



SOJI ONI (Ph.D.)

CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS IN

AFRICAN

EDUCATION SYSTEMS



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Edited by : Soji Oni (Ph.D.)

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Higher Education and National Development

B.O. Emunemu & E.J. Isuku

Education is any act or experience that has a formative effect on the mind, character or physical ability of an individual. In a broad sense, it is a process by which an individual acquires the many physical and social capabilities demanded by the society in which he/she is born into to function. In an ideal sense, education is an ultimate value and hence, through the provision of social service, it is an agent of change. In its technical sense, education, according to the Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary, is a process by which knowledge, skills, ability and the development of character and mental powers are acquired through training. It is this enviable position which education occupies in the light of the development of any economy that earns it the unique qualification as being the prime mover of development without which all other resources—material, natural and other infrastructures would lie untapped, underutilized or even utilized to the detriment of mankind (Ogboru, 2005). In other words, the single most significant complex of social control tools for national development is found in the educational system, be it formal or informal. According to Emunemu and Onuka (2009), the vision of education, essentially, emphasizes a holistic, interdisciplinary approach to developing the knowledge and skills needed for a sustainable future, encompassing both formal and non-formal education and alternate delivery systems.

According to Orobosa (2010), in ancient Greece, the cradle of Western scholarship, education was a highly functional search-light beamed on society. It transcended reading and writing. While the Nigerian state was still under colonization, modern education had already taken place in the developed and advanced countries of the world such as the United States of America, the United Kingdom, France, etc. This brought successful engendered industrial revolution and breath-taking development.

Development, on the other hand, is a progressive unfolding of the potentialities of a given reality. As it applies to human, it is the integration

of the various givings, natural, physical, acquired and human of a people towards the full working out, permanently and cumulatively of their being, as persons of their nation and their real productivity.

The essence of education, whether formal or informal is to produce a person that would be a useful member of a society. Such education must engender in the individual a disposition of personal autonomy, responsibility and relevant forms of life, thought and action. This is the type of education that is provided by higher education.

Higher Education (HE) is a term used to describe post-secondary education of a certain intellectual standard that contains elements of theoretical, abstract and conceptual knowledge and is taught in an environment which also includes advanced research activities. According to Nigeria's National Policy on Education (NPE (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004), higher (tertiary) education is the education given after secondary education in universities, colleges of education, polytechnics, monotechnics including those institutions offering correspondence courses. These institutions of learning award academic degrees, professional certificates and/or advanced/higher diploma; and as further step, postgraduate programmes such as masters' degrees and doctorates. Such institutions of higher learning are recognized throughout the world as representing specialist expertise supported by a wide range of skills that employers find very useful. Nigeria currently has a total of 122 accredited universities; with Federal having a total of 36; States with 36 while Private universities are 50 (National Universities Commission, 2012). On the other hand, the number of Colleges of Education and Polytechnics/Monotechnics in Nigeria stood at 85 and 125 respectively (Shu'ara, 2010).

Higher education includes teaching, research and social services activities of universities. Within the realm of teaching, HE includes both the undergraduate and postgraduate levels. In most developed countries of the world, a high proportion of the population now enters higher education at some time in their lives. HE is therefore very important to national economies, both as a significant industry in its own right, and as a source of trained and educated personnel (manpower) for the rest of the economy.

Concept of National Development

National development is the ability of a county to improve the social welfare of the people, for example, by providing social amenities like quality education, potable water, transportation, infrastructure, medical

care, etc (Last, 2010). According to Dike (2005), the concept of national development (economic, political and social) is said to bring with it valuable and positive changes that improves the living standards of the people, as it creates employment opportunities and equality of opportunity, and reduces poverty, among other things. In particular, economic development increases the efficiency of a system in the production of goods and services to meet the basic needs of the people in a society.

In this chapter, two broad perspectives of the concept of national development are recognized. The first one equates national development with socio-economic development. This perspective examines it in terms of economic growth, attainment of economic targets and increase in Gross National Product (GNP) or Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The second sees national development as a nationwide "continuous promotion of the well being and security of persons in such a way that they are constantly able to optimize the realization of their individual potentials" (Oyelaran, 1990). In this context, national development involves the action of the human resources on the natural resources "to produce goods necessary to satisfy the economic needs of the community" (Chumbow, 1990). Both kinds of national development are made possible through the instrumentality of higher education.

Higher Education and National Development

Since World War I, HE has become the major instrument for any country to achieve its goals in national development in terms of human capital, economy, social improvement, democracy building, national defense, and other areas (World Conference on Higher Education, 1998). HE plays a pivotal role in the economic, political, social, scientific and technological development of every nation state.

According to Thomson (2008); Escrigas (2008); Jimoh (2010); Agu and Emunemu (2011), higher education, especially university education plays necessary and an increasingly important role in human, social, and economic development. In the same vein, Sikwibele (2012) posited that higher education is expected to play a central role in the development of scientific knowledge and its subsequent application in various sectors. This, according to her, is part of a growing shift from overemphasis on basic education to recognizing and giving higher education its rightful role in development. Higher education also plays critical roles in training high-level scientific professionals, managers, and other human resources needed to implement development activities (Onuka and Emunemu, 2009; Onuka

and Emunemu, 2010; Sikwibele, 2012). HE provides research capacity as well as being the center for knowledge and provides the needed professional and community service.

The role of higher education institutions (HEIs) in development is vital, but it is also complex, fluid and dynamic. HEIs exhibit numerous different capabilities and scope, and can affect processes of development both directly and indirectly through teaching, research and service. HEIs operate within different contexts in which they can play numerous roles and face various challenges. Furthermore, HEIs have also served as incubators for nurturing talent and developing innovation and excellence. As Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, Nigeria's first President, succinctly stated, "originality is the essence of true scholarship; creativity is the soul of the true scholar" (Abubakar, 2009). It is this urge to excel that had traditionally sustained the innovative spirit in colleges and universities and had opened up new fields of learning in the world of scholarship. It is also this spirit of innovation and excellence which propels a people and a nation to greater heights and accords it the edge to thrive in a competitive environment (Abubakar, 2009).

It is indisputable that government recognizes the importance of higher education in national development, as reflected in the goals for tertiary education enunciated in the National Policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004), which are to:

- a) Contribute to national development through high-level manpower training.
- b) Develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of the individual and society.
- c) Develop the intellectual capability of individuals to understand and appreciate their local and external environments.
- d) Acquire both physical and intellectual skills, which will enable individuals to be self-reliant and useful members of the society.
- e) Promote and encourage scholarship and community service.
- f) Forge and cement national unity; and
- g) Promote national and international understanding and interaction.

In recognition of the importance of education (especially higher education) and its role in national development, the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) advocated that 26% of a country's annual budget be devoted to the funding of education. However, it is quite disheartening to note that several years after the formulation

of the NPE, Nigeria is yet to fully achieve the aims and objectives of education as stated above. According to Ottaway and Lester-Smith (2003), this state of affairs has created an imbalance in the economic, political and cultural development of the nation. Just as in most African countries, Nigerian public schools are in dire financial crisis. Yearly budgetary allocation to education falls short of the UNESCO prescribed 26% of the entire budgetary allocation. According to Abubakar (2009), the budgetary allocation to education had always been viewed as meager, which, between 1999 and 2007, fluctuated between 5.09% and 11.83% of the national budget. He stated further that it was President Umar Musa Yaradua who succeeded in raising the budget from 6.07% to 13% in 2008, a percentage which he sustained in the 2009 budget. This is a far outcry from the 26% recommended by UNESCO for developing countries. The dwindling allocation to education sector in the national budget also implied that there was decreased funding for education in general. The consequence of this decreased funding is that facilities and infrastructure declined in quality and quantity, thereby, contributing to the system's inefficiency (Obanya, 2006).

However, in recent times, the Nigerian government is beginning to pay more attention to education by increasing the budgetary allocation of N210 billion for the education sector in 2008 and N249 billion in 2009 (Federal Ministry of Education, 2011).

At this juncture, the pertinent question to ask is how adequate are these funds in meeting the basic developmental needs of the sector? It is indeed desirable that we expend much more on our tertiary educational sector to sustain minimum standards and make the sector competitive. Although reliable and up to date figures are hard to come by, it has been adjudged that Nigeria's expenditure on education, as a percentage of its GDP, is lower than that of many African countries (Abubakar, 2009). There is also a study by Professor Peter Okebukola, the former Executive Secretary of the National Universities Commission (NUC) and Professor Oye Ibidapo-Obe, a former Vice-Chancellor of University of Lagos, which indicated that the nation would need to expend a mean annual sum N5.65 billion to enable a Nigerian university to rank among the top 200 universities in the world. This obviously comes to a ten-year total of N56.5 billion per university by the year 2020. These are indeed sobering statistics which tell us, in no uncertain terms, how far we have to travel to attain world-class status and the imperative of facing the challenges of adequate funding of our higher educational institutions without delay.

These concerns, rightly expressed though, are being driven by the acknowledgement that human resource development plays a critical role in the attainment of national development. The growth of knowledge economy demands new and changing competences such as adaptability, communication, and the ability to acquire new skills independently. Invariably, tertiary education institutions are therefore expected to adapt programmes, curricula, and pedagogy to meet these mounting challenges.

Contributions of Higher Education to National Development

According to Iseku and Emunemu (2009), higher education exercises a direct influence on national productivity, which to a very large extent determines the country's standard of living and helps in stimulating local economy as an engine of growth. Specifically, higher education contributes to national development through the following:

Human Capital and Capacity Building

Higher education specifically trains a critical mass of a country's labour force (also referred to as human capital). In the "standard" conceptualization, higher education constitutes a form of specialized training. What used to be referred to as "man-power planning," higher education provides the knowledge base, skills, and training to perform specific tasks and jobs (Thomson, 2008). Human capital (HC) refers to the abilities and skills of any individual, especially those acquired through investment in education and training that enhance potential income earning. In economic terms, "human capital" adds higher levels of education and competency to the national capacity for economic growth. As Jimoh (2010) rightly puts it, economic development depends on qualitative workforce and this qualitative workforce can be acquired by developing professional, social and communication skills through literacy and education. Invariably, this is the basis for the concept of human capital. As the people of a country are educated, they will work much better to satisfy their needs. Simultaneously, the country's economy will grow and develop.

One of the greatest challenges facing Nigeria and other developing economies in this millennium is the issue of capacity building (CB) to enhance productivity in the economy. CB is undoubtedly central to sustaining economic growth and development because human capital is the greatest asset of any organization. Most developed and emerging economies focus on building human capital, since it is only those countries and

enterprises that possess what it takes to be competitive will survive in the current global economy.

Capacity building refers to the means by which skills, experience, technical and management capacity are developed within an organizational structure—often through the provision of technical assistance, short/long-term training, and specialist inputs (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2012). According to Sanusi, (2002), CB entails the development of a workforce through the acquisition of technical and managerial efficiency and effectiveness in the overall performance of an organization. He posits that the process may involve the development of human, material and financial resources. It also entails investment in human capital, institutions and practices necessary to enhance human skills, overhaul institutions and improve procedures and systems. CB thus enhances the ability of human resources and institutions to perform or produce. CB has undoubtedly become central to sustainable national development in the global economy. According to Serageldin (2000), a recent World Bank calculation shows that the knowledge sector adds more value to a product than the business process. Therefore, “if knowledge is the electricity that enhances an economy, then institutions of higher education are the power sources on which a new development process must rely” (Castells, 2001).

The enterprise of human capacity building is practicalized on the transfer of knowledge and skills to the trainee through education and training. It has never been in doubt that investment in university education and other tertiary institutions is core to the development of high level manpower. Higher education and research are essential components of cultural, socio-economic and environmentally sustainable development of individuals, communities and nations. The pace at which a country generates the ideas which lead to sustainable economic growth and development, depends largely on the quantum, quality and diversity of its human resource endowment, which to a large extent, determines technological change. For instance, the engine of growth of some East Asian countries (such as South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia in the 1970s and 1980s) was powered by sustained and productive high levels of investment in HC through HE. Other Asian countries such as Japan, China, India, Indonesia, etc, are also reaping massive investments in their human capital. Thus, there is a highly skilled labour force which has impacted positively on growth and development. Suffice it to state, therefore, that human capital investment has multiplier effects, which engender long-term economic growth and increases in the standard of living. Thus, any

country that desires to enhance and accelerate its development process, must take capacity building seriously, and execute it methodically and comprehensively.

Tertiary institutions are expected to achieve these goals through teaching, research and development; sustainable staff development programmes; generation and dissemination of knowledge; a variety of modes of programmes including full-time, part-time, block release, day-release, sandwich, etc; access to training funds such as those provided by the Industrial Training Fund (ITF); students industrial work experience; maintenance of minimum educational standards; inter-institutional cooperation and dedicated service to the community through extra-mural and extension services

Research and Technology Transfer

Research and practical, application-based technology conducted by higher education are needed to create sustainable economic growth that would bring about national development. The role of Science, Technology and Innovations (STI) is widely acknowledged in socio-economic development. There is increasing evidence that high levels of education in general, and tertiary education in particular, are essential for the design and productive use of new technologies, while they also provide the foundations for any nation's innovative capacity (Carnoy and Castells, 2003; Serageldin, 2000). This is evident in Nigeria where the products of our higher education have been the engine of the nation's development such as local content in building the first warship in Africa and so on (The Nations Newspaper, 2nd June, 2012). This type of evidence has led to a number of countries putting higher education at the core of their development strategy.

The best known model in a developed country is that of Finland, which, following the deep recession of the early 1990s, selected knowledge, information technology and education as the major cornerstones of the new (economic) development policy (Höltkä and Malkki, 2000). Ireland, Australia and New Zealand have also followed this route successfully.

According to Jimoh (2010), the development model of the East Asian countries in the 1970s and 1980s, in particular that of South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore, and to a lesser extent Malaysia, was a product of the massive investments made in education in general and in higher education in particular. The latter became especially important when

some of these countries decided to shift the emphasis in their economic development strategy to high value-added production.

The Chinese and Indian economies which have been displaying unprecedented levels of sustained growth since the early 1990s, on the other hand, exhibit two important characteristics with respect to higher education that sets them apart from both the 'East Asian tigers' of the 1980s and from other contemporary developing countries. First, investment in higher education is seen as a parallel process (and not a consecutive one) to providing broader access to, and improving the quality of, primary and secondary schooling. In other words, they have shown that if poor countries want to participate in the globalized knowledge economy, investments in higher education are crucial, at the same time as improving access and quality in schooling. The second, related point, illustrated in the development pattern of the Chinese and Indian economies, is that the traditional growth path of domination first of primary sector activities (agriculture and mining) followed by manufacturing and then by services, does not necessarily hold. The speed and extent to which developing countries are able to absorb, use and modify technology developed in the north, will ensure a more rapid transition to higher levels of development and standards of living.

Social Transformation and Democratization

Higher education is also seen as cultivating and inculcating social and moral values in students and the larger society. As such, the HEIs play an integral role in social and cultural transformation or preservation (Taylor and Fransman, 2004; Zaglul and Sherrard, 2006); cultivating democratic values (Task Force on Higher Education and Society, 2000) or international or global citizenship (Delanty, 2008). The common claim between these arguments is that higher education should create socially responsible and aware graduates capable of leading a country or community towards prosperity and success (Kenneth, Fogel and Danner, 1976; and McMahon, 1999).

In the area of democratization of the polity, higher education is said to have a significant political impact by equipping cadres of informed and rational citizens who support democratic reforms. There is no doubt that politics is crucial, and there is some indication that democratic systems on the whole are more efficient in reducing human suffering than other political systems. In recent times, Nigerians have made tremendous efforts at strengthening

democratic and peaceful developments in developing her economy through capacity building by directly supporting democratization efforts. However, there are clear indications that if youths and other members of the society are empowered through the provision of higher education in relevant areas, they would create an enabling environment and sustainable development through skills and knowledge acquired.

Challenges of HEIs in Developing Economies

There is no doubt that there are numerous challenges facing HE and HEIs in Nigeria, which to a very large extent, are likely to inhibit the achievement of the visions and missions of such institutions. Some of the challenges faced by Higher Education in developing economies include but not limited to the following:

- i. Inadequate funding and poor disbursement pattern; together with very low Internally Generated Revenue (IGR).
- ii. Lack of qualified teaching and technical staff coupled with high student-teacher ratio (STR)
- iii. Dearth of and dilapidated infrastructure and aged teaching facilities in some Nigerian universities.
- iv. Aging and high retirement rate of senior and experienced staff (this has been checkmated by the recent 70 years retirement age for professors).
- v. Brain drain resulting from poor staff incentive packages and retention schemes; thus leading to loss of teaching and non-teaching staff to local private companies, politics, foreign tertiary institutions, international agencies, etc.
- vi. Diminishing scope of mentoring junior researchers by seasoned and senior researchers due to brain drain.
- vii. Low webometric ranking of Nigerian universities.
- viii. Inadequate research funds and high dependence on external donors; especially for Research and Innovation funds;
- ix. Ceaseless strikes by teachers and/or non-teaching staff; and general student unrest.
- x. Inadequate practical exposure for science-related and engineering graduates (one of the many causes of buildings collapsing in many parts of the country).
- xi. Irregularities in access to education and admission policies (quota system).

- xii. General feeling from the public that universities are producing *job seekers rather than job creators* due to lack of practical and *entrepreneurship skills*.
- xiii. Challenge of graduate employment and employability which often leads to social tension and vices among graduates such as armed robbery, militancy, kidnapping, among others.
- xiv. Cultism on campuses which often leads to armed robbery, sexual harassment/rape, assassination and other social vices.
- xv. Widespread examination malpractice; including plagiarism among postgraduate students and sometimes academic staff.

Strategies to Reposition Higher Education Institutions for a Globalised World

There is no gainsaying the fact that Higher Education (HE) and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) play an indispensable role in national development. In view of the numerous challenges facing HE and HEIs, and considering the fact that HEIs have responsibilities to positively affect the global world, there is need therefore to proffer strategies that could help to reposition HEIs for a global world. These include the following:

- i. Increase funding and the revenue base of HEIs. To supplement government funding, HEIs should explore alternative sources of funding such as endowments, consultancy services, commercial ventures, tuition and other related fees, etc.
- ii. Science, Technology and Innovations (STI) to be given highest priority in the education system and resource allocation.
- iii. Regular capacity building programmes for teaching and non-teaching staff in order to reposition HEIs for a globalised world.
- iv. Teachers in professional fields should have relevant industry and professional experience.
- v. Applied researches conducted in our HEIs should be relevant to the needs and aspirations of the society and nation.
- vi. Universities to seek alternative sources of financing research through private and public sectors (public-private partnership ventures).
- vii. Universities to change from being conventional sources of graduates to becoming engines of community development and social renewal.
- viii. There should be deliberate collaborative efforts by governments, academia, business and civil society to reinvent Nigerian higher education system and put it to the service of the people.

- ix. Industries could provide support for research since the education industry depends on research findings to come out with new and improved products.
- x. Work with industry to turn innovations and research outputs into commercial enterprises.
- xi. HEIs to embrace strategic management and evolve a community-wide sense of responsibility.

Conclusion

Higher education, and by extension, higher education institutions are increasingly recognized as playing central role in human, social and economic development of nations. Also, in contemporary “knowledge societies” and in the face of pressures and changes from globalization, this role is increasingly important, yet ever more complex. HEIs serve as agents in development in multiple ways depending on their capabilities, objectives and the contexts in which they operate.

The role of higher education in capacity building through the provision of manpower personnel for both the public and private sectors has been quite significant in the sustenance of many societies and nations. The accelerated growth experienced in many emerging economies such as in East Asia has also been largely associated with substantial investment in human capital development.

The Nigerian government should borrow a leaf from the experience of such East Asian countries like China, Japan, Malaysia, and South Korea. Investment in human capital is a worthwhile investment, and the resultant benefits are to say the least, over-whelming. The low webometric ranking of Nigerian universities is a clear indication of the low level of financial investment in higher education by government. This trend should be reversed in view of the crucial role played by higher education in national development.

There is the need therefore for the Nigerian government to invest heavily in the education sector, especially higher education which is the centerpiece of development.

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