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All correspondence should be mailed to the Associate Editor: Dr. Joseph Bonnici, Vance Hall, 4th Floor, Central Connecticut State University, 1615 Stanley Street, PO Box 4010, New Britain, CT 06050-4010, USA.

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## HIGHER EDUCATION: A PANACEA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT - THE NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE

Ngozi E. Uzoka, Rosita O. Igwe and Casimir I. Ekwerike

*University of Lagos, Nigeria*

Higher education in Nigeria is saddled with the responsibility of providing competent and flexible workforce that would ensure all round development in the country. To achieve this, a lot of resources – human and infrastructural – have to be in place. The study is principally aimed at assessing the importance of higher education in the development of Nigerian economy. Specifically, it sets out to examine the place of higher education in engendering long-lasting development in the individual and the society, analyze the goals of higher education and its capacity to enhance sustainable development, among others. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The population comprises teachers and students in all the tertiary institutions in Nigeria. A total sample of 500 participants was selected for the study. Stratified and simple random sampling techniques were employed to select four out of the six geo-political zones in Nigeria. Questionnaire was the major instrument used for data collection. Quantitative and qualitative analyses - percentage, mean score, and chi-square were employed to analyze the data. Some of the findings include: higher education is very important in the development of the individual and the society, the goals of higher education have been realized to some extent, non-realization of the goals of higher education have tremendous negative effect on the country as a whole, among others. The study concluded by recommending that government should ensure that all the policies and practices are geared towards improving the quality of higher education, there is need for government to increase revenue allocation, so as to save it from collapse, among others.

**Keywords:** Higher education, Sustainable development, Panacea, Nigerian experience.

### Introduction

Education, generally, is a prerequisite for economic and social development. Hence, it is fundamental to the training of a competent and flexible workforce that can acquire new skills as economies change. Education in Nigeria is said to be an instrument per excellence for effecting national development (FRN, 2009). It is described as a process by which persons, usually young people, develop their intellectual, emotional, spiritual and physical powers. In Nigeria, it involves three levels, namely: primary, secondary and tertiary levels.

Tertiary education, otherwise known as higher education, is the education given after secondary schools which includes universities, polytechnics, monotechnics, colleges of education, including those institutions offering correspondence courses. It can be regarded as a high or specialized form of human capital development because its contributions to economic growth are very significant. It is rightly regarded as the “engine of development” in new world economy (Castells, 1994).

As pointed out in the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2009), the major goals of higher education includes among others:



- a. Contribution to national development through high level relevant manpower training;
  - b. Development and inculcation of proper values for the survival of the individual and the society;
  - c. Development of the intellectual capability of individuals to understand and appreciate their local and external environment;
  - d. Acquisition of both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to be self-reliant and useful members of the society;
  - e. Promotion and encouragement of scholarship and community service;
  - f. Forging and cementing of national unity; and
  - g. Promotion of national and international understanding and interaction, among others.
- (FRN, 2009; p.36)

Similarly, Idogho (2011) reiterates that some of the purposes of higher education in Nigeria and Africa include:

- i. Acquisition, development and inculcation of the proper value orientation for the survival of the individual and society;
- ii. The development of the intellectual capacities of individuals to understand and appreciate their environment;
- iii. The acquisition of both physical and intellectual skills, which will enable the individual to develop into useful members of the community; and
- iv. The acquisition of an objective view of the local and external environments.

Literatures abound in Nigeria and Africa on the importance of higher education to economic development. Higher education brings about transformation in the attitudes, skills, knowledge and employability of the recipients. This would lead to effective learning which produces graduates that are adequately informed, technically equipped and morally prepared to become productive workforce, self-reliant, entrepreneurs and responsible individuals. Tilak (2003) opines that the larger the stock of the population with higher education, the higher the prospects for economic growth. In the same vein, the United Nations Development Programmes (UNDP) in their study, cited by Njoku et al (2013), has shown that the level of achievement in technology critically depends upon the level of higher education in a given economy.

Also, Njoku et al (2013) note that when individuals gain from higher education, the entire society also gains. This is because higher earnings from well-educated individuals raise tax revenue for governments and ease demands on state finance. Moreover, well trained teachers produced by higher education institutions enhance the quality of primary and secondary education, and give graduates greater opportunities for economic development. Trained medical doctors and other health workers also help to improve the entire society's general health which in turn raises the level of productivity at work.

This has shown that higher education is a major determinant of all aspects of change in the society. It assists through teaching and research, in the creation, absorption and dissemination of knowledge (Okogie, 2013). As such, it is the key that unlocks every door as a master instrument for accelerating economic growth and sustainable development (Uzoka, 2006).

Recent debates about the place of higher education in Nigeria have focused on the need to provide quantitative and qualitative human resources of the highest level to take charge and control the economy of the nation. Yet it has become glaring that the desired significant expansion in manpower is daily becoming a mirage. This is because higher education system which produces the high level manpower is being underfunded. Suffice it to say that successive governments in Nigeria have failed to inject adequate resources in order to make education realize to the optimum, its goals in the society. Like other nations in Africa, Nigeria needs higher institutions to train the high management workforce to propel the nation's all round development.

This study, therefore, intends to assess the extent to which higher education has helped in the realization of sustainable development in the country. Specifically, the study examines the place of higher education in engendering a long-lasting development in the individual and the society; analyze the goals

of higher education in its capacity to enhance sustainable development; measure the extent to which these goals have been achieved, and highlight the consequential implications which may arise if higher education in Nigeria fails to attain its expected goals.

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

- What are the importance of higher education in the development of the individual and the society?
- To what extent has the goals of higher education been realized?
- What are the challenges confronting higher education in Nigeria?
- What implications may arise if higher education in Nigeria fails to attain its goals?

Furthermore, two hypotheses were raised for the study:

- There are no challenges facing higher education in Nigeria.
- There will be no implications if higher education in Nigeria fails to attain its goals.

## Method

Descriptive survey research design was adopted for this study. The population comprised of teachers and students in the tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Stratified and simple random sampling techniques were employed to select 500 teachers and students (participants) from four out of the six geo-political zones in Nigeria (North Central, North East, South East and South West). The instruments for data collection were researchers' developed structured questionnaire and interview schedule. A three-point rating scale of agree, don't know and disagree was employed. The instruments were validated by experts and the reliability coefficient was 0.75 using the Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. The research questions were answered using simple percentages, mean scores, while chi-square was employed to test the hypotheses. The data analyses were, therefore, presented in tables according to the research questions and hypotheses.

## Results

**Research question one:** What are the importance of higher education in the development of the individual and the society?

Table 1. Higher education and the development of the individual and society

s/n	ITEMS	Agree	Don't Know	Disagree	Total	Mean	Standard deviation	Variance
1	Higher education enhances the spirit of patriotism among the students	425 85%	40 8%	35 7%	500	1.22	0.56	0.31
2	Higher education inculcates respect and obedience to constituted authorities	395 81%	60 12%	35 7%	490	1.27	0.58	0.34
3	Higher education helps the recipients to develop the spirit of tolerance and accommodation	420 84%	35 7%	45 9%	500	1.25	0.61	0.37
4	Higher education exposes the recipients to the values and cultures of the people	375 76%	84 17%	35 7%	494	1.31	0.60	0.36
5	Higher education engenders cooperation among the recipients	420 84%	55 11%	25 5%	500	1.21	0.52	0.27

Source: Field Survey, 2015



Table 1 shows that majority of the participants, that is, 85% and 84% respectively confirmed that higher education is important in the development of the individual and society, while few of the participants, that is 8% and 11% are not in support. However, 7% and 9% of the participants seem not to have much input to make.

**Research question two:** To what extent has the goals of higher education been realized?

**Table 2.** Higher education and the realization of educational goals

s/n	ITEMS	Agree	Don't Know	Disagree	Total	Mean	Standard deviation	Variance
6	Higher education has helped to produce competent personnel for national development	450 91%	35 7%	10 2%	495	1.11	0.37	0.14
7	Higher education has helped in the production of relevant manpower	425 85%	50 10%	25 5%	500	1.20	0.51	0.26
8	Higher education helps the recipients to acquire physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to be self-reliant and useful members of the society	435 87%	58 12%	7 1%	500	1.14	0.39	0.15
9	The products of higher education have contributed to national development	410 82%	65 13%	25 5%	500	1.23	0.53	0.28
10	The recipients of higher education have been equipped with the intellectual capability to enable them understand and appreciate the local and external environment.	440 88%	45 9%	15 3%	500	1.15	0.43	0.19

*Source:* Field Survey, 2015

Table 2 reveals that almost all the participants are unequivocal that the goals of higher education to some extent have been attained. Thus 91%, 87% and 88% respectively are of the view that it is only through higher education that competent personnel will be produced and likewise relevant manpower, intellectual skills and capabilities of individuals and society enhanced

**Research question three and Hypothesis one:** What are the challenges facing higher education in Nigeria?

**Table 3a.** Challenges confronting higher education in Nigeria

s/n	ITEMS	Agree	Don't Know	Disagree	Total	Mean	Standard deviation	Variance
11	Inadequate funding is a major crisis area in the provision of higher education in Nigeria	395 80%	80 16%	20 4%	495	1.24	0.52	0.27
12	Politicization of education has negative impact on the progress and continuity in higher education	405 81%	75 15%	20 4%	500	1.23	0.51	0.26
13	Lack of adequate planning and proper implementation have great influence on higher education in Nigeria	430 86%	60 12%	10 2%	500	1.16	0.42	0.18

14	Poor infrastructural development and poor teaching and learning facilities have affected the success of higher education in Nigeria	425 86%	50 10%	20 4%	495	1.18	0.48	0.23
15	Inadequate welfare package for lecturers, administrative staff and students have grossly affected higher education in Nigeria	420 84%	80 16%	0 0%	500	1.16	0.37	0.14

Source: Field Survey, 2015

Table 3a shows that majority of the participants are of the opinion that higher education in Nigeria are faced with many challenges. This is reflected in their responses showing that 80%, 86% and 86% respectively agree that inadequate funding, lack of adequate planning and proper implementation and poor infrastructural and poor teaching and learning facilities are some of the major challenges confronting higher education in Nigeria. However, 16%, 12% and 10% of them had different opinion.

**Hypothesis One:** There are no challenges confronting higher education in Nigeria.

Table 3b. Challenges confronting higher education in Nigeria

Variables	N	DF	LS	X <sup>2</sup> cal	X <sup>2</sup> tab	Decision
Higher education in Nigeria and challenges	500	8	0.05	35.264	15.51	Rejected

Source: Field work, 2015

The chi-square statistics on table 3b gives further credence that there are many challenges confronting higher education in Nigeria.

**Research question four and hypothesis two:** What implications may arise if higher education in Nigeria fails to attain its goals?

Table 4a. Implications of the inability of higher education to attain set goals

s/n	ITEMS	Agree	Don't Know	Disagree	Total	Mean	Standard deviation	Variance
16	Failure in attaining the goals of higher education will affect the quality of potentials and individuals in the society	390 78%	110 22%	0 0%	500	1.22	0.42	0.17
17	Failure in attaining the goals of higher education will delay the rate of economic, social and political development	445 89%	35 7%	20 4%	500	1.15	0.46	0.21
18	Failure in attaining the goals of higher education may lead to disunity, conflicts and their attendant vices	390 79%	65 13%	40 8%	495	1.29	0.61	0.37
19	The rate of productivity and professionalism may be grossly affected if higher education fails to attain its goals	345 69%	110 22%	45 9%	500	1.40	0.65	0.42
20	The realization of job creation in Nigeria may be a mirage if higher education should fail to attain its goals	403 81%	84 17%	13 3%	500	1.22	0.47	0.22

Source: Field Survey, 2015



Table 4a shows that 78% and 89% of the participants agree that quality individual potentials and delay in the rate of development (that is, economically, socially and politically) may impede the realization of the goals of Nigeria's higher education. Furthermore, the rate of productivity and professionalism and job creation may be affected. However, 22% and 35% of the participants have different views, while negligible number (3%) of the participants appeared to be ignorant of the issues raised.

**Hypothesis Two:** There will be no implications if higher education in Nigeria fails to attain its goals.

Table 4b. Implications of the inability of higher education to attain set goals in Nigeria

Variables	N	DF	LS	X <sup>2</sup> cal	X <sup>2</sup> tab	Decision
Higher education and the attainment of set goals	500	8	0.05	122.84	15.51	Rejected

Source: Field work, 2015

The chi square statistics on table 4b affirms the fact that there will be very serious consequences if higher education in Nigeria fails to attain its goals.

## Discussion

The almost unanimous response by the participants as regards the significance of higher education in the development of any nation points to the invaluable role higher education plays in the development of the potentials of the individual and the society. Higher education promotes the development of high level manpower required for an all-around development, skills, abilities, competencies and desirable attitudes. In support of this, Uzoka (2006) observes that higher education is seen as the key that unlocks every door and is considered as the master instrument for sparking and accelerating economic growth and sustainable development.

Suffice it to say that in any effort injected at developing the nation, it is the human resource that harnesses other resources for the development of the country. To this end, quantitative and qualitative production of human resource at the highest level becomes necessary and mandatory. This is why Idogho (2010) points out that acquisition of both physical and intellectual skills, which will enable the individuals to develop into useful members of the community, and the acquisition of an objective view of the local and external environment can only be obtained through higher education.

Majority of the participants agree that the goals of higher education have been realized to some extent. Although some progress have been made in areas like in the production of competent personnel for national development and relevant manpower, acquisition of physical and intellectual skills, etc., yet, the level of competence and relevance of the personnel is comparatively low. Okunuga (2013), in her work on comparative analysis of competencies in undergraduate chemistry curriculum and job competence by chemical-based industries brought to fore the unemployability of the graduands in the industries. She further points out the inadequacies in the curriculum in terms of skills and attitudes.

It seems from all indications that higher education is performing its duties in the aspect of theoretical knowledge. However, the question that readily comes to mind at this juncture is: Why are the employers of labour not satisfied with the performance of the graduates from the country's higher education institutions, and also why is the level of development rather slow? It seems that in the area of physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to be self-reliant and useful members of the society, the goals are yet to be fully realized. This can be seen in the areas of capacity to learn fast, problem solving ability, capacity to apply knowledge in practice, practical skills to enable one cope with change etc. (Igwe & Uzoka, 2014).

The overwhelming agreement of the participants on the challenges confronting higher education in Nigeria is worrisome. This indicates the level of difficulties being faced by higher education in Nigeria. Some of the challenges are inadequate funding, improper planning and implementation strategy, poor infrastructure, and inadequate teaching and learning facilities. Finance, no doubt, is the bedrock of every educational institute. There is a general agreement that poor funding is a major cause of decay in higher education in Nigeria. As Uzoka & Adetoro (2009) reiterate, adequate funding of higher education will help to revitalize academic and physical facilities on a continuous bases and maintenance of high academic standards.

Similarly, Okah (2011) observes that university education in Nigeria could be said to be in a dilapidated state. This is due to poor funding which can result to lack of equipment, poor library and laboratory facilities, low staff morale, etc. Moreover, the study discovers that there is need for infrastructural support and this is highlighted by Subair (2008) in Subair et al (2012), who said that high quality university education and training requires appropriate infrastructure. Infrastructural development according to Khanom (2010), is very instrumental for the development of an economy as infrastructural facilities are the wheels on which an economy runs and it provides an enabling environment for sustained economic growth and wealth.

The findings on the implications that may arise if higher education fails to attain its goals show that majority of the participants agree that non-realization of higher educational goals will have tremendous negative effect on the country as a whole. Notable among the consequences of the non-attainment of the goals of higher education are the poor social and political development. This often manifests in disunity, poor governance, civil unrests in the various facets of the society, political thuggery, poor job creation, to mention but a few. Attesting to this, Igudaitohan (2014) citing Durkheim (1961) observes that society can survive only if there exist among its members a sufficient degree of homogeneity; educating people by fixing in the child from the beginning the essential similarities which collective life demands. This view is supported by Haralambos and Holborn (2007) who state that without these essential similarities, co-operation, social solidarity and social life itself would be impossible.

Since the physical and intellectual skills are not fully developed and the potentialities not actualized, it becomes a mirage to expect meaningful development in Nigeria.

## Conclusion

The present inefficiency in higher education will persist unless appropriate steps are taken to ameliorate the challenges and constraints hindering the realization of higher education goals in Nigeria. There is need to rekindle the interests and commitments of the stake-holders, as well as open their eyes to their responsibilities towards higher education. Suffice it to say that it is evident that the needs and goals of the society have changed, it is therefore pertinent that higher education should focus on these changes in order to keep producing relevant and more competent workforce for the society.

## Way Forward

- i. In view of the importance of higher education in the development of the potentials of individuals and the society, government should ensure that all the policies and practices are geared towards improving the quality of higher education.
- ii. Government should put more efforts in the capacity building of the workforce vis-à-vis production of competent and relevant manpower required to develop and manage the economy.
- iii. There is need for the government to put in more effort to ameliorate the visible challenges and constraints confronting higher education in Nigeria, especially in the areas of funding, provisions of adequate infrastructure and learning facilities.



- iv. Efforts should be made by stake-holders to avert some of these consequences, e.g. disunity, poor governance, civil unrest, etc. which will lead to non-realization of higher education goals.
- v. There is need to redesigned the curriculum of the higher education to meet the 21<sup>st</sup> century global requirements. It is believed that a properly designed and implementable curriculum would help to reduce social vices and prepare the citizens for life-long learning culture.
- vi. There is need for the government to increase revenue allocation to higher education, so as to save it from collapse.

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