Sustainability of Tertiary Education through Quality Assurance and Development in Nigeria

Francis Akubuilo

Department of Arts Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, E-mail: drfrankakubuilo@yahoo.com

Eugene U. Okorie

Department of Science Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, E-mail: eugene.okorie@unn.edu.ng

Abstract

Tertiary education in Nigeria has witnessed rising and falling within the past three decades with the attendant loss of status both within the sub-Saharan Africa and the world at large. This paper is focused on sustainability of tertiary education through quality assurance and development. It examined the dwindling status and challenges facing higher education in Nigeria. It also identified critical areas for quality assurance and development, and suggested the need for adoption of technology-based teaching and learning as a way of improving the quality of higher education in Nigeria.

Keywords: Sustainability, tertiary-education, quality assurance, development.

1.1 Introduction

Economic and social development is increasingly driven by the advancement and application of knowledge. Education in general and tertiary education in particular, is widely accepted as a major instrument for the construction of knowledge based economy and society. According to the revised National Policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004), tertiary education is the education given after secondary education in universities, colleges of education, polytechnics, and monotechnics including those institutions offering correspondence courses. Accordingly, Section 8 of the National Policy on Education 2004 States that the goals of tertiary education are 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 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.

Despite the immense benefits of tertiary education to nation building, as pointed out by the above goals, their achievements have remained a marriage. According to Olaleye (2012:580) higher education in Nigeria like other systems of education especially in developing countries is going through a series of challenges. Saint et al (2003) also observed that the potential of higher education systems in developing countries to fulfill its responsibility is frequently thwarted by long-standing problems. These multi-faceted problems have inhibited goal attainment led due to draw backs in development and have created fear and doubt about the quality of tertiary education in Nigeria.

1.1.2 The Challenge of Quality

According to Anugwom (2009:128), education acquired is only relevant to the extent it makes notable impact in the lives of the individual and society. The quality of tertiary education system in Nigeria reflects in its products-the graduates. Dabalen et al (2000) observed that public and private employers of university graduates, as well as the government itself, consider the quality of university graduates to be inadequate. Employers believe university graduates are poorly trained and unproductive on the job and shortcomings are particularly severe in oral and written communication, and in applied technical skills. Ayeni and Dada (2011:204), insists that the educational system in Nigeria has not had the financial resources to maintain education quality in most of the significant expansions. Oni (2000) posits that the factors responsible for the poor quality of university programs (and graduates) appear to be both internal and external to the universities. internal factors include strikes, lack of employee motivation, and weak accountability for educational performance. External factors comprise teacher

shortages, corruption, inconsistent funding efforts by government and admissions based on quotas rather than merit.

The above factors have really engraved an indelible mark on the quality of tertiary education in Nigeria. For instance, strike has become the only effective weapon in the hands of education workers to get what is due to them from the government. Thus, hardly is any agreement reached or implemented without strike. Some institutions spend upwards of three to six months on strike within one academic session, only to rush back and conduct examinations for the students. The result is that the students concentrate on doing everything possible to pass the examination rather than reading to acquire relevant knowledge.

Shortage of teachers fueled by brain-drain and inadequate funds to recruit more teachers also has significant impact on the quality of education. It leads to high student and academic staff ratio, resulting to situations where academic staff teaches up to six courses in a semester, at times, at both the undergraduate and high degree levels. The implication is that most academic staff has no time for research as they find solace in preparation and distribution of handouts and mini-text books.

Another factor that affects quality of education is the quota admission system. Under the system, 30% of admissions into federal universities is reserved for catchment area 20% for educationally disadvantaged students, 10% at the vice chancellors' discretion. Only 40% of students were admitted on the basis of the merits of their academic performance. (Saint et al 2003).Adeyemi (2001) cited in Saint et al (2003), found that there is significant differences in academic performance between students admitted on merit and those admitted on other criteria. He also discovered that the drop-out and repetition rate for the latter group was three times higher than for the merit-based group.

1.1.3 The Dwindling Status of Nigerian Universities

The history of university education in Nigeria started with the establishment of university college Ibadan in 1948 notably the University of Nigeria Nsukka, 1960, University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University), 1962, Ahmadu Bellow University, Zaria 1962 and University of Lagos, 1962 (Ekundayo and Ajayi 2009). The growth of tertiary education continued with more federal, state, and private universities. Polytechnics and colleges of education were not left out. As at 2012, there were 37 federal universities, 38 state universities and 50 private universities (NUC 2012). There are also 52 colleges of education and 44 polytechnics in Nigeria.

According to Saint et al (2003), by 1980, Nigeria had established a well-regarded higher education system offering instruction at an international standard in a number of disciplinary areas. The universities of Ibadan and Ahmadu Bello, for example, earned global recognition for their research in tropical health and agriculture, respectively. Under successive military governments during the 1980s and 1990s, however, this sparkling reputation steadily tarnished. Low level of investment in research capacity and education could be blamed for this. On research side, Nigerian's number of scientific publications for 1995 was 711-significantly less than its output of 1,062 scientific publications in 1981 by comparatively much smaller universities. In contrast, scientific publications were 3,413 for South Africa, 14,883 for India, 310 for Indonesia, and 5,440 for Brazil (TASK FORCE 2000 Cited in Saint et al 2003).

Although it is Africa's largest country with 20 percent of the region's population, Nigeria has only 15 scientists and engineers engaged in research and development per million persons. This compares with 168 in Brazil, 459 in China, 158 in India, and 4,103 in the United States (World Bank 2002 cited in Saint et al 2003).

Despite the democratic government in place since 1999, various reforms in education sector, and increased number of tertiary institutions, Nigeria remains Africa's sleeping giant. With a population of over 150 million and about 125 universities, no Nigerian university is regarded as World Class. In contrast, South Africa, with a population of 51.77 million people and less than 50 universities, has a number of her universities rated as World Class. According to the World University Rankings 2012-2013 published by the Times Higher Education World University Rankings, no Nigerian University made the list. Strikingly, South Africa has four universities in that list. University of Cape Town ranked 113, University of Witwatersrand, 226-250, Stellenbosch University, 251-275 and university of Kwazulu-Natal, 351-400. (Times Higher Education 2012).

The present situation indicates that Nigeria is backward in terms of quality of higher education, not only in the world but also within the African continent. The scenario appears worrisome when viewed against the background that Nigeria once served as the hub of university education in West African sub-region. Recent changes in education policies which led to the establishment of more public and private universities have not helped matters as increase in the number of educational institutions only addresses the issue of access, while other factors such as shortage of teaching staff, research grants, infrastructure, corruption, weak technology and other related issues are still facing the Nigerian education system.

1.1.4 Critical Areas of Quality Assurance

According to Chambers (2004) quality is the degree or extent of excellence of something. It has to do with the standard expected of a product or service. On the other hand, quality assurance has to do with the maintenance of a desired level of quality or standard in product or service. In regards to education, quality assurance implies consistent maintenance of standard of education. Quality assurance in tertiary education in Nigeria is imperative in four critical areas; namely: Human capital, content, process, and output.

1.1.5 Quality of Human Capital

The quality of education to a large extent depends on the quality of teachers. Accoriding to Oliver (2001), most universities today are grappling with issues associated with up skilling their staff to enable them to make efficient use of new technologies in their teaching. In today's technology driven world, high quality teachers with knowledge of information and communication technology must be maintained in order to produce quality graduates

1.1.6 Quality of Content

The quality of curriculum and academic programs in the nation's tertiary education system should be made to meet the needs of the society that consume its products. As pointed out by Duchastel (1997) there are changes that are now flowing through education systems worldwide in response to a growing awareness and understanding of how learning occurs. These changes include:
* A Move away from specified content to learn to specified learning outcomes.
* An acceptance of diversity in outcomes among learners rather than the goal of common results.
* A focus on the process of learning as well as the product.
* Evaluation of outcomes in practical contexts and in terms of tasks as distinct from discrete knowledge; and
* An acceptance of the role of social cognition in learning.

1.1.7 Quality of Process

The quality of learning/teaching process is vital to the overall quality of education. Ali and Akubue (1998) Cited in Oladipo et al (2009), found that teachers dominate in lessons and pose few open-ended questions. Group work which encourages discussion is rarely encountered, and only 10% of teachers used continuous assessment.

Oliver (2001) posits that effective tertiary teaching and learning setting should support and encourage:
a. High levels of students activity and encouragement.
b. Forms of collaboration and cooperation among learners.
c. Situations where learners are exposed to a variety of different perspectives.
d. Assessment that forms integral part of the learning process and is sensitive to the intended uses of the learning outside the classroom.

1.1.8 Quality of Output

The output of an educational system is the graduates of that system. Quality of output has two dimensions, internal and external. The internal consists of the test scores, pass rates and general performance of students before graduation. The external manifestation of output quality is found in their performances and achievements on the job outside the school system. As pointed out by Mosha (1997) cited in Oladipo (2009), quality of education is measured by the extent to which the training received from an institution enables the recipient to think clearly, independently and analytically to solve relevant societal problems in any given environment.

To ensure quality of output, the following measures are necessary:
1. Admission into tertiary institution should be based on merit and not on quota.
2. Course content should meet labor market demands.
3. Minimum academic standard should be met before progression
4. Institutions should invest in information and communication technology as a means of providing learning resources to teachers and students using web based technologies. Oliver (2000) identified four categories of learning resources and strategies for web-based learning environment.

2.1 Conclusion

The role of higher education in economic and social development is very strategic and indispensable. The dwindling quality of education in Nigeria has become perennial issues that require pragmatic approach.

Sustainable tertiary education is possible if quality assurance and development are given deserved attention. Without quality assurance and development, sustainability of tertiary education in Nigeria will remain an elusive endeavor. There is need to adopt technology-based teaching and learning as a means of improving quality and sustaining higher education in Nigeria.

3.1 Implications to Educational Practice

Nigeria's higher educations are likely to be downgraded to degree mill offerings if the current trend of down slide is not checked. The urge to continue to approve new generational universities is flawed without adequate infrastructure and planning. The existing institutions need desperate help from the government in checkmating the causes to the dwindling quality assurance in Nigerian higher institutions.

Nigeria may longer meet her desired aspirations to be among top 20 world economies if Nigerian education continues to slide. Quality education is highly relevant to the Nation's economic development that seeks to provide well qualified graduates capable of meeting the global challenges of a competitive world economy.

4.1 Recommendations

The authors recommend that Nigeria should boost the quality assurance of the nation's institutions of higher learning. Nigeria should slow the pace of establishing or approving new generational universities and improve in student recruitment, teacher retention, and overall management.

References

Ajayi, I.A. and Ayodde J.B. (2002). Fundamentals of educational management. Ado-Ekiti: Green Line Publishers.

Aluede, O. Idogho. P.O. and Imonikhe J.S. (2012). Increasing access to university education in Nigeria:Present challenges and suggestions for the future. The Africa Symposium: An online Journal of the African Educational Research Network. Vol 12. No 1. June.

Anugwom, E .E. (2009). Women, education and work in Nigeria. Educational Research and Review. Vol 4. No 4 pp. 127-134. April. Accessed online at www.academicjournaly.org.

Ayeni.M.A. and Dada. M.A (2011) An Exploration into the education innovations in Nigeria in The last two decades. Journal of Emerging Trends In Educational Research And Policy Studies Vol. 2 No 4 www.jeteraph.scholarlinkresearch.org.

Chambers (2004). The 21st Century Dictionary. Edinburgh: Harap Publishers.

Clark B. (2001). The Entrepreneurial University: New Foundations for Collegiality, Autonomy and Achievement. Higher Education Management vol. 13, No 2.

Dabalen. A. Oni. B, And Adekola O. (2001). Labor market prospects for university graduates in Nigeria. Higher Education Policy vol. 14 PP 141-159.

Dachastel.P. (1997). A web-based model for university instruction. Journal of Educational Technology Systems. vol. 25 No 3. PP 221-228.

Ekundayo H.T. and Ajayi I.A. (2009). Towards effective management of university education in Nigeria. International N.G.O Journal Vol 4 No 8. Accessed online at www.academicjournals.org

Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004). National Policy on Education. Lagos: NERDC Press.

Federal Ministry of Education (2009). Road map for the Nigeria Education Sector. Abuja: Federal Ministry of Education.

National University Commission (2012). List of Approved Universities in Nigeria. www.ncic.edu.ng

Okebukola P.C. (2008). Education Reform: Imperatives for achieving Vision 20-20. Paper presented at the National Summit on Education organized by the Senate Committee on Education held at Sheraton Hotel. Abuja 10-11 December.

Oladipo. A., Adeosun. O. And Oni .A. (2009). Quality assurance and sustainable university education in Nigeria. Accessed online at www.adcice.hiroshima.u/research/paper-109/pdf.

Olaleye F.O. (2012) Sustainability of private sector participation in the provision of access to higher education in Nigeria. Journal of Emerging Trends in Educational Research and Policy Studies, Vol. 3 No 4 www.jeteraps.scholarlinkresearch.org.

Oliver .R. (2000). Developing and sustaining technology-based learning in higher Education: The way ahead. Accessed online at www.citeseerx.1st.psu.edu/viewdoc.

Oni. B. (2000). The demand for universities graduates and employers' assessment of graduate skills in Nigeria. Ibadan: Nigerian Institute of Soical and Economic Research.

Saint .W., Hartnett.T.A. and Strassner. E. (2003). Higher education in Nigeria: A Status Report. Higher
        Education Policy Vol 16.
Times Higher Education (2012). World University Rankings 2012-2013. www.timeshighereducation.28.co.uk.

Table 1. Learning Resources and Strategies for Web-based learning Environment

Learning strategy	Learning activity	Examples
Information Access	The Web is used to convey information alone to the learner, for example, a course syllabus, a calendar, assignment descriptions, lecture notes, workshop descriptions etc.	PDF files, HTML documents, streaming audio, streaming video, applications files, eg. Papers, spreadsheets etc.
Interactive Learning	The Web is used to involve instructional elements that engage the learner, encourage reflection and decision making and provide feedback in response to learner actions	Java Applets, Shockwave movies, animations.
Networked Communication	The Web is used to provide a means for the organization, communication and exchange of ideas and information among learners and teachers and other parties in the learning process	List servers, email, chat, discussion groups
Materials Development	When the Web is used as a means for learners to create and publish materials. The WWW is used as a tool for gathering and collecting information and presenting that information in a published form.	Creating and publishing Web pages, Web content, FTP processes.

Source: Oliver R. (2000) Developing and sustaining technology- based learning in higher education: the way ahead.

This academic article was published by The International Institute for Science, Technology and Education (IISTE). The IISTE is a pioneer in the Open Access Publishing service based in the U.S. and Europe. The aim of the institute is Accelerating Global Knowledge Sharing.

More information about the publisher can be found in the IISTE's homepage: http://www.iiste.org

CALL FOR PAPERS

The IISTE is currently hosting more than 30 peer-reviewed academic journals and collaborating with academic institutions around the world. There's no deadline for submission. **Prospective authors of IISTE journals can find the submission instruction on the following page:** http://www.iiste.org/Journals/

The IISTE editorial team promises to the review and publish all the qualified submissions in a **fast** manner. All the journals articles are available online to the readers all over the world without financial, legal, or technical barriers other than those inseparable from gaining access to the internet itself. Printed version of the journals is also available upon request of readers and authors.

IISTE Knowledge Sharing Partners

EBSCO, Index Copernicus, Ulrich's Periodicals Directory, JournalTOCS, PKP Open Archives Harvester, Bielefeld Academic Search Engine, Elektronische Zeitschriftenbibliothek EZB, Open J-Gate, OCLC WorldCat, Universe Digtial Library , NewJour, Google Scholar