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LOW QUALITY OF TERTIARY EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM IN NIGERIA : A THREAT TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Quality education is the most powerful weapon a nation can give her people, and this can be used for self-enlightenment and sustainable development. One of the aims of quality tertiary education is to equip one with capability, skills to interpret things rightly and apply the information garnered in real life scenarios. In Nigeria today, the opposite is the case in our tertiary institution, because of the low quality of education which has affected the training of quality manpower for economic growth and sustainable development. In view of the above, this paper focuses on low quality of tertiary education system in Nigeria which serve as a threat to sustainable development. It identifies those challenges and causes of low-quality education in our tertiary institution that has affected development over the years. These among others include inadequate funding, strike, examination malpractices, lack of qualified and passionate lecturers, poor supervision of teaching activities, attitudes of lecturers to work, poor implementation of educational policies and brain drain. It is recommended that to prevent all these challenges and to improve the quality of tertiary education in Nigeria, enabling environment should be created for staff through improved conditions of service, providing adequately equipped libraries, well-furnished facilities, increase in the salary structure and deserving benefit to limit brain drain; accreditation exercises in tertiary institutions should be strengthened, qualified internal quality assurance and monitoring units to enhance good quality delivery. This study indicates the fact that once quality education is assured, the outcome of it is development.

Keywords: Low Quality, Tertiary Education, Quality, Sustainable Development, Challenges

Introduction

Education is the foundation of growth, human development and the backbone of every nation, and legacy a country can give the younger generation. Any

state that leaves the bulk of her citizen uneducated can be said to be ill-prepared on various fronts such as economic growth and competitiveness, physical safety, intellectual capacity, global awareness, employability, national unity and cohesion. Education is seen as an important sector in the development and transformation of any nation. For education to drive development and social transformation, requires a major investment in the provision of its quality at both Macro and micro levels (Uwa, Lanrewaju & Ojeme, 2014).

According to the Federal Government of Nigeria (NPE, 2013), the goal of tertiary education encompasses the development of relevant high levels of manpower, the intellectual capacity of individuals, and acquisition of physical and intellectual skills. These goals of tertiary education are pursued through a variety of programmes such as certificate, diploma, degree and postgraduate (Oyebade & Dike, 2013). Unfortunately, the practice of tertiary education in Nigeria has not met the expectations of the above goals and objectives which result in the low quality of education that has contributed negatively to the number of unemployable graduates been sent to the labour market yearly from our institutions. The low quality in the tertiary institutions emerged as a result of failure from all stakeholders involved in the educational sector, such as the government and its agencies, parents, students, lecturers and among others.

To achieve education that will provide all learners with capabilities they required to become economically productive, develop sustainable livelihoods, contribute to peaceful and democratic societies and enhance individual well-being (VVOB's, 1978). The quality given to education must depend on the characteristics of learners (healthy, motivated students); Processes (competent teachers using active methodologies); Content (relevant course content/ curricula) and System (good governance and educationists) (Ali & Aaleen, 2014). However, for

Nigeria tertiary education to contribute meaningfully to the making of balanced and analytical citizens capable of leading government as well as driving economies, industries, and sustainable development, its quality has to be excellent. (Lapite & Adebajo, 2020.) The despicable and intolerable state of low quality tertiary education can be remodeled by looking vividly into the problems and profound solutions towards achieving its goals and sustainable development.

Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study is to examine the low quality of tertiary education in Nigeria as a threat to sustainable development. The specific objectives are to:

- i. explain the concept quality, Low quality education and sustainable development;
- ii. find out those challenges responsible for the low quality in tertiary education and a threat to sustainable development; and
- iii. proffer solutions to the challenges of low quality in tertiary education as a key factor for achieving the sustainable development.

Tertiary Education System in Nigeria

Federal Government of Nigeria (NPE, 2013) defines tertiary education as the education given after post Basic Education in Institution such as Universities and Inter-university, Centers such as the Nigerian French Language Village, Nigeria Arabic Language Village, National Institutes of Nigeria language, institutions such as Innovation Enterprises Institutions (IEI's), College of Education, Monotechnics, Polytechnic and other specialize institutions such as Colleges of Agriculture, Schools of Health and Technology and National Teachers Institutes (NTI). Tertiary Education refers to all formal post-secondary education, including public and private universities, and vocational schools. It is an instrument in fostering growth; reducing poverty, boosting shared prosperity, and a prerequisite for innovation and growth (The World Bank 2021). Peretomode (2007) as seen in Asiyai (2013) assert that tertiary education is the facilitator, the bedrock, the powerhouse, and the driving force for the strong socio-economic, political, cultural, healthier, and industrial development of a nation.

According to Adeyemi (2001), the tertiary Education refers to a system which embraces much of the country's research capacity and reproduces the majority of the skilled professionals that are required in the labour market. Tertiary educational institutions are unique institutions which are differentiated from others in terms of research and its managers are

designated as Provost, Rector, and Vice chancellor (Bernett 1997).The tertiary education in Nigeria comprises 170 universities, 152 polytechnic, 47 monotechnics, and 152 colleges of education. The Universities are made up of 43 federal, 48 states and 79 private universities; likewise Polytechnics comprises of 37 federal, 51 states and 64 private polytechnics; Colleges of education is also made up of 27 federal, 54 state and 82 private; also 47 monotechnics. This brings together the total of 521 tertiary institutions in Nigeria (Olusegun, 2022& Sasu, 2012). These institutions are being maintained by Federal and State Government agencies such as National University commission, (NUC); National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE); National Board for Technical Education (NBTE), Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TET-Fund). These agencies are responsible for the formulation and implementation of educational policies, developing the minimum academic standards, funding, accreditations of school, academic awards, monitoring, and ensuring that quality is maintained within the academic programmes (OECD 2016).

The aims of tertiary education in Nigeria as outlined by the Federal Ministry of Education (2014) section 5(39) are:

- i. Contribution to national development through high level manpower training;
- ii. Provide accessible and affordable quality learning opportunities in formal and informal education in response to the needs and interests of all Nigerians;
- iii. Provide high quality career counseling and lifelong learning programmes that prepare students with the knowledge and skills for self-reliance and the world of work;
- iv. Reduce skill shortages through the production of skilled manpower relevant to the needs of the labour market;
- v. Promote and encourage scholarship, entrepreneurship and community services;
- vi. Forge and cement national unity; and
- vii. Promote national and international understanding and interaction

Quality Education

It is important to note that the progress achieved in an organization, business, and education for centuries is because of the quality of goods or services rendered to the final consumers. Quality means the standard of something when it is compared to other things like; how good or bad something is. This shows that any commodity can be of high quality or low quality. According to Badr. Eldin, (2011), quality means

freedom from deficiencies, from errors that requires doing work over again. He further gives several definitions of quality as customer satisfaction and loyalty, doing right, providing a product which is fit for the purpose, providing an acceptable product at an acceptable cost, a standard which be accepted by both suppliers and the customer, ability to satisfying a given need. The ISO8402 defines quality as the totality of features and characteristics of a product or services that bears its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs.

More so, quality with regards to tertiary education is defined in terms of excellence, perfection, values for money, fitness to purpose (Harvey, 2005). Isyaku (2011) sees education as an instrument of social mobility, a potent factor in national development and social engineering. It is therefore, the key which unlocks the potentials of peoples, empowers and equips them to be active participants in and beneficiaries from society. Otieno (2000) opine that the meaning of quality education consisting of two basic concepts; first aspects refer to the level of knowledge and skills that the society wishes schools to impart to students by looking at the level of achievement of either academic attainment or values; the second aspects refer to the characteristics of the school environment that produces skills, knowledge and values through the teaching and learning process. Quality education as equipping learners with skills and knowledge that would help develop psychologically and benefit them in future, being able to employ the skills they learnt in the days to day lives to sustain themselves even after graduation. Agyem & Osei-Poku, (2012) opine that Quality in tertiary education is centered on providing a holistic and quality approach to education by creating well-balanced individuals with requisite knowledge, skills, values and aptitudes for the purpose of self-realization and for the socio-economic development and political transformation of the country. Hammond (2013) asserted that quality education entails the following aspects; learning resources, technology programme enrolled, modules done, lecturing methodology, attachments, qualification, co-curricular activities, performance awards, students and lecturers' perspective in the institution operating management also their opinions and appraisal toward education. Quality education enables students to develop all their attributes and skills to achieve their potentiality as human beings and members of society. It also therefore, implies looking into what desirable changes the educational institution wants to make in each student.

Ese (2009) is of the view that in offering quality education to the populace, it must ensure the presence

of the following conditions:

- I. Learners who are healthy, well-nourished and ready to participate and learn who are supported in learning by their families and community. It is a common belief that quality learners influence the quality of education given;
- ii. Environment that are healthy, safe, protective and gender-sensitive provide adequate resources and facilities. Psychological aspect (adequate safe environment for the girl-child & violence free environment);
- iii. Services delivery (the provision of health services to prevent illness) must be provided in order to have a great impact on learning;
- iv. Content that is reflected in relevant curricular and materials for the acquisition of knowledge and skills for life taught in school. The course content taught should be as a matter of importance stress to strive to solve the problem in the society.

Vlasceanu, Grunberg & Parlea (2004) defined quality in higher education as a concept that stresses the need to meet or conform to generally accepted standards such as those defined by an accreditation or quality assurance body, the focus being on the efficiency of the processes at work in the institution or programme in fulfilling the stated, given objectives and mission.

Low Quality Education in Nigeria Tertiary Education

The Purpose of education has been always to empower, impart skills and knowledge in learners; and the education the learners get has to be of certain qualities. However, the quality of tertiary education in Nigeria is far away from this and it is presently rated low and disgraceful. Akinpelu (2000) argued that education without quality can even be more dangerous than no education, stressing that without quality, education has no value. Asiyai (2017) is of the view that when quality education is delivered high enough to meet set standards, the products of education should be able to perform well in the world of work in real life situation, but when quality is low, performance cannot meet the standard; Hence one can say quality in tertiary education in Nigeria has declined below the standard. Salako (2014) asserted that the quality of education in Nigeria is declining because of some challenges facing higher education which include inadequate financing, deteriorated, infrastructures, Brain-drain and the University autonomy.

It is observed by many scholars that the quality of tertiary education in Nigeria is been questioned based on the number of half-baked, and unemployable graduate produce into the society from our

institutions. These graduates lack reflective and critical thinking ability, inadequate communication skills, organizational and employable skills (Onuocha and Ewuzie, 2012). In support of the above, Adedeji and Bamidele (2003) asserted that the alarming rate of ineffectiveness of lecturers (inputs) in the profession of teaching has led to substandard students (products) and it has extended to graduates who are unemployed and unfit to be placed in any job as an outcome of their half-baked nature and this is a dilemma situation which we are confronted with in our tertiary education. The poor quality of education is responsible for the appalling low performance of graduate of higher education in Nigeria and the high rate of examination malpractices (Ujabor, 2021). However, the weak quality of education received by most tertiary institutions places the students in permanent disadvantages relative to those attending the mainly more affluent and better performing institutions (Van der Berg, Burger, Burger, Devos, Du Rand., Gustafsson, Moses, Shepherd, Spaul, Taylor, Van Broekhuizen & Von Fintel, 2011). Nonetheless, the following are factors responsible for low quality in Nigeria tertiary education:

Academic Staff Union Dispute with the Federal Government

The Nigeria University union strike dispute with the Federal Government has led to the closing down of institutions which affect the quality of education. Recently, on 23rd of March, 2020, the university students were locked out for over 9 months largely due to ASSU strike and COVID-19 pandemic; as well, this year 2022, February 14 precisely ASSU announce a one month warning strike, and if their needs were not addressed, they threatened to call for an indefinite strike. This has cause serious setbacks that have resulted to disruption of academic calendars, giving students' under served extension in their study years, poor students' concentration on academic programmes and poor students relationship (Edinyang & Ubi, 2013); and bad performance in examination, decrease in research and innovation (Adetula, Ekwughu & Samuel, 2021).

Examination Malpractice

This act connotes all forms of cheating which directly falsify the ability of the students in or outside an examination hall (Tyokya, 2014). There has been a high decadence in today's tertiary education as a result of examination malpractice which has eaten deep into students, parents, lecturers, teachers as well as educational sector has a whole. It is observed that most of the students are no longer serious with their studies, as well as no longer believe in hard work (Ogundele, 2020); because they see examination malpractice as

the short cut to success (Yahaya & Odebo, 2017). This act discourages reading habits in students.

Lack of Qualified and Passionate Teachers

In the absence of good and qualified teachers, quality cannot be achieved as teachers are the most vital component of the administration system of a country. It is obvious that quality education is possible only by getting services of competent teachers (Parveen & Bao Tran, 2020). Teachers are the key to educational development. It is also noted that recruitment and employment of teaching staff sometime is not based on merit but on godfathers, which led to the employment of unqualified teachers/lecturers. Due to this act, tertiary education has suffered low quality because it takes a very passionate and patient person to teach effectively (Vanguard News, 2018).

Insufficient Material and Resources

The lack of human and material resources such as science laboratories, workshops, students' hostels, libraries, electricity, infrastructures, research activities, many other material facilities, affect the quality of tertiary education, because they are either not available or insufficient (Ujabor, 2021). Quality higher education is dependent on the quality and quantity of human and material resources put in place in institutions of higher learning. The lack of infrastructures such as science laboratories, workshops, students' hostels, libraries and electricity will affect the quality of education. For good quality delivery, these facilities must meet the minimum standard specified by the National Universities Commission (NUC), the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) and National Council for Colleges of Education (NCCE).

Inadequate Lecturers

This is a serious problem facing tertiary education in Nigeria. The shortage of lecturers is responsible for the poor-quality teaching and learning in higher institution in Nigeria. This is one of the reasons why Nigerian Universities have been unable to compete favourably with universities in many other parts of the world (Ogunode & Abubakar, 2021). These deficiencies have led to a situation in which many universities have to rely exclusively on part time and under qualified academics with negative implications for quality education in the institutions (NEEDS, 2014)

Inadequate Funding

Inadequate funding is the most critical challenge that has threatened the attainment of good quality higher

education in Nigeria. The problem of inadequate funding of education has been a bane to educational development in the country. (Onokerrhoraye, 1995) maintained that a major constraint to attaining academic excellence in Nigerian universities is financial constraints which made many academics and non-academics staff to be working under difficult circumstances. Many institutions of higher learning in Nigeria were unable to build lecture halls, and students' hostels, equip laboratories, workshops and payment of staff salaries, research grants, allowances and medical bills (Asiyai 2005). The inability of the Nigerian Government to objectively accept and implement the 26% funding formula for education recommended by the UNESCO has a negative impact on the performance and sustainability of tertiary institutions.

Attitudes of Lecturers to Work

Lack of dedicated lecturers and punctuality to duty by the teachers has contributed to the fall in quality and standard of education. Some lecturers show divided loyalty to the teaching job and pay lip services to their job, spending more time and energy on business and less time in the classroom (Usman, 2013). A good lecturer is expected to be committed to his work, but when their attention is divided, students and their academic performance will suffer (Maina, 2013).

Poor Supervision of Teaching Activities

Lecturing is a teaching activity. Academic freedom does not imply that a university lecturer does what he likes in the class. There should not be too much freedom to the extent that lecturer's class activities were not checked, assessed or monitored. It is observed that some lecturers are not properly checked and as such they miss classes and lecturers. This failure shows that there is a big gap between teacher and the ministry of education and other agencies that are responsible to checkmate, accredit courses and recognize schools (Omorobi, 2021). How are they going to provide feedback to educational planners and policy makers, on what can enhance the quality of tertiary education while sitting in their offices?

Poor Implementation of Educational Policy by Poor Leadership

Educational policy is the practical and operational guide which provides the bases for carrying out the vision, action, intentions, goals and objectives of an educational system. Therefore, if the policy meant for tertiary education is not implemented by its stakeholder; this will lead to the fall of quality in our tertiary education. It is observed that political leaders

lack the political honesty and will to implement good educational policies. Some leaders keep changing policies indiscriminately due to ulterior motives and this does not lead to the success of policy implementation (Igbokwe, 2016)

Brain Drain

A big challenge to the quality of higher education in Nigeria is the problem of brain drain. Over the past decades, there has been mass exodus of brilliant and most talented lecturers to other sectors of the economy. Some of the lecturers left Nigerian universities to join the business world, some joined politics while others left Nigeria for better services and opportunities, because of poor leadership, remuneration, conditions and terms of services, low morale, poor working environment among others (Odhiambo, 2013). This has led to a decline in research outputs and disappearance of research centers in Nigerian Higher institutions

Concept Sustainable Development

The word "Sustain" means to support for a prolonged period or to keep an effort continuously. With reference to development, sustainability means to keep the productivity and wealth of our society going continuously into the distant future (Mishra, Sachan, Mutsuddi, & Mukherjee, 2015). Development is the unfolding of human potentials for meaning participation in economic, social, political and cultural process and institutions, so that people can improve their conditions (Mishra et.al, 2015).

Therefore, sustainable development is a dynamic process which enables all people to realize their potential, and improve quality of life, in ways which simultaneously protect and enhance the Earth's life support system (Tippet, 1998). According to the World Commission on Environment and Development's 1987 Brundtland report defines Sustainable development as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' (WCED, 1987).

Sustainable development is basically action plan which helps us to achieve sustainability in any activity where resources are used. It is both a way of understanding the world and a method for solving global problem. As an intellectual purist, sustainable development tries to make sense of the interaction of three complex systems; the world economy, the global society and the Earth's physical environment. Sustainable development is defined as a pattern of social and structural economic transformation

(development) which optimizes the economic and societal benefits available in the present, without jeopardizing the likely potential for similar benefits in the future.

Emas (2015) asserted that the overall goal of sustainable development is the long-term stability of the economy and environment; this is only achievable through the integration and acknowledgment of economic, environmental, and social concerns through the decision making process. Sustainable development is the organizing principle for meeting human development goals; while at the same time sustaining the ability of national systems to provide the national resources and ecosystem services upon which the economy and society depend. The desired result is a state of society where living conditions and resources used continue to meet human needs without undermining the integrity and stability of the national system.

Sustainable development recommends a set of goals to which the world should aspire, it calls for a world in which economic progress is wide spread; extreme poverty is eliminated; social trust is encourage through policies that strengthen the community; and the environment is protected from human induced degradation. In order to achieve these Sustainable Development Goals UNESCO (2006) opined that education of good quality and relevant involves significant effort towards empowerment of people, including the poor, which will help them to meaningfully act on the challenges posed by vulnerability and risk; re-orienting education policies towards Sustainable Development is a necessary effort towards empowerment. Atubi (2020) argue that the attainment of the sustainable development goals (SDG) agenda 2030, of no poverty, zero hunger, good health and well-being, quality education, decent work and economic growth amongst others will become a far cry from actualization without the development agenda being driven by quality education. According to United Nations (2017), quality education is one of 17 global goals that make up the 2030 Agenda for sustainable Development which empowers learners with knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes to address the interconnected global challenges we are facing, including climate change, environmental degradation, loss of biodiversity, poverty and inequality.

Conclusion

Tertiary education is the facilitator, the bedrock, the powerhouse and the driving force for the strong socio-economic, political, cultural, healthier and industrial development of a nation and human capital development. Tertiary education of good quality is critical for Nigeria to become globally competitive. It is only quality education that can sharpen the minds of the individual and help transform the society economically, socially and politically. Any nation that invests in quality tertiary education can achieve sustainable development and provide higher level of man power for national development. Without doubt education is an essential pillar of development in any nation, and it determines the growth of the nation. Ayinde (2021) opines that giving children/ students the best quality education is far better and safer for a nation than building modern houses, constructing weird bridges, and making nuclear weapons. Therefore, quality education is a necessity to a sustainable development of any nation.

Recommendations

In order to overcome the challenges and improve quality education to achieve sustainable development, the following are recommended:

- i. Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria should set-up internal quality assurance and monitoring of lectures to improve delivery quality;
- ii. Lecturers deserve good and equal remunerations as their colleagues in the ministries, CBN, other higher parastatals. They should be paid on at the right time with good working conditions.
- iii. Increase in the salary structure and deserving benefit to limit brain drain;
- iv. Setting up research-friendly environment to encourage innovation
- v. Providing adequately equipped libraries, well-furnished facility for students and lecturers
- vi. To improve quality in tertiary education, both the Federal and State government should increase allocation to 26% as recommended by United Nations Organisation.
- vii. Quality assurance measures have to be put in place in other to achieve quality education
- viii. To improve quality, there should be proper and timely implementation of educational policies by policy implementers.
- ix. To improve quality, lecturers and non-lecturers should be motivated to make them more dedicated, devoted and committed and effective in their jobs.
- x. Effective supervisory system must be injected

into the tertiary system

- xi. There is need to improve or employ teaching methods and techniques
- xii. Employment of more qualified Lecturers
- xiii. Adequate Security in Higher Institutions should be provided

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