

HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE CHALLENGES OF MANPOWER TRAINING AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the challenges which Manpower Training and National Development pose for higher education in Nigeria. The rationale for the study is the very embarrassing unemployment climate vi-a-vis the ever increasing out –put of high level manpower resource from higher educational institutions in Nigeria. Data for the study was generated through a structured questionnaire which was administered to a sample of graduate population in the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria. Results indicated that higher education has fallen drastically below international standards, with the result that it is unable to make appreciable contribution to sciences and technology and to the development of qualitative human resource which are the basic ingredients of National Development.

Keywords: Manpower, National Development, Higher Education

INTRODUCTION

Higher education has been identified as a fundamental requirement for the construction of a knowledge economy and the development of the human resource all over the world (World Bank, 1999). Knowledge has become the most important factor for economic development. The education system has been acknowledged as the most effective instrument in modern times for knowledge appropriation (Nwagwu, 2002). In order for an educational system to effectively harness its potentials for knowledge appropriation, it has to exhibit certain characteristics. Education has to be socially domesticated if it is to be relevant to the people it has been designed for. At the same time, it has to be so dynamic that it is able to respond appropriately to the changing times and conditions in the milieu. In addition, the educational system should provide the opportunities for nurturing and encouraging individual growth, initiative, divergent thinking and critically analytic minds. Most importantly, a higher education system should provide the opportunity for the acquisition of the appropriate knowledge, marketable skills and the cherished values. According to Nwagwu, (2002) an educational system should enjoy popular support from all stakeholders and this should be demonstrated in robust funding just as the access opportunities have been popularized and increased.

Similarly, Okebukola (2012), has observed that if we must get to where we should be, we must set a national goal indicating our Higher Education Participation Rate (HEPR), that is the proportion of eligible population who have access to higher education. On a comparative basis, the continental higher education participation rate for Africa is currently reported to be only 10% while the United States of America and Europe have recorded as much as 50-60% (HEPR). While South Africa records 18% the United Kingdom is recording 50%. According to Okebukola, the Nigerian HEPR stands at 8% which he says should reach a 20% target in the year 2020.

Unfortunately, these characteristics have not resulted in very positive changes for the economy and the development of the Nigerian nation. Just as the admission policies are being liberalized, so are many new institutions of higher learning coming on stream, with the village of Otuoke in the swampy recess of Bayelsa playing host to one of the new universities even when the Niger Delta University in Wilberforce Island just next door to Otuoke has not been optimally subscribed.

In addition, there appears to be no effective networking between the various sectors of the economy and the education system and so admission policies are unrelated to current labour demand requirements. Boateng (2002) has aptly described the Nigerian education services as being market blind” with a near absence of entrepreneurial developmental needs. The result is that the higher institutions are simply churning out unemployable graduates into the already saturated labour market.

There has to be a proper linkage between education and entrepreneurship through the appropriate knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that are transmitted under the auspices of an entrepreneurial education programme. In its broadest sense, the catering staff of Omega Restaurant who are enrolled at the University of Benin for a certificate in catering and hospitality management; the UNIBEN undergraduate who has successfully completed the mandatory entrepreneurship course (CED 300), and the Senior Secondary School Certificate graduate enrolled in a computer training at the UPS or Pioneer Computer Academy in Ugbowo, Benin City, all represent the linkage between education and entrepreneurship. As in many Japanese Universities a number of Nigerian universities – like the University of Ilorin, University of Ibadan, Covenant University, Ota and Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Juroye have successfully embraced the philosophy of entrepreneurial education.

State intervention in higher education dates far back to the pre-independence years when in 1932, the Colonial Government established the Yaba Higher College in Lagos. Since then, successive governments have acknowledged the challenges to higher education by enacting policy initiatives and actions which were geared towards national and economic development. Development implies changes in technological and institutional organization of production systems as well as in the distributive pattern of incomes. It involves perceptible changes in the composition of output, shift in allocation of productive resources and the alleviation and reduction of poverty, inequality and hydra-headed unemployment indices. Development also involves the complex forces of differentiation in modern societies requiring the removal of all impediments to freedom from poverty, tyranny, deprivation and neglect (Jhingan 2008). Todaro (2009), also posits that development involves the sustained elevation of an entire society and the composite social system toward a better and more humane life.

The Conceptual Basis of Development

Three basic concepts underlie development in all ramifications. They include sustenance, self esteem and freedom, all of which jointly represent the common goals generally sought by individuals and societies. They are closely tied to the fundamental human needs in almost all societies and cultures (Todaro and Smith, 2008). Sustenance involves the ability of the authorities to provide the basic human needs without which life would be uncomfortable. These basic needs include food, shelter, health and protection. The self esteem component implies a sense of self worth and self respect and relevance within the systems network. The freedom component involves a sense of emancipation from alienating material conditions of life and from social servitude to nature, powerful” other people, misery, oppressive bureaucratic institutions and some fatalistic beliefs and values.

They also argue that development is both a physical reality and a state of the mind by which society secures the means for obtaining a better life for its citizens through a combination of social, economic and institutional processes. Such development is generally anchored on the objectives of increasing the availability and widen the distribution of basic life sustaining goods, raising the standards of living and finally, expanding the range of socio-economic choices available to individual citizens and nations (Todaro and Smith 2009).

In order for a country to achieve sustainable development, the society must work towards improving skills of its available manpower by means of training, especially at the higher level. It is the higher level training that enables people to learn and acquire the appropriate knowledge and skills which enhance human efficiency. The higher level manpower training is generally conceptualized as the cumulative of a process of maturity and systematic training through experience and the extensive development of the intellect, orientation and values imbued in the individual at the various levels of education (Longe, 1991).

Higher level manpower training has been universally acknowledged as the pathway to national development. The process enables the country to confront underdevelopment through the production of appropriate human resources for service in her socio-political and economic sectors. According to Ehiamentor (1988), such high level educational provision enables the citizens to acquire skills and techniques which are ploughed into human productivity, creativity, competence, initiative, innovation and inventiveness. The products of such a system are generally exemplified in the Educationists, Lawyers, Accountants, Physicians, Engineers, Scientists, Business Administrators and Managers. As at the last count, Nigeria boasts of 111 Universities, 121 Mono/Polytechnics, 85 Colleges of Education and about 65 Innovative Enterprise Institutions (Shuara, 2010). Nine (9) of the 111 Universities were approved in November 2010 and they are to take off in November 2011.

Higher Education in National Development

Recent evidence suggests that higher education is both a result as well as a determinant of income with considerable capacity to produce public and private benefits (Bloom, Hartley and Rosovsky, 2004). In fact higher education is capable of creating greater tax revenue, increased savings and investment which should lead to a more entrepreneurial and civic society. Higher education can also improve a nation's health status, contribute substantially to population control, improve technology and strengthen governance. It has been suggested that India's leap onto the world economic stage with the Asian Tigers" has stemmed from its decades of long technically oriented tertiary education to a significant number of its citizen (Bloom, Canning and Chan 2005).

Okebukola (2012) also observed that the central role of education in human, cum national development was underscored by Omolewa (2010) who conceived of education in terms the process of enlarging peoples' choices to live longer and healthier lives, to have access to knowledge, to have access to income and assets and enjoy a decent standard of living. Continuing, he posits that education enables people to make informed decisions, articulate and protect their rights and privileges. On graduation, the learner is better prepared to contribute meaningfully to the growth of the economy and the overall development of the nation. Armed with the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values developed through education, the products of our higher education who join the nation's workforce are able to foster economic growth. In the same way, new industries are encouraged to spring up through entrepreneurial skills which have been acquired through education.

At the level of the United Nations, Kofi Annan in 2002 had argued that the university must become a primary tool for Africa's development in the new century. Universities can help

develop African expertise, enhance the ability to analyze African problems, strengthen domestic institutions, serve as a model environment for the practice of good governance, conflict resolution and respect for human rights and enable African academics to play an active part in the global community of scholars (Annan, 2002, UNIS/SG/2625).

In a Knowledge for Development Report, the World Bank (1990) had examined how developing countries could use knowledge from higher education to narrow the income gap with developed countries. The report showed a correlation between education in Mathematics, Science and Engineering and improved economic performance for some countries. It also showed that private rate of returns to tertiary education at 20 per cent was similar to that for secondary school.

Also, in a Task Force Report of the World Bank in collaboration with the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) titled Higher Education in Developing Countries, Peril and Promise (2000), it was forcefully argued that higher education is fundamental to all developing countries if they are to prosper in a world economy where knowledge has become a vital area of advantage. The quality of knowledge which is generated within higher educational institutions and its availability to the wider economy is becoming increasingly critical to national competitiveness.

Higher Education Policies in Nigeria

The history of higher education policies dates back to Eric Ashby's classic blueprint – "Investment in Education" of 1960 which gave rise to the establishment of the first generation Universities of Nigeria at Nsukka, Lagos, Zaria, Ife and Ibadan. Details of the higher education policies in Nigeria are clearly documented in the National Policy on Education (2004).

At present the Nigerian higher education system comprises universities, polytechnics or colleges of technology and colleges of education. With both federal, state and private individuals and organizations concurrently involved in the business of education, the Nigerian higher education system is easily the largest and most complex one on the African continent with over 350 institutions of higher learning. This large number is perhaps part of the challenges especially in terms of the quality of available facilities.

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

This study is designed to address the inability of the higher education system to produce the appropriate manpower resource that is required for national development.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To guide this study, the following research questions have been formulated:

1. Has higher education training effectively provided the required manpower resources in Nigeria?
2. To what extent does higher level manpower resource training contribute to entrepreneurship development in Nigeria?
3. What is the role of high level manpower resource training in the development of Science and Technology?
4. To what extent does high level manpower resource training enhance productivity in Nigeria?
5. What are the effects of high level manpower resource training on the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Nigeria?

Methodology

A quasi-survey research design was employed in carrying out this research.

Population of Study

The population comprises all higher education graduates from the South-South geopolitical zone who are resident in Edo State, Nigeria. It was from this population that a sample of two hundred respondents (112 male and 88 female) was randomly selected. The Likert-type research instrument used for data collection was the High Level Manpower Resource Training in National Development Questionnaire (HLMRTNDQ)" which was self constructed. The questionnaire was subjected to face-validation by some evaluation experts in the Faculty of Education at the University of Benin. The reliability was ensured by means of a test-retest procedure in which the research instrument was administered to twenty (20) higher education graduate who were not necessarily part of the population of study. After about two weeks the questionnaire was readministered to the same people. The resulting data was then subjected to the Pearson Product Moment Correlation statistics and a value of 0.76 was obtained which implied that the reliability was high. Data was collected with the assistance of some postgraduate students who were located in the area of study. The researcher visited the schools and offices personally to retrieve the completed data from the research assistants.

Data Analysis

The data was collected and carefully analyzed by means of tables, percentages and the calculated means responses.

Research Question One

This question was intended to find out whether higher educational training has significantly provided the required higher level services in the various sectors of the Nigerian development process. Items 5, 6, 7, 9, 10 and 17 on the instrument were specially formulated to address this question. Each of the six items on the questionnaire had a mean of 2.0, 2.1, 2.3, 1.8, 2.6, 1.7 and 2.1 respectively with a grand mean of 2.1 which means that higher educational training has not provided in a significant proportion, the required high level manpower. Item 10 however is slightly above the agreed mean of 2.5, meaning that research and teaching in higher institutions of learning have had significant positive effects on the growing of the Nigerian economy.

Research Question Two

This research question sought information on the contribution of high level manpower resource training on entrepreneurship development. Item 15 and 16 on the research instrument addressed this question with each of them having 2.3, 2.2 as mean, with a grand mean of 2.3. With the grand mean of 2.3 which is less than the agreed mean of 2.5, it means that high level manpower resource training has not had appreciable effect on entrepreneurship development in Nigeria. It is perhaps for this reason that the National Universities Commission is making it mandatory for all universities to include entrepreneurship programme in their undergraduate degree programmes.

Research Question Three

The third research question was concerned with the role of high level manpower resource training in the development of Science and Technology. Data for this question was provided by questionnaire items 8, 13 and 14 with individual mean of 2.4, 1.9 and 2.0 respectively and a grand mean of 2.1 which is less than the agreed 2.5 mean. The implication is that the

respondents believe that high level manpower resource training does not have any significant role to play in the development of Science and Technology in Nigeria.

Research Question Four

The research question four was to find out the extent to which high level manpower resource training enhances productivity. The question items 2,3 and 4 on the research instrument provided the data for answering this question. With the agreed mean at 3.0, the grand mean at 3.2 and each of the three items mean at 3.2, 3.0 and 3.3 respectively, it is evident that the respondents all agreed that high level manpower resource training enhances productivity.

Research Question Five

This question inquired into the effects of high level manpower resource training on the Gross Domestic Product GDP in Nigeria. The statement items 1, 11 and 12 on the research instrument generated the data for research question five. With the agreed mean given at 2.5 and the calculated mean for the items at 2.8 and being greater than the agreed mean, it follows that high level manpower resource training has had some significant effects on the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Nigeria. This positive effect of high level manpower resource training on the Gross Domestic Product may be attributable to the fact that it has facilitated the growth of a knowledge economy. This is line with the observation of the Task Force Report (2000) on Higher Education that higher education is essential to developing countries if they are to prosper in a world economy where knowledge has become a vital area of advantage.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Analysis of the data with respect to research question two indicated that entrepreneurship skills are yet to be adequately developed in higher educational institutions in Nigeria. The private sector and individual investors appear to dominate this sector. This is perhaps the reasons for the insistence by the National Universities Commission that courses in entrepreneurship development be mounted in all universities.

The data for research question three revealed that high level manpower training has not rubbed off on the development of Science and Technology to any appreciable level. Awopegba (2003) had also observed that the falling standard of education has resulted into a situation in which those who have studied Science and Technology courses in Nigeria do not possess the necessary practical knowledge, skills and ideas to compete effectively on the scientific super highway or even in the emerging demands of the global labour market. Higher education graduates are expected to be conversant with, and better able to utilize the new technologies. They are also supposed to be able to develop new tools and skills by themselves but this is hardly ever the case in Nigeria.

The 2002 World Bank Report – Constructing Knowledge Societies: New Challenges for Tertiary Education: had also some momentum for higher education, stressing that higher education should be allocated nothing less than 20% of a country's total budget for education.

In the emerging economies of India, China, Japan, Taiwan and even Brazil, the place of higher level manpower training in bolstering the economy has long been identified. A study in Taiwan, Lin (2004), showed that higher education has played a very major role in the growth and development of the economies of the respective countries. In fact, the study found that 1 percent rise in high level manpower stock resulted in a 0.35 percent rise in industrial output and that 1 percent increase in the number of graduates from Engineering or the Natural Sciences led to a 0.15 percent increase in Agricultural output. Wolf and Gintleman (1993) had also shown that university enrolment rates are correlated with labour productivity growth

with the number of scientists and engineers per-capita being associated with economic growth and development.

Bloom, Hartley and Rosovsky (2004), had also shown that college graduates in the United States of America had higher productivity and earnings than non-graduates. The same study also revealed a positive correlation between high level manpower training and the development of entrepreneurship skills.

CONCLUSION

There is no doubt whatsoever that the quest by the Nigerian nation for growth and development has posed very serious challenges to higher education in terms of the training of high level manpower resources. With an estimated population of over 150 million and a large assortment of ample natural resources, Nigeria no doubt has all its takes to compete very favourably in the comity of nations. In spite of all these however, the reality of the development situations clearly indicates that Nigeria is on the list of the countries that cannot attain the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) in 2015. One sure evidence of this tragedy is the near-total collapse of the educational system in the last decade or two. The higher education system which was founded on very sound developmental goals with world class universities has suddenly deteriorated to such an embarrassing level that even local employers of labour are reluctant to employ her graduates. Reports also indicate that foreign institutions which reluctantly admit Nigerian university graduates for higher studies sometimes have to subject them to remedial classes to make-up for their deficiencies.

IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATION

There is ample evidence that higher education in Nigeria has witnessed some significant growth in terms of expansion of access through increase in enrolment figures and the establishment of additional higher institutions. However, many of the indices that generally guarantee qualitative high level manpower training are generally not taken into consideration in the usual fire-bridge approach to all aspects of education. It has been observed Boateng (2002), Nwagwu (2002), that political factors are the main motives behind many of the expansion policies in education. In the main, admission policies of higher institutions are neither related to labour demand requirements nor to individual student interest. Such other critical factors as funding, staffing and facilities rarely get attention. The continued face-off between the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) and the Federal Government tells the whole story.

Some reforms in the entire educational system have therefore become imperative. Admission policies should be guided by labour market demands. In other words academic programmes should be streamlined to avoid unnecessary duplication and ensure adequate and effective utilization of the limited available resources. Universities should begin to specialize and develop centres of excellence in specialized disciplines.

Okebukola (2012), had also identified some factors which he called the big seven” that may account for the depressed quality of the education sector. Among them are: policy incoherence and implementation inconsistency. Because of the prevalence of weak monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, the gap between policy prescription and practice has continued to be widened nationwide. The inspectorate division has been fingered for its impotence or dormancy. Another factor for reform is teacher education in terms of quality and quantity. A recent survey has shown that many teachers are very shallow in the area of subject matter knowledge. The challenge of teacher quantity is very serious in the universities with slightly more than half of the full complement of full-time teachers engaged in the 124

universities nationwide. Funding inadequacies, infrastructural/facilities deficiencies and very endemic social vices of examination malpractices, cultism, sexual harassment (Musa, 1999), and admission racketeering are other areas of very serious challenges to our manpower training efforts.

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