

THE PLACE OF TERTIARY EDUCATION IN FOSTERING SELF-RELIANCE

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ABSTRACT

The quest for self-reliance has been the ubiquitous clamour and benchmark that every nation of the world strives at. Tertiary education therefore is that round peg in the round hole or rather, a catalyst for the attainment of self-reliance. This paper examines the trends in tertiary education in Nigeria. The objectives of tertiary education are also explored into. The paper also mirrors into usability of tertiary education for enhancing self-reliance. Recommendations such as overhauling of courses in tertiary institutions, establishment of more tertiary institutions to allow more intakes, adequate funding of tertiary institutions, adequate training and re-training of tertiary institutions staffers, etc. are made so as to make tertiary institutions actualize the conceived self-reliance which is the prime purpose of tertiary education..

Introduction

The potency of tertiary education for self-reliance in a developing nation like Nigeria cannot be dismissed with a wave of hand. As a rider, Dabalén and Oni (2003: 3) opine that: 'higher education is crucial for economic growth'. This is an obvious fact since the level of a national enlightenment will set the pace for her concomitant greatness in economic, scientific, technological, social and political wheels especially during this current global economic recession when even the developed nations are staggering and searching vigorously for economic stability and survival.

In spite of the fact that Nigeria is the giant of Africa endowed with innumerable untapped natural resources, still majority of the citizenry are wallowing in abject poverty. This is funny and saddens enough! While corroborating this, Adeniji (2008: 3) posts:

Indeed, the vast majority of our people suffering in the midst of plenty all because our so called Economic Development Plans have failed to achieve the desired results and where little gains recorded, these were ruthlessly consumed by corrupt practices prevalent in our society.

The pertinent question now is what necessitated the hunger in the midst of the plenty and even the ruthless consumption of little gains? The answer is not far fetched. It has been due to the failure of the nation to allow tertiary education has it ways in the nation bottleneck and bastardization by the people in government who are not prepared to work for the country's raining days.

In fact, the level of poverty is so degrading that no particular individual/group(s) can proffer a clear-cut answer. It is a disturbing reality! In their wisdom, Dabalen and Oni (2000) claim that with half population of West Africa and vast natural resource endowments, Nigeria hold the potential to be the source of growth and prosperity for the whole region. Instead, the economic performance has been so erratic, devastating and fallen short of expectations. This problem has been due to the inability of the bulk of population to attain tertiary level of illiteracy. While sharing the same view, Egwu (2009) says less than ten (10) percent of Nigeria who take matriculation Examination annually are being offered admission into Universities, a number which is less than minimum international standard of sixteen (16) percent. This is a pointer to the fact that to attain height in literacy or in higher education, Nigeria as a wide gap to fill.

This study is borne out of the desire to alleviate Nigeria from the set back recorded due to failure in utilization of tertiary education foster the desired self-reliance.

AN OVERVIEW OF TERTIARY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

The demand for tertiary education came after the world economic depression of the early 1930s. According to Abdulkareem (1990), the proposal on education could not be implemented due to financial constraints resorted from the global depression which had made the colonial government retrench workers, especially the expatriate to reduce costs.

However, since the government needed manpower to carry on its administration, it was forced to begin to look for recruitment. The government started Departmental training programmes for grooming the Nigerians for different posts in the government departments under the auspices of the colonial government.

The colonial government set another pace with the establishment of Yaba Medical School in 1930. Sequel to this, Yaba Higher College started in 1932 with forty – one (41) students admitted including six (6) students who had a year earlier started a course in Civil Engineering.

In order to meet the demand for local personnel, Yaba Higher College was formally opened on 19th January 1934. According to Taiwo (1986) ninety one men (91) and nine (9) women students were admitted pursuing various discipline in Medicine, Secondary School teacher training, engineering, agriculture and surveying.

The colonial government shoulders almost all the expenses of the college. Taiwo further posits that Yaba was a small residential college and had capacity for about one hundred students. Admission was through competitive entrance exam of the standard of London Matriculation Exam tied to the anticipated vacancies in the civil service and the schools.

Moreover, the role of Asquith and Elliot Commissions and Ashby Commission on Higher Education (1943 and 1959) respectively were significantly on the development of higher education in Nigeria. Most especially, Elliot Commission precipitated the establishment of University College, Ibadan. Thus, after sixteen years of operation, Yaba Higher College was transferred to Ibadan to form the nucleus of the country's Premier University, the University College Ibadan in 1948 affiliated with University of London until it finally gained autonomy in 1962. In 1961, University of Nsukka was established. The government kept on in its giant stride with the establishment of University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University) and University of Zaria now (Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria) in 1962 presently. Since then, University establishment has been spreading like harmattan fire.

However, the technical/polytechnic education had a slow start due to its expensive nature and low interest of the Christian Missions. According to Fafunwa (1974) there were the establishment of technical education courses at five post – secondary technical colleges located in Lagos, Ibadan, Enugu, Kaduna and Auchi. Admissions into technical colleges were on the basis of passing West African School Certificate Exam or the Ordinary General Certificate of Education (GCE) of London University. These technical colleges were later upgraded to become polytechnics.

In the aspect of teacher education the first teacher training was established by the Church Missionary Society in Abeokuta in 1859. It was later moved to Oyo called St. Andrew's College Oyo. In 1930, the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society

opened an institution at Ibadan for training Catechists and teachers. In the Eastern part the Presbyterian Church of Scotland in 1892 established Hope Waddel and in the Northern part Nassarawa School was established in 1909 by Hanns Vischer, the Director of Education for Northern Nigeria.

The teacher training institutions were established in almost all the provinces of Nigeria and were later upgraded to Advanced Teacher Colleges (now Colleges of Education).

The trends in tertiary education in Nigeria has been an encouraging. For instance, presently Nigeria has twenty four (24) State Universities, five (5) State Universities of Technology, sixteen (16) Federal Universities, three (3) Federal Universities of Technology, twenty eight (28) Private Universities (source UME/DE Brochure 2008/2009 Edition, pp. 13 – 17).

Also, there are twenty (20) Federal Polytechnics, twenty nine (29) state Polytechnics and ten (10) private Polytechnics (source MPCE Brochure 2008/2009 Edition, pp. 8 – 10).

Similarly, there are fifteen (15) Private Colleges of Education, twelve (12) Federal Colleges of Education (Regular), eight (8) Federal Colleges of Education (Technical) and one (1) Federal College of Education (Special) and thirty nine (39) State Colleges of Education (source MPCE Brochure 2008/2009 Edition, pp. 10 – 14).

THE RATIONALE FOR TERTIARY EDUCATION

According to NPE (2004: 36) the goals of tertiary education shall be to:

- a. contribute to national development through high level relevant man power training;
- b. develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of the individuals and society;
- c. develop the intellectual capacity of individuals to understand and appreciate their local and external environment;
- d. acquire both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to be self-reliant and useful members of the society;
- e. promote and encourage scholarship and community service;
- f. forge and cement national unity; and
- g. promote national and international understanding and interaction.

TERTIARY EDUCATION AS A MEANS OF FOSTERING SELF-RELIANCE

No nation can hardly attain height without education. More so, to enhance self – reliance, tertiary education is highly pertinent and unnegotiable. In the first place, tertiary education is primarily designed to impart physical and intellectual skills in individuals. Going by this, individuals (tertiary education benefactors) will be able to stand on his/her own and utilize his physical and intellectual skills to develop himself/herself and the immediate environment.

The essence of tertiary education should be for qualitative and functional development of individuals. In this regard, there will be no unemployment since the kind of training at tertiary level of education is always a comprehensive one. As a rider Adeniyi (2008: 21) says; “a comprehensive education that will impart and impact the right attitudes, skills and knowledge as well as the productive potentials of the citizenry is what needed at this time”.

The value of professionalisation embedded in tertiary education deserves mentioning. As a result of being effectively equipped/skilled individual will be competent to stand alone and embark upon/setting up on his/her own in the area of professional calling.

Aside from the above, tertiary education will make an individual a job creator rather a job seeker. In corroboration, Vanguard (2004) posits that the graduates could establish small scale business and employ youths that roam the streets.

Similarly, if tertiary education is accorded the prime recognition, excessive reliance granted to foreigners will be waned down because there is no feat that the expatriates can perform that Nigerian, cannot better perform when they are encouraged and patronized.

In the field of agriculture, there is no limit to what tertiary education can afford. Instead for dependence on food importation, specialists in agriculture can offer antidote to marshal abundant food production rather than depending on other nations as ‘food baskets’.

The high level manpower that are produced by the tertiary institutions in Nigeria are competent enough to enhance self – reliance when full attention is diverted to engendering/waking up local or indigenous technology to replace the existing dilapidating and inertia present technological problem that the country is facing in various fields.

The national and international understanding and interaction value that tertiary education offers will in no small measure assist in attaining peaceful atmosphere where people can ponder on forging ahead progressively thereby facilitating national and self sustenance.

STRATEGIES TO FOSTER SELF - RELIANCE THROUGH TERTIARY EDUCATION

Since tertiary education is the vehicle through which individual can actualize one's heart desire, strategies for self - reliance should be put in place. It is expedient to consider the following strategies as adjunct in fostering self - reliance through tertiary education.

Firstly, there is need for constant overhauling of tertiary education curriculum. For instance, efforts should be geared towards the national economic development by giving apprenticeship training which will afford the graduates some work skills and experience in economic and social objectives.

Moreover, the policy on admission of 60: 40 sciences and humanities (Arts) respectively should be revisited by jacking it up to 70: 30 (Sciences and Arts) respectively due to hysterical tempo at which the whole universe is embracing science and technology and most importantly the germane of sciences and technology to human advancement.

Furthermore, tertiary education should be made more functional. Emphasis must now be placed on technically oriented courses rather than theoretical knowledge based.

Again, value should not be placed on certificates. In order to prepare the tertiary institution beneficiaries for the challenges ahead, rigorous interview should be conducted at entry into institution in addition to passing the prescribed examination organized by various tertiary institution examination bodies.

In the realm of appointment it has been too much politicized in so far that meritocracy has suffered adversely. This to a large extent has hampered national development.

The management of tertiary institutions should strive to ensure that no stone is left unturned by updating the skills of its staffers so as to impact current knowledge, skills and values.

Coupled with the above, the various national commissions – The National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE), the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) and the National Universities Commission (NUC) which are to accredit the Colleges of Education, Polytechnics and Universities should be alive to their responsibilities by visiting the respective tertiary institutions in every two – year so as to effectively mirror if the tertiary institutions are proving their metus towards production of manpower for a better self – reliance Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

From the foregoing, the excessive reliance of tertiary institution graduates on white collar job has become a cankerworm deserving urgent healing, hence the need arises that all tertiary institutions should incorporate various programmes in their curriculum to facilitate the relevance of tertiary institution in meeting the challenges of self – reliance in Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to enhance self – reliance in Nigeria, the following steps should be taken:

It is high time that Nigerians should get rid of corrupt practices at private or public life so that individual would be able to work under a sanitized environment with zero level corrupt practices.

The tertiary institutions stakeholders need to fund this level very well. In order to reap the fruits of tertiary education, huge fund is expected to provide sufficient teaching and learning resources such as lecture theatres, libraries, computer centres, workshops, laboratories, etc.

Furthermore, private organizations and government need to establish more tertiary institutions for majority of the citizenry to have wider opportunities of enjoying tertiary education.

More importantly, there is need for funding of researches at the tertiary institutions. The idea of buying researches at the four corners of the tertiary institutions should be an event of past.

The issue of poverty among the citizenry is another phenomenon worthy of mentioning. Thus, there is need for government at various levels to shun off embezzlement or misappropriation of resources (funds) so as to give chance for building a self – reliant Nigeria in this era of global economic recess.

Coupled with the above, tertiary institution should focus on effective capacity building so as to promote the citizens' interests in higher productivity.

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