

REVITALIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION FOR SOCIO-ECONOMIC EMANCIPATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Socio-economic development is the primary goal of every well-meaning government, and it is essentially dependent on the level of economic activities in a country. There is no doubt about the fact that Nigeria socio-economic activities is confronted with daunting challenges and this includes poverty, insecurity, high rate of unemployment, banditry, low industrial output, unstable and deteriorating exchange rate, high inflation rate, inadequate physical and social infrastructure, very large domestic debt, and rising stock of external debt among others. Socio-economic emancipation relies on quality of human capital resource and this is a product of higher education in Nigeria. The contribution of Nigerian higher education is crucial if the country is to witness an increase in socio economic emancipation. Regrettably, a close look at the Nigerian higher education reveals that it is confronted with myriads of problems, which made it impossible to achieve the goal of contributing to socio-economic development of the country. This paper suggested ways of revitalizing higher education for socio economic emancipation in Nigeria. Suggestions raised include that government should ensure larger percentage of her budget is allocated for higher education, while every stakeholder should rise up to fund higher education so as to achieve socio-economic emancipation in Nigeria. Also, higher institutions should put in place strategic plan for impacting employability skills in their students, so as to prepare them for the tasks of life after schooling.

Keywords: Higher education, Socio-economic emancipation, Revitalization of higher education

Introduction

Higher education is provided in the tertiary institutions of learning, such as universities, colleges of education, polytechnics, monotechnics and other institutions offering correspondence courses. According to the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013), the goals of tertiary education include the following, to;

- a. contribute to national development through high level of 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
- d. external environment;
- e. acquire both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to be self-reliant and
- f. useful members of the society;
- g. promote and encourage scholarship and community services;
- h. forge and cement national unity; and
- i. promote national and international understanding and interaction.

it is recognized that higher education has the potential to enhance socio-economic development and contributes to human capital formation; provides the foundation for democratic and knowledge-driven societies; and plays a key role in achieving the national development. it is recognized that higher education has the potential to enhance socio-economic development and contributes to human capital formation; provides the foundation for democratic and knowledge-driven societies; and plays a key role in achieving the national development.

Nigeria is Africa's most populous country with an estimated population of about 150 million and a land mass of 923,768 square kilometres. Nigeria is blessed with abundant natural resources and is the fourteenth largest exporter of crude oil in the world. After sixty years of independence, Nigeria still counts among the poorest countries in the world, ranks low in all socio economic indicators such as life expectancy, death rate, access to water, poverty rate, mortality rate,

and crime rate. With this assertion, it is obvious that Nigeria as a nation is battling with the problem of socio-economic emancipation.

There is no doubt about the fact that Nigeria is confronted with daunting developmental challenges which pose serious threat to her socio-economic development. These developmental challenges include endemic rural and urban poverty, high rate of unemployment, debilitating youth unemployment, low industrial output, unstable and deteriorating exchange rate, high inflation rate, inadequate physical and social infrastructure, very large domestic debt, and rising stock of external debt (Ewetan and Esie, 2014; Itumo, 2017).

According to Ewetan and Esie (2014) socio-economic development is the primary goal of every well-meaning government, and it is essentially dependent on the level of economic activities in a country. The human development report by the UNDP (2005) revealed that Nigeria is one of the poorest among poor nations of the world. Also, the federal office of statistics reports that between 2007 and 2012, 100million Nigerians live in abject poverty and earned less than \$1 US per day, and this is an indication of low level of socio economic development. However, the overall unemployment rate in Nigeria increases to 33% in Q4 2020 from the 27.1% recorded in Q2, 2020 (NBS, 2021).

In the opinion of Danjuma (2012), Nigeria as a nation is experiencing low level of institution and administrative bodies, few people are rich, while majority are poor. He stressed further that we are in a country where almost all the institutions of the state are performing below expectation of the masses, no access to good drinking water, unemployment and crimes ranging from bomb blast, kidnapping and armed robbery are the order of the day. It has become tradition to any government that comes to power in Africa without identifying with the imperative of fighting poverty as a basis for irreversible and sustainable social and economic development.

High cost of governance is one of the factors affecting socio-economic activities in Nigeria. Amidst dwindling national revenue during the covid-19 pandemic in recent times, the Federal Government of Nigeria increased the allocation for National Assembly in the 2021 budget by 3 billion when compared to previous years (Premium Times, 2020). Distressingly, the mindset of the Nigeria political office holders has been that of self service for the pursuit of selfish and personal goals

at the expense of national interest (Ameh, Okloho Ogunmola, 2017; Emejiwe, 2017). Despite the introduction of anti-graft agencies (such as Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) and Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) in Nigeria to tackle the menace of corruption, still, the problem persists. The inference from this assertion shows that there is correlation between tackling corruption and socio economic emancipation.

Poor economic investment culture is another factor responsible for low socio-economic development in Nigeria. Nigeria as a nation is abundantly endowed with natural resources in the forms of mineral resources, oil resources (crude oil and gas), agrarian soil for agriculture, and so on. Itumo (2017) reported that from obvious assessment in the African region (Nigeria Inclusive), there exists a poor culture of ensuring economic investment. He stressed further that no real planning, evaluation and execution is made on investment that would be a viable source of revenue and socioeconomic development for the people, and as a result, it greatly affects socio-economic development of the nation.

Another resultant effect of low socio-economic development is the rising cases of irregular migration among the citizens. The issue of banditry, corruption, acute lack of infrastructure, kidnapping, insecurity, high rate of unemployment, poor educational system, poverty, terrorism, inadequate health facilities, oppression of citizens by law enforcement officers, fear of free speech, among others have characterized Nigeria nation, and as a result lead to movement of citizens to other countries for greener pastures and others (Itumo, 2017).

Socio-economic emancipation relies on quality of human capital resource and this is a product of higher education in Nigeria. Higher education is fundamental to the construction of a knowledge economy and society in all nations. It is evident that state and national level have considered higher education as veritable tool for achieving radical social, economic and political development in Nigeria. The quality of knowledge which is generated in institutions of higher learning is critical to national competitiveness (Asiyai, 2013). She emphasized that it is only quality higher education that can sharpen the minds of the individual and help transform the society economically, socially and politically.

There is no doubt about the fact that for a country to be relevant in this world of globalization and competitiveness, her higher education should be framed in such a way that graduates coming out of this citadel of learning must adequately prepare for the labour market, but reverse is the case in Nigeria in recent times, as state of Nigerian Higher education is in comatose (Okebukola, 2015; Akanbi and Jekayinfa, 2019; Aselebe, 2019).

Higher education, therefore, has great potentials to facilitate socio-economic growth and human capital development of a country.

It is obvious that Nigeria possesses the largest tertiary institutions in Sub-Saharan Africa. Enrolments in the higher institutions grow at the rapid rate and the growth rates far exceeded government policy guideline (Saint, Hartnet and Strassner, 2003; Simona, 2021). Higher education has great potentials to facilitate socio-economic and political activities in Nigeria, but the situation is different due to the crisis that engulfed the higher education sector in many developing countries from the mid-1970 in many ways epitomized a much wider economic and political crisis in recent times.

Although, there are lots of challenges confronting higher education in Nigeria among which are problems of finance, efficiency, equity, quality, infrastructural decay, governance among others. In response to these challenges, a number of African countries including Nigeria are exploring how higher education could contribute directly to economic transformation through closer interactions with the private sector and government. Universities and other institutions of higher education, such as technical colleges, have been arguably the most under-utilized institutions in efforts to promote sustainable development (Zaglul, Sherrard and Juma, 2006; Kah and Kah, 2008).

Previous researches had looked at the relationship between higher education and other dependent variables, while little works was carried out on higher education and socio economic emancipation. Therefore, this study examined revitalization of higher education for socio-economic emancipation in Nigeria.

Conceptual Issues

Socio-economic emancipation

The concept of emancipation is defined as the act of freeing or state of being freed, liberation, freedom from inhibition and convention (Akanbi and Jekayinfa, 2019). They stressed further that it is the act or process by which a person is liberated from the authority and control of another person. Ewetan and Esie (2014) viewed socio-economic development as a product of development and can be defined as the process of social and economic transformation in a society. Socio-economic development embraces changes taking place in the social sphere mostly of an economic nature. Thus, socio-economic development is made up of processes caused by exogenous and endogenous factors which determine the course and direction of the development. Socio-economic development is measured with indicators, such as GDP, life expectancy, literacy and levels of employment.

Higher Education in Nigeria

Higher education, as defined by the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013) is the education given after secondary education in universities, polytechnic, colleges of education, monotechnic, including those offering correspondence courses. The establishment of Higher Institutions was to train various crops of people. The goals of higher education include to:

- (a) contribute to 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 capacity 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 services;
- (f) forge and cement national unity; and

- (g) promote national and international understandings and interaction (FRN, 2013).

Challenges of Higher Education in Nigeria

Funding

Funding is one of the obstacles facing higher education in Nigeria. Funding has been a fundamental determining factor for successful attainment of goals of higher education in Nigeria. Nigerian governments do not allocate enormous percentage of its yearly budget to higher education. The amount of money allocated to education is lower than 26% of government expenditure as suggested by UNESCO. The analysis of World Bank (2012) budgetary allocation to education shows that Ghana allocated-31%, Cote d'Ivoire-30.0%, Uganda-27.0%, Morocco-26.4%, South Africa-25.8%, Swaziland-24.6%, Mexico-24.3%, Kenya-23.0%, Botswana-19.0%, USA-17.1%, Burkina Faso-16.8%, Norway-16.2%, Colombia-15.6% India-12.7%, Nigeria-8.4%. Inferring from this, it is evident that Nigeria is the least country in terms of budgetary allocation to education.

Graduate Employability

All over the world, the issue of graduate employability has become of serious concern to higher institutions due to labour market that had become increasingly competitive. Despite the high number of higher education institutions in Nigeria, the country's status in the area of human resource development is unacceptable. It is quite unfortunate that responses of employers of labour on the competencies and performance of higher institutions graduates in recent time reveals that characteristics such as analytical skills, good communication skills, good personal and social skills, technical and managerial skills among others are lacking in the graduates which are turned out into the labour market on yearly basis (Akinyemi, Ofem and Ikuenomore, 2012; Kakwagh, 2013; Oni, 2014; Olaniyi, 2017; Aselebe, 2019).

Poor Policy Implementation

There is no doubt that Poor policy implementation is a challenge to quality delivery in education. In the opinion of Asiyai (2013) poor quality delivery is responsible for the appalling low performance of

graduates of institutions of higher learning in Nigeria in their world of work and the alarming incidence of examination malpractice.

Inadequate and Poor Quality of Teaching Staff

A big obstacle to the attainment of quality higher education in Nigeria is the lack of academic staff. According to Bamiro (2012) the problem of de-intellectualization of the academia could be attributed to low quality of staff of some institutions of higher learning in Nigeria. He stressed further that, where there is inadequacy of teaching personnel and poor quality of teaching staff, it will be difficult to attain the mission for which higher institutions was established. Jaja (2013) opines that Nigerian graduates from one level to the other up to the doctorate programmes have graduated without proper and solid foundation, but have continued to contribute to the development and transformation of nation.

Campuses crises and Strike action

In recent times, Nigerian higher institutions are faced with issues of campus crises (student violence) and strike action by the employees. The incessant strike actions by employees in Nigerian higher institutions destabilizes the school programme, and leading to production of unqualified graduates who cannot defend their certificates while seeking for employment. The inability of the visitors in the tertiary institutions to meet the demands of the various unions, at times inform the strike action. It is obvious, unionism is a fundamental right of every staff, yet unionized staff militancy over agitations for their welfare has been a clog in the wheel of progress of the higher institutions in Nigeria (Ogbete, Eke and Orji, 2017).

Towards Revitalization of Higher Education for Socio-Economic Emancipation in Nigeria

Higher institutions are saddled with the responsibility of the production of graduates that are worthy in character and possess the skills, knowledge and innovations for the socio-economic development of a country. High quality education has become synonymous with self-sustained economic growth. The under listed suggestions are proffered as ways of revitalization of higher education for socio-economic emancipation in Nigeria.

The issue of higher education under-funding is seen as a phenomenon, which is deeply rooted in the social, economic and political structures of the society (Bassey, Akuegwu and Udida, 2007). The fundamental change in the intellectual and social outlook of any society lies in educational revolution and the fulfillment of this role rests on funding system. Government should place high premium on education by targeting the 26% educational spending as suggested by UNESCO, to help revitalize the higher education system in Nigeria. Government should ensure that larger percentage of the budget is earmarked for higher education in Nigeria while every stakeholder should rise up to fund higher education for the attainment of stated goals. The fact that government at all levels alone cannot adequately fund higher education in Nigeria, shows that institutions should look inward for sourcing fund through Internally Generated Revenue (IGR), endowment funds, Alumni association, Appeal fund, fess/levies, consultancy services and others.

Unfortunately, it is becoming difficult for graduates of higher institutions to secure employment, especially in the face of global economic downturn coupled with competitive job market. Olaniyi (2017) sees employability as a set of achievement skills, understanding and personal attributes that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefit themselves, the work force, the community and the economy. Higher institutions should put in place strategic plan for impacting employability skills in their students, so as to prepare them for the tasks of life after schooling. Higher institutions should ensure quality service delivery in teaching learning process in order to interest the attention of employers of labour.

Asiyai (2015) argued that our policies are written by knowledgeable writers who have foresight and believe strongly in what they write for the future but the problem comes when it comes to translating theory into practice by implementers, and several factors could be adduced as inhibitors to smooth implementation of educational policies and thereby resulting to poor quality delivery. Quality assurance mechanism should be strengthened in all higher institutions for optimal performance in the area of policy implementation.

According to Jaja (2013) the numbers of academic staff in Nigerian higher institutions are not adequate. No education system can rise above the quality of its teachers. Teachers are the prime executors of government policies on education and, as such their operational performance and vision could make or mar the future of the nation (FRN, 2013). Globally, national development has continued to be intricately tied to educational development in which the teacher is the critical element. Management of higher institutions of learning in Nigeria should employ more lecturers to match the students' population while institutional policies should be reviewed to ensure that more emphasis is placed on teaching effectiveness of lecturers for better quality delivery.

The issue of campus militancy and strike action by the workers can be handled through conflict management principles. The higher institutions' administrators should work on how to demilitarize the campuses. Babalola (2007) highlighted some administrative techniques for handling campus crises which include: Enlightenment; Counselling; Legislations (set out rules and regulations to guide actions of staff and students); Issuing of mandates (using existing laws as threats); Using and empowering security outfit. Administrators in every higher institution should embrace dialogue in resolving differences with their staff. Also, government should quickly intervene when issues of strike arises to avoid prolong industrial unrest among workers in the higher institutions in Nigeria.

Conclusion

It is a known fact that revitalization of higher education will aid socio-economic emancipation in Nigeria. The centrality of higher education to socio-economic development of a nation is unassailable. Investment in higher education is a key factor to Nigeria's socio-economic development. The need to revitalize higher education becomes imperative because it has been adjudged as one of the decisive means for developing knowledge, talents and skills of learning in all fields. It is hardly inconceivable to imagine socio-economic emancipation in Nigeria without higher education.

Recommendations

Based on the above, the following recommendations were made:

1. Government should endeavour to allocate huge fund as budget for higher education in Nigeria while effort should be made by relevant stakeholders to fund higher education in order to achieve the stated goals.
2. Higher institutions should devise mechanisms for impacting employability skills in their students, so as to get them ready for the undertakings of life after schooling.
3. Administrators of higher institutions of learning in Nigeria should engage more lecturers to cope with the students' population while institutional operations should be reviewed to ensure that priority is placed on teaching effectiveness of lecturers for optimum productivity.
4. Government should be proactive in handling issue relating to strike to avoid prolong industrial unrest among workers in the higher institutions in Nigeria.

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