

POLITICS AND QUALITY OF NIGERIAN TERTIARY EDUCATION

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Abstract

The demand for higher education is imperative and is rapidly increasing in Nigeria. The global perception agrees that for economic and social development to be derived effectively, there is need for advancement in, and application of knowledge. However, this is not the case in Nigeria. Nigeria's tertiary education system is beset with political interference and manipulations over the years. Nigeria tertiary education was established to produce the needed manpower necessary for transforming the available natural resources to the greater height of the economy. However, political issues has been influencing effective management of Nigerian tertiary education in the areas of teaching, appointments, admission, research and community services in many ways. This work examines the concepts of politics, the mode of political interplay in the areas of institutional location, funding, policy making, appointments, institutional ranking and admission policy. The paper also looked at the quality of Nigeria's tertiary education from output rating and concluded that the management of Nigerian tertiary education has been greatly influenced by political interference which has greatly affected the quality of the products. It was however suggested that the issues of politics be substituted for merit operations to eliminate the risks of degrading the quality of tertiary institution's input and output.

Keywords: Politics, Quality and Tertiary education

Introduction

Tertiary education is the most potent tool for effecting individual emancipation, growth and development as well as national transformation. Nonetheless, tertiary education system in Nigeria is facing major challenges in ensuring that standards are maintained and these are comparable locally, nationally and globally. These challenges are largely due to political

interface and pokes by the political system in practice. Notwithstanding, for tertiary education system to remain attuned to cohere with the world of work, such that those who should be in school are not merely schooled but functionally educated to be self-reliant and productive and sought after by employers of labour far and above their peers, mitigating the challenges and filling the gaps through a robust turn around strategies has become an urgent imperative. The training provided in Nigerian tertiary institutions is often theoretical or obsolete and does not equip graduates with the necessary skills to positively impact the productivity or development of their country. There is therefore a strong need to improve the quality of education and ensure that applicable practical know-how is transferred, not minding polity and its intrigues.

Concept of Politics

Politics is a critical issue for the development of humanity. The questions of who gets what how and when to get it are political issues that define and influence the wellbeing of people in a society. These issues are influenced and determined by the political behaviour and actions of the ruling class. As politics influences human being so also are the social institutions. Political actions and conducts are pronounced in the educational system. Thus, the subject of politics of education becomes essential in determining the nexus between politics and education. The symbolic relationship existing between them showed that they mutually reinforce each other for the growth of the system and society. In line with this, Babalola (2005) posited that politics is the protection of domain acquisition of power, support building, influence gathering and self-serving.

Politics is a social process which deals with the continuous affairs of people. It is concerned with the issues which affect the general populace. It involves the allocation of values in a society. It involves the use of legitimate authority (Fabunmi, 2005). Politics as power – Politics is the process through which the production, distribution and use of scarce resources is determined in all areas of social existence. This basic element essentially underscore the descriptions of politics and reflect the fact that politics is about human beings in terms of how it can be used as a tool to better and improve the welfare and wellbeing of people in a place.

Understanding the Relationship Between Politics and Education

Politics bears direct, visible relationship with the process of education. The relationship is direct in the sense that the idea and orientation of education are determined by the political community in which the system is operating. In the light of this, there are variations in the ways curricula are designed and imparted in various countries of the world. In line with this thought, Ijaduola, Odunaike and Ajayi (2012) posited that no educational system can escape from the political community in which it operates. The system must reflect what the political community want it to be. The idea and orientation formulated by the political community will be imparted on the populace by the educational system to moderate their behaviours and attitudes to reflect the acceptable way of the people. The National Policy on Education (FGN, 2004), which is the political document that gives direction to how education should operate in the country, stipulates in section 1 sub-section 9 (f) that “efforts shall be made to relate education to overall community

needs”. The document further indicated, in the same section, that “a nation’s policy on education is government’s way of realizing that part of the national goals which can be achieved using education as a tool”. This explains the importance of politics in education as well as the significance of education in politics. The contribution of one will influence the way the other will behave. The allocation of resources to the educational system by the political class will improve the productivity of the system, and lay foundation for the experience of qualitative education, which fundamentally will lead to national development.

The Concept of Quality

Quality is a slippery concept, which implies different things to different people (Preffer and Coote, 1991). It is that which best satisfies and exceeds customers’ need and wants (Artzt, 1992). Quality can be said to lie in the eyes of the beholder. This is because the consumers, who make the judgment on quality, do these by reference to the best comparable performance. Quality refers to the standard of a phenomenon when it is compared to other things like it: how good or bad something is, that is, to be of good/poor/top quality or of a high standard. In this context, it is associated with the ‘monitoring and evaluation component of education’ to see whether the outcome is good and of the intended standard. However, Zelvys (2004) perceived that the concept of quality has been one of the most important concepts in contemporary educational terminology. Many educationists have attempted to define the quality of education and educational assurance.

The concept of quality has attracted many definitions from several scholars. Kalusi, (2001) argued that quality is a complex concept and there is hardly any consensus. According to DuBrin, (1997) quality is a desirable attribute of a product or service that distinguishes it for the person seeking the attribute. Viewed from this definition, quality could be said to have the attribute of worth and acceptance. Nevertheless, DuBrin maintained that good quality should possess the characteristics of conformance to expectation, conformance to requirement, excellence and value and loss of avoidance. Asiyai and Oghuvbu (2009) defined quality as a measure of how good or bad the products of higher education institutions in Nigeria are in terms of their academic performance and meeting established standards. According to Ekong (2006), quality builds knowledge, live skills, perspectives, attitudes and values. When quality education is delivered high enough to meet set standards, the products of education should be able to perform well in the world of work in real life situation. When quality is low, performance cannot meet the set standard. Hence one can say that the quality of education has declined below set standards.

According to Uchendu, Akuegwu & Nwi-ne (2006) quality is seen as the degree of excellence while quality assurance is seen as a system for assuring that quality of output meets the required standard all the times. It therefore implies that a product has to conform to a specification or requirement. Quality assurance is a retroactive action used to determine the quality of a product or a system after processing and during which wastages would have occurred and what is left is to reject or battle with rectification in a like manner.

Tertiary Education

Tertiary education is the education given after secondary education in colleges of education, polytechnics, universities and other institutions offering correspondence courses (FRN, 2004). According to the document, the goals of tertiary education encompass the development of relevant high level manpower, development of intellectual capability of individuals and acquisition of physical and intellectual skills. Others are to promote and encourage scholarship as well as community service. Tertiary educational institutions pursue these goals through teaching, research, generation and dissemination of knowledge which they achieve through a variety of programmes such as certificate, diploma, undergraduate and postgraduate courses. Tertiary education contributes to the production of high level manpower in diverse professional callings as dictated by national development requirements. The goals of tertiary education also focus on inculcation of community spirit in the students through projects and action research.

The Aims of Tertiary Education In Nigeria As Outlined By The Federal Ministry of Education (2004) Section 8 (59):

- 1 Contribution to national development through high level manpower training.
- 2 Development and inculcation of proper values for the survival of the individual and the society.
- 3 Development of the intellectual capabilities of the individual to understand and appreciate their local and external environment.
- 4 Acquisition of both physical and intellectual skills which will enable the individual to be self-reliant and useful member of the society.
- 5 Promotion and encouragement of scholarship and community services.
- 6 For national unity and the promotion of national and international understanding and interaction.

Challenges of Quality in Nigerian Tertiary Education

In the early years in Nigeria, it was glaringly obvious that the university was regarded as the single most important industry for the production of high-level manpower and the capstone of the entire educational system. University training according to Ume (1979) aims at raising the intellectual tone of society, cultivating the public mind, purifying the national taste, supplying the principles of popular aspirations and giving enlargement and sobriety to ideas of the age. It is not surprising that stakeholders in University education tend to guard jealously the integrity of the university and the quality of graduates produced. As affirmed by Daisi (1997), many graduates from the nation's universities have distinguished themselves in their areas of specialization so much so that some of them are now professors in the best universities across the globe. This attestation is quite resounding in that quality entrants were developed into quality graduates. Due to the declining quality in recent years, however, the accolade attached to Nigerian Universities have faded away. This can be seen by the flood of criticisms that becloud the admission procedures and quality of graduates produced. In his keynote address delivered at the first education summit of Oyo State Universities especially in the last four years and thumbed

down the quality of those that would graduate in the next held in Ibadan, Okebukola (2006) decried the quality of graduates produced in Nigerian three years. Similarly, Adebayo (2007) commented that the non-inclusion of any of the nation's universities in the world best 500 universities is unsatisfactory.

In another development, the NUC (2004) assessment study on labour market expectations of graduates from Nigerian Universities revealed that there were scores of unemployed graduates roaming the streets and more embarrassingly, those who were lucky to secure employment had to undergo remedial training in order to bridge the huge knowledge and skills gaps left over from university training. This tends to negate the tenet of University education which is essentially an industry established to produce a quality workforce for national development.

Nigerian universities cannot meet their expectations especially in terms of the quality of teaching and research. Lack of adequate funding has clearly impaired the performance and standard of Nigerian universities as the vicious circle of inadequate funds, helplessness, frustration and recriminations is continually fed in a mutually reinforcing manner (Kayode, 2002). Babalola (2001) reported that Nigerian universities are currently in crisis. He further stressed that there is less money to spend on teaching, research and community services. Libraries are ill equipped, laboratories lack essential apparatus, classrooms are dilapidated and office accommodations are a mirage. Many Nigerian universities even lack lecturers in the right quantity and of proper quality.

Politics In The Management of Nigerian Tertiary Education

The rate of which politics constitutes risk to the management of Nigerian higher education are reflected in the following policies.

Institutional Location: The critical for the location of the higher institution are not strictly followed. According to Oke (2016), the factors for the location of institution are rural-urban resource availability, needs and aspirations, educational policies, students demand, industrial-institutional relations and manpower requirements. However, the educational planners consider these factors before institutions could be approved for establishment. However, with the politics in the management of tertiary education, the policies grinding the location are not effectively sited in the strategic places, the issue of nearest neighbors analysis is not well determined. In Nigeria, it is observed that most of the institutions are concentrated in the urban areas neglecting the rural areas in Nigeria, the concentration of the institutions in the urban areas caused rural-urban drift risks to the Nigeria youths and other members of the rural communities. For instance the politicians that is in the helm of government affairs will influence the location of institutions in their own state or in their communities mindless, whether their state or communities are in the urban areas. They only use institution location to compensate the ministers, president, senators, ambassadors, governors etc whether the goals in the higher education will be achieved or not in their institutional location areas. It is less of their concerned (Borkono (2017).

Appointment: Appointment of academic and non-academic staff of higher education are politicized, the appointments are therefore influenced by the government in power. The action on the recruitment of the staff are influenced by the government to gain the political popularities from the public. The appointment of vice Chancellor's, Provost's, Rector's and all the management of the higher institutions are done by the government in power. However, the politics have great impacts on the appointment of the staff for the smooth running of the institutions. Furthermore, the risk involved in the appointment is that most appointments are influenced by political participation in the ruling parties. The procedures for the appointment are not strictly followed.

However, the problem of politics in appointment according to Ahmed (2013) is to reward loyalists but this at the end undermines the objective of the educational system. However, the risks of this type of appointment lead to the inability of the government to regularly and promptly pay the workers monthly salaries, regular retrenchment and the poor consideration for the available facilities which have negative effect on the worker's productivity. The realities of the consideration of the institutional needs in terms of qualified and skillful workers was supported by Oyedele (2013) that the consideration of both the needs of the institutions in terms of skillful and expertise workers have positive impacts on the institutional productivity and effectiveness. It is important to note that politics in the appointment of workers for the higher education is used positively for reducing high level of unemployment among the graduates.

In Nigeria context therefore, whenever there is the need for recruitment exercise into higher institution there are some percentages of the posts that are illegally reserved for the politicians in the presidency, ministers, honorable members of government etc. However, the reservation of the position to the politicians creates excessive power control of the management by politician. It should be noted that the candidate presented may not be quality candidates. As Ogundele, Eseyin and Abimiku (2017) posit that the quality of the product of educational institution are being determined by the quality of the teachers, that no educational standard can rise above the quality of its teachers and quality teachers enhance quality education in Nigeria.

University Ranking Processes: There are many factors that influence university ranking in Nigeria. The factors according to Ogundele and Jake (2016) are research, publications, teaching, community services and quality control mechanisms. However, for the universities to be ranked high, there should be high commitment of the institutional workers, adequate funding and efficiency in the management's control of the institution. The ranking of Nigerian universities is noted through accreditations, whereby the accreditation panels will assess the research publication, level of conference attendance and sponsorship. The availability of quality physical facilities like information and communication technology building, offices and classroom accommodation, library facilities workshops and science laboratory equipment.

Some Strategies for Enhancing Quality Tertiary Education in Nigeria.

Modification of curriculum in tertiary institutions

The curriculum is expected to respond positively to modern trends of event through emphasis on innovative knowledge and skills which are variously referred to as ‘daily living skills, survival skills and life coping skills’ (Njoku 2003) The world is not static in nature but dynamic and change is a constant phenomenon in the world, therefore, the education industry which is the most dependable for interpretation and adaptation of the constant changes in the world turn out a lot of graduates every year who are expected to identify and solve problems, establish good working relationships with others, organize and manage themselves responsibly, collect and evaluate information, communication in different ways, use science and technology effectively and the capacity to develop a consistent world-view (Udosen, 2003:75). Courses are modified and new courses are introduced to enable student acquire life-long coping skills through science processes which include observation, experiment, generalization and prediction. The modification of the curriculum enhances the holistic development of cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains for quality productivity and meaningful integration into the society for sustainable living. The introduction of courses like general studies (GST), entrepreneur education, vocational education among others are indices of curriculum modifications in tertiary institutions.

Accreditation of Tertiary Institution and their Programmes

The phenomenal growth of tertiary institutions in Nigeria is unparalleled anywhere in the African continent. The growth has been in terms of increase in students’ population and then number of tertiary institutions themselves. These citadels of learning which are means of social mobility, self-development and skill acquisition, are expected to play major roles in the fulfillment of Nigeria philosophy of education through training and research to ensure quality of their institution. It is therefore imperative for faculty members, facilities, the examination and grading system to be subjected to scrutiny by a team of professors in that discipline, selected from different tertiary institutions by the different commission or board like NUC, NCCE, NBTE, who are charged with responsibility of monitoring the activities of the various tertiary institutions. The accreditation exercise is usually carried out every two-five years.

Strategic Planning of Programmes

Another strategy for quality assurance in Nigeria tertiary institution according to Etuk (2006) is strategic planning of programmes stated that strategic planning requires that heads of departments, deans of school/faculties state the objectives of their academic programmes, its contribution to economic development with regard to their graduates in terms of their capabilities when they are out of school. They should also use Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis to access their programmes. Strategic planning in tertiary institutions will attract funds from government and other agencies if the programmes are relevant and given accreditation. Funds have been a very crucial and fundamental concern to the government and managers of tertiary institutions. Strategic planning of programmes can induce generation of

revenue from both internal and external sources, since government alone cannot fund their tertiary institutions sufficiently.

Availability of Human Resources

A very fundamental issue in assessing quality in the educational sector is the quality of human resources available. It is worthy of note that the unprecedented influx of academic personnel into tertiary institutions poses both strength and threat to these ivory towers. It is strength when the human resources available have potentials. On the contrast, it is a threat when these potentials and talents combine with other resources to produce mediocrers. According to Madumere-Obike (2004) the influx of unqualified personnel into the academia determines the quality of graduates produced. A survey of teachers in Nigeria tertiary institution shows this level of dissatisfaction among the teachers Tanji (2001).

Adoption of Information & Communication Technology

Another laudable area of need in ensuring quality in tertiary institution is the adoption of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). Information is an indispensable part of the contemporary world, not only has it brought about rapid technological, economic transformation, and globalization, the tertiary school system depends on it to cope with the worldwide information needs within the school system.

ICT adoption promotes teaching and learning for instance, in recent times the multimedia internet-based technologies have provided opportunities for teaching and learning at a distance. ICT also facilitates the management information system (MIS) into the administrative processes, on-line libraries provide access to current books, journals and other information resources through global networking.

A study by Ige (2002) on computerization of MIS and administrative effectiveness in Nigeria Universities holds that MIS has helped to facilitate decision-making for effective administration, classroom and individual management, resource management and generation of data. It also helps to generate additional information concerning problems, opportunities and challenges inclusive as well as its contribution to the development of on-line screening and registration of students.

ICT can be used to ease the load of supervision, evaluation and appraisal of students and teachers. The management task, removal of wastages and quality cannot be achieved without application of ICT in all areas of school application.

Effective Supervision

Effective supervision of activities within the tertiary institutions should be enforced in order to attain quality assurance in tertiary institutions. Supervision involves the use of expert knowledge and experience to oversee, evaluate and coordinate the process of improving teaching and learning activities in schools. Close monitoring and supervision of teachers pulsates them to

implement educational policies, and reforms. Based on these supervisions, recommendations are made such as provision of adequate facilities and human resources. Supervision creates awareness of sound education philosophies. Igwe in Egbo (2007) describe supervision as a process that policy, principles, rules, regulations and methods prescribed for the purpose of implementing and achieving the objective of education are carried out. Teachers are influenced, stimulated, coordinated, commanded to carry out their assigned task in order to maintain standard. For quality education to be realized at the tertiary level of education, supervision is highly crucial as it boosts the morale of teachers.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made in order to allow the impact of politics to be more than the risks involved in the management of Nigerian tertiary education system;

1. The government should avoid the issue of god-fatherism and favortism in the appointment processes. Appointment should be based on quality, effectiveness and merit, for this will bring about effective realities in the higher educational system.
2. Politics should be played with caution on the institutional location, appointments, funding and accreditations in order to remove the risk of inequity, inaccessibility, fairness, justice and quality in the products of the Nigerian tertiary education.
3. Political interference in educational policies planning, implementation and evaluation should be stopped. Non-professionals should not be allowed to take part in the curriculum development process.
4. Government should come up with a policy that will bring about equal accessibility of the citizens in order to meet up with the social-demand approach to Nigerian higher education.
5. Systematic approach should be used when seeking higher education in a particular area in order to consider environmental factors and the need and aspiration of the people within the geographical areas.
6. Finally, community participation should be allowed in the institutional decision making process in order to encourage community-school relationship in the management of the institution especially in the areas of funding of educational facilities and all areas that will aid complementary efforts to the government.

Conclusion

Nigerian tertiary education is not totally free from the influence of politics. In the last three decades, higher education in Nigeria has witnessed significant growth in terms of expansion of access through increase in enrolment and the establishment of additional higher educational institutions. However, it is saddening to note that many of the indices that can guarantee quality higher education are not taken into consideration in the country's quest to meet the quantitative target. The supply of educational services in Nigeria is market blind. Admission policies of university education are not related to labour demand requirements, nor to individual student interest, but mainly to secondary school grades. The result of this is pressure on the available

limited resources thereby resulting in downward pressure on staff salaries together with deteriorating working conditions. The effects include a high degree of “brain-drain” among the academic staff, incessant strikes, student riots, etc. All of these have contributed to a precipitous fall in the quality of tertiary education.

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