SYSTEM PERFORMANCE AND SUSTAINABILITY OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN NIGERIA.

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Abstract

Higher educational institutions in Nigeria from their modest beginning are expected to offer services that significantly contribute within the context of a sound macro-economic and political environment to the growth of the society. Today, in the process of performing their legal duties, these institutions are confronted with several challenges. The challenges facing Nigerian higher institutions are complex. It is a combination of inadequate performance, limited access, increasing cost, declining quality, rigidity in course selection, and sustainability of the tempo of community service. A good performance of higher education system though is a necessary condition for sustainability of the nation's development, it will however be inefficient and ineffective if reasonable attention is not given to the ability to build capacity, sustain the process and ensure effective utilization of what has been built for the survival of the system. Amongst this backdrop, this study seeks to investigate

issues that affect the performance of higher educational institutions and proffer solutions towards sustenance of the system.

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Introduction

System performance in this paper will be referred to as the structured programme of activities carried out in the University System in form of teaching, research, community services and other managerial activities within the university context. However, the sustainability of Higher education may be said to be dependent on how the system performs in terms of leadership in the implementation of Higher Education policy, through proper control, organization, budgeting and upholding the basic social beliefs, values of the system to achieve its set down goals and objectives for a sustainable development.

Agwaranze (1987) maintains that, Universities have the basic responsibility to provide good educational opportunities through a well developed curriculum that aids students to obtain academic and professional competences in selected fields, fulfill appropriate standards of academic conduct, explore cultural interest and the enhancement of cultural skills. The University system is faced with lot of draw back and these problems that affect system performance include inadequate funding, inadequate coordination of curriculum, leadership problems, lack of infrastructural facilities, to mention but a few. The ability of the University Administrator and Management to over these problems calls for the research on the paper: System Performance and Sustainability of Higher Education in Nigeria.

The Goals of Higher Education in Nigeria

According to Adeyemi (2001:5), Higher Education refers to a system which embraces much of the country's research capacity and reproduces majority of the skilled professionals that are required in the labour market.

Obanya (1999:6) views higher education thus

" ….. Higher Education is taken to embody all organized learning and training activities at the tertiary level. This includes conventional universities, those with the conventional arts, humanities and science faculties as well as specialized universities like institutions specializing in agriculture, engineering, science, and technology. It also includes post-secondary institutions such as the polytechnics and colleges of education. "Higher Education" includes all forms of professional institutions drawing from the available pool of persons who have completed a various forms of secondary school education: Institution of

the military, the police, nurses, agriculture, forestry, veterinary workers, catering services, tourism, secretarial services and other possible combinations of programmes. Even this wide spectrum does not exhaust the possibilities of forms of Higher Education…… such as non formal higher education. Indeed, any situations in which mature persons are organized for building up their knowledge and skills, to apply knowledge to the analysis and search for solutions to life problems."

According to the National Policy on Education (NPE) (2004:36) the goals of tertiary education that is necessary for system performance include to

(a)   Contribute to national development through high level relevant 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 the local and external environment

(d)   Acquire both physical and intellectual skills for self relies

(e)   Promote and encourage scholarship and community service

(f)   Forge and cement national unity

(g)   Promote national and international understanding and interaction. The above goals as enunciated by the NPE are laudable enough for consideration and utilization by educational managers for the purpose of improving and sustaining Nigerian educational system. It is a statement of fact that the sustainability of institutions, organizations or any society depends largely on the creative capacity of the institution to be capable of effectively performing its functions by offering the required services for the sustenance of the system. Services performed are those that can significantly contribute within the context of a sound macro-economic and political environment to the growth of Nigerian educational institutions and the society.

Literature Review

Contemporary critics like Deniyi and Adesola (1998) noted that, the disastrous decline of Nigerian education system include those who cite "the good old days" when/they acquire higher education. The remembrance of what those days were like in our educational systems adds up to the following scenario: the curriculum stock to

the basics, lecturers were offered the best environment and salary for better performance of their jobs, they were dedicated, and conscientious, maintained strict discipline and insisted on high standard for sustainability of the Nigerian educational system. Students took their studies more serious, worked harder and learned more than they do today. Students knew nothing like cheating in examination and never engaged in cultist activities. Education generally was well funded and hence the quality and standard were very high. The focus of this paper is not to get back to the modest beginning of our education system, rather it is to formulate a framework and strategies that will lead to effective performance and sustainability of our higher education in the 21st century.

Institutional management and performance

It seems that many higher education administrators do not consider values, cultures, system motivation, cost and quality that affect effective management and performance of higher education. In assessing and explaining the effective management and performance of education institutions, most people and even professional educators tend to focus on the internal university environment variables. For example institutional administrators still see themselves as staying in the Ivory tower and do not have any commitment outside the system. Others pointed out that manager of higher education are dictatorial, corrupt and not flexible in school governance. These problems often lead to indifference, incompetence, infighting, poor interpersonal relationship to sustain the system. (Ekaette, 2001:58-59) From this discussion, we have observed that for a long time now, the basic social belief, values, systems and code of behaviour that hold higher education managers and system, and give them their special identity by sustaining them has been broken and destroyed/or eroded. From our observation, no analyses of higher education in Nigeria could be undertaken without placing in perspective its historical development. Its performance cannot be separated from the vision and mission of the system.

To show the high value the Federal Government of Nigeria places on education and particularly higher education, budgetary allocations has been committed funds to the education sector. However, the model of development chosen was very wasteful and contributed partly to the decline recently undergone by higher education. A large proportion of the funds were spent on developing new

campuses. Apart from the cost of opening up these isolated locations and the costs of construction, large sums of money were spent on providing municipal facilities and services. This strategy of development involved building new towns with a larger proportion of funds committed to their physical development and a relatively smaller proportion devoted to academic infrastructure. The upkeep of municipal plants is expensive and is often undertaken by depriving academic programmes of much needed funds. The gradual decline of academic work and especially the quality of higher education has followed in the wake of the neglect of libraries, laboratories, teaching equipment and other resources which at the outset allowed universities to uphold high academic standards. The pertinent point here is therefore that most of our higher education have lost their past glory and there is a great need to revamp the image and achieve an objective of sustainability of the system.

Current Trends In The Assessment Of System Performance And Sustainability Of Higher Education In Nigeria.

(a) Leadership/ Administration of Higher Education:
Some individuals appointed as vice chancellors of some university are weak, not competent and lack administrative potentials; such appointees must possess administrative qualities and must lead by example. The leader must have integrity, must be knowledgeable, and practice modern types of management leadership styles. He or she must be visionary and ready to adjust to situations in the system. The performance of the administrator should be sustained through the proper utilization of material and human resources in the achievement of the institutional goals and objectives.

(b) Internal Quality Assurance:
The common wealth of learning (1999) defines quality assurance as an approach to organizing work that sets in place system to check that the programmed activities are carried out according to its plan.
To ensure internal control and quality assurance (A) Student Intake/ Quality of University product must be controlled right from the admission stage brought scorning test before admission. The joint Admission and Matriculation Board in Nigeria has demonstrated integrity in conducting her examination, white the various Universities have come up with the Post- JAMB Screening. According to A neither

(2004) he maintains that,"the POST – JAME Policy will prevent morally bankrupt student's form gaining admissions.

Aside from

(c) Teaching / Learning

The National Commission for colleges of education (2002) stated that, the teacher is the King-pin of quality in education. There are situations where students with bright academic performance fail to actualize their life ambitions because of the incompetent and ineffective teachers within the system. It is expected that academic staff perform their role through proper teaching, guidance and counseling of students to gainfully learn from them and their personal positive examples in the areas of character and learning.

(d) Supervision/ Evaluation

Ojugwu(2001) maintains that supervision creates the awareness of sound education philosophies in teachers and makes them to be aware of educational policies and reforms. Thus supervisors are to play leadership roles that would stimulate and encourage both staff and students in the system to perform their duties as to achieve the institutional task or objectives.

Also the effective supervision of instruction will help administrators to identify the quality of lecturers in the institution. It will also check and balance academic staff, non-academic staff and students.

Through constant monitoring and evaluation of the system activities in terms of effective control by the different heads of units or departments and constant feedback to management and good utilization of reports the standard in the system would be raised high and sustained.

The Role of National University Commission (NUC) in system performance cannot be overlooked. As an external quality assurance agency of the Nigerian University System, it has the following role;

- Advising the federal Government on the establishment and location of universities, creating new facilities and post graduate units in the universities.
- Advising Government on the fundamental needs of the universities.

- ◆ Carrying out periodic plans on the general programme to be pursued by universities staff.
- ◆ Preparing periodic plans on the general programme to be pursued by the universities
- ◆ Receiving and disbursing Federal grants to Federal Universities.
- ◆ Establishing and maintaining the minimum academic standards.
- ◆ Accrediting the degrees and other academic programme awarded by the universities (Lassa, 1992). The audit role and the supervisory functions of NUC has indeed contributed to the quality and sustainability of higher education in Nigeria.

Research and Development

Universities can gainfully acquire information through research. Through research work universities can provide information for the labour market and provide skilled workers on the areas of needs in the immediate and outside world. Grant circulation for research work in university is slim and this has affected the conduct of research by scholars in Higher Education.

Thus the system should provide research grants to and encourage scholarship among staff and the graduate students. This will promote scholarship and the publication of different findings in all areas of endeavours and thus aid growth, progress and system performance and its sustainability.

Problems Of System Performance And Sustainability Of Higher Education

(a) Leadership/management factor:

Leaders in some universities are weak, uncoordinated and lack administrative skills. Some do not have administrative knowledge or skills. According to Taiwo (1980) in Ekaette (2001). A lot of higher education system managers do not poses the charisma, or good human relations needed for effective and efficient leadership. As a result of the poor leadership and ineffective style of administration, a lot of programme of activities are not carried out in such institutions such as provision of grant for research and publications, staff welfare is neglected, no adequate control of staff and students, no vision for the University. Such leaders also do not have the

zeal for supervision and monitoring of institutional activities. This can affect the systems performance in that, workers can result to a non-chalant attitude toward work and hence no sustainability or continuality of good track records of performance in the system. Nigerian Higher Educational System need leaders who can position it to an envying height of success and progress this contributing to society's quest for self reliance Ujomu (2001).

(b) Work Environment:

(Akuezuilo, 2007) noted that the root disturbing problems of performance and sustenance of higher education in the country could be related to environment. It has been observed that many academic staff has been employed without the adequate designed facilities to cope with and perform their job. This condition among others has resulted in systems poor performance and sustainability of the credible tempo of community service. Besides, we further observed that most of the facilities available are dilapidated are below standard. Accordingly, students selection procedure is often frauded with abuses and marginalization, number and standard of academic programmes offered are not relevant in some cases to the cultural values and needs of the society, content of courses does not reflect, the marketable trends of the society including researches, appointment and retention of teachers, scholars and professional are politicized (Oni; 2000:15). These inadequacies cannot promote nor sustain the high quality standard needed in our higher education.

(c) Inadequate funding:

The major issue in educational development is shortage of funds. One of the most serious problems threatening the survival of the educational systems is that of dwindling level of public funding in the face of rising demands and hence rising cost of higher education. This shortage of funds affects job performance and the growth of the institution. Higher educational institutions cannot perform optimally without funding. This situation calls for increased fund initiative from both the government and educational stakeholders so as to sustain the tempo and growth of education industry. The inability of the Nigerian government to objectively accept and implement the 26% funding formula for education recommended by the UNESCO impact negatively on the performance and sustainability of higher education. Thus, it

has become obvious that Nigeria's neglect of the funding formula is detrimental to higher educational institution performance and development aspiration as quality performance is the veritable instrument for sustenance of education system. This neglect has further precipitated crises in the entire higher educational systems as effective teaching, research and service are no longer taking place seriously.

On this note, Akinola (1990) was worried about the funding situation and commented thus:

"Our higher institution education systems are in dire need of money.....to cater for both their capital and recurrent needs. For a few years past, the budget have been cut back from year to year by the federal government. This cut back has affected both capital and recurrent expenditures. In many higher institutions capital projects embarked upon are few years ago, are yet to be completed due to lack of adequate funds".

The many years of disagreements even until (2009) between the academic staff union of universities (ASUU) and the federal government is a product of under-funding of education. The summary of the situation according to (Okeke, 2005) is that, the educational sector in Nigeria is grossly under-funded. Hence, he suggested that education should be given the highest budgetary vote of allocation.

(d) Improper curriculum contents:

The lack of adequate curricular preparation and content to meet with the goals of higher education in Nigeria and the global challenges is a factor that has impeded system performance and its lack of sustainability. Babalola and Jaiyeoba (2008), the federal government in (2004) identified curriculum renewal as one of the issues of our national strategy for the development of higher education in Nigeria (FME, 2004)

Scholars have advocated the repackaging and repositioning of higher institutions and their programmes. Babalola (2007) stressed that , higher institution should provide researchers – based labour market and career information to prospective students and their parents through publications, seminars, workshops and other informative advertisement. Further more, Udida (2008) maintains that curriculum is a mirror image of a society and therefore cannot be better or worse than the society it reflects.

(e) Lack of efficient communication

Communication is the exchange of facts, ideas, information for the purpose of promoting, understanding, systems performance, stability in the accomplishment of organisational task. It helps to encourage cordial interpersonal relationship among institutional workers and job satisfaction. A simple survey of some higher educational institution today, according to Callan (1996) shows that managers of our institutions lack effective communication principle. This poor management strategy has caused poor job performance and satisfaction. The way to improve higher education management and sustain it development has been the centre point of many current seminars, workshops, conference and symposia. Beside, effective management can also be achieved by combating crime and eradication of evil practices such as cultism, exam malpractices, poor staff behaviour and poor students' performance. Anoff, 1990, porter (1995), Prahalad (1997).

Angbogu and Chidolve (1994) observed that most higher education institution staff exhibit poor attitude to work and lack communication skills this has led to poor performance, Instability and the fallen standard of our higher educational system.

(f) Lack of political will

Ade-Ajayi, (2003) identified politics as having tremendous influence on Universities in Nigeria. This could be as a result of political Instability particularly during the Military era.

The Nigerian society is made up of different political parties. At any time in point that a political party comes to power, it tries to keep to its own agenda or campaign promises. Hence, the ruling party tends to lack the political will to fund, carry out the programme of activities outside its agenda and therefore no continuity.

Even in the universities, different unions operate, those in the minority groups tend to loose out while the majority dance with the ruling system for political appointments. The system is affected negatively because there is no unity or cordial relationship for the performance of the institutional objectives as a result of on-fighting and lack of understanding to sustain the system.

(g) Over Population in the university

Research outcome shows that the universities in Nigeria had good beginnings in the early colonial era (1970) as an instrument for national reconstruction and development. However, the recent over population in the university system has affected performance. According to Momoh (2006) in 1980, the total enrolment in universities was 72,425. In 1990 it rose to 180,871 with an increase of 246%. The quality has fallen hence inadequate staff to control a small size for adequate teaching and learning and adequate supervision.

The overpopulation issue has become a threat to security in the university system, some individuals in the system have formed several social negative groups (cultism) which threaten the peace of both management, staff and students in the Universities. The lack of stability and peace has affected system performance and its development sustainability.

(h) Inadequate Infrastructures

The lack of adequate infrastructures in our higher education has posed serious setback in the achievement of higher education goals. In institution where there are no adequate classrooms, resource rooms, staff rooms, lack of laboratory facilities, computers and the like; proper teaching and learning cannot be effective and efficient in the system. Salisu (2001) in her study of influence of school physical resources on students' academic performance concludes that, there is significant difference in the academic performance of students in institutions with adequate facilities and those with inadequate facilities. The lack of good buildings or funds to rehabilitate collapsed structures poses threat to the system performance and its sustainability hence education to some extent is falling due to low standard.

Strategies in achieving system performance and sustainability of Higher Education

- ✓ Adequate provision of computers to Higher Education. This will promote quality teaching, research and learning, thus help to check variables that would draw back the system to perform adequately for its sustainability.
- ✓ Adequate funding of Higher Education by Nigerian government

- ✓ The provision of adequate infrastructures to cope with the current increased population enrolment in Higher education and provision of adequate funds for the construction and rehabilitation of collapsed buildings
- ✓ Provision of funds to lecturers for research. This will not only improve teaching but will also meet the technological, global needs and challenges
- ✓ Ensuring that the course contents curriculum meets the institution needs. And cultural needs of the modern society in Nigeria
- ✓ The system in its performance must encourage staff productivity through prompt payment of salaries.
- ✓ Adequate monitoring, supervision and evaluation of system activities such as teaching: research activities and community services
- ✓ Higher education curriculum should be constantly reviewed to meet up with the needs and demands of the citizens and the society especially in terms of employment of our graduates to fit in the world of works
- ✓ There should be a link between Higher institutions, government and other educational stake holders in the provision of facilities and skilled manpower resources to enhance self-employment and entrepreneurial developmental programme of activities within the context of the National policy, system performance, and the sustainability of Higher Education in Nigeria.
- ✓ Effective and efficient communication system should be adopted by the management of higher education. The participatory approach should be adopted. This is to encourage a free flow of communication within the system, and in turn encourage productivity and the sustainability of workers in the university.

Some scholars recently are of the opinion that, where government cannot meet up with the financial demands of higher education, institutions are encouraged to downsize its workers. And also retire workers who are due for retirement. This is to create chance for new graduates to have access to job opportunities in organizations The desire high quality assurance in the higher education can be attained through the motivation of staff and the provision of adequate funds for system performance and sustainability.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis, the paper concludes that higher education system performance and sustainability requires good leadership, technological innovation, provision of adequate facilities, motivation of administrators and staff to ensure that their intellectual resources are well utilized for the development of higher education and the society. In addition, the academic work environment of the system should be conducive to ensure that staff are encouraged to contribute adequately in system performance and the sustainability of higher education in Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusion, the following recommendations are made:

(1)   There is need for a well designed institutional structure to be adopted to sustain performance. Developing of structure involves participatory approach through allocation of task responsibility and authority within the institution. To ensure performance of various groups within the system, there is need to decentralize decision making by distributing responsibilities and authority amongst the various levels of hierarchy in order to achieve integration for sustainability of the system.

(2)   Government and education stakeholders should put in place best way(s) of assessing the performance and the actions of the staff working in the system. Reward and incentive systems for staff must be functional based on:

(a)   Payment of staff salaries and allowances promptly

(b)   Encouragement of a peaceful academic environment that is void of fraudulent.

(c)   Provision of adequate fund for research and publications.

(d)   Making available enough academic materials for teaching and research.

(e)   Maintaining the new methods of selecting university administrators.

(f)   Encouraging meritocracy in appointment in higher education system.

(3)   University administrators and management of higher institutions should effectively control the work environment and adjust to any change that may occur while interpreting the policy for implementation

(4)   Student bodies should be cohered in system decision making.

(5)   Above all, there is need for regular monitoring and evaluation of policies, programmes, projects students' activities in the system. This would create opportunity for the application of new ideas and the sustainability of the system.

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