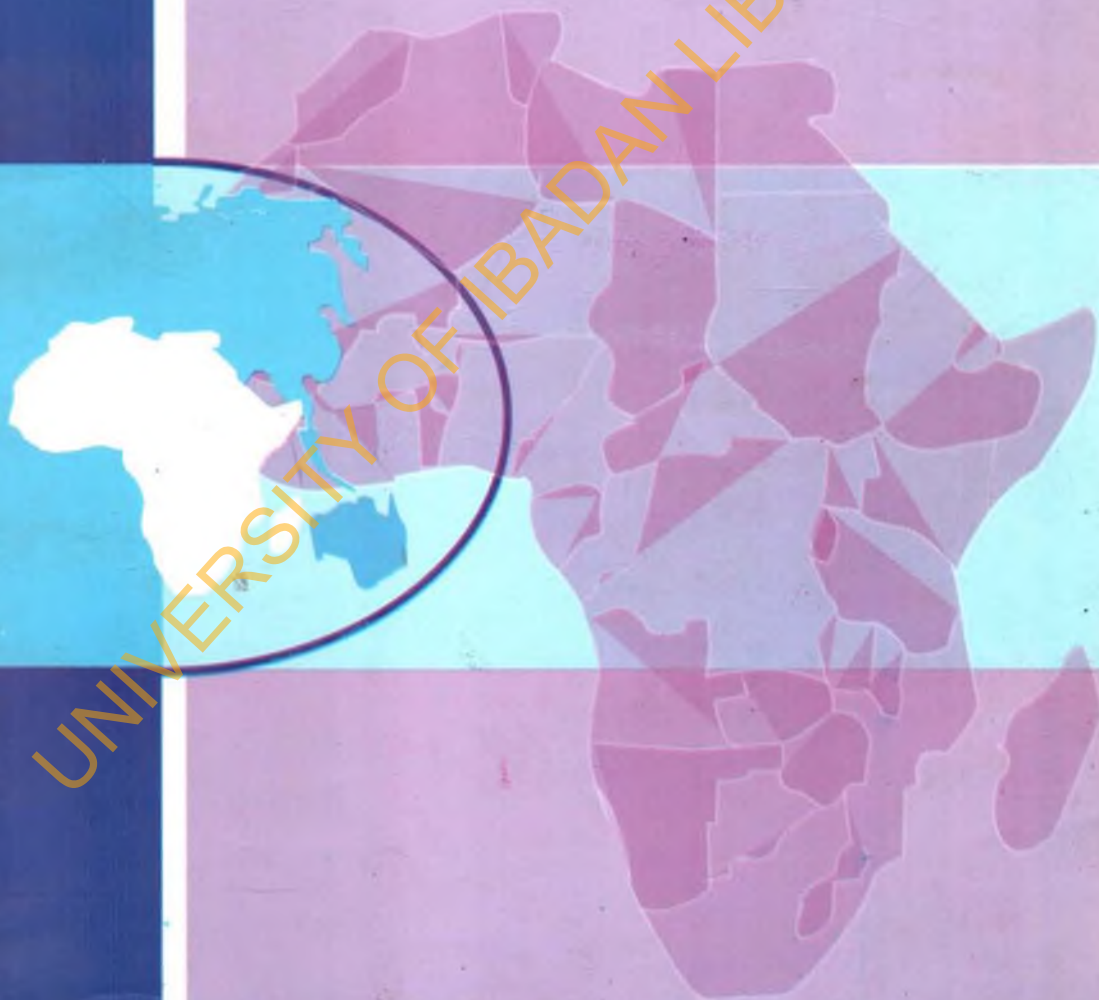


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Economic Relevance of Widening Access to Higher Education in Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper explored the economic benefits of widening access to higher education in Nigeria. Available evidence from theoretical analysis and various data obtained show that higher education contributes to both society and individual economic wellbeing. These are manifested in the form of increase in productivity and output, as well as in earning profiles of recipients among other benefits. Other findings show that in spite of the global rapid growth in tertiary education development, most Sub-Saharan African countries (Nigeria included) still lag behind in terms of access to higher education and human development index. In Nigeria, out of over 140 million population (2006 census figures), only 6% (7.50 males and 4.50 females) had higher education. The implication is that except there is a deliberate effort to widen access to higher education in Nigeria, the dream of attaining economic freedom may be difficult. Nevertheless, the paper concludes that although investing in human beings is important at every stage of development, the returns accruable to society from investing in higher education are always higher. It therefore recommends that greater access to higher education be provided in order to ensure economic growth and development.

Introduction

The economic relevance of widening access to higher education relates to the role of higher education in solving development problems. In almost every country, access to higher education has been recognized as an important societal goal. Higher education provides the training needed for

most skilled occupations and professions in the society. For almost a century, higher education (particularly the universities) has become an instrument for social mobility – a way for individuals to obtain the skills they need to improve their income level and status. Consequently, there is an increased number of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) which have provided an increased access to a wider section of the population. For instance, since World War II (second world war) especially after the 1960s, enrolment in higher education increased dramatically worldwide, doubling from 40 million in 1975 to 80 million in 1995, and perhaps reaching 150 million in 2007 (Altbach, 2008).

In Nigeria, the number of HEIs has increased over the past few years as the response to the rising demand for higher education in the country. This created opportunity for increased access among prospecting candidates in the country. Between 2001 and 2005, the total number of universities in the country increased from 51 to 80, while other university equivalent increased from about 163 to 178 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2006). Similarly, enrolment into universities increased from 225,707 to 778,253 students during the same period. In the polytechnics and colleges of education, enrolment rose from 217,296 to 318,195 and 222,733 to 552,417 respectively during the period under consideration (Babalola and Isuku, 2008; NBS, 2006).

However, in spite of the seeming rapid growth in tertiary education development, the enrolment gap between demand and supply have not improved, rather the demand for access have continued to rise in the face of limited supply. For instance, in 1995/96 academic session, only about 7.3 percent of the total applicants to universities in Nigeria were admitted, while only about 11.3 percent were offered admission in 2001/2002 academic year (Isuku, 2007). In comparison with most other countries, Nigeria's Human Resource development index fell below standard both within and outside the continent. In 1985, for instance, the percentage enrolment into higher institutions in Nigeria stood at 3.5%. In 1990, it rose to 4.11% and later dropped slightly to 4.0% in 1995; while Algeria had 7.9%, 11.4% and 12.0% respectively during the same period. South

Korea's tertiary education enrolment reached 52.0% in 1995 from 34% and 28.5% during the period under review, while the United States of America had an enrolment of about 90% by 1995 (World Bank, 2002).

In 2006, out of the over 140 million Nigerian population (2006 census figures), only 6.0% (7.50% males and 4.50% females) had tertiary education. The implication is that access to higher education is not keeping pace with the growing population.

The theoretical argument for the expansion or increase in access to higher education is based on the human capital theory of economic growth. The neo-classical growth theories posit that changes in the quantities of factors of production account for growth (Iyoha, 2000; Khan, 1997). Economic growth is said to occur when there is an accumulation of physical capital and an increase in the labour force with improved technological embodiment without which labour cannot be effective.

Human capital is a major determinant of labour productivity because it facilitates the absorption of new technology, increases the rate of innovativeness and promotes efficient management (Adamu, 2003). Hence, for a high labour productivity to occur, investment in human capital (which is attained through the acquisition of knowledge, skills and attitudes of the recipients) is necessary. In other words, there is a direct positive correlation between investment in human capital and increased productivity, and by implication, economic growth. Hence, human capital formation and economic growth are not mutually exclusive as they reinforce each other. As succinctly put by Salleh (Adamu, 2003) "it is human resources that develop the nation and the nation's development in return develop the human resources."

Of course, providing a wider opportunity of access into higher education to a greater proportion of the population would guarantee the availability of the needed human capital stock which is an important source of economic growth. Literature on human capital has established that education (and particularly higher education) matters and investment in human capital is critical for economic growth. Of particular importance are the new

technology and its dissemination through education, and related externalities. Researches have shown the positive externality effects of human capital in China, Australia and Guatemala (World Bank, 2003:4). Similarly, economic growth had been tied to acquired knowledge in Israel and a significant spill over effects of human capital was also found for South Korea (Bregman and Maronn, 1993; Feensha, Madani, Yang and Liang, 1999).

Results of researches clearly validate the proposition that investment in human capital accelerates economic growth. For instance, the empirical results generated from theoretical model of (Adamu, 2003) summarized that investment in human capital in the form of adequate and relevant education and training can lead to economic growth because of its impact on labour productivity (See Adamu, 2003: 73).

In consideration of the immense benefits derivable from higher education development, there is need for the country to take very seriously the issue of access to higher education which has the capacity to guarantee individual and national economic wellbeing.

Regional Status of Higher Education and Human Resource Development

In modern emerging economies, the foundation of success in growth and development has been linked to the spread of education in those countries, particularly most of the East Asian countries which are now being perceived as role models of economic development. Education is not only a means to an end, but also an end in itself. It is a means because, by it, the level of productivity is increased. Moreover, most of the abundant resources in the economy (labour) can be mobilized for the purpose of development. Similarly, education is an end because it makes basic contribution to the improvement in the quality of life for the individual and for the society at large (Nayyar, 2008).

Since after the World Conference on Higher Education (WCHE) in 1998, most regions of the world have made efforts at developing their higher education systems to meet the emerging economic challenges in their countries. The core mission of the higher education conference declaration was (to educate, to train, to undertake research and, in particular to contribute to sustainable development and improvement of society as a whole). As a result of this important role, higher education system is not only to be preserved, reinforced and further expanded but also educate highly qualified graduates and responsible citizens throughout life.

Obviously however, countries in the different regions of the world differ significantly in their status. These differences are not only restricted to their geo-political and socio-economic contexts, but also in terms of the size of their population, their status in human development and also in the size of their higher education development (Sanyal and Segrera, 2008). The Human Development Index (HDI) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), measures the average development of a country in three basic aspects of human development. These are: long and healthy life; knowledge; and a decent living standard. Education is perhaps the most important indicator of human development (Mohamedbhai, 2008; Philip, 2003 and Adamu, 2003). However, all indicators show that in all the regions of the world, Sub-Saharan Africa (Nigeria included) is the worst in terms of human and social development. For instance, in 2004, barely two third of the region's children that were eligible to attend primary schools were actually doing so. In the same year, the enrolment rate was 24% at the secondary level and a dismal 5% at tertiary level. At all education levels, the participation rate of females was lower than that of their male counterparts (See Mohammedbhai, 2008).

Countries differ both in size of population and human resource development, for instance, in Sub-Saharan Africa consisting of 45 countries, the population varied from 80 thousand in Seychelles to 129 million in Nigeria (now over 140 million, according to NBS, 2007). In the Arab States, with about 20 countries, the population varies from 716

thousand in Bahrain to 73 million in Egypt. While in Asia and the Pacific, with about 51 countries, it varies with 1,000 population each in Njue and Tokelau to about 1.3 billion in China. In Europe, with 44 countries (including Israel), the population varies from San Marino's 28 thousand to Russia's 144 million population, etc. (See Sanyal and Segre, 2008). Similarly, the HDI also varies from region to region. For instance, the HDI varied from 0.311 in Niger (the lowest in the world) with rank of 177 to 0.842 in Seychelles (rank: 4) in Sub-Saharan Africa; from 0.492 in Yemen (rank: 150) to 0.859 in Bahrain (rank: 39) in Arab States; and from 0.527 in Nepal (rank: 38) to 0.957 in Australia (rank: 3) in Asia and the Pacific: from 0.694 in Moldova (rank: 114) to 0.965 in Norway (rank: 1) in Europe (Sanyal and Segre, 2008). Table 1 shows the average enrolment, Growth Enrolment Ratio (GER) and the Gender Parity Index (GPI) among the different regions of the world in 1999 and 2004 respectively.

Table 1: Regional Average Enrolment, GER and GPI (1994 and 2004)

Regions	1999		2004		1999		1999	
	Total	Female	Total	Female	GER	GPI	GER	GPI
Arab States	5165102	2146236	6519997	3104275	19	21	0.74	0.94
Central and Eastern Europe	12960439	6930388	18517288	10137470	39	54	1.18	1.24
Central Asia	1278741	609876	1883736	956126	19	25	0.91	1.04
East Asia and the Pacific	22809230	9493134	39397161	17882	14	23	0.74	0.88
Latin America and the Caribbean	10662525	5619539	14869644	7973367	21	29	1.12	1.17
North America and Western Europe	28240	1534602	32951513	18387176	61	70	1.23	1.31
South and West Asia	*na	*na	15390226	6019718	*na	10	*na	0.70
Sub-Saharan Africa	2133275	858935	3338	1271189	4	5	0.67	0.62

Source: Sanyal and Sangre, 2008

*na = data not available.

Table 1 shows the global/regional status of higher education development in the world. Almost all available indicators show that Sub-Saharan Africa fares below all other regions of the world in their level of higher education development. For instance, with the exception of Central Asia's total

enrolment, which is a little lower, both indicators of GER and GPI for all regions were quite higher than that of Sub-Saharan Africa. While North America and Western Europe had GER of 61% and 70% in 1999 and 2004 respectively, Sub-Saharan Africa had 4% and 5% GER during the period. Similarly, the GPI (measured by the female GER divided by the male GER) showed that Sub-Saharan Africa had the least among all the regions of the world

Nigeria's Higher Education and HRD Status in Perspective

In Nigeria, the growth and provision of higher education have increased of late. For instance, between the year 2000 and 2005, the number of universities, polytechnics and colleges of education increased from 155 to 187. Similarly, the number of students with access to higher education increased from a total of 611,079 in 2000 to 1,649,865 (Isuku, 2007; National Planning Commission, 2006 and Federal Ministry of Education, 2007). By 2008, the number of approved universities in Nigeria had reached 94 (National Universities Commission, 2008).

However, when compared with most countries, Nigeria's enrolment rate into higher institution falls below expectation. In 1995 the GER for Nigeria was 4.0 while that of Egypt and South Africa were 20.2 and 18.9 respectively. In 2005, the GER into higher education for Nigeria was 10%, Egypt 33% and South Africa 16% (World Bank, 2002 and 2007). In terms of human resource development, Nigeria's position was 137 among the 174 countries ranked in 1996 and 148 in 2000. When the number of countries ranked increased to 177 in 2004, Nigeria's position in human resource development ranking stood at 158. Table 2 shows the status of higher education growth in Nigeria from 2000 to 2005.

Table 2: Higher Education and Enrolment Trends in Nigeria (2000–2005)

Year	No. of HEIs	Total Enrolment
2000	155	711079
2001	156	765736
2002	162	1226883
2003	165	1453783
2004	167	1477834
2005	187	1649862

Source: Compiled from Isuku 2007 and NBS 2007

Note: Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) focus mainly on universities, polytechnics and colleges of education

Between the year 2000 and 2005, the total number of higher education institutions increased steadily from 155 in 2000 to 187 in 2005. This meant an additional number of 32 higher institutions of learning to the nation's stock of higher institutions. Similarly, the total enrolment increased over the period from 711,079 in 2000 to 1,649,862 in 2005 representing an increase of 938,786 enrolments. The percentage of adult literates also increased from 57.22 in 2001 to 63.1 in 2005 (NBS, 2007).

At the university level, enrolment has been unstable over the years. This is in spite of the increasing number of universities in the country. Table 3 shows the trends in university growth and access in Nigeria over the years.

Table 3: University Growth and Access Status in Nigeria (2000 – 2008)

Year	No. of Universities	No. of Applicants	No. Admitted	% Admitted
2000/2001	45	550399	45766	11.0
2001/2002	46	772389	90769	11.8
2002/2003	53	994380	51847	05.2
2003/2004	54	1046950	105157	10.0
2004/2005	56	844965	122492	14.5
2005/2006	75	916371	75884	8.5
2006/2007	76	804444	13626	15.4
2007/2008	95	828036	116817	14.1

Source: Culled from Raji, 2009

Table 3 shows that although there are increases in the number of universities in the country, access has not significantly improved when compared with the number of applicants. During the period under review, the percentage enrolment was highest in 2006/2007 with just 15.4% of the over 800 thousand applicants given access to university education, while only 5% could gain access to university out of about one million applicants in 2002/2003 session. The average growth in access to universities stood at about 11.3% during the eight year period. This implies a shortfall of about 88% on the average.

In terms of the human resources development index for Nigeria, the country's position stood at 137 among the 174 countries ranked in 1996, and 148 in 2000. When the number of countries ranked was raised to 177 in 2004, Nigeria's position deteriorated to 158. Table 4 shows the HDI for Nigeria between 1996 and 2007.

Table 4: Nigeria's ranking in Human Development Index (1996– 2007)

S/N	Year	No. of Countries Surveyed	Position of Nigeria
1	1996	174	137
2	1998	174	151
3	2000	174	148
4	2002	173	148
5	2003	177	158
6	2004	177	159
7	2005	177	158
8	2006	177	158
9	2007	177	158

Source: The Nigerian Accountant, October/December 2008 pages 49- 57

Analysis of Table 4 shows that when measured in percentage score, Nigeria's HDI in 1996 was just 21.3%. In 1998, its position fell to 13.7% among the 174 countries ranked. By the year 2006 and 2007, the HDI for Nigeria dropped to 10.8% and 10% respectively among the 177 countries ranked.

Higher Education and Economic Development

Higher education can contribute to economic growth and development in the following ways:

(1) Increase in Productivity

Higher education exercises a direct influence on national productivity which, to a large extent, determines a country's living standard. They support the knowledge-driven economic growth strategies and poverty reduction by training qualified high level manpower which includes scientist, professionals, technicians and teachers, etc. This stock of human capital has the capacity to increase national productivity through their innovations. According to Hopper, Sami and Bassett (2008), sustainable transformation and growth throughout the economy are not possible without the capacity building contribution of an innovative tertiary education system. This is especially true in low-income countries with weak institutional capacities.

(2) Engine of Economic Development

Higher education stimulates local economies as engine of development. For instance, higher education institutions usually generate economic benefits to its immediate and even relatively distance host communities. This is effective or made possible through local purchases, property investment and expenditures by investors, staff and students, thereby improving social welfare. In fact, a large proportion of the population is engaged in occupation, which is directly dependent on the existence of the educational enterprise (Dusaro and Akinsola, 2007). In Nigeria, educational activities have generated added value to the gross domestic product in addition to the socio-economic benefits associated with it. For instance, the value-added at current price of economic activity of education stood at 13,974.35 million Naira in 2000, while it steadily increased to 22,842.94 and 29,689.87 million Naira in 2004 and 2006 respectively (See NBS, National Accounts of Nigeria, 2007).

(3) Economic Growth

Many researchers conduct detail growth accounting exercise of some countries. It was discovered that apart from the productive output of capital and labour, 'something else' accounted for the increase in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the countries. Many economists have come to conclude that this 'something else' must have been as a result of the improvement in the quality of labour inputs due to improved education and health which is responsible for the increase in the total factor productivity (TFP). Table 5 shows the difference in TFP of some selected countries after capital and labour factors have been accounted for.

Table 5: Share of Capital and Labour to TFP in selected Countries (1960s – 1990s)

Economies	Share of Capital in National Output	GDP Growth	Share Contribution by		
			Capital	Labour	TFP
OECD 1960 - 1990					
France	.42	3.50	58	1	41
Germany	.40	3.20	59	-8	49
Italy	.38	4.10	49	3	48
Japan	.42	6.81	57	14	29
United Kingdom	.39	2.49	52	-4	52
United States	.41	3.10	45	42	13
Hong Kong China	.37	7.30	42	28	30
Singapore	.53	8.50	73	32	-5
Korea, Rep. of	.32	10.32	46	42	12
Taiwan China	0.29	9.10	40	40	20

Source: William Easterly and Ross Levine (2001)

Table 5 shows the contributory impact of capital and labour productivity on economic growth of most developed and emerging economies of the world between the 1960s and 1990s. For instance, the interactive effect of capital and labour productivity resulted in the TFP of 41 in the case of France while her GDP growth was 3.50 during the period. Germany, on the other hand, had its capital and labour productivity to be 49 with GDP growth of 3.20.

The Table also shows that factor accumulation plays crucial role in growth determination except only in Singapore among other East Asian miracle economies. Many economists traced the increase in the TFP to improvement in the quality of labour through education (See Jorgenson, 1995). This underscores the importance of education, particularly higher education, to economic growth and development.

(4) Improvement in Earning Profile

Access to education could lead to increased earning of the recipients of such education. For instance, Edwards (2002) examined the effect of Gender on Social Security Reform in Chile. Using the estimate of contributing behaviour of wage data from both gender elements, the researcher observed that additional years of schooling, especially four years of post secondary schooling, contributed to improvement in earnings, inspite of age and work experience of the employees. This resonate the added volume of education especially at the tertiary level. Table 6 below shows the value of higher education in some developed economies.

Table 6: Value of Higher Education in some Industrial Economies (1970s – 1990s)

Decade	Country	Year	Wage Ratio Higher/Secondary Education	Year	Wage Ratio Higher/Secondary Education
1970s	Canada	1970	1.65	1980	1.40
	Sweden	1968	1.40	1981	1.16
	United Kingdom	1974	1.64	1980	1.53
	United States	1969	1.49	1978	1.35
1980s	Canada	1980	1.29	1989	1.35
	Sweden	1981	1.16	1986	1.19
	United Kingdom	1980	1.33	1989	1.46
	United States	1979	1.47	1987	1.52
1990s	Canada	1992	1.62	1997	1.48
	Sweden	1992	1.60	1998	1.36
	United Kingdom	1992	1.71	1999	1.59
	United States	1992	1.64	1999	1.83

Source: World Bank (2003)

The above Table shows the wage ratio between higher and secondary education. Using the index one (1) as a common denominator, the data shows that when Higher Education (HE) was 1.0, secondary education was 0.65 in the case of Canada during the 1970 decade. During the same decade, the United Kingdom had a wage ratio of 1.0 to 0.64.

In all cases, the gap in wages between those with higher education and the less educated workers as in the above Table, widened significantly during the decades of the 1980s. For instance, the wage ratio for Canada in 1980 was 1.29 while Sweden was 1.16. According to the World Bank (2003), increasing wage disparity became more severe in the service sector where the decline in the variance in schooling was most dramatic. It was found that more educated workers increased their earnings advantage over the less educated ones (World Bank, 2003; Murphy and Welch, 1991; Ryscavage and Henle, 1990).

Summary and Conclusion

The process of Sustainable Development (SD) requires that productive men and women in the society attain the skills needed to handle the complex challenges of change and uncertainty. However, SD does not occur impromptu, rather, it must be engendered by a long term after thorough analysis and goals (See Janson, 2008). This requires that HE must play the role of producing and supplying the graduates with the prerequisite attitude, knowledge and skills that are needed for increased productivity and growth of the economy.

Education is one of the most important indicators of human resource development. A market-oriented education has the ability to reduce inequality and poverty level. Increasing access to all eligible citizens is therefore a *sine qua non* for national development. This is based on the visible role of higher education as an engine of growth and economic freedom.

The relevance of widening access to higher education in the country therefore relates its role in solving development problems. Although, some improvement had taken place in terms of access to higher education in Nigeria, a lot more needs to be done in providing increased access through adequate funding and increase in the number of tertiary institutions to meet the demand of the growing population. This is because the GER into higher institutions in Nigeria are not satisfactory when compared with most other countries around the world. With a population of over 140 million people and an access rate of less than 6% in higher education, there is the need for government to consider the economic benefit of increasing access to higher education in the country through massive investment and intervention in higher educational institutions and by equally expanding the tertiary education system.

The expansion of the tertiary education system in Nigeria is important if the country must witness an increase in the overall literacy level and general economic development. Except this level of education is solid enough to meet the challenges of producing the needed manpower for the economy, the dream of attaining economic freedom may be difficult and elusive.

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