QUALITY ASSURANCE IN TERTIARY EDUCATION AS A VERITABLE TOOL FOR ACHIEVING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

PEWAM, CALVIN DANIEL,

NYAMDU, STEPHEN CHIYA

And

ARUM, SYLVANUS
Department of General Studies,
Plateau State Polytechnic Barkin Ladi
Jos, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

The relevance of quality education as a major instrument for sustainable economic development is recognized world over. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which ended in 2015 outlined the provision of education for all as one of its goals. Likewise, quality education for all by 2030 is one of the provisions of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as prescribed by the United Nations. The attainment and sustainability of economic, social and political development of Nigeria can be fully achieved if quality education is offered at the tertiary level. This paper focused on the relevance of quality assurance in tertiary education as a veritable tool for achieving sustainable development in Nigeria. The authors recommended that the Nigerian government should prioritize education by meeting the 26% expenditure recommended by UNESCO. Others include prudency of Pnancial management, staff welfare, entrepreneurship by tertiary institutions to generate more funds , public private partnership offunding of tertiary education, employment of more manpower and proper monitoring.

KEYWORDS: Quality, Quality assurance, Tertiary education,Sustainable development

INTRODUCTION

In today's world, knowledge is valued as the determinant and driver of economic growth, development and competitiveness thus, university (tertiary) education is the

major source providing the required knowledge that will help generate md accelerate knowledge flow for modern based economies_ ale concern for quality tertiary education in Nigeria is therefore absolutely in the positive direction because it is the hope for the national development of any country. According to Banabo and Ndiomu (2014), knowing that education plays a pivotal role in determining the human resource needs of the nation to face the dynamic and competitive nature generated by globalization, it is imperative to strategically change the funding and financing of this vital sector. Sustainable development can only be gllaranteed by a qualitative education system. This is the fundamental frame work of this paper, To achieve meaningful development in any country, quality education must play a pivotal role, especially at the tertiary level. For any community to be transformed, the education of its residents is essential because it possesses transformative power.

According to Igwe (2007), quality entails policy formulation and implementation of educational process concerning curriculum content; teaching/learning process; resource and facilities; students and teachers. better school environment all harnessed to meet society's needs. It is sad that the increasing number of tertiary educational institutions in Nigeria do not reflect on the economic development of the country. This has generated growing concern among various stakeholders. According to Federal Ministry of Education Statistics (2011), Nigeria has a total of 267 tertiary institutions comprising 104 universities, 75 polytechnics and 85 colleges of education owned by both government and private organizations. Examining the quality of these institutions to determine their capabilities of providing the education that is needed for the achievement of a sustainable economic development in Nigeria is therefore the background oftIris study.

CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

Tertiary Education

Tertiary education is that form of education often delivered at universities, academies, colleges, conservatories and institutes oftechnology. Higher education is also available through certain college level institutions including vocational schools, trade schools and other career colleges that award academic degrees of professional certificate such as ICAN. According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2003),higher education is education beyond the secondary level, especially education provided by a college or university. The world declaration on higher education adopted by the world conference on higher education defined tertiary as:

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> all types of studies, training for research at the post secondary
> school level, provided by universities or other educational establishments
> that are approved as institutions of higher
> education by competent state authorities. (UNESCO, 1998)

The implication of this is that for higher education to effectively perform its fbnctions in any society, it must be competently managed by the application of right quantity and quality of resources and its content should be strategically planned and implemented to drive the desired economic development. In view of this, the federal minister of education in Nigeria created a department of higher education in 2000 which was meant to carter for only university education. By 2003, the department's role was expanded to include all tertiary institutions and in 2006 the name was changed to Department of Tertiary Education with a vision and mission statement. The vision of tertiary education is to advance Nigeria's economic growth and global competitiveness through the provision of accessible, relevant and high quality education in tertiary institutions. While the mission is to constantly attract, develop and graduate competent, knowledgeable and talented individuals from tertiary education institutions (FME, 2003).In the observation of Jones (201 3),

> . .. in order to develop, a country must have a very considerable proportion of trained citizens, not only to act as doctors, engineers, teachers, and agriculturists but also to establish its own values of justice selection on merit, flexibility, empiricism and efficiency.
> Thus, no nation would achieve significant development without investing its resources in quality education.

According to the National Policy of Education (2014), tertiary education is defined to include all post secondary school institutions such as universities, polytechnics, colleges of education, monotechnics and professional colleges. The document spelt out the following as aims oftertiary education in Nigeria:

a To contribute to national development through high-level relevant manpower trarnrng
b To develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of the individual and the society.
c To develop the intellectual capability of individuals to understand and appreciate their local and external environments.
d For the acquisition of appropriate skills, the development of mental, physical and social abilities and competencies as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of the society.
e To promote and encourage scholarship and community services.
f To forge and cement national unity; and
g To promote national and international understanding and institutions.

These educational goals can only be attained in Nigeria if tertiary institutions, where this type of training is provided, are given priority in terms of adequate funding, financing, equipment, relevant curricular, efficient management of human and

material resources to guarantee quality. This is so because quality is a multifaceted concept. In recognition of this fact, Abdul (2005) rightly noted that tertiary education in any country is the engine of progress especially as university institutions act as laboratories for preparing the next generation for molding and pro\iding necessary skills expected to solve many of the challenges encountered by society. Tertiary education can therefore be defined as post secondary education obtained at the university, polytechnics, and colleges where an individual acquires skills and knowledge that will enable him add value to the society.

Quality Assurance

Generally, quality entails the worth of something or a system. It is also defined as fitness for purpose (Banabo & Ndiomu, 2014). It can also be described as characteristics of fitness of an individual of any material resources to achieve stated objectives and goals. While International Organization for Standardization (2005) defined quality as the degree to which a set of inherent characteristics fblfill requirements, it is viewed by economic agents in different ways. DuBrin (1997) viewed quality as a desirable attribute of a product or service that distinguishes it for the person seeking the attribute. He further maintained that good quality should possess the characteristics of conformance to expectation, requirement, excellence and value, and loss of avoidance. With regard to quality assurance, Okebukola (2010) opined that quality assurance is an umbrella concept for a host of activities that are designed to improve on inputs, processes and outputs of the higher education system. To the consumers it may be viewed from the specification of quality of a product/service.Producers on the other hand might measure quality based on the degree or extent to which a product/service is produced correctly whereas government and support personnel may measure quality based on the degree that a product is reliable, maintainable or sustainable. Thus, quality assurance is having the confidence that the good or service will be satisfactory. It involves maintenance of a desired level of quality in service provision and product with adequate attention to all stages of the delivery process.

Quality Assurance in Tertiary Education

There is a great need for quality tertiary education in Nigeria if the country must achieve sustainable economic development. In view of this, Nwanna (2000) opined that quality education is the scale of input in form of funds, equipment, facilities, teachers and students alike and to the fact that the activities and output of institutions in the form of their products are acceptable, desirable, beneficial, efficient and effective from the point of view of the government, society, private agencies and stakeholders. To further support the need for quality education in any societY, AjaYi in Okimakinde (2014) asserted that the worth of any educational system lies in its

capability to continuously serve its stakeholders better and remain relevant. He added that quality of education is dependent upon the vision of leaders for education at the community, state and national levels. Therefore, the need to achieve quality education in Nigeria cannot be over emphasized. However, Sunday (2010) pointed out the following as major needs for quality assurance in the Nigerian education system:

i. To serve as an indispensible component of quality control strategy in education.

ii. To ensure and maintain high standard of education at all levels.
iii. To assist in monitoring and supervision of education.
iv. To determine the quality ofteacher input.
v. To determinenumber of classrooms needed
vi. To determine the level of adequacy of facilities achievable for quality control.

vii. It would ensure that financial resources available would be prudently and judiciously utilized.

To achieve quality assurance in Nigerian tertiary education, certain mechanisms have been put in place by various institutions and accreditation bodies. According to Adepoju and Akinlola (2007), the following variables are used to determine quality assurance:

- Canyingcapacity andadmissionquota
- Minimumacademic standard
- Institution
- Accreditation
- Publicationandresearch assessment
- Structure, infrastructure andutilities

To Adepoju in Romina (2013), accreditation bodies such as National Univeristies Commission (NUC) for universities, National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) for Polytechnics and National Commission for Colleges of Education for colleges of education also ensure quality assurance in tertiary institutions in the following ways:

- Accreditationofprogrammes of institutions.
- Monitoring, assessment and evaluation of existing staff strength, students and facilities.
- Capacity building for teaching and non teaching staff.
- Exchangeprogrammes forteachingpersonnel and students.
- Institutional ranking in terms ofundergraduate and post graduate courses and programme.

- Prescription of benchmarks and periodic review and production of documents on minimum standard
- External moderation system.

Other measures used by tertiary institutions of learning in Nigeria to ensure quality assurance include screening of West Africa Examination Council's, National Examination Council's certificates and Joint Admission and Matriculation Board **scores**

However, it is imperative to note that assurance of quality education can largely be achieved when quality funding and prudence are given priority at the tertiary education level. This must be strategically done to ensure that materials/facilities needed to enhance the teaching/learning process are made available. Examining the state of education in Nigeria, Okemakinde (2014) lamented that there are so many challenges facing the Nigerian educational system making it difficult for good, and quality education that is empowering and capable of bringing about sustainable development in Nigeria to be achieved. Some of the major challenges as he pointed out include inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, limited access and lack of teaching/learning materials. Pewam (2016) stated that the state of tertiary education in Nigeria is a reflection of many realities that can be observed by mere sensibility of sight without much experimentation. The infrastructural decay especially in government owned institutions, defects in curricula and pedagogy, poor incentives to research, high level of corruption and crimes (cultism), frequent strikes, etc, all describe the characteristics of most tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Banabo and Ndiomu (2014) maintained that poor funding and poor management of funds within the educational system has led to dysfUnctional and unethical practices and has generated a multitude of limitations especially at the tertiary level of education. Thus, the continuous fall in the quality of tertiary education in Nigeria caused by theafore-mentioned factors cannot guarantee the achievement of sustainable economic development. A look at the funding of education in Nigeria reveals that N4001.15.bn was allocated to education in 2012 representing 8.4% of the total budget; in 2013, N426.53bn representing 8.7% was voted for education. However, 6% and 7.4% were allocated to the same sector from the total budgets of 2017 and 2018 respectively (National Bureau of Statistics,2018). These appropriations fall far below the UNESCO standard of 26% oftotal budgets to education

The American Society for Quality (2008) viewed quality as a product of service free from deficiency, the characteristics of a product or service that bears on its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs. Therefore,- the most important question to ask is, does the Nigerian tertiary education system possess the desired quality that will guarantee

the achievement of sustainable development? Clare (2004) in a study using the consumer behaivour theory of education considered students as consumers of services offered by tertiary institutions and viewed quality in education as function of input – process – output approach. According to Clare, "input" refers to the entry requirements; "process" refers to the teaching and learning process, while "output" refers to employability and academic standings. Thus, input, process and output must be adjusted to be at the best standard before an educational system is said to be of high quality. What this means is that quality education depends on the quality input in the system, quality of the process and quality of the output.

Role of Tertiary Education in Sustainable Development

Education is well recognized as a powerfbl tool in promoting sustainable development. According to Goolam (2015),sustainable development is not a new concept, yet it is complex and not easy to define. Hence, he adopted the 1987 Bnmdt land report from the World Commission on Environment and Development's definition which viewed sustainable development as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. United Nations (2002) declared 2005 – 2014 as the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development appointing UNESCO as the lead implementing agency to ensure the objective of intergrating the principles and practices of sustainable development into all aspects of education and learning. It is therefore imperative to note that sustainable development obtained through quality tertiary education is the hope of future generations meeting their needs. If Nigeria is to increasingly advance, it must invest in its competitiveness by not only diversifying its economy but also investing in its people and building strong institutions.

As the world becomes more technologically advanced, complex skills that lead to the next innovation are often attained through educational institutes such as polytechnics and universities. This implies that there is no alternative to quality education for sustainable development since the needed skills for development are products of education. Sustainable development has become a global objective for all nations of the earth as a beacon of hope for future generations. In view of this, the United Nations General Assembly in September 2015 adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UN, 2015). The Agenda contains 17 sustainable development goals (SDG's) aimed to secure a sustainable, peaceful, prosperous and equitable life on earth for every one now and in future (UNESCO, 2017), To achieve the SDG's, education has been identified as the key instrument and Irina (2015) opined that education has a responsibility to be in gear with 2 1 st century challenges and operations, and foster the right types of values and skills that will lead to sustainable and inclusive growth, and peaceful co-existence. Specifically, goal 4 of

The following are the SDG's ofUN for 2030 agenda:
SDGI :No poverty: To end poverty in all its forms everywhere
SDG 2: Zero hunger: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nuuition md promote sustainable agriculture.
SDG3:Good Health and well-being: Ensure healthy lives and promote u-eII- Ring for all at all ages.
SDG4:Quality education: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

Others include:
SDG5 :Gender equality
SDG6: Clean water and sanitation
SDG7: Affordable and clean energy
SDG8: Decent work and economic growth
SDG9:Industry, innovation and infrastructure
SDG10: Reduce inequality within and among countries
SDG 11: Sustainable cities and communities
SDG 12: Responsible consumption and production
SDG 13: Climate action: An urgent action to combat climate change and its impact
SDG 14: Life below water
SDG15: Life on land
SDG16: Peace, justice and strong institutions
SDG17: Partnership for the goals: Strengthen the implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development.

Education which is SDG 4 is a veritable tool for achieving all the other SDG's and with regard to that, UNESCO (2017) maintained that education can and must contribute to a new vision of sustainable global development. The main target of SDG4 is to ensure that by 2030, all learners acquire knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others through education for sustainable development and sustainable life styles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development.

Also security cannot be guaranteed without quality education. Abdulrahaman (n.**d)** viewed education as a major tool for human security which provides the opportunity for creativity, research and innovation, making it possible to improve the quality **of** life. His position has justified the relevance of quality education in the modern day's

technological innovations and inventions which has helped to improve the quality of human life holistically. Therefore, with quality human resources obtained from a quality tertiary education system, the effort of a nation to drive sustainable development will be fruitful. Human resources are key factors which take responsibility for the economic, social, and scientific growth and development of a country. That is development is possible only when citizens are dynamic and enterprising. Ahmed (2012) opined that without such citizens, a country cannot achieve the desired progress in any field.

Quality Assurance in Tertiary Education and Sustainable Development in Nigeria

Quality assurance is a core ingredient of tertiary education while sustainable development is development that guarantees hope for present and future generations' well being. The quality embedded in the tertiary education system of a nation defines its citizens' quality of life. Thus, the most advanced economies of the world have the most advanced educational systems which explains the fact that quality assurance in education is a pathway to sustainable development. That is, a better tertiary education system will produce high quality human resources in the fields of medicine, engineering/technological innovations, and inventions. This will translate into an industrial revolution where a variety of goods and services will be produced leading to more employment opportunities and a rise in Gross Domestic Product (G.D.P) as well as quality health workers and teachers would be produced. In the third world countries, Malaysia, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan are among the most successful where education and technology have played significant roles in the national development policies. The potentials of these countries to become global competitors in sustainable development is evident because of their efficient and increasingly well-educated labour forces and export oriented industries (Suleiman, n.d). Thus, for Nigeria to be a force in this agenda, quality tertiary education must be made the core of educational practice.

Increased and sustained funding of tertiary education especially for research and development (R&D) in the areas of science and technology, human resource capdLILy development, infrastructural expansion and general materials for teaching/learning and prudence would guarantee quality in tertiary education in Nigeria. To achieve improved and adequate funding and move education forward, encouragement of participation of NGO's, private sector in education financing, mobilization of external sources through appropriate bilateral agreements and effective monitoring of funds allocated to education among others are required (Ige, 2016)

CONCLUSION

Higher education in Nigeria must be supported to ensure quality delivery for the growth and development of the nation. The social, economic and political development of any country is often a reflection of the quality of its tertiary education. It is the view of these authors that quality education is derived from quality funding, good policies, relevant curricula, prudence in resource management and quality human resources. Thus the achievement of sustainable development in Nigeria depends on the quality of its higher education. All stakeholders in the tertiary education sector must prioritize the harnessing of all factors that would bring about quality in the sector as the current standard of higher education in Nigeria needs to be improved upon through a synergy by all stakeholders in the field

RECOMMENDATIONS

To achieve quality assurance in higher education in Nigeria, the following recommendations are made :

- Government should consider funding of the tertiary education sector as a critical priority where annual allocations would not be less than 26% as prescribed by UNESCO. This should be done to ensure upgrading of facilities, human resources, capacity development and research and development (R&D).
- Government should also put inplace proper mechanisms for monitoring and checking the management of tertiary institutions in Nigeria to ensure prudence of fUnd utilization. Corrupt managers of higher institutions should be held accountable for the ways and manners they appropriate all funds that accrued to their institutions.
- Higher institutions must devise alternative means of raising funds internally to complement government efforts. That is, they should be more enterprising and business oriented.
- e To achieve quality education, motivation of staff is a key ingredient. This will ensure commitment, dedication and efficiency. The welfare of staff, work environment, training and retraining of manpower would aid largely in attainment ofquality.
- e More lecturers should be employed and facilities expanded tO meet the increasing students' population.
- Mechanisms should be put in place to assess the teaching effectiveness of lecturers and efficiency of support staff.
- e Finally, in line with sustainable development goal 4, more access tO qualitY education for all should be provided by a sustained increase of funding through public private partnership.

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