

Full length Research

The Strengths, Weaknesses and Prospects of University Education in Nigeria. A Critical Review

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This paper x-rayed the strengths, weaknesses and prospects of university education in Nigeria. It contends that continuous and holistic improvement in university educational system requires the collaborative efforts of various stakeholders. Various societies of the world have evolved various forms of education over time. Formal education has been accepted over time as being capable of enhancing unprecedented growth in societies. Considering the importance of education to the integral development of various nations, huge resources have always been channeled to boost the educational sector by various nations. This paper further discusses the roles of stakeholders in improving quality of university education in Nigeria. Internal and external stakeholders are identified and the various roles they could play in improving the quality of university education are discussed. In Nigeria, for instance, the educational sector is considered as one of the most essential sectors of the yearly budgetary schedule. Looking at the various levels of education, it is true to state that the university education is most suited towards providing the socio-economic development that Nigeria yearns for. This is because it has been discovered that it is the development of the human person that invariably trickles to the development of other sectors of the socio-economic system. An efficient university educational system could be considered as one of the best assets a nation can have. And against this backdrop, one could rightly assert that a dysfunctional university system would surely make for a malfunctioned country. This is why this paper has as its thrust to x-ray the university education in Nigeria, bringing to bare its history, strengths, weaknesses and prospects. The paper challenges that even though the nation's university education has achieved quite much, it is equally laden with weaknesses. If the future of university education in Nigeria is to be revamped, then the authors has made some recommendations that could assist in amelioration the university education system in Nigeria.

Keywords: Strengths, Weaknesses, Prospects, University Education, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Education is the bed rock to social, economic, political and human developments. The prime place education occupies in the developmental effort of

nations has never been doubted the world over. Education is the biggest industry that touches on every fabric of our human endeavour (Castell, 2016). Various

nations, including Nigeria, have been making conscientious efforts to harness this important sector for optimal development. Although much has been achieved in this regard, much still needs to be done in order to confront effectively the ever-increasing challenges of our time. Higher education generally is also referred to as post-secondary or tertiary education is the education given after secondary education in colleges of education, monotechnics, polytechnics and universities and those institutions offering correspondence courses (Eke, 2006). Higher educational institutions are unique institutions which are differentiated from others in terms of research and its managers are designated as Provosts, Rectors, and Vice chancellors.

University education, which is our focal point in this paper, is an important form of investment in human capital. It can be viewed as a high level or a specialized form of human capital, contribution of which is very significant to economic growth in any society (Castell, 2016). This is why Castell rightly refers to it as – the engine of development in the new world economy. Nevertheless, it is by adequate university education that people get to know their basic rights and seek to get them enforced. This is because part of the reasons for the smooth ride of the unscrupulous ruling elite – lies in the fact that they have constantly worked on the emotions of an ignorant population. Lack of adequate education limits the horizons of the masses and therefore restricts the capacity of the oppressed to extract their rights from state. However, in spite of the pertinence of university education to any nation, Nigeria has been bedeviled by many woes in her university education sector, such that anyone who has the good of the country at heart would agree that the sector need a divine touch. This write-up, will therefore have as its kernel, to consider the situation of the Nigerian university education – the history, relevance, Strengths, weaknesses and prospects as well as areas that need to be touched and how this should be done in order to salvage the university education in Nigeria (Kukah, 2017).

The aims of university education in Nigeria outlined by the Federal Ministry of Education (2004) and highlighted by Asiyai (2005,) are:

- Production of the much-needed high-level manpower essential for the nation's growth and development.
- They are centers of excellence in teaching, research and storehouses of knowledge for nurturing the manpower needs of the nation.
- Promotion and encouragement of scholarship and community services.

The Federal Ministry of Education also stated that universities in Nigeria shall vigorously

Pursue these goals through:

- Teaching
- Research and development
- Knowledge generation and dissemination and

international cooperation

- Dedicated services to the communities through extra-mural and consultancy services

All these stated goals are closely related to quality education. Nigerian government both state and national level has considered quality higher education a veritable instrument for achieving radical social, economic and political development. Nigeria intend to use education as a vehicle for fostering development of all her citizens to their full potentials in the promotion of a strong, democratic, prosperous, indivisible and indissoluble sovereign nation.

However, one critical weakness to quality higher education especially university in Nigeria is funding. Nigerian government appears not to have seen the need to allocate a reasonable proportion of budget to higher Universities. World Bank (2012) analysis of budgetary allocation to education in selected countries of the world indicates that Nigeria is the least country in terms of budgetary allocation. The analysis shows that Ghana allocated 31%, Cote d'Ivoire 30.0%, Uganda 27.0%, Morocco 26.4%, South Africa 25.8%, Swaziland 24.6%, Mexico 24.3%, and Kenya 23.0%, Botswana 19.0%, USA 17.1%, Burkina Faso 16.8%, Norway 16.2%, Colombia 15.6% India 12.7%, Nigeria 8.4%. UNESCO (1995) had recommended 26% budgetary allocation to education in terms of GDP but Nigerian government appears to play down on this recommendation despite the numerous mineral resources at her disposal. The standard argument for Nigerian government not paying adequate attention to the education sector is the competing demand from other sectors such as transportation, health and similar areas of services to the economy. This study is based on contemporary literature on strengths, weaknesses and prospects of university education in Nigeria. Nigeria has a teeming population of about 154 million people. A growing population necessitates some growth in higher education to accommodate the increasing number of students seeking a higher education degree, yet the potential of Nigerian higher education systems to fulfill this responsibility is frequently thwarted by problems of finance, efficiency, equity and quality (Ibukun, 2007).

History of University Education in Nigeria

The history of university education in Nigeria is traced to the Elliot Commission of 1943, which culminated in the establishment of University College Ibadan (UCI) in 1948. UCI was an affiliate of the University of London. Ibukun also contends that the UCI was saddled with a number of problems at inception ranging from rigid constitutional provisions, poor staffing, and low enrolment to high dropout rate (Babalola *et al.*,2007) In April 1959, the Federal Government commissioned an inquiry (the Ashby Commission) to

advise it on the higher education needs of the country for its first two decades. Before the submission of the report, the Eastern Region government established its own university at Nsukka (University of Nigeria, Nsukka in 1960). The implementation of the Ashby Report led to the establishment of University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife) in 1962 by the Western region, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria in 1962 by the Northern Region and University of Lagos (1962) by the Federal Government. Babalola *et al.*, (2000) posited that the University College, Ibadan became a full-fledged university in 1962. This meant that UCI, Ibadan and University of Lagos became the first two federal universities in Nigeria – the other three remained regional. In 1970, the newly created Midwestern region opted for a university known as University of Benin. The six universities established during this period 1960-1970 are still referred to as first generation universities. Babalola *et al.*, (2007) remarked that during this period, universities in Nigeria were under the close surveillance of the government. Appointments of lay members of the council, and that of the Vice-Chancellor, were politically motivated.

Adeboye (2003) posits that in the Third National Development Plan (1975–1980), the government established seven universities instead of the four proposed in the plan, and also took over the four regional universities in 1975. They were Universities of Calabar, Ilorin, Jos, Sokoto, Maiduguri, Port Harcourt and Ado Bayero University, Kano – all known as second generation universities. The third generation universities were established between 1980 and early 1990. They are: the Federal Universities of Technology in Owerri, Makurdi, Yola, Akure and Bauchi. While state universities were found in Imo, Ondo, Lagos, Akwalbom, Oyo and Cross-River states. The fourth generation universities are those established between 1991 and the present date. They include more state universities, Nigerian open universities and many private universities (Asiyai, 2005).

Importance of University Education in Nigeria

The benefits derivable from a good and functional university education system can never be overemphasized. The entire developmental apparatus of the socio-economic structure revolves around a good university education. The contribution of university education to development comes in varied forms as shown by (Asayi, 2007).

- ❖ Firstly, it helps in the rapid industrialization of the economy. This it does by providing manpower with adequate professional, technical and managerial skills.
- ❖ In another vein, a good university system helps to boost the transformation of societies into knowledge societies. This it does by providing not just educated

workers, but knowledge workers who will contribute immensely to the growth of the economy.

- ❖ Furthermore, a worthwhile university education helps to instill good attitudes and engenders attitudinal changes that are necessary for the socialization of the individuals, thereby, leading to the modernization and overall transformation of the society.

- ❖ It is also clear that a functional university system helps, through teaching and concise research, in the creation, absorption, dissemination and application of knowledge.

- ❖ Healthy university education helps in the formation of a strong nation-state and at the same time aids globalization.

- ❖ Finally, it allows people to enjoy an enhanced life of mind, offering the wider society both cultural and political benefits.

In spite of such monumental importance a good university education, the Nigerian, Infact African university system has been subjected to and constrained by what one could described as several weaknesses. It is these that we shall consider below.

Benefits Derived so far from the Nigerian University Education System

Even though the university system in Nigeria has not had a very smooth sail from inception, it has witnessed many successes. The gains that Nigeria has derived from the university education become glaring when one considers the five national goals through which Nigeria's philosophy of education draws its strength, namely, to create a democratic and free society, a just and egalitarian society, a united, strong and self-reliant nation, a great and dynamic economy and a land full of bright opportunities for all citizens as expressed by (Akinmusuru, 2009).

According to Amaele (2005) university education is more than the next level in the learning process; it is a critical component of human development worldwide. It provides not only the high-level skills necessary for every labor market but also the training essential for teachers, doctors, nurses, civil servants, engineers, humanists, entrepreneurs, scientists, social scientists, and a myriad of other personnel. It is these trained individuals who develop the capacity and analytical skills that drive local economies, support civil society, teach children, lead effective governments, and make important decisions which affect entire societies. This function of education can be seen vividly in action in Nigeria. Adepoju (2007) outlined the functions of university education as follows:

- The university education in Nigeria has led to the development of many Nigerians into sound and effective citizens. Here, university education more than any other, has led to higher self-awareness and self-realization of

individuals at various tasks, enhanced better human relationships, national consciousness and effective citizenship.

➤ One cannot doubt the fact that the university education system has enhanced social, cultural, economic, political, scientific and technological progress in Nigeria. The country is more blessed now with specialists at various fields of endeavour: medicine, law, engineering, philosophy, education, etc. And due to this development, the nation is becoming more and more dynamic and self-reliant as the days go by. This has been made possible because of the university education.

➤ In addition, university education has been on the vanguard of creating opportunities for the teeming Nigerian population. To build a united and egalitarian country entails that every Nigerian should contribute to

the development or up-liftment of the country. The opportunity to do this in Nigeria has been largely provided by the university education.

➤ Apart from serving their fatherland, the university education has continually churned out scholars who have contributed meaningfully to the world's reservoir of knowledge. There is thus growing evidence that university education, through its role in empowering domestic constituencies, building institutions, and nurturing favorable regulatory frameworks and governance structures, is vital to a country's efforts to increase social capital and to promote social cohesion, which is proving to be an important determinant of economic growth and development (Adepoju, 2007).

The figure below shows internal and external stakeholders of higher education like Nigeria universities.

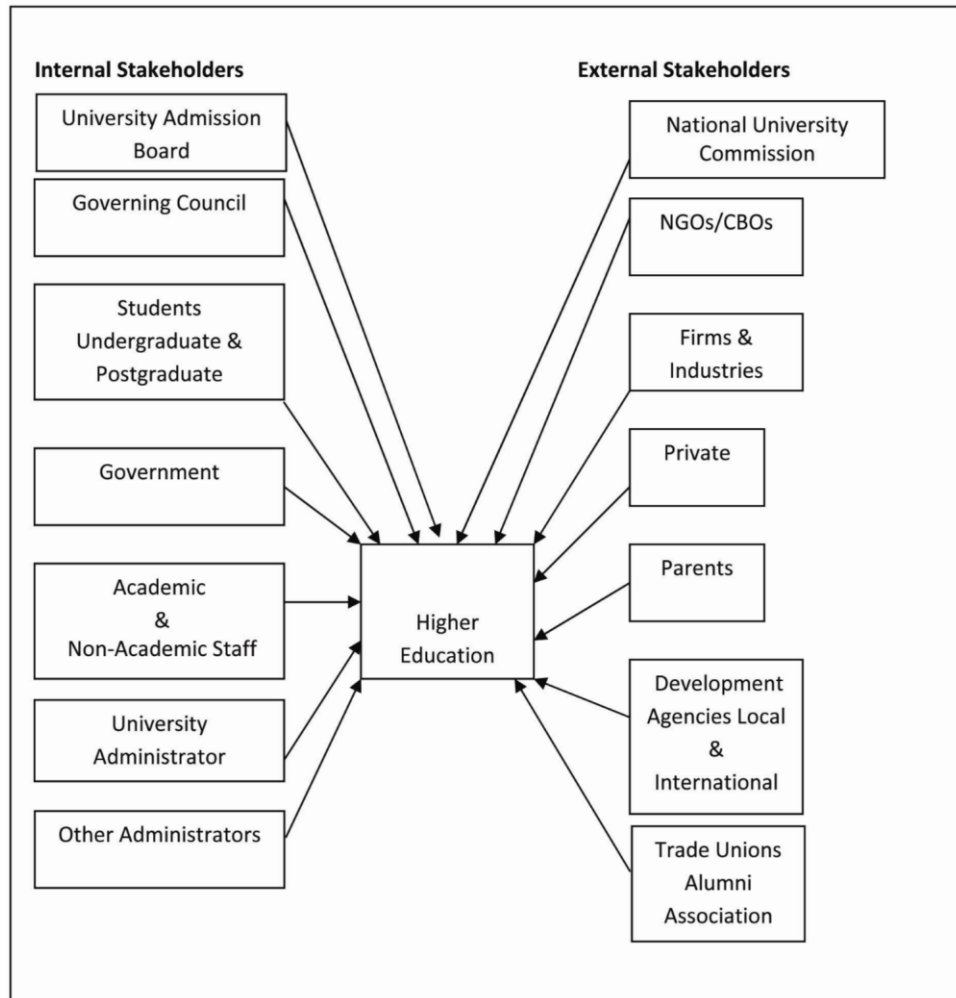


Figure 1: University Education Stakeholders

The Role of Different Stakeholders in Improving Quality University Education in Nigeria

1. Internal Stakeholders

i. University Administrators

The university administrator play very critical roles towards improving the quality of teaching and learning, research, community services and other functions of university. The university administrator is designated as Vice-Chancellor. He is the most influential stakeholder in the institution. The Vice-Chancellor sets the academic tone of the institution for students, teaching staff, other staff, parents and community members by providing effective leadership. The university administrator is assisted in administering the university by other administrators including the deputy Vice-Chancellors, registrar, deans of faculties, directors of institutes and heads of departments (Adeoyogun, 2006). The Vice-Chancellor contributes to institutional improvement by developing a collaborative team approach to school decision making process and problem solving. The administrator should employ a distributive approach to routine operations of the institution to ensure maximum involvement of other internal and external stakeholders (Anyakaoha, 2018). Adopting a distributive approach involving other internal and external stakeholders in the management of affairs could enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the decision making process of the institution for improved policy implementation and better learning outcomes of students. For adequate improvement in the quality of university education to be achieved, Vice-Chancellor and management should be performance and result oriented by focusing on the pursuit of the vision and missions of the university. As well as commitment to infrastructural development using internally generated fund. In addition, the Vice-Chancellor should ensure that good leadership is provided by creating conducive school climate where student/student, student/lecturer, lecturer/staff and management/staff strives in a harmonious relationship.

The university administrator must ensure that relevant curriculum is implemented for students' better learning. School curriculum must emphasize skills that are commonly sought by employers. Such skills of important quality values to students include communication skills, problem solving, critical thinking, critical analysis, thinking inventively, logical reasoning, confidence and ability to see things from different perspectives (Asiyai, 20006).

University administrators should ensure that the quality of research is improved. Achieving this objective necessitate improved spending on research and universities adopting a good research culture. Establishing a good research culture in Nigeria universities, it becomes imperative to increase national

investment on research. Studies have shown that African countries spend as little on research compared to developed countries (Baiké, 2012). The poor spending on research in Africa (Nigeria inclusive) is responsible for poor performance of the university system (Asiyai and Oglauybu 2009). In addition, Nigerian universities must check staff and students research activities through establishment of internal quality control mechanism. To improve the quality of research, the plagiarism detection software should be established in universities so that research conducted by staff and students are submitted through the software to control plagiarism. This would be one of improving the quality of research.

The university Vice-Chancellor has a critical role to play through to ensure that institutions mission statement is vigorously pursued by all stakeholders. The administrator should set the vision and empower other stakeholders to take responsibility in achieving it. Through collaborative efforts involving different stakeholders, universities could sponsor lecturers and other staff to training programs such as workshops, seminars and conferences both local and international for update of knowledge and skills. Such training programs could involve trade unions, employers of labour and public assistance. This will help in shaping education and training to make it more relevant to the needs of the market. Nigerian university Vice-Chancellors must ensure that lecturers continue to learn through continuous education and training via professional development training programs. The education and training of lecturers is critical to continuous improvement in quality of university education. Lecturers' capacity building or professional development will help to keep them abreast of modern teaching technologies as well as innovations and changes in teaching and learning so that they are able to guide students in learning experiences to meet world-class standards. The more professional knowledge teachers have, the higher the level of student achievement (Babalola *et al.*, 2007).

ii. The Government and University Governing Council

The government is the owner of public state and federal universities in Nigeria. The federal government owns and finances federal universities through the National University Commission (NUC) while the state government owns and finances state universities. In Nigeria, government has continued to be the main financier of education. Government can influence the improvement of higher education by ensuring that relevant funding policy is established for proper funding of universities in the country. Government must ensure that relevant curriculum is implement in universities and

also see to it that such curriculum is constantly review in line with market demands.

The university governing council or board of governors performs numerous roles in ensuring continuous improvement in quality of university education. They make important contribution in defining strategic vision for the universities. They are also responsible for policy formulation and monitoring institutional performance. Members of board of governors contribute immensely in institutional decision making. Ike (2006) asserted that effective policy making requires enlightened governing board that has a broad view of the impact of higher education on the society and is cognizant of the strategic directions and resources for achieving institutional missions with quality. Additionally, council members should ensure that academics of good quality are employed. Members of governing council must work as a team with external stakeholders in seeking continuous improvement and in the process of reviewing academic standards and quality in university education systems in Nigeria.

iii. University Admission Board (UAB)

The university admission board in Nigeria comprises the deputy Vice-Chancellor Academics as chairman, the university admission officer and deans of faculties and heads of departments. The UAB reports all issues concerning admission to the Vice-Chancellor. The UAB chairman of the university admission board must ensure that admission policies of good standards are put in place. The UAB perform the role of ensuring that only qualified candidates are admitted into the various departments. Members of UAB can influence improvement of quality university education by ensuring that they do not compromise quality during admission process. This is because the inputs into university determine the quality of the outputs. Additionally, the UAB should ensure that learning environments are healthy, safe and protective and provide adequate resources, instructional and infrastructural facilities for effective teaching and learning including provision of information and communication technologies. Such infrastructural facilities like lecture hall or auditorium, workshops, theatres, libraries, laboratories, staff offices as well as public utilities like water and electricity should be adequately provided (Achibong and Okey, 2016).

iv. Academic and Non Academic Staff

The lecturers are the teaching or academic staff of Nigerian universities. The teacher's (lecturer's) role is pivotal in the improvement of quality of teaching and learning in universities. Lecturers are frontline producers of university education in Nigeria. The lecturer is a pace setter who sets plans aimed at ensuring students' effective learning by devising learning experiences which

arouse students interest and inspire them to work diligently so as to become creative problem solvers. All over the world, the teacher is recognized as a major factor in implementing educational reform efforts aimed at improving the quality of education. Teachers are the most significant change agent in educational reform (Akuezuilo and Ndu, 2003). Teachers are key players in the process of educational change and school improvement, who not only deliver the curriculum, but are engaged in defining and interpreting curriculum. The teachers classroom practices can help to ignite the interest of students and inculcate in them, positive attitude towards their studies. The lecturer is a professional in a given discipline, an instructional expert who plans, guides, and evaluates students' learning. The lecturer's role in improving the quality of university education is that of a manager charged with the provision of stimulating and conducive learning environment for students' productive learning as well as ensuring effective classroom management during lectures.

To improve the quality of teaching and learning in Nigerian university, the lecturer's roles are:

- Adopt a good work ethics and habit
- Encouraging team work, innovation and creativity among students
- Provision of guidance to students in their learning
- Ensuring effective classroom management and control during instruction
- Creating positive leaning environment or climate so that students can actively be involved in learning process to ensure in them, a permanent change in desirable behaviour
- Promotes a classroom atmosphere that motivates self-directed and cooperative learning
- Communicating with parents students learning progress
- Ensuring that they attend their lectures regularly and timely
- Ensuring that lectures are student-centered
- Teaching effectively, using active learning strategies
- Avoiding unethical conducts such as plagiarism, poor teaching, aiding examination malpractice and missing students' scores
- Conducting researches that can help improve instructional practices
- Monitoring and evaluating students learning

iv. Students (Customers)

Students are customers in the education industry striving to get the best education. The essence of the establishment of any institution of higher learning is to ensure the sound development of students academically, morally, socially, politically, spiritually. Students must be made an integral part of the success of any educational institution. Successful institutions

encourage significant participation by students, teachers and parents (Castell, 2016). Consequently, university administrators should incorporate students in the participative decision making of the institution. Kukah (2017) clarifies that empowering students with shared decision making increases their choices and responsibilities of their own learning. Students can gain the skills, knowledge, values and attributes needed for productive and viable living in the society through participation in institutional decision making. For quality education, students must be encouraged to exercise their decision making roles in the education process especially participation in decision in issues pertaining to their academics. The attainment of quality education, requires that students resume at their institutions at expected date, regularly attend their lectures so that they can learn and avoid issues of academic misconduct.

2. External Stakeholders

i. National University Commission (NUC)

The national universities commission is the regulator of university education in Nigeria. It regulates all the activities of public and private universities in Nigeria. The NUC accredits programs of university education in the country. It ensures that only accredited programs are ran by universities. The NUC is charged with ensuring quality and quality assurance in Nigerian universities. The NUC has a quality assurance unit that is responsible for using international best practices on quality assurance. The NUC demands accountability from universities and checks the overall effectiveness and efficiency of program offerings and all activities of Nigerian universities. The NUC sets the minimum standards regarding qualification of teachers, the quality of teaching in institutions, number of students to be admitted and the universities carrying capacity. As a way of improving quality, the NUC regularly monitors the activities of universities and conducts a need assessment exercise as reported by (Asiyai 2006).

ii. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Local Communities and Private Sector

Non-governmental organizations, local communities and private sectors have numerous contributions in improving the quality of university education in Nigeria. An earlier study by Asiyai (2005) showed that NGOs and Community Based Organizations (CBOs) have numerous contributions in garnering resources for quality education delivery. In developed countries, school improvements have been greatly achieved through collaborative participation of different stakeholders such as non-governmental

organizations and local communities. Asiyai (2012) showed that community organizations provided monitoring of teaching by teachers which lead to significant improvement in the quality of teaching and improved accountability systems and ethos of schools.

In Nigeria, communities are gradually being involved in institutional improvement through collaborative efforts. Private sectors such as alumni association, religious organization, manufacturers associations, trade unions, industries, other employers of labour, other institutions, bilateral and multi-lateral agencies have numerous contributions in seeking improvement of university education in Nigeria. They can contribute greatly to the growth and development of university education for improved quality delivery. Since private business organizations and industries/firms employ the services of university graduates, their participation in funding and provision of physical facilities will enhance efficiency of university education systems. Alumni association could assist in improving funding of their alma mater through a fixed levy paid by members of their institutions (Schultz, 1997). There is need to reduce the overdependence of government in funding higher education in Nigeria through private sector participation in funding of education. The industries can assist in financing universities in research or training students in practical areas required by the industries while the industries can leverage universities research since they lack the capacity to innovate. In developed countries private sector participation in education is well established. Adeboye (2003) indicates private sector participation in education in school building construction and provision of health facilities in schools in Adepoju (2007) found that the private sector contributed immensely for schools in Port Philip Specialist School in Port Melbourne which serves about 140 students with moderate and severe disabilities.

iii. Parents

Parents' contributions are numerous in the improvement of the quality of university education in Nigeria. Parents are to ensure that their children are provided with adequate materials needed for their academic activities. Adequate provision must be made for students in terms of buying their food stuff, early payment of tuition fees, provision of accommodation and provision of books. Parents could also play the roles of provision of counseling to ensure that their children stay in school, attend lectures, refrain from joining secret cults, develop good study habits and learn effectively. Parents should also play the role of provision of spiritual support for their children while at school through praying for them. The primary objective of parents is the assurance of their children quality education which will enable them to lead productive and rewarding adult life in a global society (Amaele, 2005).

Weaknesses to Quality University Education in Nigeria

Several factors pose as challenges of quality University education in Nigeria. These factors are highlighted and discussed below:

1. 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. The 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 Universities 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 (Ike, 2006). Even the FGN/ASUU Re-negotiation Committee (2009) realized as widely acknowledged that the key to the survival of Nigeria in the 21st century lies in the country's ability to produce applied and theoretical knowledge in science, technology and humanities and hence the Renegotiation Committee arrived at a consensus on the need for a rational and scientific procedure for determining the funding requirements to begin the revitalizing the Nigerian university system. Despite all efforts made the Nigerian government have not showed enough commitment towards adequate funding of university education.

2. Inadequate teaching staff

A big challenge to the attainment of quality higher education in Nigeria is the lack of academic staff. Teachers are the hub of any educational system. Teachers determine the quality of education because they transmit educational policies into practice and action. As rightly pointed out by Schultz, (1997) without adequate number of inspiring, well-informed teachers, fully prepared to meet their responsibilities in our schools, we cannot have good education and without good education, we cannot hope for long to meet successfully, the challenges of a changing world. Asiyai (2006) seems to concur with the above when he noted that good teachers are needed for good education which in turn is indispensable for social change, social transformation and national development. The importance of teachers cannot be over emphasized. Despite the importance of teachers in the attainment of good education, universities in Nigeria are short of lecturers to adequately handle teaching and learning activities. The institutions because of inadequate funding are not able to employ additional lecturers. The few

available lecturers are seriously over worked. In some universities, because of shortage of lecturers their programmes are not accredited by the accreditation agencies. Attainment of good quality in higher education requires teaching staff of adequate quantity and quality.

3. 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 universities and other institutions of higher learning in Nigeria in their world of work and the alarming incidence of examination malpractice. Ajayi (2007) 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 thereby resulting to poor quality delivery. Such factors as government underfunding of education and injudicious utilization of available funds by implementation agencies such as vice chancellors, rectors, provosts deans of faculties, heads of department etc. when funds meant to deliver quality education is misappropriated or embezzled, the education which learners receive becomes worthless. Anyakaoha, (2018) noted that money the government votes for running the institution does not get to the institutions and the little that gets there is normally wasted by education managers. Additionally, in Nigerian institutions of higher learning little attention is paid to teaching effectiveness of academic staff. The "publish or perish" syndrome which places more emphasis on research makes lecturers to be more committed to research. Akinmusuru, (2009) attributed the low quality of Nigerian universities graduates to little attention given to teaching effectiveness, stressing that institutional policies are not geared towards making students learning a priority.

4. Lack of resources

Quality university education is dependent on the quality and quantity of human and material resources put in place in 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 universities in Nigeria, the lecture halls are overcrowded with majority of the students standing at the corridors during lectures. Besides, the libraries in most universities in the country are stocked with obsolete text

books, with current journals and text books lacking. In the opinion of Kukah (2017), the library is at the heart of the academic effort in a college or university. For an institution to be strong academically, it must have a formidable library put in place. This explains why the top universities of the world (Harvard, Cambridge, Tokyo and university of California) are academically of high strength and quality. The acute shortage of educational facilities in universities in Nigeria has led to decline in the quality of university education in the country. For example, in most universities, the science laboratory and vocational and technical education workshops are empty, lacking the equipment needed for effective teaching and learning. It is not uncommon to see a student graduating from chemistry department without handling volumetric analysis apparatus. The undesirable conditions of universities in Nigeria have been worrisome to many scholars (Adeoyogun, 2006).

Worried about the poor quality of graduates of Nigerian universities in Nigeria, the national universities commission carried out a need assessment survey which was reported by Ajayi, (2007) and highlighted the following:

- Only about 30% of Nigerian students' population has adequate access to classrooms, workshop, lecture halls, laboratories and libraries.
- Deficient libraries in terms of currency and number of books, journals, and electronic support facilities.
- Inadequate academic calendar resulting from staff unions' industrial action premised on low salary, wages/welfare and students strikes often time related to inadequate facilities.
- Lack of practical experience, often times resulting from deficient facilities.

5. Lack of information communication technology facilities

Another challenge to quality attainment to university education in Nigeria is lack of information communication technology facilities. As part of her education reform effort Nigerian government adopted information communication technologies in all levels of education since information communication technology integration in educational practices is meant to improve teaching and learning, enhance higher education research, enhance collaboration among peers and improve quality of education. Unfortunately, most universities in the country, there is acute short of computers, multi-media projectors, electronic white boards, and automation of lecture halls and lecturers offices. Even majority of the institutions are not linked with functional internet connectivity. According to Ibukun, (2007) these new digital technologies make possible a learning revolution in education. As rightly noted by

Achibong and Okey, (2016) information and communication technologies could be used to prepare lesson plan, collect data and analyze students' achievement. Curriculum content could be enriched through search from the internet by teachers. Through such internet search, information and relevant school practices which are unknown to teachers and students and which cannot be found in textbooks, can easily be downloaded for use.

6. Frequent labour disputes and closures of universities

A big challenge to quality university education in Nigeria is the incessant staff union disputes and subsequent closures of the institutions. Closure of the universities affects staff productivity and the realization of educational aim and objectives. Asiyai (2005) provided a catalogue of strikes by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) and the Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities (SSANU) within fourteen years. She revealed that they were too many strikes, some of which lasted up to six months. Asiyai (2006) identified the variables inducing the frequent trade union disputes as poor conditions of service of staff, non-implementation of ASUU/FGN or SSANU/FGN agreements, lack of autonomy and academic freedom and poor funding. The universities in Nigeria are presently closed down for one month rolling strike since February 14th 2022 as a result of failure of the federal government to implement the agreement reached with the academic staff union of universities since 2009, despite all assurances and memorandum of understanding between the two parties. The disruption of academic programmes of institutions of higher learning affects students learning outcomes, since lecturers find it difficult to complete the course work. The frequent disputes and strike galore by university staff and students leave students with little or no time to complete both their theoretical and practical work. In most cases a semester's course work is sandwiched to few weeks during which lectures are rushed to accommodate the time lost to strike. This type of academic rush is a big threat to attainment of quality in higher education in Nigeria. Adeboye, (2003) in his study noted that the higher the level of crisis, disruptions and hostility, the lower the level of productivity, standard and quality of the products of the system.

7. Lack of vibrant staff development programmes

Most universities 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. Adepoju, (2007) argued that the weakness of post graduate programmes of some universities in Nigeria required a strong staff development programme for staff. He maintained that universities are staffed by lecturers who are not familiar with the topography of educational landscape and have never been expected to formulate their own philosophies of education or their own views about teaching and learning. Again to buttress this point, Asiyai, (2005) noted that given the increasing number of pseudo scholars in Nigerian university education in the wake of enormous rapid expansion of university, it is clearly seen that the doctorate degree is not sufficient for true scholarship.

7. Cultism and other vices

A big challenge to quality in university education in Nigeria is the increasing activities of secret cult groups, kidnappers and other vices. The universities in Nigeria are under siege barded and almost ruined by secret cults (Asiyai, 2005). As a result of the activities of cult groups and kidnappers' majority of students, lecturers and their families live in perpetual fear. Some of these cult groups indulge in arm robbery, rape, assassination and infrastructure destruction. They cheat in the examination openly and threaten lecturers when caught. While academic and senior staff of universities in the country are being hunted by kidnappers and those kidnapped are made to pay huge sum of money as ransom before they are released. The tensions induced on members of higher education institution communities as a result of the activities of these secret cult groups and kidnappers tend to generate negative impacts on quality of higher education in Nigeria.

8. Brain drain

A big challenge to the quality of university education in Nigeria is the problem of brain drain. Over the past decades, there has been mass exodus of brilliant and most talented lecturers to other sectors of the economy. Some of the lecturers left Nigerian universities to join the business world, some joined politics while others left Nigeria for better services. As succinctly put by Ike, (2006) many experienced and young lecturers are fleeing Nigeria from the frustration of university life into more rewarding and more challenging

sectors of the economy and even to overseas countries. There is diminishing scope of mentoring junior researchers by seasoned and senior lecturers in Nigeria due to brain drain. Brain drain has led to decline in research outputs from institutions of higher learning in Nigeria vis-à-vis the disappearance of research centers in Nigerian universities. Research brings about improvement in teaching and learning (Asiyai, 2005) but when there is exodus of brilliant and seasoned academics from institutions of higher learning, the quality of education delivery is threatened.

9. Poor leadership

Poor leadership both at the government level and at the institution level have been a big challenge to quality university education in Nigeria. Since the nineties, the government of the country has not shown enough commitment to university education development in Nigeria. One of the several indices for properly evaluating government commitment to educational development in any country is budgetary allocation and disbursement to education. UNESCO had recommended 26% budgetary allocation to education based on GNP but the amount allocated to education by Nigerian government has continued to be smaller when compared to other African countries. For example, budgetary allocation to education as percentage of GNP was 0.7%, South Africa was 7.9%, Ghana was 4.2%, Kenya was 6.5% and Sub-Sahara 4.2% in 2005 (Akuezuilo and Ndu, 2003). A World Bank Report cited by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU, 2013) noted that in 2012 Nigeria's GDP was 262.2 billion USD while allocation to education was 1.96 billion USD, the amount spent by Nigeria for the entire education sector being less than what individual universities spend on education in some countries. It is clear that the government of the country is not committed to quality education. Additionally, poor leadership of some Nigerian university administrators has been a bane to the attainment of quality university education in Nigeria.

Prospects to Effective University Education in Nigeria

The paper meticulously unveiled the systemic genesis of the current state of university education in Nigeria so that various stakeholders can come together to retrace footsteps and begin to resolve the lingering issues in the university system. We must all share the blame for the state of the nation's educational system equally. Government must be blamed for not creating an enabling academic environment through prioritization of funds and the creation of necessary employment to justify the establishment of so many universities. The

lecturers must take responsibility for deciding to play financial politics instead of proudly teaching the students. It must be acknowledged that some may have been driven to the brink by circumstances beyond their control but this does not excuse them. Students share part of the responsibilities because they work so hard to purchase degrees/certificates in cash or in kind without mastering what it takes to be worthy of the degree/certificates. Finally, our capable and able parents failed to monitor the progress of their children against morally, socially, academically acceptable standards (Castell, 2016).

If the Nigerian government is very serious in revamping the educational system, it is time to bring home some of the country's professionals in the Diaspora. They have fortunately acquired all of the technologies that the country needs and can be transferred back to Nigeria. If Nigeria did not knowingly or conspiratorially destroy the educational system, it will be easy to attract capable Nigerians to help rebuild the nation that they aptly criticize from the Diaspora. The government and concerned relevant agencies should therefore rise up to the challenge of revamping the Nigerian university education system so as to benefit lavishly from the benefits that are accruable from this sector.

CONCLUSION

This article discussed the strengths, weaknesses and prospects of university education in Nigeria, roles of internal and external stakeholders in influencing the improvement of quality university education in Nigeria. The paper contends that government who has continued to be the main financier of education in Nigeria has not been able to meet the demands of university education systems in the country. Government alone cannot continue to fund education. Attainment of quality university education can be achieved by collaboration of universities with industries in research and development activities. The industries can assist by financing universities in research or training students in practical areas required by the industries. This paper maintains that improving the quality of university education in Nigeria, much sacrifice is required from some stakeholders of university education including internal stakeholders such as academic staff, non-academic staff, university administrators, deans of faculties, directors of institutes, heads of departments, senators and board of governors of universities. Lots of improvement can be recorded in university education if the weaknesses discussed in the paper can be addressed by the parties concerned. External stakeholders can influence improvement in quality in donation of fund, implementing reform, participative decision making, institutional policy making, construction of buildings, donation of health facilities and textbooks, construction of access roads to institutions,

monitoring performance. An educated populace is vital in today's world; this fact becomes more indubitable considering the convergent impacts of globalization, the increasing importance of knowledge as a main driver of growth, and the information and communication revolution. Knowledge accumulation and application have become major factors in economic development and are increasingly at the core of a country's competitive advantage in the global economy. However, the state of university education in Nigeria has been very discouraging and sad. It is very sad because it reflects the frustration that university lecturers, students, some in government, and parents have been feeling for a long time. What should be new, however, is that instead to feeling sorry, Nigerians should renew their interest and resolve to revive the quality of the educational system for the next generation. No Nigerian can exonerate himself from the culpability of the deplorable state of the nation's educational system. A cursory review of the genesis of events that led Nigeria to this discouraging paradigm is necessary.

A pertinent question here is, does the government have the capacity to change the direction of the nation or is it just paying lip service to all problems? Let no one make the mistake, Nigerians will survive in any situation they find themselves but we want them to survive in an academically, socially and morally acceptable environment just like their counterparts in other parts of the world. The deplorable conditions of university education and the rate of unemployment in Nigeria are clear and present dangers to any old and new political party. Nigerians need a benevolent and patriotic government consisting of people that are ready to wipe falling tears of the citizens and help them dream again.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address the weaknesses /challenges of quality university education in Nigeria, the following are recommended:

- Government of Nigeria should place high premium on education by meeting up the recommended 26% educational spending prescribed by UNESCO, to help revitalize the university system,
- Enabling environment should be created for staff through improved conditions of service, provision of basic infrastructures, virtual libraries and information communication technologies and internet connectivity.
- Universities in Nigeria should set up internal quality assurance and monitoring of lecture units to enhance good quality delivery.
- Reform in existing universities in Nigeria can be promoted through deliberate collaborative efforts by government, business sectors, civil society and the academia. This could help to reinvent Nigerian university system for better quality delivery in research, teaching

and community services.

- To improve quality, lecturers and non-lecturers should be motivated to make them more dedicated, devoted and committed and effective in their jobs.
- Universities in Nigeria should employ more lecturers to match the students' population. Institutional policies should be revised to ensure that more emphasis is paid on teaching effectiveness of lecturers for better quality education.

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