

Managing Cross-Border Tertiary Education in an Era of Economic Recession in Nigeria

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Abstract

Cross- border tertiary education can be described as the movement of people, knowledge, programmes, providers, curricula, projects, research and services in higher education across national or regional jurisdictional borders. Cross border higher education is a step in aligning education to international standards and being responsive to the impact of globalisation. The mobility of students, academic exchange programmes, knowledge and even values has been part of tertiary education for centuries, but it has recently grown at an unprecedented level .Given the limited resources occasioned by the current economic recession in Nigeria, it is imperative that cross border tertiary institutions appreciate the potential for establishing regional networks to compete with other regions of the world. This paper, therefore, discusses cross border tertiary education in the Nigerian context and the impact of economic recession on tertiary institutions in Nigeria. It also proffers some management initiatives aimed at providing effective response to the impact of economic recession on cross border tertiary education in Nigeria, and concludes that tertiary institutions can take advantage of these management initiatives to foster intellectual advancement that could contribute to the realisation of the broader goals of cross- border tertiary education in a recessed Nigerian economy.

Keywords: Managing; Cross border; Education; Recession; Economy,

Introduction

Tertiary education has become more international in the last two decades by having more students desiring to study abroad, enroll in foreign educational programmes and institutions in their home country or using internet to take courses at universities or colleges in other countries. This can be referred to as cross border tertiary education (John, 2010).The growth in cross-border education in Nigeria has been attributed to different reasons among them, a desire to promote mutual understanding, the migration of skilled workers in globalised economy, and desire of institutions to generate additional income or the need to build a more educated work force in the home countries especially for emerging economics like Nigeria. In the last two decades cross border education has developed differently across countries. Student movement has been policy driven in Europe and demand driven in the Asia-Pacific region, while North American has highest attraction for foreign students (Njuguna & Itegi, 2013). Unless Nigeria and other developing economies in Africa invest more in higher education in terms of physical infrastructure, programmes and research, the perception that quality international education cannot be obtained in Africa will continue to deplete the cream of best brains in this region.

Cross border tertiary education could be seen as one of the ways a country responds to a globalized era and at the same time respect the individuality of the nation. It has both economic implications and internalisation of human ideas and partnerships. In Nigeria tertiary institutions are making effort to actualise this scenario by sending students abroad on exchange programme, exporting programmes, establishment of campuses and institutes that attract international students as well as participation in international research activities.

Higher education serves as the catalyst for innovation, entrepreneurship and regional cooperation as well as promoters of economic development and technology. Thus, Nigeria need to embark on series of short and long term strategic plans and implement as well as continuously evaluate them to meet the dynamic needs of modern world. According to World Bank Report (2003) students from Sub-Saharan Africa, Nigeria inclusive, are the most mobile in the world with 1 in 16 studying abroad. Whereas, only 1 in 250 North American students (0.4%) study abroad, while United States of America takes highest share of international students. Thus, Nigeria and other African countries have become totally vulnerable to advanced recruitment strategies by industrialised economies, and they continue to be disadvantaged as the rapid mobility of students and qualified human personnel continue unabated due to limited access to domestic institutions. To share the benefits of internalisation and globalisation of higher education institutions, Nigeria and other African nations must be prepared to compete for quality international students and human resource to check imminent marginalization in the process of globalisation where the developed economies have the advantage of absorbing the best international students, and earning huge revenue. Collaborating this view, Maggut (2012) observed that the revenue earned through visa application and tuition fee plays a significant role in the British economy, accounting for about six billion sterling pounds annually, and providing thousands of job opportunities. Nigeria must invest in world-class higher education institutions enabled to compete favourably with other institutions

globally.

This paper utilising extensive review of secondary literature focuses on some models of cross-border education and the impact of economic recession on tertiary education in Nigeria. It equally advances some management initiatives aimed at providing effective response to cross - border tertiary institutions in an era of economic recession in Nigeria.

Conceptual Framework

This section of the paper provides conceptual clarification to cross-border education and economic recession. Cross-border tertiary education can be regarded as the movement of people, programme, providers, curricula, projects, research and services in higher education across national jurisdictional borders (The World Bank, 2007). In the same, cross-border tertiary education has been described as the movement of people, knowledge, programmes, providers and curriculum across national or regional jurisdictional borders (UNESCO, 2005). Cross-border education can also be referred as a dual and joint degree programmes, branch, campuses and virtual on line education (Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development, 2004). It is a subset of internationalization of higher education and could be limited to development patternership cooperation, exchange programmes, and commercial initiatives. Thus, the mobility of students, academic staff, knowledge and intercultural values and understanding has been an integral part of higher education for decades, but it has recently grown to phenomenal dimension. Many factors drive demand and supply for cross-border tertiary education (Knight, 2002). The demand dimensions include:

- ❖ The attraction for foreign qualification to students in the receiver country.
- ❖ Inadequate supply of level-appropriate education in the receiver country.
- ❖ Attraction of students studying for foreign qualification at a lower cost and without having to leave their home country.
- ❖ The attraction of a more flexible mode of study offered by cross-border programmes, such as part-time, distance learning and intensive mode.
- ❖ The attraction of a greater variety of programme.

The supply dimensions include:

- ❖ Developments in technology to facilitate improved remote delivery and remote support of programmes.
- ❖ Pressure on institutions to generate additional sources of revenue.
- ❖ The desire to pilot new programmes or new mode of instructional delivery in a foreign market.
- ❖ Desire of resource personnel for self-advancement of education ideas through delivery of education in a foreign country.

Arising from the above, the increasing movement of education between countries implies education is becoming increasingly globalised. Although, the overall benefits of globalisation will not necessarily be global but are likely to accrue to countries that will position themselves strategically.

Another concept that merits clarification in this paper is economic recession. Economic recession can be described as a negative growth for two consecutive quarters. It is also a business cycle contraction which results in a general slowdown on economic activity (Vanguard, 2016). The National Bureau of Economic Research (2010) defined a recession as a significant decline in economic activity spread across the economy, lasting more than a few months, normally visible in a real gross domestic product (GDP), real income, employment, industrial production and wholesale – retail sales. Going by the definitions, Nigeria is currently experiencing economic recession, since her first and second quarter growth in 2016 are – 0.36% and – 1.5% respectively(Noko, 2016). Thus, economic recession is a period of general economic slowdown, typically associated with financial crisis. In the current recession in Nigeria, nearly every state in the federation has less to spend on education. There has been a surge in parents asking for fee reductions and some schools offering credit to struggling families.

Models of Delivery of Cross-border Education

Knight (2007) provided explanation of six models for the delivery of cross border education. These include:

- ❖ **Franchise:** In this model of delivery, an institution of higher education from another country (A) authorizes an institution of higher education in the host country (B) to deliver their courses in their nation or other countries. The credits for successful completion of studies are awarded by the institution (A), but the agreement must comply with existing regulations and accreditation standards in country (B). For instance, a Nigerian University (A) authorizes a Togolese University (B) to offer courses in Togo Republic or another country. However, the Nigerian University (A) awards the degree.
- ❖ **Twinning:** This model involves an articulation agreement and collaboration between the source (providers) country (A) and the receiver country (B) that allows students to earn credits in either country. Credits and award of degree are undertaken by source country (A) and complies with

regulations and standards of the source country (A). For instance, a Canadian university (A) collaborates with a Nigerian university (B) and students take courses in Nigeria or in Canada that earn credits awarded by Canadian University.

- ❖ **Double or Joint Degree:** This involves providers in different countries forming collaboration to offer a programme where students receive credits from each provider or a joint award from the collaborating institutions. For instance, a Nigerian university collaborating with a Ghana University and students complete courses at both institutions that may lead to a degree from the Nigerian university and a degree from the Ghana University.
- ❖ **Articulation:** This is similar to twinning but with a looser collaboration. Here, providers from different countries allow students to earn credit by completing work with a collaborating party. For instance, a United Kingdom University collaborates with a French University and credits earned at either university are recognized and may lead to award of a degree.
- ❖ **Validation:** This model allows providers in different countries to allow the provider in country (B) the receiving country to award the credits of provider (A) in source country. For instance, a French university may award the credits of a Canadian University in Ottawa.
- ❖ **E-learning or distance learning:** In this model courses or programmes of study are offered to students in any location in the world through distance models. This may involve face-to-face support for students through support centres.

Arising from the above, new models and technologies have been instrumental in increasing wider access to education and have also opened more avenues for cross-border education. Tertiary education institutions can easily link with partners in other countries and make their programmes and course accessible. Also the typologies highlighted by Knight (2007) may not be an exhaustive list of all models as providers have developed other means of delivering education to students.

Cross-border Tertiary Education in the Nigerian Context

Tertiary education sector in Nigeria has been facing a number of challenges including poor funding, low institutional capacities, and ever increasing demand for higher education, quality issues and competition from other providers (Ibara, 2011). Nigeria has a long history of internationalization of higher education dating back to pre-independence era. The pioneer group of students travelled to the United States of America, United Kingdom, and Russia. This was mainly due to the paucity of skilled human resources needed at independence. Among other African countries Nigeria aligned herself to expand higher education for the citizens to meet the human resource needs, especially to domesticate administrative positions earlier occupied by foreigners. After independence Nigerians have continuously been seeking opportunities for higher education overseas (Malumba, Abdulkarim, Lagiso, &Rohen, 2005). Also, many Sub-Saharan African countries had many more students studying abroad than at home. Nigeria had the second highest number of African students in the United States. Nigeria had a total of 15,138 students in various destinations of USA, United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, and India. However, due to increasing cost of international education in Europe and USA, the trend has changed, as Nigerian students who cannot afford the cost of higher education at home are seeking alternative countries like Malaysia, Hungary, South Africa, Dubai, Ghana, and even Uganda (Njuguna & Itegi, 2013).

The introduction of self privately sponsored programmes both at undergraduate and postgraduate in public universities was a major landmark in higher education in Nigeria. To meet the growing need in the face of limited resources, the federal government established the National Open University of Nigeria. Also many universities in Nigeria have created open and distance learning units. However, enrolling for e-learning courses has been low among Nigerians and other developing countries because many students still prefer the face-to-face mode of delivery (Ibara, 2008). Higher institutions in Nigeria have also entered into collaboration in research and exchange programmes for staff and students. Some of these institutions include, the University of Ibadan, University of Lagos, Obafemi Awolowo University, University of Benin, Covenant University, among others. These universities are benefiting from internationalization in form of staff development and securing resources for infrastructural development.

The Impact of Economic Recession on Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria

The recession is on in Nigeria and federal government is promising that it will technically end in 2017, education budgets are not expected to regain their pre- recession 2017 funding levels until late in 2018 and above. The economic down turn has impacted on tertiary institutions in Nigeria in the following ways:

- ❖ The most worrisome impact is in decline in budgetary allocation to the education sector in Nigeria that witnessed a sharp drop. For instance, recurrent expenditure of N398.01 billion in the 2017 budget of N7.2 trillion represents 5.41 percent of the total budget, a reduction by 1 percent from the 6.1 percent allocated in 2016 (Noko, 2016). The allocations for 2016 and 2017 are far cry from the 26 percent UNESCO benchmark for developing countries like Nigeria. The meagre allocation to the education

sector in the 2017 budget is an indication of dwindling resources of the Federal Government of Nigeria, occasioned by economic recession. The stark reality of the current economic recession in Nigeria can be seen in the inability of some state governments to pay staff salaries, salaries cuts, and low infrastructural development in the education sector.

- ❖ As a result of the recession, students in Nigeria consider international mobility less attractive, due to increasing costs in the form of tuition fees, living expenses and even stricter immigration rules in some traditional destination countries like the United States of America.
- ❖ Due to the economic crisis, tertiary institutions in Nigeria pursue plans to create alternative streams of income more aggressively, while imposing drastic cuts in their budgets. They also mount new academic programmes to attract more students.
- ❖ The economic recession has caused students to play down on their educational aspirations and spending. Thus, students have opted for public universities instead of private ones. The desire for lower costs has increased demand for places at public universities.
- ❖ The economic down turn has driven the unemployment rate of young Nigerian graduates to its highest level. The National Bureau of Statistics affirmed that unemployment rate in Nigeria has risen from 13.3 percent in the second quarter to 13.9 percent in the third quarter of 2016 (vanguard, 2016).

Management Initiatives for Coping with Cross-border Tertiary Education in Economic Recession

The following management initiatives could be applied in responding to cross-border tertiary education in a recessed Nigerian economy.

- ❖ Downsizing of operations and services are very paramount. This may include, freezing job recruitment, cutting jobs, cutting of student support systems and study programmes in higher institutions.
- ❖ Tertiary institutions are expected to make a transition towards recruiting temporary academic and support staff. This means more adjunct teachers should be hired, while full-time teachers should assume oversight role. This will reduce recurrent expenditure.
- ❖ To save cost, parents can cope with economic recession by moving their children and wards from high fee-paying private institutions to public institutions considered relatively cheaper.
- ❖ Student support schemes, such as student loans scheme and scholarship could be provided to students undergoing studies in cross border tertiary institutions to reduce dropout rate, especially for students enrolled in private institutions. Such provisions would assist private universities and even public universities survive the economic crisis.
- ❖ Given the extent of job and income losses to families or households in the current economic crisis. Households can re-prioritize their budget to keep the investment of their children intact, and could also make a substitution between public and private institutions during this crisis period.
- ❖ Development of internal efficiency profile. The concept of efficiency in cross-border tertiary education emphasizes resources must be used efficiently in the sense that there must be maximum output realized per unit of resources. Secondly, supply must reflect demand. Internal efficiency is often ignored but an important means of maintaining stability in funding. It connotes prudence in the use of available resources. As Ogbodo in Ibara (2011) rightly observed an internally in efficient school would require more funds for any given level of operation.
- ❖ Reduced expenditure that can take different forms is imperative. For instance, reduction of spending on construction, maintenance, supplies and stationery, and instructional personnel, generally the largest portion of the education budget.
- ❖ Enhanced access to credits. The total consumer credit in Nigeria stands at less than \$10 billion in about \$500 billion economy which corresponds to about 2% of her Gross Domestic Product (GDP). While in some developed economies consumer credit range from about 20% for the United States of America and 50% for Brazil (Noko, 2016). Thus, enhanced consumer access to credit will speed up the economy, and also impact positively on higher education.

Conclusion and Recommendations

It is obvious from the discussion that cross-border tertiary education has many potential benefits, but at the same it presents a number of challenges for administrators, students and policy makers especially in an economy that is experiencing recession. It would also appear that Nigeria is in a nascent stage of designing an effective cross border tertiary education model. However, cross border tertiary education offer opportunities for collaboration to assist build human capital and capacity development in Nigeria.

Based on the discussion the following recommendations are advanced:

1. Cross-border education has been a source of brain drain. Many cross-border students are lost to host countries as a good number do not return to home country to contribute to national development. Countries involved in cross-border education need in revise their visa rules to discourage student

- staying away after studies.
2. To protect consumers of cross-border education, it is important to ensure that accreditation of foreign institutions and their programmes are carried out by the appropriate agencies in the host country. This is to ensure quality in provision and recognition of degrees.
 3. Cross-border institutions need to operate in collaboration with national institutions. This ensures that national policy and regulations are followed by all institutions.
 4. Cross-border or transnational institutions in general tend to charge high fees which cover full costs plus profit, and there are instances where these institutions increase fees frequently and students are forced to pay additional fees every year. In this regard, the Federal and State governments should stipulate regulations regarding fees. For instance, in countries such as China, cross-border providers are not permitted to raise tuition fees without the approval of the national authorities.

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