

# EFFECTIVENESS OF REPOSITIONING HIGHER EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE YOUTH AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

*Smart Onyemauche Nwonkwo, Joseph Johnny Idungafa and Francis Bagbula Okwu*

## **Abstract**

*This paper intends to examine the effectiveness of repositioning higher education for sustainable youth and national development. Education is considered to be a key instrument of human and economic transformation in all nations of the world. Education is an instrument of launching nations into the world of science and technology, with consequential hope of human advancement in terms of living conditions and development of the environment. Higher education is an institutions that help to drive innovation with the aim of finding solutions to global challenges. Higher Education is instrumental in fostering growth, reducing poverty, boosting shared prosperity and equipped youths with basic skills for sustainable development. This paper examines some of the daunting problems militating against achieving the objectives of higher education in Nigeria. These problems range from inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, lack laboratory equipment, poor teaching methods, lack of standard laboratory shortage of qualified personnel, political instability, poor policy formulation and implementation to endemic corruption among others. This therefore calls for certain repositioning that would perhaps bring about some improvement in the higher education system. The paper recommends that all stakeholders in education sector should be deeply involved in finding lasting solutions to the problem of higher education for better repositioning. And that government should provide human and material resources for the improvement of higher education so that the goal and objectives of higher education in Nigeria can be actualized.*

**Keywords:** Education, Repositioning, Higher Education, Sustainable Development, Role of Higher Education, Challenges of Higher Education and Way Forward to the challenges of Higher Education.

## **Introduction**

Repositioning higher education is pertinent in sustainable youth and national development. Repositioning higher education in Nigeria requires a blunt and radical change from the present practice. It is therefore the function of the school organisation and those involved in the trade. Education is a crucial sector in any nation. Being a major investment in human capital development, it plays a critical role in long-term productivity and growth at both micro and macro levels. This explains why the state of education in Nigeria continues to be our national discourse at all levels. Higher education is an institutions that help to drive innovation with the aim of finding solutions to global challenges. Higher education is education that helps to bring desirable change into the behaviour of human beings (Abeshi & Ezondi, 2019). It deals with the process of imparting, acquiring knowledge or habits through instruction. Education, for any nation, whether developed or developing, is to help solve the problems that affect that nation. Higher Education is instrumental in fostering growth, reducing poverty, boosting shared prosperity and equipped youths with basic skills for

sustainable development. Busari (2018) observed that the essence of higher education in postmodernism is to youth with necessary skills, ensure peace, liberate oppression, fight poverty and promote industry through entrepreneurial skills. All these are necessary ingredients for development.

Higher education remains one of the fundamental institution for sustainable youth and national development as it has the potential of enriching people's understanding of themselves and the world. Consequently, the implication of the declining quality of higher education has far reaching negative impact on a nation's moral, civic, cultural and economic sustainability. Okon (2019) reported that the main challenges of higher education in Nigeria are:

- a. Inadequate funding and lack of reliable statistical data
- b. Inadequate access to qualitative education.
- c. Poor state of infrastructure and facilities
- d. Lack of relevance, appropriateness and responsiveness in the curriculum.
- e. An over-emphasis on rote learning.
- f. Endemic strikes and work to rule action by lecturers, non-academics and students
- g. Persistence of gender gap in enrolment, participation and achievement.
- h. Problems of organization and management.
- i. government policies. At this point, it is important to realize that discussions on higher education and its reposition to make it contribute meaningfully to national development should gradually and systematically move away from a politicized to a more analytical approach that appreciates the complexities inherent in proffering genuine and workable solutions for revamping our educational system.

Over the last few decades Nigeria has witnessed tremendous growth in its higher education and research sphere (Busari, 2018). This is to a large extent a manifestation of the recognition by major stakeholders, including political leaders of the value of higher education in achieving their visions of prosperity, peace and integration. International agencies, once sceptical about the value of university education in Nigeria's socio-economic development are now among the chief advocates of revitalisation of higher education in Nigeria. Challenges in recruiting and retaining faculty staff with senior academic qualifications and research experience, include limited postgraduate opportunities, low graduation rates and discouraging conditions of service. Most institutions have been unable to recruit additional academic staff to cope with increased enrolment figures, either because of shortage of funds or unavailability of qualified candidates. The staff shortages in many Nigerian universities are compounded by the fact that the average age of faculty members is relatively high and are exacerbated by brain drain. The slow expansion of postgraduate education has seriously constrained innovation as most research skills are commonly acquired during masters and doctoral studies (Abeshi & Ezondi, 2019). The lack of academic staff with PhDs has adversely affected the quality and depth of the instruction provided to undergraduate students and the ability to provide graduate students with adequate supervision

In the Nigerian context, for higher education to contribute meaningfully to national development; there should be proper repositioning such as funding of the three tiers of government. If this is done in the proper way, the Academic Staff Union of Universities will not have any need to embark on industrial actions as there will be improved infrastructure in the higher institution; there will be no more brain-drain as research activities will be effectively carried out and examination misconduct will be eradicated or reduced and the sector will contribute meaningfully to national development (Idungafa, 2021). Higher education has the capacity to improve the quality of human life and leads to broad social

benefits for individuals and society. Higher education has the potential to raise people's productivity and creativity and promotes entrepreneurship and technological advances. In addition, it plays a very crucial role in securing economic, social progress, improving income distribution and national development.

### **Concept of Education and National development**

Education over the years has been regarded as the key to entire individual development (Ali, 2019). Throughout one's life it is education that remains central to shaping the goals and ideas of an individual pace of coping with daily challenges and integral development. Society's development is also determined by the standards of education people undergo, hence, the aspect that determine an individual academic performance remain vital to any member of the society that is value development (Chronister, 2018). Education is a process by which youth acquire the relevant skills, knowledge and values to ensure proper intellectual, character development of individuals for self-reliance and responsible citizenship. It is a vehicle for economic, socio-cultural and political development of a nation. Over the years, education has been regarded as the key to entire individual development. Education remains central to shaping the goals and ideas of an individual space of coping with daily challenges.

The term education is derived from two Latin words "educare" and "educere". Accordingly, "educare", means to train, to form or to mould. In other words, it means that the society trains, forms or moulds the individual to achieve the social needs and aspirations. "Educere", on the other hand means to build, to lead, or to develop. This is mostly favoured by the humanists who argue that the function of education is to develop the natural potentialities in the child to enable him function in the society according to his abilities, interests and needs. This is child-centered orientation (Amaele, 2018). Ordinarily, education is exclusively used for the development of human beings in the cognitive, affective, psychomotor and psycho productive domains. It also involves a desirable approach in human behaviour through the process of teaching and learning. Fafunwa (1974) defines education as what each generation gives to its younger ones which makes them develop attitudes, abilities, skills and other behaviours which are the positive values to the society in which they live. From the above, education, according to Brownson (2017) is seen as the total development of the individual child through acceptable methods and techniques according to his abilities and interests to meet up the needs of the society and for the individual to take his rightful place and contribute equally to the enhancement and development of the society.

The next concept to be explained in this paper is national development. Development can be conceived as involving, not only economic growth, but conditions in which people in a country have adequate food, job and the income inequality among them is greatly reduced. According to Obasali (2019), development is a process by which high degree of self reliant economic growth in a given society, sustained over a long time, is associated with substantial reductions in poverty, unemployment and inequality. Lichman (2020) stress that a developed society is the one that has succeeded in providing a source of living for the majority of its inhabitants and that in such society, premium is attached to elimination of poverty, provision of food, shelter and clothing to its members. This argument agrees with the definition of development by Smith (2018) from the modernization paradigm which sees development as a multidimensional process which involves the sustained elevation of the entire society and social system towards a better or humane life. They identify three basic components for understanding development. These components are sustenance, self-esteem and freedom. These represent common goals sought by all individuals and societies. According to author, sustenance is concerned with ability to meet basic needs, self-esteem is concerned with a sense of worth and self-respect, of not being used by others as tools for their own needs and

freedom is concerned with freedom from servitude- servitude to nature, ignorance, other people, misery, institutions and dogmatic beliefs especially, that poverty is a predestination. Therefore, the definition by this paradigm which emphasizes the basic needs of life in transforming the individual in the society to self-actualization is a true definition of development. Any development model that does not reflect these tenets needs a paradigm shift.

According to Omoyibo and Agbonzeke (2021) development are categorizes into five dimensions which are peace, economy, environment, social studies and democracy. In the Nigerian context, these components are missing as democratic processes are absent and the government in power abuses the rule of law. In Nigeria, the process does not create opportunities for opposition to strive and majority of those in power are there on the basis of what to get and the development of their various communities is not their priority Apart from the above, Oke (2020) stresses that sustainable national development starts with the ability of a nation to satisfactorily provide the food and fibre that are needed by its people and industry. Again Hammel (2021) supported this argument by stating that food security must be given adequate attention to the solve problem of mass hunger in Africa and Nigeria in particular. Even if these scholars have given importance to agriculture, national development should be able to transform individuals in virtually all sectors of the economy.

### **Contributions of Higher Education for Sustainable Youth and National Development**

Higher education contributes effectively to sustainable youth and national development. Prominent among the contribution is that higher education helps to supplies the needed manpower for national development. This is support by the argument of Lot o (2019) who stated that a developed or educated polity is the one that has enough manpower and each person occupies his or her rightful position to enhance the growth of the society. To support this, have also remarked that higher education is largely perceived in Nigeria as an indispensable tool which will not only assist in meeting the nation's social, political, moral, cultural and economic aspirations but will also inculcate in the individual knowledge, skills, dexterity, character and desirable values that will foster national development and self-actualization (Ajayi, 2019). From the definition of higher education given above, it is clear that higher education trains an individual to be useful in the society and to meet up the need of the society for national development. Therefore, it should be clear that without higher education, a nation cannot get the needed manpower for material advancement and enlightenment of the citizenry. The trained engineers, teachers, medical doctors, inter alia are all the products of education. This explains why it is argued also that the quality of a nation's education determines the level of its national development.

Higher education is a principal instrument in social mobility and facilitates reduction in income inequality, health and opportunities inherited from the past. It is used for the consolidation of the democratization process in Nigeria. Higher education exposes youth to the basic political norms and values of the society. This ranges from the principle of free and fair elections to the avoidance of political apathy. The merit of this is the inculcation of patriotism and political consciousness in the students including their obligation, the virtues of discipline, tolerance, justice and so on (Abeshi & Ezondi, 2019). Higher education, therefore, consolidates the forces of national unity and a purposeful national awareness for economic sustainability. It is also an instrument that yields dividends which transcend mere economic returns. This is because education, especially tertiary education, elevates the quality of life of the recipients; bequeaths individual dignity and self-respect which are the hallmarks of individual freedom. Indeed, the merit of education in this regard is beyond estimation (Patel, 2020).

Higher education is important in promoting social and group relationships (Armstrong, 2021). In this regard, Oderham (2020) reported that higher education is an institution that trains individuals to relate to and interact meaningfully with others in the society and to appreciate the importance of effective organization for human progress. Here, the school system within the educational system fosters this development. The school brings people of different cultural backgrounds together for a common purpose. This promotes mutual co-existence among the different students. Learners who strongly identify with their school are thought to have a more positive attitude towards teachers, other learners and the entire educational enterprise (Armstrong, 2021). Again, in the school system, there are official clubs and organizations in existence. Learners who participate in these organizations and clubs gain experience in working with others outside the individual organizations and to some extent in working and competing with outside groups with minimum friction and this goes a long way to promote national unity and peaceful co-existence which will lead to national development.

Sometimes, organizations not formally sponsored by the school in some cases make arrangements to use school facilities when classes are not in session. Learners derive benefits from their association with these groups in the same way they profit from participation in school sponsored organizations (Adetuka, 2019). By doing this, education provides a setting within which different learners organizations flourish and a context for helping young people learn appropriate patterns of interpersonal relations. Through this, it provides a forum for the development of many kinds of acceptable person-to-person behaviour patterns as the school classes include a variety of individuals. In these classes, learners meet people from different social, ethnic and cultural backgrounds from their own. Here, male-female relationships begin to develop as young people mature. It is obvious education through the system inculcates much to learners beyond the prescribed academic curriculum and also encourages the development of social behaviours that will be useful to them as adulthood.

Higher education also promotes the culture of productivity by enabling individuals to discover the creative potentials in them and apply same the improvement of the existing skill and technique of performing specific tasks, thereby increasing the efficiency of their personal societal efforts (Obaseh 2018). Higher education teaches or trains people to be useful to themselves and the society they live. By this, they have to be productive and discover their creative abilities and use this to perform specific tasks to attain self-actualisation. Higher education plays a critical role in development, particularly in the global context in which knowledge-based innovations and products fetch high value on the market. Beyond economic benefits, higher education also offers scope for cultural and community development. Higher education aid in advancement in technology. Advances in information technology have aided the accessibility of knowledge, declined the importance of geographical boundaries due to globalization. The intellectual capital has become an instrument of competitive advantage amongst nations and the thinking skill is viewed as a pre-requisite for employment (Isyaku, 2019)

Higher education also develops in individuals those values which make for good citizenship, such as honesty, selflessness, tolerance, dedication, hard-work and personal integrity, all of which provide the rich soil from which good leadership potential is groomed. As already noted, higher education trains an individual to be responsible in the society. From this, it is clear that higher education helps to gives moral training to the youths (Isyaku, 2019). From the above facts, it is clear that higher education has a critical function in sustainable youth and national development.

But in the Nigerian, context, higher education has not fully played its roles in the regard. This is as a result of certain inherent problems in the Nigerian education system. First among these problems is inadequate funding (Abeshi, 2019). Higher education is no doubt,

directly linked with the processes of nation building and development. Higher education in Nigeria has not been properly funded and this leads to poor infrastructure developed in the universities, secondary and primary schools. This poor infrastructure makes the environment very hostile. This explains why highly placed Nigerians like senators and state legislators are cruel to each other to the point of fighting in their legislative houses. Still in the same vein, higher education in Nigeria is politicized (Adobo, 2017). Educational policy decisions in Nigeria are highly political orders, directives, and assertions bereft of synergy. This happens when the envisaged educational plans and objectives are being politically manipulated to suit the whims and caprices of policy formulators. This explains why some political appointees are given portfolios as European commissioners and ministers which they are least qualified for. This explains why Adesina (2017) states that Nigerian politicians would rather advocate unrealistic populist educational programmes than risk their constituency through technically derived and obviously realistic and productive educational programmes. It is sad to note that political appointments in most universities evade due process to the detriment of stakeholders.

Nevertheless, incessant change of educational policies also impacts negatively on national development. A policy requires sufficient time to mature from planning phase to implementation phase and finally to review phase. For instance, a policy that affects the secondary level of Nigerian educational system would definitely require five years to have just complete a programme in higher institution. This is the reverse in the Nigerian context as the usual practice is to jettison such policy, drastically modify or completely abandon it for reasons obvious to the policy makers who are political leaders in power (Aliba 2018). Also important to be mentioned is corruption. In most cases, budgetary allocation to the sector is always embezzled. At the same time, politicians use their offices to accumulate more money. For example, Nigeria has spent over N1.1 trillion on national assembly for the past eight years. With this, much will not be spent on education and it cannot contribute more to national development.

Despite the instrumental role of education in national development, it is confronted with series of other challenges, one of which is epistemological colonialism. Many developments within Africa have been explained from the perspective of the West. On this note, Ali (2018) pointed to the cultural westernization of Africa via the instrumentality of colonization, imperialism and capitalism affecting adversely the education curricula in Africa a number of which are alien construction and incompatible with the African context (Francis, 2018). These problems so identified explain why the crises in the sector have lingered for a long period.

## **Conclusion**

Higher education, which is aimed at providing a functional and qualitative education for sustainable youth and national development, has faced myriads of problems in Nigeria. These challenges have affected its role at providing national development. It has also made higher education nonfunctional because youth do not acquire enough skills to be productive and employable which needed repositioning. These problems can be overcome when all the stakeholders in higher education are deeply involved in finding the lasting solutions and performing their major roles. When this is done the goal of higher education which is for skill acquisition, self-reliance and sustainable development would be achieved.

### **Recommendations**

The following serve as recommendation based on the discussion above

1. Government should be determined to make provision for effective funding of higher education.
2. Again, education should be a tripartite affair and responsibility of federal, state and local governments. At the same time, the private sector should also be made to participate in the funding. This will be successful if government on its part shows its seriousness and commitment to the system in terms of funding. The private sector can participate by providing research grants, awarding of scholarships and endowment of Professorial Chairs in universities. An enabling law should also be enacted making it mandatory for multinational companies operating in Nigeria to set aside a minimum of 5% of their profits to finance higher education and allied projects.
3. There should also be the need for strong political will among political leaders to ensure continuity of educational policies and doggedness in the fight against corruption in the country. Severe punishment should be meted to financial crimes and other corrupt practices in the educational sector.
4. Education should not be politicized and there should be a steady political environment to ensure continuity and maturity of educational policies.
5. In order to revitalize and reposition the Nigerian educational sector it is germane to suggest that emphasis should be placed on sound technical and vocational educational programmes at all levels. The nation needs competent manpower to design and install improved equipment and technically skilled personnel who can help in the production of quality products.

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