11 Re-imagining Tertiary Education in Nigeria: Issues, Challenges and Solutions

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INTRODUCTION

Tertiary education denotes all formal post-secondary education, including the one obtained in public and private universities, colleges, technical training institutions and vocational schools. The purpose of tertiary education in a country is to promote knowledge, explore solutions to countries' problems and support the greater society in attaining its objectives in the field of human and socio-economic development (Adepoju, 2007; NPE, 2004). In addition, tertiary education is believed to be instrumental in fostering growth, reducing poverty, and boosting shared prosperity. The benefits are not just to the individual, but the entire system, this is because a highly skilled workforce, with lifelong access to a solid post-secondary education, is a pre-requisite for innovation and growth; well-employable and productive population that earns higher wages, and cope better with economic shocks. It is also a benefit to the society at large because those exposed to tertiary education are more environmentally mindful, have healthier habit and a high level of civic involvement. It can also translate into higher earnings, healthier children and families, which ultimately translates to a stronger nation.

According to a Word Bank Group (WGB) report, there are about 220 million tertiary education students in the world, up from 100 million in 2000. In Latin America and the Caribbeans for example, the number of students in tertiary education programs has doubled in the past decades because students with a tertiary education degree in the region earns more than twice as much as a student with just a high school diploma. In Nigeria, the National Policy on Education (2004), principally specified tertiary education to mean universities, polytechnics and colleges of education.

Amidst challenges, countries all over the world especially the developed countries have undertaken major restructuring of their tertiary education system to expand their scope and efficacy. This restructuring includes engaging in strategic reforms by ensuring that national policies, priorities equitable access to tertiary education, work towards improving learning and skills development relevant to the labor market.

In Nigeria, the National Universities Commission (NUC) subscribes to the position that the country's higher education system needs reforms. And that the challenges

confronting the higher education system in Nigeria are alarming and have, over time, contributed towards watering down the quality of higher education. This feeds into the seeming norm of jumping at any opportunity to study outside the country nowadays. Undeniably however, the increasing number of students seeking for tertiary education in public-funded institutions of higher learning should not be ignored. Thus, with all hands-on-deck, the nation can achieve sustainable economy and social development. This paper comprised eight sections – an introduction, brief history of tertiary education in Nigeria, policies on tertiary education in Nigeria and the regulatory bodies of tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Other sections are on global best practices in tertiary institutions, issues and challenges of tertiary education in Nigeria, solutions and recommendations, and a conclusion section respectively.

BRIEF HISTORY OF TERTIARY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

The history of tertiary education in Nigeria is centered on the report of Eric Ashby Commission which was set up in 1959 to investigate into Nigerian's need in the arena of post school certificate and higher education over twenty years. By 1960, the report of the Commission was submitted, in which the Commission observed paucity of opportunities for Nigerians to gain admission into tertiary institutions. Prior to the emergence of the Ashby Commission, the colonial educational policy centered on the provision of literate nationals who were required to man positions, which were strictly administration. Thus, existing educational institutions, few as they were then could only produce clerks, interpreters, forest guards and sanitary inspectors; as no domain for entrepreneurial skill was envisaged in the educational system (Akinyemi, 1987).

Consequent upon the independence, it was discovered that this system of education did not meet the aspirations of Nigerians. Hence a need for paradigm shift. According to Fafuwa (1971:151), tertiary education in Nigeria moved into its second phase of development with the setting up of the Asby Commission. The Commission recommended the establishment of four new universities: in Enugu, Zaria, Ibadan, and Lagos. The Federal Government chose to approve the setting up of five universities instead of the four suggested by the Commission. Thus, by the of 1962, there were five universities in Nigeria as follows: University of Ibadan, University of Nigeria Nsuka, Ahmadu Bello University Zaria, University of Ife, and University of Lagos. While University of Ibadan and Lagos were owned by the Federal Government, Nsukka, Zaria and Ife were regional universities.

The Ashby Commission also observed the inadequate supply of trained and educated teachers on Nigeria secondary grammar schools, hence the Commission recommend:
1. Opening of more universities.
2. The institution of a bachelor's degree in education i.e. BA (ED), B.Sc. (ED).
3. The training of more teachers for the national secondary schools.

According to Adeyinka (1988), certain categories of education institutions are charged with the responsibility of giving the essential professional training for teachers; these include:
1. Grade II Teachers College
2. Advanced Teachers College
3. Colleges of Education
4. Institute of Education
5. National Teachers Institute

The Ashby Commission did not limit its recommendations to the establishment of universities and polytechnics, but its report stretched across the educational sector, ranging from primary to secondary education, teacher training and supply, technical and commercial education, agricultural and veterinary educations. The first generation of these institutions were established in the early and middle 1960s (Taiwo, 1980:46). After the first generation, colleges of education were established, many other colleges of education were set up. As of 1996, the country had fifty-six (56) colleges of education of which 20 were owned by the Federal Government, thirty-five (35) by state governments and one run by a private organization.

Over time, the numbers of tertiary institutions in Nigeria have increased tremendously; presently, Nigeria has forty-nine (49) federal universities, fifty-nine (59) state universities, seventy-six (76) private universities, forty (40) federal polytechnics, forty-nine (49) state-owned polytechnics, seventy (70) federal and state-owned colleges of health, seventeen (17) private colleges of health, and two hundred and nineteen (219) colleges of education.

POLICIES ON TERTIARY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA
Educational policy is the modus operandi that government employs to resolve issues connecting to education in a logical and realistic manner towards achieving the nation's needed development. It spells out issues like school management, class size, school fees, teaching methods and materials, training and development, curriculum design, admission and graduation requirements, salaries of teachers, etc.

According to Fabnmi (2005), the first policy on education was in 1925 when the memorandum on education policy in British Tropical Africa was presented for the colonies as a foundation for the British Colonial Education Policy. The nation, overtime, has experimented various educational policies like the 6-3-3-4 system, 9-3-3-4 system, education for all, universal basic education, deregulation and privatization policies. Basically, there are three broad categories of tertiary institutions in the country, and they are empowered by the law. They include:
i. The University system that awards degrees at Bachelor, master's and Ph.D. levels and run by both the federal, state government and private organizations. Its direct regulatory agency is the National Universities C

omission (NUC).

ii. The Polytechnic/Monotechnic system instituted mainly to provide technological graduates that will assist the nation in technological advancement. This institution awards National Diplomas (ND) and Higher National Diplomas (HND). They are directly regulated by the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE).

iii. Colleges of Education are empowered to produce qualified teachers who are to man the primary and secondary schools in the country. They award National Certificate in Education (NCE) and are regulated by the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE).

There are also the Colleges of Health that are empowered to produce Para-medical personnel. Across all the broad categories, there are bodies responsible for initiating and making rules that governs their operations internally and externally. The bodies include:

a) National House of Assembly/State House of Assemblies
b) Federal Ministry of Education through the regulatory agencies (NUC, NBTE, NCCE)
c) The Governing Councils of the various institutions
d) The Senate/Academic Board of the institutions as the case may be
e) The School Management Committees

Rules of Tertiary Institutions
There are:
a) Establishment Acts of the Institutions
b) The Statuses
c) Regulations governing the Condition of Service of the Senior and Junior staff
d) Establishment Circulars
e) Academic Briefs: i.e., a sort of strategic plan on programs/departments, examples are:
    i) Course Curriculum
    ii) Number of Programs
    iii) Number of Staff per Program
    iv) Academic Policy
    v) Code of Conduct/Code of Ethics for workers

Enabling Laws
Tertiary institutions in Nigeria are product of law. Each federal or state tertiary institution is established by an Act or Law enacted by the federal or state legislature. The private institutions are incorporated as legal entities and thereafter licensed by the federal government to function as tertiary institutions under the Education (National Minimum Standards for Establishment of Institutions Act (Cap. E3. LFN, 2004). The enabling laws defines the powers, functions and responsibilities of the

various constituent functionaries in the system.

Nigeria National Higher Education Equity Policy
The federal ministry of education through its department on tertiary education, sets the national higher educational policies. The NUC supports the work of the federal ministry of education with respect to universities by providing policy advice, assuring quality of higher education in Nigeria and regulating the establishment of new universities in the country. The NBTE plays same roles in the case of polytechnics and the NCCE caters for that of colleges of education.

Higher Education Policies Documents
These are current official documents defining the national higher education strategies/policies including:
 i.   National Economic Recovery and Growth Plan….2017-2030
 ii.   Ministerial Strategic Plan-2016-2019
 iii. National Policy on Education (2013)
 iv.   National Policy on Special needs Education in Nigeria
 v.   Blueprint on the Rapid Revitalization of University Education in Nigeria (2015)

Equity Policy Documents
This explains the broad and specific equity objective that the policy document should identify, it covers:
 • The National Policy on Education – which states that a main goal of tertiary education should be to provide accessible and affordable quality learning opportunity for formal and informal education in respect of the needs and interests of all Nigeria (NPE, p26). To pursue these goals, the National Policy on Education outlines the need to have flexible learning modes. Scholarship and loans and dedicated services to the community, amongst other strategies. Open and distance education are also promoted in this NPE as way of supporting equity goals.

Target Groups Identified in the Policy Document
 • Gender:
 • The blueprint proposes intervention to increase the proportion of girls. In addition, some universities have implemented specific interventions to promote female participation through scholarship to female students, fellowships to female staff, sensitization and advocacy workshops, enlightenment and outreaches programs, and networking with other universities.
 • Students with disabilities:
 • Persons with special needs are highlighted in the targeted equity policy and in the National Policy on Education.

- Special Intervention and Instruments of Equity Promotion as included in the official Strategy and Policy Document (monetary and non-monetary)
- Monetary Policy Instrument:
- Students do not pay tuition fees in federal universities, polytechnics, and colleges, except for expenses related to administrative and educational services. Thus about 45% of the students have their education fully subsidized.
- **Non-monetary Policies Instruments:**
  i. Preferential admission procedures: Quotas have been in place since 1979 through the compulsory Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination organized by JAMB. Merit is weighed at 45%, catchment areas at 35%, while 20% given to educationally less developed states which are mainly in the northern part of the country (Opera, 2017).
  ii. Reformed admission procedure for women
  iii. The National Open University is Nigerian's main distance university that functions under the National Universities Commission (NUC) on Online programs
  iv. Nigeria has drafted an Open Education Resource Policy and is developing it as a mean to enhance equity.
  v. The NUC has a specific section that deals with gender-related issues and the students' welfare.

REGULATORY BODIES OF TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN NIGERIA

Regulatory bodies help to control, supervise, monitor and govern the activities of tertiary institutions in Nigeria. They work as parastatals under the department of tertiary institution in the Federal Ministry of Education (FME), to initiate policies and monitor the implementation in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The following are the regulatory bodies under the control of the department of tertiary institution in the Federal Ministry of Education:

a) National Universities Commission (NUC)
b) National Board for Technical Education (NBTE)
c) National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE)
d) Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB)
e) Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN)
f) Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETfund)
g) National Teachers Institute, Kaduna (NTI)

The Overall Functions of the Regulatory Bodies

Being that they function as parastatals under the Department of Tertiary Education in the Federal Ministry of Education, their overall functions include:
  i. Policy designing, coordination, implementation and monitoring
  ii. Establishment of new federal tertiary education institutions or take-over

existing state tertiary institution in collaboration with relevant agencies.

iii. Supervision of the activities in the tertiary education sector

iv. Coordinating the performance of the visitor's role in the federal tertiary institutions

v. Organizing and coordinating panels to federal tertiary institutions every four years in accordance with the law

vi. Organizing the drafting of the white papers from the recommendations on the reports of visitation panels

vii. Placement and supervision of ministry's representatives on the Governing Councils of the federal tertiary institutions and the Board of Federal Ministry of Education parastatals.

viii. Coordinating staff and students' union matters in the sector

ix. Licensing of private tertiary institutions including the Innovation Enterprises Institutions (IEIs) in collaboration with the regulatory agencies

x. Provision of advisory and appellate services to state and private institutions

xi. Coordinating matters of international relations in tertiary education sector

xii. Promoting ICT penetration and utilization in tertiary institutions

GLOBAL BEST PRACTICES IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS

Global best practices refer to certain methods, techniques, mechanisms and practices that have been tested and found to be result-oriented at a global level. They refer to those practices that have worked and produced result globally and as such, can serve as examples and template and set as the pace for others to follow. Paying close attention to the world's top ten universities ranking, it shows that mainly the USA, and the UK universities dominate the world rankings of the best universities. Generally, most of the similar rankings are formulated based on different characteristics including several international students, research and development, capability, employment rate of graduate, the expertise of the faculty, satisfaction of students, staff, etc. (Leathwood, et al, 2004; Francis, 2002; Sadlak, 1978).

The increasing importance and expansion of world-class universities and other tertiary institutions can be explained in terms of their contribution to economic and social growth of the society. This is the main reason for Nigeria to join the global race to establish world-class tertiary institutions. Word-class institutions are reported to attract the attention of top academicians and students and they are prepared to offer excellent teachings and learning environment with the availability of necessary facilities (Kettunun, 2010).

Metric Indices for Ranking Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions Globally

Across the globe, there are laid down standards for judging the performance of a discipline, educational system inclusive. Global best practice is an internationally benchmarked self-assessment tool. There are three major ranking organizations

globally, and each one uses a different methodology, they are:
  i.   QS World University Rankings
  ii. Time Higher Education World University Ranking
  iii. Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU)

Time Higher Education has been providing trusted performance data on universities for students and their families, academics, university leaders, governments and industry, since 2004. Its ranking covers three main areas of university activities i.e., Research, Impact and Teaching and the yardsticks are called *metric index.*

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES OF TERTIARY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA
Tertiary education is specialized education taken after high school. Though it is non-compulsory but given to the importance of such education and its role in a country, there is a need to figure out the challenges in our tertiary education system with a bid to finding solutions to such challenges. Thus, the following are viewed as issues and challenges amongst others:
  a) Meagre Budgetary Allocation/Funding: Poor budgetary allocation to the education sector is a challenge in driving the course of the system.
  b) Shortage of Competent Manpower (Brain Drain): The qualified and capable hands are leaving the shores of this country for greener pastures; output will be affected.
  c) Overcrowding and Deteriorating Physical Facilities: with the increasing number of candidates who sits for UTME, there is high demand for tertiary education, as such much pressure is mounted on the facilities.
  d) Lack of Updated library books, educational materials, laboratories and consumables
  e) Incessant Strike Action by workers in the system, just like the immediate past universities workers strike, this cripples the academic calendar and promote crash programs which affects the assimilation level of the students.
  f) Incompetency of our Graduates: Many graduates do not have locally relevant skills needed for a successful integration into the labor market.
  g) Obsolete Curriculums: The curriculums are traditionally built to prepare graduates for employment and white-collar jobs, unfortunately such jobs are not available for the large number of graduates, this is part of the reason for high unemployment.
  h) Lopsided Policy Implementation: This is a major challenge; a lot of concepts in policy documents exit only in principles and not in practice.
  i) Increase in Running Cost: The numerical strength is rapidly increasing; the paucity of adequate fund and staffers poses challenge.
  j) Examination Malpractice: Across the high schools, many private schools engage in malpractice just to make profit, this in turn it leads to admission of students who are under prepared to face to the rigors of tertiary education.

SOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1.   Adoption of Dual Mode of Teaching: with the advent of Covid 19, the use of technology in knowledge transfer and delivery become vital. Hence the development and enlargement of digital hub for general use of online platforms is advocated for.

2.   Curriculum Review, Assessment of Tertiary Education on E-learning:
      a.   The review of curriculum requirements, strengthening of quality assurance mechanism as well as fortification of modern methods of data processing and retrieval will facilitate E-learning

3.   The curriculum should be reviewed to reflect new social needs of the society

4.   Government should regulate tuition fees of both public and private tertiary institutions

5.   Stakeholders should strive to breach the gap between the upper class and indigent students by compelling all public office holders to have their children enrolled in public tertiary institutions. This will enable the upper class who likely are stakeholders in the sector to understand the realities in our public tertiary institutions

6.   There should be mandatory entrepreneurial studies for all undergraduates as a way of preparing them for the realities of the society

7.   Stakeholders should guide against discriminations in the system either by gender, religion or ethnicity

8.   Deregulation cum privatization, and commercialization should be strengthened, as this is expected to encourage private participation, institutional autonomy, and strengthen governance

9.   Tackling the menace of illegal institutions and fake certificate

10.   Salary structure of both the teaching and non-teaching staff should be augmented with the inclusion of the deserving benefits; this will limit brain drain and frequent industrial actions

11.   Increase in Funding: The percentage allocation to educational sector should be reasonable enough to meet the modern-day requirements in our tertiary institutions

CONCLUSION

This chapter focused on broad sections on the brief history of tertiary education in Nigeria, policies on tertiary education in Nigeria and the regulatory bodies of tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Other sections are on global best practices in tertiary institutions, issues and challenges of tertiary education in Nigeria, solutions and recommendations respectively. Conclusively, in the words of Lady Theresa May, the past British Prime Minister at break of popular BREXIT that "When everything fells, Great Britain will fall back to its universities for solution". In the same voice, Nigeria today, like never before, is faced with numerous challenges ranging from insecurity to unemployment, to corruption, etc. If the tertiary educational architecture can be strengthened, there will be a future to hold on to.

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