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The Role of University Education in Sustainable Development in Nigeria: A Study of Federal University Lafia, Nasarawa, State

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Abstract:

This research study examines the role of university education in sustainable development. Particularly, it focuses on the connections and contributions of university education to the economic, social and political growth of the nation, and the challenges that universities face in achieving their functions. The research is a study of Federal University, Lafia, Nasarawa State, Nigeria, carried out through a survey research design by employing both quantitative and qualitative methods to generate data. Questionnaires were administered to the Staff of the university and data gathered were analyzed using inferential statistics with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and the Chi-Square method. The research findings indicate that government policies on education over the past thirty years have been tremendous but inconsistent, realistic but lack proper implementation plan. Additionally, university education is a tool for poverty alleviation, job creation and employment, improving the living standards of the people and the promotion of entrepreneurship. However, while university education impacts positively on sustainable development, there is need for improvement in the areas of infrastructure development, funding and management of universities by the government.

Keywords: *University, education, sustainable development*

1. Introduction

Western education is about one hundred and fifty-six years old in Nigeria. Despite this, some socio-cultural factors still hinder our economic development, causing poverty. From 1983 to 2002, education in Nigeria has been too successful in doing what society has expected it to do. Fifty years of independence society tend to keep pressure on the schools to do more and better from year to year without corresponding increase in financial and managerial investment in education. Unfortunately, the concept of what education is or what the school should do according to the Nigerian society is the same for the most successful. (Venn, 1970).

Over the years, the Nigerian government has invested more in other sectors of the economy compared to education. Example of these sectors are Agriculture, communication, power, the oil and gas sector to mention but a few giving little attention to education. This has been the reason why most of Nigeria's tertiary institutions are struggling with dilapidated infrastructures, bad and poor learning condition, inadequate and qualified tutors, inadequate libraries, and where they exist, no adequate textbooks and other research materials etc. to help improve the performance of students. This is the reason why private universities have become preferable for those who can afford them, hence increase in the establishment of private institutions and their dominance in the education sector.

However, the contributions of tertiary institutions to sustainability in Nigeria cannot be overemphasized; therefore, this research study tries to identify the connections between tertiary education and sustainable development, its contributions to economic, social and political growth and nation building, the role it played and still playing in sustaining development in the country, its challenges, and government policies on tertiary education. The study will also build on the discovery of previous research by other international organizations like the UNESCO.

1.1. Statement of Problem

Over the years, different scholars have written on the contribution of education to sustainable development, arguing that education is a tool for sustainable development in any society. For instance, Maclean (2008) states that, "although there are many keys to development, such as improved infrastructure such as dams, roads, telecommunication facilities, ports and the likes, education is regarded as being the master key to economic and social development. High quality and relevant education have been shown to open the doors to poverty alleviation, sustainable development, equity, justice and mainstreaming of the marginalized and vulnerable groups in the society". In fact, Maclean, (2008) concludes that, "effective education can help ensure a safer, healthier, more prosperous, and environmentally sound world, while simultaneously

contributing to social, economic, and cultural progress, tolerance and international co-operation. Education also raises income levels and improves standards of living”.

However, despite these positive claims about the contributions of education to sustainable development, in many third world countries, especially Nigeria, high unemployment level, poor infrastructures, high level of corruption, poverty characterized by low per capita income, low life living standards, bad and slow economy growth and development, political and religious instability persist.

1.2. Objectives of the Study

This research study seeks to examine the role of university education in sustainable development in Nigeria. These objectives are summarized as follows:

- To examine the role of university education in sustainable development.
- To analyse government's policies on university education in Nigeria and
- To examine the challenges faced by universities as it affects development and its sustainability.

1.3. Research Questions

- What is the role of university education in achieving sustainable development in Nigeria?
- What are government policies on university education in Nigeria for effective sustainable development?
- What are the challenges faced by universities and other higher institutions of learning that hinders development and sustainability in Nigeria?

1.4. Significance of the Study

The relevance of this study to the development of the Nigerian society is indeed enormous as it is in its self a roadmap that will help to further discovery on the vital role education plays in nation building and sustaining development and growth. To the government, it will help her in making policies that will help not only in the funding but also proper management of tertiary institutions so as to provide an enabling environment for studies where there is availability of all the necessary infrastructures for research and learning that will produce skilled and qualified manpower who will engineer rapid economic, social, and political growth and stability in Nigeria. The study will also be an eye opener to all the stakeholders and policy makers in both private and public organizations in the education sector to make more effort to improving the standard of institutions of learning especially, tertiary institutions as they do on other sectors of the economy. Finally, it is hope that this study will not only contribute to knowledge but also serve as a useful document of reference for scholars and researchers in the academia.

1.5. Methodology

The method employed in carrying out this study is a survey research design using both quantitative and qualitative methods to generate data. The survey was carried out using questionnaire as the instrument for gathering data and information from one hundred and thirty-five (135) respondents with a sample size of one hundred (100) drawn from both academic and non-academic staff of the Federal university Lafia, Nasarawa State. Consequently, the simple random sampling was used and the sample size was calculated using 95% confidence interval. The data collected was statistically analysed using the Chi-Square method with Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

Furthermore, after the final draft of the questionnaire, its reliability was tested using the trial test and the reliability of the coefficient of the test was determined using the super-man rank order correlation statistics.

1.6. Conceptual Clarifications

1.6.1. University

University is any higher institution of learning where students are thought and trained through acquisition of knowledge and skills to facilitate economic, social and political upward mobility. It is also an agent of cultural change that provides the people with social and civil competences to make them useful members of the society.

1.6.2. Education

The term education has been defined and conceptualised in a number of ways; Okoh in Okorosanya Orobite, (2005:19) sees education as a process, a product, and a discipline. As a process, it is the activity of preserving, developing and transmitting the culture of a people from one generation to another. As a product, it refers to change, whether over or covert, implicit or explicit, which education is expected to bring about.

Ukeje, (1986:8) summed it up when he opined that education is power; it is a process of acquiring knowledge and ideas that shape and condition man's attitude, actions and achievements. It is the process of developing a child's moral, physical, emotional and intellectual power for his contribution in social reform; it is the process of mastering the laws of nature and utilizing them effectively for the welfare of the individual and for social reconstruction; it is the art of utilization of knowledge for complete living. (Ukeje, 1986:8, cited in Nnabuo, Peter O. M.; Asodike, & Juliana, D., 2012).

1.6.3. Sustainability

Sustainability can be said to mean "the good life" as a combination of (a) a high level of human wellbeing and (b) the high level of ecosystem that supports it (Allen Prescott). Sustainability is the action-oriented variant of Sustainable Development.

1.6.4. Sustainable Development (SD)

This implies economic growth together with the protection of environmental quality, each reinforcing the other. Sustainable Development, thus, is maintaining a balance between the human need to improve lifestyles and feeling of wellbeing on one hand, and preserving natural resources and ecosystems, on which we, and future generations depend.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Economic Sustainability

2.1.1. Economic Sustainability in Development Theory

'Economic sustainability' implies a system of production that satisfies present consumption levels without compromising future needs. The 'sustainability' that 'economic sustainability' seeks is the 'sustainability' of the economic system itself. The notion of 'economic sustainability' originated by Hicks' classic work "Value and Capital" (1939; 2nd edition, 1946). Hicks defined 'income' as 'the amount one can consume during a period and still be as well off at the end of the period'. Traditionally, economists, assuming that the supply of natural resources was unlimited, placed undue emphasis on the capacity of the market to allocate resources efficiently. They also believed that economic growth would bring the technological capacity to replenish natural resources destroyed in the production process. Today, however, a realization has emerged that natural resources are not infinite. The growing scale of the economic system has strained the natural resource base. This has caused many commentators, such as Goodland, to question the feasibility of uncontrolled growth and exponential consumption. Goodland, (1995) writes that to speak accurately in terms of 'economic sustainability', it is necessary to 'extrapolate the definition of Hicksian income from its sole focus on human-made capital and its surrogate (money) to embrace the other three forms of capital (natural, social and human)'. (Hicks, 1939; 1946).

An economic system designed in light of the theory of 'economic sustainability' is one constrained by the requirements of 'environmental sustainability'. It restrains resource use to ensure the 'sustainability' of natural capital. It does not seek to achieve 'economic sustainability' at the cost of 'environmental sustainability'. In the literature of sustainable development, it has become commonplace to call for supplanting the prevailing doctrine of economic growth with a new doctrine of economic development - for pursuing a form of qualitative growth rather than quantitative growth. (Hicks, 1939; 1946).

2.1.2. Social Sustainability

2.1.2.1. Social Sustainability in Development Theory

In the most basic sense, 'social sustainability' implies a system of social organization that alleviates poverty. In a more fundamental sense, however, 'social sustainability' establishes the nexus between social conditions such as poverty and environmental decay. (Ruttan, 1991).

This theory of social organization identifies a negative linkage between sustained colonization, sustained poverty levels, and sustained natural resource exploitation. There is a divergence of opinion in development theory whether 'environmental sustainability' is a prerequisite of economic growth and poverty alleviation, or economic growth and poverty alleviation are needed before 'environmental sustainability' can even be addressed.

There is some evidence that 'environmental sustainability' may be a necessary pre-condition of sustained economic growth. For example, the United States has been expanding the amount of its land area covered by trees since the 1920s and actively managing its soils since the 1930s. These measures have greatly improved America's productivity in paper products and foodstuffs since the Great Depression. On the other hand, some developing countries, for example, Costa Rica, are jeopardizing their long-term socio-economic prospects by engaging in rapacious resource depletion. Net losses of natural capital in these nations imperil social gains from improvements in financial, technical and human capital. (Repetto, 1992).

The latter position was defended by the late Indian Prime Minister Gandhi, on the grounds that very poor countries must accept temporary environmental degradation in order to meet immediate needs of food and shelter before they can pursue permanent economic and environmental improvements. Her view was that developing countries simply cannot afford to put environmental protection before economic development. In contrast to this view, the theory of 'social sustainability' posits that the alleviation of poverty need not entail environmental decline. It aims to alleviate poverty within the existing resource base of a society.

3. Empirical Review

Evidence from OECD countries Mankiw, Romer & Weil, (1992) suggests that those that expanded their higher education more rapidly during the 1960s experienced faster growth. It appears that, while primary and secondary education skills are related to growth in developing countries, tertiary education skills are most important for growth in OECD countries. UK Panel for education for Sustainable Development, (1998) states that education for sustainable development enables people to develop the knowledge, values, and skills to participate in decisions about the ways we do things, individually and collectively, locally and globally, that will improve the quality of life now without damaging the planet of the future. Education and sustainable national development are interwoven, intertwined, and interconnected. While on the one hand, development is geared towards producing or creating something new or more advanced for the society and its members. On the other hand, education is a tool which can enhance the desired sustainable development. Umoh, (2005) therefore, refers to education and sustainable development as two sides of the same coin.

In a study of six developed countries, De Meulemeester & Rochat, (1995) showed that higher education had a strong causal impact on economic growth in France, Japan, Sweden, and the United Kingdom, but no impact in Australia and Italy. The authors conclude that higher education is necessary for growth but not sufficient. They argue that it is important that the socioeconomic structure and technological level complement the educational system such that graduates are able to harness their accumulated knowledge. (De Meulemeester & Rochat, 1995 cited in Tichaona Zivengwa, 2012).

In another study carried out by Schultz, (2004) on the impact of education on wages, the highest rates of return were in secondary and tertiary education. For example, in Burkina Faso, the rates of return for tertiary education were 18% for men 26% for women in 1998, on par with secondary education, but significantly higher than the rates of return for primary education.

Olubadewo, (2006:9) opined that it is only educated population that can command skills necessary for sustainable economic growth and a better quality of life. Given these facts above, education is undoubtedly a major factor for determining whether sustainable national development is achievable or not hence, the need for a well-structured educational system that will enhance the achievement of the aforementioned development.

Kundan argues that continued sustainable development is only possible or assured when it is agreed and indeed concrete steps are taken to raise the level of literacy and numeracy in any society. Educational institutions and their programmes are therefore, the tools with which to achieve development and its sustainability. (Kundan, in Ugoh, 2008, cited in Nnabuo, Peter, O. M; Asodike, & Juliana, D. 2012).

The World Bank, (2008) also emphasised the role of tertiary education in Accelerating Catch Up: Tertiary Education for Growth in Sub-Saharan Africa. The report argues that human capital gains from tertiary education can increase allocative and technical efficiency, spur innovation, and improve export competitiveness. Countries can also use information and communication technology to promote higher-skilled jobs and add value to exports. The report argues that it is insufficient merely to increase the number of graduates; a corresponding improvement in quality is required as well.

Education at all levels and in all its forms constitutes a vital tool for addressing virtually all global problems. Education is not only an end in itself. It is a key instrument for bringing about changes in knowledge, values and behaviours and life styles required to achieve sustainability and stability within and among countries. (Bajaj & Chiv, 2009:9 cited in Boyi, A. A. 2013).

3.1. Education Policy in Nigeria

Policies on education in Nigeria can be traced back to the colonial era precisely during the phase of worldwide depression, which began during the Second World War and which from a political perspective ignited the clamour by Nigerian nationalists' movement for self-government and educational relevance, which gained momentum in 1944. Thus from 1944 to independence in 1960 was a period of self-determination and educational expansion in Nigeria. This development formed the basis for the promulgation of the 1948 Education Ordinance, which decentralized educational administration in the country.

Furthermore, the 1977 national policy on education was revised in 1998 and 2004 to make it relevant to the development needs of the country. Woolman, (2001) opined that there is observable relationship between education and national development in Africa, as education continues to be a question of critical concern in many of the countries just like it is in Nigeria. Since education is an agent of cultural transmission as well as change, the constant revision of the National Policy on Education in Nigeria readily finds support in Woolman's prescription that education should also reflect the dynamic process of nation building that is continually being modified by new conditions. (Woolman, 2001, cited in Hauwa, I., 2012).

The National Policy on Education has been revised to accommodate changes in the direction of education brought about by technological development. (Nwagwu, 2007). To this end, the policy proposed that admissions into universities be based on 60 per cent science based programmes and 40 per cent humanities. Nwagwu, further stressed that 'is emphatic that it was in the bid to launch Nigeria into a technological and industrialized nation that universities and institutes of technology were established by the government'. He supported his argument with the expressed belief in the National policy on education (2004: 8) that 'education shall continue to be highly rated in the national development plans because education is the most important instrument of change; any fundamental change in the intellectual and social outlook of any society has to be preceded by educational revolution'. (Nwagwu, 2007, cited in Hauwa, I.2012).

3.2. University Education and Economic Growth

In a time-series analysis of the United Kingdom, Jenkins looked at an index of total factor productivity and its relationship to different levels of educational attainment. When higher education qualifications (including undergraduate, postgraduate, and other tertiary graduate stock) increased by 1 percent, annual output grew between 0.42 and 0.63 per cent. (Jenkins, 1995).

A study in Taiwan showed that higher education is positively correlated with the country's economic growth. (Lin, 2004). It found that a 1% rise in higher education stock (as defined by those who had completed higher education, including junior college, college, university, or graduate school) led to a 0.35% rise in industrial output, and that a 1% increase in the number of graduates from engineering or natural sciences led to a 0.15% increase in agricultural output. This work examined the effects of concentration in different disciplines and concluded that study of the natural sciences and engineering had the strongest positive association with output. (Lin, 2004).

Bloom, Hartley, & Rosovsky, showed that workers in US states where the proportion of college graduates is high earn significantly more than those in states with few graduates, whether or not they have received a tertiary education themselves. The same study showed a positive correlation between higher education and entrepreneurship. The authors used Babson College's Global Entrepreneurship Monitor's Total Entrepreneurship Activity (TEA) Index, which uses information from 17 countries to measure the share of adults involved in new firms or start-up activities. Individuals with higher education levels were more likely to engage in entrepreneurial activity, and more educated entrepreneurs created larger numbers of jobs than less-educated entrepreneurs. (Bloom, Canning; Chan, & Luca 2013).

3.3. Impact of Education on Poverty Reduction

A survey study in five local government areas of Lagos State in South Western Nigeria investigated the intensity of entrepreneurship training and education as strategic tools for poverty alleviation in Nigeria. The study confirmed that entrepreneurship training and education are significantly related to the youth empowerment and social welfare services. The findings of the survey revealed that youth empowerment are influenced by their acquired technical skill. The study recommends effective technical education, youth empowerment, and social welfare service as a catalyst for poverty alleviation. (Ogundele, 2012).

The important factor to note concerning education's significant role in poverty reduction is the direct linear relationship between education and earnings. In Pakistan, it has been found that monthly earnings of an individual worker increased by 7.3 percent with an additional year of schooling. Earnings will be increased by 37 percent with the attainment of ten years of schooling against no education. In addition, each additional year of schooling level increased earnings by 3 percent at primary level, by 5 percent at secondary level, and by 7.1 to 8.2 percent at higher/tertiary level. Each additional year of technical training increased earnings by 2.5 percent. Therefore, it is clearly pertinent that education can increase the earning potential of the poor and make them productive. (Awan, et al, 2011).

According to the study, the attainment of education of household head appears to be the critical determinant of household poverty in Pakistan. An increase in the educational level of the head of the household significantly reduces the chances of the household being poor. This is because, an increase in the schooling of household heads not only has a positive impact on their productivity and earnings but also enhance the productivity of other members of the household perhaps by encouraging them to be educated and/or skill-oriented.

The results have shown that education attainment has a negative impact upon poverty. The other notable thing is the consistent increase in the chances of escaping poverty of a person. Which implies that; as educational level increases, educational achievement will increase hence, the likelihood of a person being poor declines. Therefore, education is the most important factor regarding poverty reduction. The attainment of education enhances the earning potential of individuals and consequently, the increased earnings will definitely help them to be out of poverty. Education is negatively linked with the poverty status and higher levels of education will be more and more effective in poverty reduction. (Awan, et al, 2011).

3.4. Education in Nigeria: Problems and Challenges

The first amongst many setbacks faced by tertiary institutions in Nigeria is poor infrastructure. This entails the teaching/learning facilities, structures and equipment such as lecture rooms, libraries, laboratories, workshops, hostels, school farms, electricity/water supply and sanitation. All the aforementioned are either unavailable, dilapidated or inadequate in most Nigerian universities. Therefore, there is an urgent need for government to provide these facilities in their appropriate quantity, size and quality to meet the minimum standards for promoting any meaningful teaching and learning condition. Second is inadequate workforce which according to a data revealed by the Federal Ministry of Education, there is acute teacher shortage at the tertiary level of education. For instance, there are 37,504 teachers in the nation's public universities with a student enrolment of 1,252,913, representing a student: teacher ratio of 1:33. Statistics on teacher shortage obtained from other secondary sources such as the reports of the Needs Assessment of Nigerian Public Universities presented by the Federal Ministry of Education to the Federal Executive Council in 2012. According to the reports, the teaching staff-student ratio is very high in many Nigerian universities. For illustration, the National Open University of Nigeria was reported to have a student-staff ratio of 1:363, University of Abuja 1:122 and Lagos State University 1:114. When compared with the student-

staff ratio of some highly-rated universities such as Harvard (1:4); MIT (1:9); Yale (1:4); and Cambridge (1:3), the reports concluded that the majority of universities in Nigeria were grossly under-staffed. (NEEDS, 2014).

Furthermore, lack of adequate funding of tertiary institution in Nigeria is a major problem. The trends in the funding of University education in Nigeria revealed that there is no progressive increase in the funding injected to the universities with the growing cost of maintenance, increased students' intake, inflation trends and overhead cost. Oguntoye, (2000) noted that the phenomenal expansion in the number of students enrolled in Higher Education Institutions has not been matched by expansions in government funding that has affected the quality of higher education in Nigeria. (Oguntoye, 2000, cited in Tunde, O. K. & Issa, A., 2013).

In the year 2000, N28,206,218,865.91 was received as recurrent grants and N1,936,785,632.00 received as capital grants for the entirely 27 federally controlled Universities. As of 2009, N98,028,449,198.00 was received for recurrent grants and 10,571,861,732.00 for capital grants for the same 27 universities. Percentage increment in recurrent grants between the years 2000 and 2009 was 89.17% and for capital grants was 197.11% (Shina, 2012).

The recent crisis in Ladoke Akintola University of Technology (LAUTECH) is another evidence of the problem of funding of tertiary institutions in the country. The university has been closed down for over nine months now due to the inability of both the Oyo and Osun State government who are joint owners of the institution to pay the salary of academic and non-academic staff of the university.

The Educational Trust Fund (ETF) later Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TET Fund) was established in 1993 and 2011 respectively by the Federal government as intervention to fund Nigerian higher education. The introduction of Educational Trust Fund (ETF) according to Agunbiade, (2006) under the Education Tax Act No. 7 of 1993 and as amended by Act No. 40 of 1998 is mandated with the responsibility of funding educational project and management to improve the quality of education in Nigeria through a 2% education tax imposed on the profits of all registered companies and banks in Nigeria. There were great expectations with the ETF interventions but the misplacement of priority has wrapped its application to most institutions and has not achieved its aims. (Agunbiade, 2006 cited in Ogunbenle, et al 2016).

4. Conclusion

The focus of this study has been to discover the role higher (university) education plays on sustainable development. The education sector is one of the largest sector of the economy of any nation and constitute the highest number of human (intellectual) resources of any country. Therefore, it requires keen attention, adequate funding, qualified and competent number of workers, and viable as well as dynamic policies on education that are capable of cushioning sustainable development in the country. Furthermore, this research project has been able to identify key issues of sustainable development, relating to university education and they include; income level, poverty, employment, Gross Domestic product (GDP), entrepreneurship, governance, national integration, economy growth and development, ecosystem amongst many others.

The study examined "the role of university education on sustainable development in Nigeria a study of Federal University Lafia Nasarawa State" and based on the results gathered from the analysis, the outcome is not surprising as it reveals that university education has indeed played and will continue to play an important role in sustainable development in the country thus reducing the poverty level of the people, creating jobs and employment, raising the living standard of the people, assist in entrepreneurship growth and also foster unity and integration among the people.

Furthermore, university education has significantly contributed to sustainable development in Nigeria through research and investigations for the formulation of better government policies, new discoveries in technological advancement and innovation in the science and technology sector, creation of a more professional bureaucracy, promoting political as well as social stability and the protection and maintenance of the ecosystem.

Finally, all the stakeholders and policy makers in both private and public organizations in the education sector should put in more effort and focus on improving the standard of higher educational/research institutions of learning as they do on other sectors of the economy because education has proven to be the most important contributor to national development and economy growth.

5. Recommendations

In view of the findings above, the researcher wishes to recommend the followings: -

- The shortage of work force needed and expertise in educational institutions across the country has been one of the major setbacks in the educational sector and therefore calls for serious scrutiny as a matter of urgency if the desired sustainable development is to be achieved.
- Government should ensure that all tertiary institutions in the country have the appropriate quantity, size and qualitative infrastructure to meet the minimum standards for promoting a meaningful teaching and learning conditions; these include classrooms, libraries, laboratories, workshops, as well as provision of water and sanitation facilities.
- Government should ensure that funds appropriated are released on time, ensure they are properly spent and strengthened the monitory and supervisory agencies in-charge of tertiary institutions for accountability, transparency, efficiency and competence.

- The yearly allocation of funds in the education sector by the government should be significantly increased and if possible, be given the highest priority so that the sector may improve its infrastructures and facilities in order to deliver quality education as well as ease research and investigation in higher institutions of learning in the country.
- Nigerian government should continue to seek more monetary assistance from international organizations such as UNESCO, World Bank etc. in order to meet up with the international educational standards.

It is hoped that the findings and discoveries of this research work will provide insight for government and the general public especially policy makers and stakeholders in the education sector to create or make more dynamic policies as well as develop programs that will bring about paradigm shift in the education sector for sustainable development in Nigeria. Finally, it is expected that this research work will serve as a foundation and or roadmap for further investigations by other researchers and students who may pick interest in the topic in the future.

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