

## **University Education: A Paradigm Shift for Human Capital Development for Sustainable National Development in Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

Education is the most potent weapon for achieving national development while the quality of education sustains such development. This paper focused on the roles played by the university in human capital development for sustainable national development. In this paper, university education encompasses most higher education programmes in Nigeria. Against this background, the paper examined the traditional roles of the university and stressed the need for a paradigm shift in university education for human capital development for sustainable national growth. The paper also examined the societal expectations of the university in a changing world. The paper explored the new roles of the university, especially in embracing environment relevant and impactful programmes for equipping students with skills that will prepare them for their contributions towards solving societal challenges such as unemployment and low pace of industrialisation. Some recommendations were made, some of which include: the university management and the governing council of the university should ensure avenues for proper funding of educational programmes for a viable human capital development; and, the university should always see itself as an avenue for proffering solutions to social challenges and as such update the frontiers of knowledge with current issues affecting humanity and how such could be eradicated through the courses offered in the university.

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**Keywords:** university education; paradigm shift; sustainable national development; human capital development

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The most important asset available for man to perform any task or achieve development and growth in his environment according to Bamisaye (1989) is knowledge, which is a necessary condition for an individual to be identified as educated. In the same vein, the great Athenian Philosopher, Socrates (470-399 BC) submitted that education should not just be about the transmission of culture but also about the making of good men and good citizens. He stressed further that virtue is based on knowledge and that man cannot act or behave in a correct manner unless he is first made to realise the right from wrong. Man according to him is endowed with natural ability to reason to a particular degree and the best way to facilitate the ingenuity of man is to create the most conducive environment that enables personal growth through the ability to reason. For this purpose, universities world over and Nigerian universities in particular, have major roles to play in the production of the good men and good citizens of Socrates' definition for national as well as global sustainability.

A University should naturally be one of the avenues for human capital development and social education in which medium and high level personnel are produced to meet emerging challenges in the society. On this note, Synder (1993) describes a university

as an institution which people attend to further their education, also as a place of employment for people to work as faculty members or staff to earn a living. This process addresses the challenges of resource management and generation of ideas that will collectively improve the standard of living of the people through efficient and effective application of such resources to create wealth. Against this background, the university is expected to develop curricula and policies that address knowledge in the society as well as generate ideas for the continuous growth of the nation. Supporting the views above, Brown and Ward (2008) opined that a university serves as a focal point for countless benefits to the community.

Consequently, DeFillipi and Arthur (1994) attested to the fact that in the post-modern world, various changes in the social context and global perspectives have changed the properties of careers tremendously. Careers are now described as mobile, self-determined, employer independent and free of hierarchy as the case may be. More than ever before, universities are expected to churn out professionals with more than just one academic career who can multi task and fit into various societal situations as the need may be. This condition invariably taxes the universities on the relevance of the programmes

offered in the university in general. To this extent, how environment relevant are the courses offered in the institutions of higher learning? How is university education solving the present day problems such as unemployment and low pace of industrialisation? What type of future is the students prepared for or how adequately prepared are the products of university for contributing to the development of their environment and sustaining such development?

### **CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS**

This section provides conceptual clarifications of the major concepts contained in this write-up: university education; education; human capital development; and sustainable national development.

#### **University Education**

University education in Nigeria as reported by Osokoya (1989) dated back to 1948 with the establishment of the University College, Ibadan following the recommendations of both Elliotts (1943) and Asquith (1945) commissions. Several reviews of the education needs of the country culminated into the Ashby (1959) commission's report which eventually brought about the creation of more universities in Nigeria to cater for the man power needs of the nation. Explaining the nature and scope of university education in Nigeria, Atteh (2006) sees universities as the only institutions where higher level studies are provided for offering, also the institutions legally allowed to grant higher degrees. Supporting the view above, Iyaye (2007) opined that the main constituent of higher education in Nigeria in terms of quality, quantity and capacity for development is the university education which is seen to encompass most higher education policy provisions, goals and objectives. Consequently, higher education in the national policy on education covers the post-secondary phases of the Nigerian system of education (FGN, 2013)

#### **Education**

Many scholars and philosophers have conceptualized education in various ways. Education as described by Socrates (470 – 399 BC) should be seen as a 'desirable knowledge' that is continuous, cumulative and a highly interdependent process touching on all the aspects of personality. He added that education should be a continuous process focusing on only what will improve man and his environment. In the same vein, Fafunwa (1994) viewed education as the aggregate of all the processes by which an individual develops abilities, attitudes and other forms of behaviours which are of positive values to the society in which he lives. Going by the submission of UNESCO (2000), education is the total process of developing human ability and behaviours. It can also be seen as an organized and sustained instruction designed to communicate a combination of knowledge, skills and understanding value for all

activities of life. This submission is greatly supported by Boyi (2013) that education is the only tool that can be used by man to solve his problems as well as improving his life to make it more comfortable. In examining the virtues of education, Plato (428 – 347 BC), viewed education as the search for truth, identifying it and applying it as the only way by which a nation can develop and grow positively. Identifying value education as the right type of knowledge essential for the growth of the individual and the nation, the World Bank report of World Development 1998/1999 made references to Korea's celebrated success in economic growth and social development being attributed to her ability to harness and use the right type of knowledge. Every country can achieve social development and economic growth if the right type of education is given to her citizen, going by the World Bank report of World Development.

Supporting the submissions above, the Federal Government of Nigeria (FRN, 2013) stated that education is an instrument for national development and change, also that education is vital for the promotion of a progressive and united Nigeria. In the same document, the goals of education in Nigeria are stated as: the development of the individual into a morally sound, patriotic and effective citizen; total integration of the individual into the immediate community, the Nigerian society and the world; provision of equal access to qualitative educational opportunities for all citizens at all levels of education, within and outside the formal school system; and development of appropriate skills, mental, physical and social abilities and competence to empower the individual to live in and contribute positively to the good of the society.

#### **Human Capital Development**

Development discourse in the recent times is fraught with the need for building adequate and sustainable capacity in all spheres of human endeavours. To Adetoro (2000), capacity failures have been associated with continued challenges of development in the developing and underdeveloped countries of the world. In the same vein, Obadan (2003) viewed adequate capacity building in terms of its building and utilization as the missing link in the development efforts of the developing and underdeveloped countries including Nigeria.

Generally, capacity building is explained as a series of actions directed towards equipping an individual in increasing knowledge, skills and understanding needed to bring about development changes in them. In a submission of World Bank (2015), capacity building is referred to as a planned development of (or increase in) knowledge, skills, and other capabilities of an organization through acquisition, incentives, technology, and/or training. This

submission describes the various means by which an organization including the university can equip individuals for the roles they play in the development of their nation.

Capacity building has been identified as one of the major global challenges which have hampered the developmental rate of many parts of the world. As observed by Adirika (2014), every nation seems to conceive education as an instrument for capacity building because no development can be achieved without adequate human capacity. Industrialization which is believed to be the solution to the challenges of the world may be difficult to achieve if the present situation of environment relevant university programmes is not well addressed. Obviously the major driver of industrialization is quality human capital which still appears as a myriad in major parts of the world, Nigeria in particular.

### **Sustainable National Development**

193 countries of the United Nations General Assembly adopted the 2030 Development Agenda titled "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" on 25<sup>th</sup> of September 2015. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals were outlined in paragraph 51 with the associated 169 targets. Unlike the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which were concentrated on the paths to achieving the set goals of the millennium, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) deal with the causes of the world problems, how to achieve development and at the same time sustain such development. This is evident in the Brundland Commission of 1987 definition of Sustainable Development as that type of development that is able to meet the needs of the present generation of people without compromising the ability of the future generations in meeting their own needs. Corroborating the definition above, Kiplangat (2018) opined that the present generation of humans have a responsibility of ensuring that it bequeaths the future generations with a habitable place which comprised of three basic elements that must complement one another: environmental, economic and social sustainability.

Sustainable national development is defined in another way by Munasinghe (2004) as a process of improving the range of opportunities that can enable individual humans and communities to achieve their aspirations and full potential over a sustained period of time while maintaining the resilience of economic, social and environmental systems. The SDGs open up channels of connectivity to all the global challenges and provide step by step approach to achieving each identified target. Some of the many global challenges identified by SDGs is the over dependence on natural resources which have been declining for decades now, inadequate human capacity among many others. This paper is centred on Goal 4: Quality Education

and Goal 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure. Arguably, there has been steady progress in the area of access to education, especially at the primary and secondary levels of education but access would not equate quality. Also, the manufacturing industry absorb the largest portion of the labour market leaving countries with less manufacturing industries with high rate of unemployment.

### **The Traditional Role of the University**

Omoregbe (1993) contends that "nothing ever emerges in a civil society (university inclusive) unless it is intended to cater for the needs of an aspect of human nature". He goes further to say that education is founded on human nature and is centred around it, therefore fostering the development of the country is not more important than the process of catering for the multiple needs of man's complex nature. He submitted inter-alia that to cater for the needs of human nature, obviously requires a thorough knowledge of the above mentioned needs and how best to cater for them. This knowledge is imparted through formal education; the peak of which is the university. Hence, education becomes a sine qua non condition for the development of every country. However, this form of education should not be devoid of value or morality. Here, the author advocates a thorough knowledge of the needs of man and the society in which he lives, this knowledge, he went further to say should be disseminated in a formal setting to the citizens who will manipulate the environment to become a comfortable habitation for all and sundry.

In the same vein, Brubacher (2003) sees the university executing a rather fundamental mission of promoting the life of the mind through intellectual inquiry, generating as well as transmitting specialised knowledge and sophisticated expertise, higher forms of culture and ethical basis of conduct. In this particular submission, the university dispenses knowledge that expands the life of the human mind which is the most important aspect of the human being because that is the seat of knowledge where conceptual abilities are developed. A man becomes functional in his environment when he possesses a certain level of conceptual capabilities. The implication of this is that the university is an institution that necessarily dispenses a knowledge that is always more knowing. From this submission, the knowledge dispensed by the university should be dynamic, invent itself, increases constantly through research that is beneficial to the entire society. This ability is meant to be developed formerly as well as informally. This is buttressed by the statement made by Oyesiku (2005) that the university, being an institution of higher learning with power to grant degrees, has three principal functions to carry out; these are teaching, research and community service. These are essentially what make the university an

academic environment where scholars are given the opportunity to formally and theoretically carry out their intellectual activities for the development and growth of the nation.

Supporting all the earlier submissions of the traditional role of the university, Ivowi (2006) also opines that universities exist to generate, disseminate and apply knowledge through teaching, research and extension services. He goes further to say that the Nigerian universities have continued to prepare high level manpower for the survival of the society and the individuals, and to expand frontiers of knowledge and apply the results of research to sustain the development of the society to a large extent.

In assessing the amount of impact the university has on the society, Synder (1993) opines that the theory of functionalism be adopted which is equally drawn from the theory of organisation. This theory portrays how the roles are defined by the society and how the individual strives to achieve personal as well as social success. According to Schutt (2006), functionalism is explained as how the society functions as a whole through the interdependence of social institutions and their willingness to maintain social order. Generally, the relationship that exists between the community and the university determines the extent of development nationally and globally because they draw from each other for survival. This can only be measured with the extent to which University education equate social development or ability to solve societal challenges.

#### **Need for a Paradigm Shift in University Education in Nigeria**

A national labour market survey conducted by the National Universities Commission (NUC) in 2004 reported a huge weakness in the quality of graduates of the Nigerian universities by the employers in both the private and public sectors (Okebukola, 2017). This has gradually increased the population of the unemployed youths.

Supporting the report above, Olagbemi (2014) observed that youth restiveness is on the increase with the attendant growth of world population coupled with high rate of unemployment, underemployment, unstable governments, insecurity and other developmental challenges. In the same vein, the Nigerian Manpower Board and Federal Bureau of Statistics according to Okafor (2011) reported that Nigeria has a youth population of 80 million, representing 60% of the whole population of the country. About 64 million of the total population of the youths are unemployed, while 1.6 million are underemployed. The key triggers and causes of Africa's conflicts may differ from country to country, but the most common to all according to Oyewole (2006) is the central involvement of Africa's youth

either as perpetrators, victims, or both. However, he went further to add that if truly the African youths are its future, then addressing the issues that affect them today as well as the challenges of the socio-economic and political environment in which they are nurtured should be a major concern for ensuring the emergence of a more positive, prosperous and peaceful future. Nations in the world over have started looking inwards into their domestic economy according to Adeyemi (2013) for the purpose of building a virile and viable economy that is relatively immune to the financial and economic strangulations that was experienced globally. He added that developing nations like Nigeria have taken actions by looking inwards into their economy, away from the foreign domination of the financial system and as a single product economy – crude oil, towards engaging the minds of the youth at both basic and tertiary institutions in skills acquisition that will prepare them for their future.

In the same vein, Okebukola (2017) observed that the major cause of this ugly situation of employability of the Nigerian university graduates is the quality of the curriculum. He went further to advise that due emphasis should be placed on developing a curriculum that will ensure that graduates of the Nigerian university system are nationally-relevant as well as globally competitive. To this end, university education in Nigeria should be geared towards equipping students with environment relevant and impactful programmes of study and saleable skills that would prepare them for leadership roles and initiators as well as giving them the opportunity to contribute their own quota to solving societal challenges such as unemployment and low level of participation in industrialization.

From the foregoing, it is expected that university education should bridge the gap between education and unemployment, and also solve other societal challenges going by the philosophy of Nigerian Education in the National Policy on Education (FGN, 2013) that “education is an instrument par excellence for national development and change”. It is also a vital tool for the promotion of a progressive and united Nigeria. Consequently, the quality of university determines the quality of the human capital for sustainable national development.

#### **The Changing Roles of the University in a New World of Work**

In the last two decades according to Boulton (2009), higher education the world over has moved from the surface to the centre of governmental agendas. According to him, universities globally are now seen as crucial national assets in addressing many policy innovative thinking, providing skilled personnel and credible credentials. The universities are seen to be capable of attracting talents as well as business

investments; they are also agents of social justice and mobility. They contribute to social and cultural vitality as well as determine health and social well-being. The universities according to him create economically valuable intellectual resources thus – skilled human resources and knowledge resources are two of the most important factors for upgrading national competitive advantage.

In the views of Faust (2010), the main functions of the university is to make a significant contribution to civil society by providing students with education that will prepare them for the contributions to the society they belong to. He went further to submit that universities have the role to nurture the hope of the world in solving challenges that cross borders, in unlocking and harnessing new knowledge, in building cultural and political understanding and in modelling environments that promote dialogue and debate. It is no gainsaying that economic growth in the world over is being driven by knowledge, information and ideas. To this end, the university is expected to play a major role in the global system in providing knowledge which is vital to the human societies and their economies. In the world of today, other traditional resources are being driven by knowledge which encompasses a kind of revolutionary communication technologies for economic growth. It is important to point out that education has increasingly become the foundation for individual growth and prosperity as well as social mobility.

Universities, as opined by O'Connell (2016), historically exist as institutions for the creation and dispersion of knowledge. However, today many young people enter university solely to prepare for careers. According to O'Connell, young people need to be prepared for a variety of roles in a future that will be transformed by automation and digitisation. Furthermore occupations that rely on people's skills have increased faster than average. These types of shifts in employment patterns and job descriptions are evident that young people today will need to be more flexible and more entrepreneurial than in the past. They need broad capabilities, while at the same time roles are being transformed to require deeper knowledge. High level of creativity and sound communication skills are demanded more than ever before from products of universities globally in order to fit into the changing patterns of the world of work.

### **Preparing Students for their Roles in the New World of Work**

University education in the world over is dispensed as series of academic and professional programmes. These programmes are prepared in content and scope and reviewed as the need may be. According to Okebukola (2017), the British tradition of curriculum development flourished in the Nigerian education

system until the establishment of University of Nigeria, Nsukka which followed the American education system. Gradually, the number of universities increased which eventually warranted the establishment of the National Universities Commission (NUC) 1967 in order to provide the minimum standards for the operation of university education in Nigeria as well as enforce such standards. According to Ramon-Yusuf (2013) the documents provided the direction to which the production of high level human resources by universities should be directed. He added further that NUC and the universities developed the minimum academic (curricular) standards to reflect this aspiration which are in operation in various capacities.

The review of the minimum standards for various disciplines has continuously been the responsibility of the universities and the commission in Nigeria. Recently, in order to address the societal challenges of unemployment, a major system-wide standards proposed in the revised BMAS was carried out to include compulsory entrepreneurial studies in all universities of the nation. The BMAS documents, according to Okebukola (2017) are undergoing reviews which are usually expected to address emergent issues in the country. It is expected that a touch of the colonial influence is still present in the curriculum of university education in Nigeria. It is encouraging to note that a big stride towards the home-grown curriculum which is expected to meet the local needs and drive national economy has been in operation.

### ***i. Changing Career Development in the Nigerian Universities (synthesizing theory and practice)***

Preparing students for the new world of work entails training students to be effective team members because according to Thacker and Yost (2002) cited in Aworanti (2012), employers often find that graduates lack good team leadership skills. Major transferable or soft skills needed by graduates according to Joshua (2013) are: communication skills, analytical skills, leadership, information management skills and project management skills which are necessary skills to prepare graduates for the 21<sup>st</sup> century increasingly competitive world of work. The significance of an appropriate and adequate supply of human capital for economic development cannot be over emphasised. In the same vein, the needs to enable industrialisation as well as reducing unemployment remains the two major challenges facing Africa, Nigeria in particular. In meeting the above mentioned needs, a lot more is required for university graduates to be competitive in the labour market. The most important step to take in preparing students for the 21<sup>st</sup> century is to synthesise theory and practice. Here various career training courses (entrepreneurship programmes) should be

integrated into the students' general curriculum from the beginning of their programme of study to the end. This is expected to assist the students to develop saleable skills alongside their course of study. There are a lot of situations where graduates of universities have been found engaging in other trades apart from what they studied in school. Against this background, opportunities should be available to students to choose from a long array of vocations for which entrepreneurial skills are developed. Supporting the foregoing, Obanya (2015) opined that for sustainable education to be entrenched in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, educational curriculum must integrate the hard, soft and other relative skills which are known as cognitive, emotional and imaginative intelligence.

**ii. Career-Focused Critical Thinking and Communication Skills Development**

The foundation for building the career-curriculum needed by every student in the university according to Austin (2014) is the application of the critical thinking skills to the career-related projects students wish to engage in. Although students should not have to engage only in critical thinking but this must be accompanied with action. The university is expected to prepare students to be involved in how to use the knowledge of their chosen career even before their graduation. In this regard, the entrepreneurship skills to accompany the career knowledge must be included in the curriculum from the beginning of students' programmes of study. Every student should be encouraged to have a goal which is realistic to their capabilities, their immediate environment and the larger society. It is expected also that students should start practicing how to accomplish their goals early in their programme.

**iii. Actualising Chosen Goals**

- a. *Determining and defining Brand/Service:* Universities should train students to define their products or service i.e. what they have to offer to the public. Students should be trained on how to find uniqueness in their chosen career. Branding in any field of human endeavour is important and is strongly based on reputation and relationship. Students need to have a clear sense of what makes their service unique.
- b. *Articulating Brand/Service:* Students should be trained on how to articulate what they have to offer the public. This could be done orally, could be written and distributed and it could be done online. It should be noted here that none of the processes of articulation can be carried out successfully without a very good measure of communication skills on the part of the students. Presentation of services or

products is a key ingredient to being marketable because this is what will appeal to the intending clientele. In developing communication skills, students should be made to participate in mock interviews, practice sound variations, speech making for various categories of audience. The university is expected to train the students on how to package their knowledge; both the content and its application for various groups of would-be clientele. Training students to develop their resume from the beginning of their academic programme is another very important role of the university. The resume should be a compilation of their relevant skills and what they have accomplished. The potential employer is interested in the quality of the service an intending employee wants to render the organisation.

- c. *Selling the Product/Service:* Combating unemployment in Nigeria is a serious task for both the government and the institutions of learning. Tailoring the career curriculum towards employers' needs is the 21<sup>st</sup> century task for the university. The students should be trained to understand what the employers are interested in. Every career has its own organisational need areas and these should be made known to students in order for them to develop themselves in those skills for better job placement. Organizations hire people who best fit their team not necessarily best person interviewed. This is where attitude plays a great role. Education or training should not be devoid of value orientation. Honesty, trustworthiness, hard work etc. are all appreciated by all organizations. Creativity is equally appreciated and is very necessary for growth. An employer expects an employee to get something done even in the remotest circumstance.
- d. *Ability to network:* Students should be trained to study their environment to become players in it. The Granular Database according to Austin (2014) serves as a system which supports and encourages people to stay in contact with those who can patronize them, hire them or refer them for work. This relationship is based on how well an individual knows the people and how well the people know such person. The quality of time spent by the parties determines the quality of relationship that exists between them and also serves as a base for job opportunities. The university should train and encourage students in the

acquisition of interpersonal skills and its application in order to sustain relationships that are beneficial for their career.

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The society expect the university to cater for some germane needs of the society by turning out quality graduates who have the moral consciousness of the expectations of their society on them as well as using research based information for solving societal problems. For the university to continue to make a difference in the area of human capital development for sustainable national growth, the curriculum programmes should be reviewed as often as necessary to keep abreast of current trends in the society. It has often been said that no nation can rise above the quality of her education system.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended here that:

- i. the university faculty members should pay more attention to developmental research especially in the areas of poverty reduction, income generation and sustainable development;
- ii. the university management and the governing council of the university should ensure avenues for proper funding of educational programmes for a viable human capital development;
- iii. the university should always see itself as an avenue for proffering solutions to social challenges and as such update the frontiers of knowledge with current issues affecting humanity and how such could be eradicated through the courses offered in the university;
- iv. the University should be conversant with the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century education and be abreast of the current happenings around the world in order to produce global graduates who can fit into any part of the world; and,
- v. abilities such as critical thinking skills, communication skills, team spirit, initiative, leadership, interpersonal skills, problem solving, analytical/quantitative skills are properly entrenched in academic programmes as they are all cherished by employers.

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