
University Education and Economic Diversification in Nigeria

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Abstract: *This paper focused on University education: Panacea for economic diversification, The Concept of Economic Diversification and Concept of University Education were highlighted and discussed. Quality university education which is a multi-dimensional concept was discussed extensively under the following subheading: adequate curriculum both in content and sequence, adequate teachers both in quality and quantity and adequate environment both in infrastructure and facilities. Strengthening University Education for Diversification of Nigerian Economy is a subheading that x- rayed the relationship between economic diversification and university education. From the above discussions some recommendations were made.*

Key words: *University Education, Economic Diversification, Nigeria.*

INTRODUCTION

Education is the basic catalyst that will bring about development of an individual and the society. Globally, it is accepted that education is a process which facilitates development of human being physically, intellectually, morally, politically, socially and technologically so as to equip him to function in any environment he finds himself (Ikediugwu, 2015). Uwadia, (2010) views education in a broad sense as a process by which an individual acquires the many physical and social capabilities demanded by the society in which he is born into to function. It is to a nation what the mind is to the body. The Federal Government of Nigeria (2007) adopted it as a gateway to the future and the driver of national development. This is why in the National Policy on Education; the Federal Government emphasised that education is an instrument for excellence through which sustainable national development can be achieved (FRN, 2004). Education is also regarded as the singular most important instrument for holistic human development and the empowerment of citizens of any nation. The global perception agrees that for economic and social development to be derived effectively there is a need for advancement in, and application of knowledge (Adebayo, Oyenike and Adesoji, 2007). UNESCO, (2005) Concurred by saying that education for diversifying economy is a dynamic concept that encompasses a new vision of education that seeks to empower people of all ages to assume responsibility for creating and enjoying a sustainable future. Nigeria system of education emphasizes certificate acquisition with little or without emphasis on the psychomotor development of the learners. In Nigeria today every potential graduate has the mind of pursuing a white collar job in the oil sector of the economy since Nigeria's main economy is the oil and gas sector. It is obvious in Nigeria that the larger percent of our graduate are either unemployed or underemployed due to their inability of critical and creative thinking in bringing out something out of nothing. These points to the need to train the citizens of Nigeria in different skills and competencies to empower them to

contribute to the development of the country's economy and this can be achieved via qualitative university education.

Concept of Economic Diversification

Economic diversification is generally taken as the process in which a growing range of economic outputs is produced. It can also be referred to the diversification of markets for exports or the diversification of income sources away from domestic economic activities (i.e. income from overseas investment). Economic diversification in its standard usage, either in terms of the diversity of economic activities or markets, is a significant issue for many developing countries, as their economies are generally characterized by the lack of it. They have traditionally relied heavily on the production of primary commodities that are predominantly vulnerable to climate variability and change. Oteh in Asiodu (nd) stated that diversifying Nigeria's economy away from oil is urgent for two reasons. First, despite Nigeria's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth over the past decade, it lags behind on human development and competitiveness indicators. A broader based, more inclusive economy is needed to effectively transmit as much oil wealth as possible into improving the wellbeing of all Nigerians. Secondly, Nigeria's over dependence on oil revenues for its economic growth and government budget makes it highly susceptible to oil price volatility. Furthermore, the future of oil industry will be shaped by climate change and environmental concerns which require a global transition from fossil fuels to a cleaner, renewable and efficient energy sources. If such moves are made the economy of the nation that is tentatively on recession will crash and this will affect every meaning Nigeria. Diversification of the economy demands improvement in activities that will create jobs and enhance production.

Concept of University Education

The term university education means the totality of general and specialized knowledge and skill that enables university graduate to solve problems that he encounters in industry or to perform scientific research or pedagogical work within the area of that he has acquired (Encyclopaedia,2014). University is the highest level of tertiary educational institutions. It is a corporate body established by an enabling law and charged with the responsibility of providing knowledge and other services to the society and also engines of growth and development. Universities play a vital role in the social, economic, technological and manpower development in the different sectors of the nation. The government of Nigeria in a number of documents had stated that teaching and research in universities play a vital role in national development and this ascertained by Aguolu & Aguolu (2002) Anaebi (2015) that Nigerian universities has roles to play which includes the following

- Conservation of knowledge
- Pursuit, promotion and dissemination of knowledge through teaching
- Advancement of knowledge through research, pure, applied and development oriented
- Provision of intellectual leadership
- Development of human resources for meeting manpower needs
- Promotion of social and economic modernization.

The belief in the efficacy of education as a powerful instrument of development has led many nations including Nigeria into putting much of her wealth to establishment of educational

institutions at various levels. Ajayi and Ekundayo (2007) submitted that funds allocated to university education should not merely be considered as an expense, but a long-term investment which is of benefit to society as a whole. This is true in view of the fact that graduates of universities impact positively on the political, economic, social and technological development of a nation as highlighted by the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2007) the aim and objectives of university education.

- To contribute to national development through high levelled manpower training.
- To develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of the individual and society.
- To acquire both physical and intellectual skills, this will enable individuals to be self reliant and useful members of the society.
- To forge and cement national unity; and to promote national and international understanding and interaction. Reviewing the achievements over the years.

With regard to the contribution of university education, it is obvious without university education; the country cannot meet her various development target especially the MDGs and Vision 2020. Olufemi, (2012) affirms that University education is been relied upon to provide the broad array of quality education and training for the development of the individual for flexibility, adaptability and continuous learning.

Quality University Education

Quality can be taken to mean that the product conforms to standards, specifications or requirements (Babalola, Adedeji & Erwat, 2007). Product in education may be referred to output that is graduates who are awarded certificates having fulfilled all stipulated requirements. Similarly, Longe (1999) asserted that the quality of education includes the learning environment (process) and the student's outcomes. Noting that the graduates should be able to go out to the society and prove their worth by their level of performance in the competitive labour market. The assertion above implies that for a country to say to have qualitative university education, graduates from its universities must be comparable and competitive in terms of knowledge and skills to other international graduates. Asiyai (2013) stated that quality university education is a multi-dimensional concept which should encompasses adequate curriculum both in content and sequence, adequate teachers both in quality and quantity and adequate environment both in infrastructure and facilities.

➤ Curriculum Adequacy:

Guthrie,(2003) in Apagu, Obunadike & Ekpo,(2015) opined that the term curriculum can be broadly defined as a formal academic plan for teaching and learning which includes goals for student learning (skill, knowledge and attitudes), content (the subject matter in which learning experiences are embedded), sequence(the order in which concept are presented). Vincent (2014) emphasized that definition of curriculum and its involvement include adjustments to be made in teachings and learning so as to get the best out of the teachers and the learners, as well as outcome notification by the employers of labour and government. Curriculum at all levels has to be relevance and adequacy in content in order to meet contemporary needs of a knowledge society (Okebukola,2009). Qualitative university education curriculum should be created for the students to gain knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will empower them to live a sustainable life. Onwualu in Lawal (2015) opined that Nigeria does not need change

of university education curriculum which is not different with what are obtainable in foreign countries but the difference is in the implementations. The implementation of the curriculum in developed countries involves more of practical than theory and internship programmes were taken seriously. According to Carpenter and Blance (nd) in Apagu, Obunadike,& Ekpo (2015), internship implies an opportunity offered to an individual who is a potential employee by an employer to work at a firm for a fixed, limited period of time. The potential employee referred to as intern, according to Carpenter and blance, are usually undergraduates or students that are expected to be engaged for period of time that ranges from two weeks to twelve months. Maike, Barts Bas and Karen 2012 in Apagu etl (2015), indicated that internship is an opportunity to interpret work – related experience into graduate education by participating in scheduled and supervised exercise or work. According to them, the experiences depict the real world adequately provided with a normal academic setting. The essence is to address the mismatched between students demands of the labour market and the skills acquired on the other hand. The developed countries curriculum implementation takes the internship programme very seriously. If you are a medical student, the internship program is as serious as passing your exam also the same thing with engineering students; they do internship in industries. But the problem we have in Nigeria is that if you are an engineering student, you will even find it difficult to find where you will do your internship so the practical training is very minimal. And even in the labs, you find that a lab that is supposed to be used by 20 students is being used by 80 or 200 students with the result that you put them in groups so they have six or seven people crowding over one machine. At the end of the day, they just copy results and submit. Some of those studying computer sciences don't have real access to computers so that is where the problem is. The curriculum per say has really no problem, it is the implementation of the curriculum that is the problem because where deficiencies have been found in the curriculum, the National University Commission (NUC) has actually tried to do something and that is why entrepreneurship is now compulsory so we can produce students that are not just looking for white collar jobs. University education system curriculum implementation is more of theory less practical. What does a student studying agronomy doing in the class instead of been in the field doing practical work. University education should be more of practical with less theory and it will help in driving home the course of study. What is happening now is that if you ask somebody to describe an engine, he will write volumes but when you take him to an engine and say ok, what do you think is wrong with this engine? University curriculum should deals with the availability, convenience and ability to be educated (Offorma, 2013).

➤ **Teachers Adequacy:**

In educational sector, teachers are the most important human resource. As the most important human resource in the schools teachers are crucial to raise education standards, Improving the efficiency and equity of schooling depends in large measure on ensuring that teachers are highly skilled, well- resourced and motivated to perform at their best in instructing others based on acquired knowledge. Production of any kind is not done in a vacuum, but a process that involves factors inputs, to produce goods and services. Production of Nigerian teachers is given a prime place in the Nigeria educational planning and system and in consistent with the National Policy on Education (2004) which states that no education can rise above the quality of its teachers. According to Uba –Mbibi (2013) a teacher is an important factor in

development and he exerts tremendous influence in interpreting and implementation school curriculum, which the essence of education. There is a plethora of evidence that teacher's quantity and quality exert noteworthy effects on a host of school variables which includes enrolment, participation and achievement of students (UNESCO, 2007). Teaching should be a highly selective occupation whereby the best quality products of the school system should be trained to be found suitable to engage in the teaching enterprise in our school system but exceptionally different in Nigeria where many in the profession are those that failed to be admitted in the course of their choice. The shortfall in teachers' number translates to high student /teacher ratio and severe stress on teachers on ground. The link between teacher stress and productivity has been established (Okebukola, 1996). The product of such system will turn out to be weak in content knowledge and pedagogic content knowledge. Adedeji et al (2003) submit that poor quality schooling is exhibited in many ways such as an increased rate of absenteeism and ineffective teachers in schools and the quality of graduates to read and write effectively. Consequently, the university lecturers who are involved in the transmission of knowledge to the learners has to be sponsor to undergo an approved professional training; undertake national and international research, seminars, conferences, workshop training and field trip which are supposed to develop their intellectual capacity.

➤ **Environmental Adequacy:**

Environment in this context refers to facilities that are available to facilitate teaching and learning. Zoom (2014) views school environment to include adequate planning of classroom space, administrative spaces and conveniences. Ability to provide the necessary infrastructure and facilities will go a long way in achieving a sustainable diversified economy. Pfeiffer (2013) indicated that adequate school environment motivate, inspired, interests and thus helps to improve education. According to World Bank (1994) the equipment for teaching, research and learning ought to be adequate and in good shape to permit universities the freedom to carry out the basic functions of academics but this is not seen in Nigeria Universities. Virtually all government owned universities in Nigeria have problems with classroom facilities, staff office accommodation, student hostels, library and laboratory facilities etc which negatively affects teaching and learning. Consequently, supporting this point of view, Okwori & Okwori (2007) noted that many universities are without good libraries, what one finds in the libraries are outdated/obsolete books while current journals and researches in relevant disciplines are not available. Laboratories are without chemicals, workshop tools and equipment have broken down and the latest ones are not available. Obasanjo (2012) indicated that at present, our educational environment and the outlook for education in Nigeria are bedevilled with many problems, some of which appear intractable and are like recurring decimals. Udu and Nkwede (2014) has a contrary view base on the outcome of their study which indicated that due to TETFund interventions, government universities has experienced a boost in infrastructural development. Supporting the findings, Ogundu and Nwokoye, (2015) also found out that infrastructural development is either completed or ongoing as part of the contributions of TETFund to the development of Universities in Nigeria. For any university to achieve academic standard tailored towards diversification of economy, the educational environment ought to be well planned and managed (Sky, 2013).

Strengthening University Education for Diversification of Nigerian Economy

The place of University education in diversification of Nigeria economy to non oil sector cannot be over emphasized. University education plays a key role of providing high level human resources for driving the economy and ensuring rapid societal transformation. Nigeria University Education with high value programmes has stimulated economic diversification through a deliberate agenda of production of entrepreneurial graduates who are Skill men and women that can harness, manipulate and transformed economic diversification of the country. All the programmes run in the university should add value in different degrees to diversifying the economy (Okebukola, 2009). Nnamani (2013) opined that the effective utilization of quality human resources is the crucial factor in determining the diversification growth and posterity of the nation's economy. This ensures self reliance, self employment, increased productivity and reduction of the nations dependent on oil sector for revenue generation which are the indices of sustainable and stable economic diversification. The greater the opportunity given to the citizenry for quality university education the more expensive the horizon for rapid social and economic development becomes. Ugbogbo, Akwemoh & Omoregie, Oghuvbu (2007) opined that development may be difficult in poor countries without qualitative and quantitative education. Commenting on the educational situation in Nigeria, Amzat (2009) argued that “the problem of university education in Nigeria could be traced to lack of proper public investment in education, poor leadership both at the government and institutional level and poor policy implementation. He propagated that private partnership in funding education should be utilized in funding universities. Udu and Nkwede, (2015) stressed that in realisation of quality transformation of university education to met the requirements of diversification of Nigerian economy, the role of Tertiary Education trust Fund (TETFund) is crucial. TETFund was established as an intervention agency under the education Tax Acts no.7 of 1993 to take charge of tax fund in providing essential services to tertiary institutions. The agency is mandated specifically for the provision and maintenance of the following.

1. Instructional material and equipment;
2. Academic training and development;
3. Research and publication;
4. Essential physical infrastructure for teaching and learning
5. Any other need which is subject to Board of Trustees approval Amaechi, (2016).

Based on the interventions of TETFund, many lecturers have undergone training both local and international; which has enhanced their level of productivity and performance for quality and academic excellence in school. Finally, Universities should work closely together with willing employers to design curriculum and programmes that are relevant to the skill needed in their areas. Onyeachu (2008) stated that appropriate required skills ensure that graduates are job providers and not job-seekers. This is in line with Nnamani (2013) who states that full employment is attainable if the tertiary institutions are viable and functional.

CONCLUSION

Universities all over the world were established to produce high level man power for job creation and national transformation. In Nigeria through her Ministry of Education and National University Commission (NUC) has put up quality assurance mechanisms in place to checkmate

the programmes and activities of the universities. The commission carries out courses accreditation from time to time in order to ensure realistic and functional university education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For strengthening Nigeria university education for full diversification of the economy the under listed recommendations were made:-

1. University education should focus on academic staff training and development so as to produce man power required for the diversification of the economy.
2. Internship programme should be strengthened by government creating enabling environment that will be conducive for industrialization.
3. Curriculum implementation at the university level should be more practical, less theory so as to impact positively on the students.
4. TETFund intervention fund should be utilized by the universities in order to sponsor more infrastructural projects in higher institutions so as to provide the required infrastructure to accommodate more students.
5. Admission of students into universities should be strictly on qualification. This will help in production of high level of manpower who can manage the diversified sector of the without prejudice.
6. Leadership both at the government and institution levels should be proactive in following the global trends of events.

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