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MANAGING FUNCTIONAL UNIVERSITY EDUCATION FOR GLOBAL COMPETIVENESS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract
Globalization has not only increased competition in world economies but also within and between the education systems. It has also increased the interdependence of people, information, ideas and institutions around the world and had brought about so many positive benefits. The paper focused onmanaging functional university education for global competiveness in Nigeria. It highlighted changing roles of university education in a globalized world, university education and global competiveness and challenges in managing university education for global competiveness. Recommendations were also made which include: government should improve on the infrastructure base of the universities in the country, policies that would encourage high level interactions and programme exchange with other universities across the globe should be encouraged and more funding should be provided for the university education system.

Key words: Managing, functional, university, education, global, competiveness.

Introduction

Education is widely accepted as a major instrument for promoting socio economic, political and cultural development in Nigeria. Education is as old as human existence on earth. Upon all the primary human life survival tools and skills, education stands out as the most singular powerful instrument of life which is sharpening and retooling others. Education today still remains a global matter in all the nations because of the intellectual power it produces which governs all aspect of life and sustainable development. Universities educate future leaders and develop the high-level technical capacity that brings about economic growth and development (Ekundayo& Ajayi, 2009). Higher education is indeed the backbone of any society, as its quality determines the quality of human resources and development. Higher education as we see it today is a complex system facilitating teaching, research and international cooperation. Higher education plays a crucial role in the supply of high-level manpower for the socio-political and economic development of a nation.

Globalization has not only increased competition in world economies but also within and between the education systems. Policies and strategies that drive educational reforms have been adjusted to the new realities by creating structures in education systems that allow assessing, comparing and rank-ordering national and regional education performances. Education reforms in different countries today share similar assumptions, values and characteristics due to the endless flow of information and harmonization of education policies through increased global educational borrowing and lending (Sahlberg, 2006). The process of globalization has increased the interdependence of people, information, ideas and institutions around the world. It had brought about so many positive benefits include which include, facilitating dialogue and exchange among people from different cultural and religious backgrounds and providing access to knowledge and opportunities through information communication technologies. However, globalization has also deepened inequalities for individuals and countries alike, and there is a growing gap between those who

have access to knowledge and learn to master it, and those who do not.

Many countries are reforming their education systems to provide their citizens with knowledge and skills that enable them to engage actively in democratic societies and dynamic knowledge-based economies. The competitiveness of the national educationsystem can only be ensured with the powerfulgovernmental support, which has to be based on theunderstanding of highly important role of higher education system as a factor of social development (Onokerrhoraye, 2015).. Such support must also be provided taking into account thecomplexity of modern social and economic conditions of functioning of higher education, particularly, the sharpening of competition on the education market in the global context; the increase of the mass-type character of higher education; the necessity of implementing the innovative ways of development of national economy and facilitating innovative activity of higher education institutions. Ensuring competitiveness of the university education system must be basedon the state policy of searching, forming and holding competitive advantages of both individual universities and the system as a whole.

Changing Roles of University Education in a Globalized World

The relation between globalization and university education is complex and dynamic. It is clear that the forces of globalization are transforming the nature and function of higher education. However, university education is driving globalization, as it transcends borders and cultures in the pursuit of knowledge and the free exchange of ideas. University education also empowered young people to participate and also help shape the processes of globalization. It is a factor in promoting democracy, sustainable development and economic growth a foundation for building a better future for all. Globalization, therefore, poses both new challenges and opportunities for University education (Sahlberg, 2006). According to the UNESCO (2008), in 1998 there were 1.5 million students studying abroad and 2004 this figure had doubled to 2.4 million. Students from developing countries, in particular from Africa, are the most mobile. One million people from developing countries are studying at higher education institutions in industrialized countries. An estimated 1 out of 16 students from sub-Saharan Africa study in a country other than their own. Such increased mobility creates

many positive new opportunities, especially in terms of fostering greater intercultural dialogue, international cooperation but can also constitute an enormous loss for countries in terms of development.

Our world is becoming ever more globalized and knowledge-based. Our society is getting more complex and heterogeneous, consisting of individuals characterized by intriguing sets of multiple identities, based on their gender, ethnicity, religion, nationality, profession and hobbies. The use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) is expanding rapidly, andcan play a vital role in increasing access to education, especially in developing countries. At a time when state budgets for higher education are decreasing, ICTs provide a cost-effective meansof delivery. In a technological era, virtual and e-learning can also create an education experiencethat is more responsive to learner needs and aspirations.However, the use of ICTs does bring new kinds of problems, such as those regardingcontent, intellectual property, and linguistic diversity. These challenges must be navigatedcarefully if we are to maximize the benefits and minimize the risks (Castells &Himanen, 2002).

Globalization has challenged institutions of higher education to explore ways in which global dimensions are expressed on a local level. In other words, our contemporary local context calls for a re-examination of the role and purpose of education in developing individuals and societies highlighting the role of the educator. New immigration patterns, the growth of information and communication technologies, and competitive global markets permeate geopolitical borders having implications for educational practices (Agnew & Fox, 2014). However, a growing awareness of global impacts such as population growth, immigration trends, environmental concerns, conflict, terrorism, girls' education, persistence of poverty, energy consumption, food shortage, and international divides of affluence and poverty, necessitate an immediate response from institutions of higher education in how to prepare educators to lead in this interdependent global reality. There is need to motivate and internationalize the curriculum to reflect the changing nature of knowledge and greater global interdependency among countries and interconnectivity between local and global contexts (Agnew, 2012).

University Education and Global Competiveness

Globalization is a cultural paradox and it simultaneously unifies and diversifies people and cultures. It unifies national education policies by integrating them with the broader global trends (Sahlberg, 2004). Because problems and challenges are similar from one education system to another, solutions and education reform agendas also are becoming similar. Due to international benchmarking of education systems by using common indicators and the international comparisons of student achievement, the distinguishing features of different education systems are becoming more visible. Globalization has not only increased competition in world economies but also within and between the education systems. Policies and strategies that drive educational reforms have been adjusted to the new realities by creating structures in education systems that allow assessing, comparing and rank-ordering national and regional education performances. Education reforms in different countries today share similar assumptions, values and characteristics due to the endless flow of information and harmonization of education policies through increased global educational borrowing and lending (Sahlberg, 2006).

Many countries are reforming their university education systems to provide their citizens with knowledge and skills that enable them to engage actively in democratic societies and dynamic knowledge-based economies (OECD, 2000; Riley, 2004). Globalization has also accelerated international collaboration, exchange of ideas and transfer of education policies between the education systems (Carnoy, 2009; Steiner-Khamsi, 2004). Analyzing global policy developments and education reforms has become a common practice in many ministries of education, development agencies and regional administrations. Therefore, the world's education systems inevitably share some core values, functions and structures. The question arises whether increased global interaction among policy-makers and educators, especially benchmarking of education systems through agreed indicators and borrowing and lending educational policies, has promoted common approaches to education reform throughout the world (Riley & Torrance, 2003).

In addition, due toglobal declarations such as Millennium Development Goals andEducation for All, increased efforts have been made to provide basicschool education to all children and to expand access and

relevanceof secondary education (World Bank, 2005). As a consequence, curriculum development, student assessment and teacher evaluation, integration of information and communication technologies into teaching and learning and proficiency of basic competences, i.e. reading and writing skills, and mathematical and scientific literacy have become common priorities in education reforms around the world (Hargreaves, 2001; Sacks, 2000).

Successful economies compete on the basis of high value, not only low cost. High value is best guaranteed by well-trained and educated personnel and flexible lifelong learning opportunities for all citizens. The most frequently presented general idea for increasing economic competitiveness is to equip people with the skills and attitudes for economic and civic success in an increasingly knowledge-based economy (Hargreaves, 2003; Schweke, 2004). Governments have an essential role to play by offering and guaranteeing good university education that adequately emphasizes the core determinants of economic competitiveness. However, it has beendifficult to translate this central role of education into concreteactions and programs that lead to improved human capital andtherefore contribute to the social and economic progress.

Challenges in managing University Education for Global Competiveness

The story of university education in Nigeria today has largely been a story of mixed fortune. These institutions initially laid claims in making respectable impact on the socio-political and economic advancement of Nigeria. Today, there are doubts whether Nigerian universities under the present conditions would be able to compete globally by connecting with the new international knowledge system and adopt, adapt and further develop the new technologies needed in the wider society (Ekundayo& Ajayi, 2009). The challenges inherent in the management of university educationinclude:

Inadequate funding

Inadequate funding is the most critical challenge that has threatened the attainment of good quality university education in Nigeria. The problem of inadequate funding of education has been a bane to educational development in the country. Onokerrhoraye, (2015) maintained that a major constraint to attaining academic excellence in Nigerian universities is financial constraints which made many academics and non-academics to be working under

difficult circumstances. Many institutions of higher learning in Nigeria were unable to build lecture halls, students' hostels, equip laboratories and workshops and payment of staff salaries, research grants, allowances and medical bills.

Volatile and militant student unionism

One of the banes of effective university management in Nigeria in recent times is the unbridled student violent reaction to national issues and internal problems. According to Ibukun (2007) and Akindutire (2007), the result of student militancy and violent unionism has been the constant closure of universities, removal of vice-chancellors among others.

Political interference

It has been observed that universities these days are not totally free from the hand of politics outside the university system. Government of the day, most especially in the state-owned varsities, interfere a lot in terms of selection and choice of the chief executive, deans, departmental heads, directors of programmes and above all, the selection of vice-chancellors. A situation whereby the members of the university are not totally free to choose who their head would be without government intervention would not augur well for the university system. According to Adegbite (2007), another area of political interference is constitution of Visitation Panels by the Visitor at wills instead of the minimum five years intervals, the main aim of which is to witch-hunt or crucifies the vice-chancellors and the university authorities.

Lack of resources

Quality university education is dependent on the quality and quantity of human and material resources put in place in the various institutions. The lack of infrastructures such as science laboratories, workshops, students' hostels, libraries and electricity will affect the quality of education. For good quality delivery, these facilities must meet the minimum standard specified by the National Universities Commission (NUC). For quality teaching and learning, the class size must be small for effective students/teacher interaction. Unfortunately, most institutions of higher learning in Nigeria, the lecture halls are overcrowded with majority of the students standing at the corridors during lectures. However, the libraries in most institutions of higher learning in the country are stocked with obsolete

text books, with current journals and text books lacking (Peretomode, 2008).

Secret cults

One of the challenges facing tertiary institutions in Nigeria today is how to handle the menace and aggressiveness of cult members. Never before has the potential for the destruction of lives and property on campuses been so outrageous and horrible presently (Ogunbameru, 2004). However, the issue of cultism among the students has opened a new and very dangerous dimension to the situation of things in our educational institutions. Smah (2007) posited that where cults exist, there is no guarantee that academic programmes and activities would run normally. Hence the university may run the risk of being constantly closed or disrupted.

Poor policy implementation

Poor policy implementation is a challenge to quality delivery in education. The poor-quality delivery is responsible for the abysmal low performance of graduates of institutions of higher learning in Nigeria in their world of work and the alarming incidence of examination malpractice. Ogunbameru, (2004) argued that, our policies are written by knowledgeable writers who have foresight and believe strongly in what they write for the future but the problem comes when it comes to translating theory into practice by implementers. However, several factors could be adduced as inhibitors to smooth implementation of educational policies and they include: government underfunding of education; injudicious utilization of available funds by implementation agencies, vice chancellors, and rectors, provosts', deans of faculties and heads of department.

Lack of vibrant staff development programmes

Most institutions of higher learning in Nigeria lack staff development programme for training and re-training of staff. Vibrant staff development programme on a continuous basis will help academics and non-academics to clarify and modify their behaviour, attitude, value, skills and competencies. In this way, they grow and develop in their knowledge and thus become more effective and efficient in the performance of tasks. Staff development is paramount because knowledge of today is only sufficient for today. In this era of knowledge explosion and emergent knowledge-based economy, staff development should be the priority of any nation (Peretomode, 2008).

Conclusion

Many countries are reforming their university education systems to provide their citizens with knowledge and skills that enable them to engage actively in democratic societies and dynamic knowledge-based economies. Globalization has also accelerated international collaboration, exchange of ideas and transfer of education policies between the education systems. However, global policy developments and education reforms has become a common practice in many ministries of education, development agencies and regional administrations. Therefore, the world's education systems inevitably share some core values, functions and structures. However, there are still doubts whether Nigerian universities under the present conditions would be able to compete globally by connecting with the new international knowledge system and adopt, adapt and further develop the new technologies needed in the wider society.

Recommendations

1. Government should improve on the infrastructure base of the universities in the country so as to be able to compete globally.
2. Government should put up policies that would encourage high level interactions and programme exchange with other universities across the globe.
3. Government should provide more funding for the university education.
4. Government should minimize external interference in governance of higher Education institutions.
5. Government should adhere strictly and implement educational policies to avoid delays in the university system.

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