrators who often prevaricate on dealing frontally with culprits for several obvious reasons among which are ethnic factor, religious affiliation, friendship, political interference, economic inducement or lack of commitment.

Social Vices

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. Common vices in tertiary institutions in Nigeria include cultism, alcoholism, rape, robbery, hooliganism, drug addition, examination malpractice, prostitution (Whawo, 2015).

These social vices have their direct impact on both students and the institutions. They are as follows:

- It affects both the perpetrators and the victims psychologically, physically and academically;
- It affects the image and rating of the various institutions negatively;
- It also affects academic achievement;
- Often when fatal situations are recorded, authorities are forced to close down schools leading to loss of time, waste of resources and lives and property (Nwideeduh, 2003).

This is a serious challenge for authorities of Higher Education Institutions and must be tackled to stem deteriorating standards in schools, if the mission and vision of higher institutions are to be achieved.

CONCLUSION

There is no society without its own fair share of challenges. The same goes for the institutions with the society. The Higher Education Institutions are no exception. Their position as harbingers of development from time puts them in more controversial position given the dispositions and exigencies of that community. Its mission must be sustained amidst the plethora of challenges it faces in as much as society's expectation and hope of creating and recreating living circumstances are predicated on these institutions. Law, medicine, engineering, education, economics, democracy are expected to advance with every entering epoch. The challenge therefore remains for Higher Education Institutions to respond appropriately to reassure society of its relevance always.

Recommendations

The place of the Higher Education Institutions in the development of the society cannot be underestimated. The following recommendations are made:

- The regulatory bodies of HEIs should be strengthened by legislation to have strong presence in monitoring the development of these institutions;
- Emphasis must be placed on specialization of Higher Education Institutions in areas they express or possess deep expertise and service;
- The need for high level interactions and exchanges with bodies and institutions responsible for higher education across the globe be stressed;
- Higher Education Institutions should be project and invention driven as mandated;
- Higher Education Institutions should be clearly encouraged to develop links with related industries;
- Funding is crucial for the survival and accomplishment of missions of Higher Education Institutions in Africa;
- Minimize external interference in governance of Higher Education Institutions;
- Display high sense of patriotism and professionalism in the governance of Higher Education Institutions; and
- Minimize conditions for social vices.

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