



THE NEED FOR QUALITY HIGHER EDUCATION IN NIGERIA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

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Abstract:

Among the causes of poverty in developing countries is the poor state and quality of Higher Education. Higher Education is the level of education that improves and enhances the potentials of men and women. Education enhances the skills and competencies of a country's work force for economic growth and sustainability. This paper enumerated some challenges to sustainable development which include lack of basic infrastructure, poor finance in education insufficient staff development activities to empower staff to transform curricular and pedagogy towards sustainable development, lack of quality control measures, incessant strike actions, etc. In view of these facts the graduates produced by the country's tertiary education do not seem to be adequately prepared to take up their rightful positions in the society. Specifically, this paper recommended that higher education should be repositioned to take care of the inadequacies in the system. It recommended that government should play its fundamental role of providing an enabling environment, facilities should be made available to both teaching and non-teaching staff, there should be recruitment of the right teachers, students should be encouraged to make trips to see what their counterparts are doing and teaching should be more practical. It also suggested that education for sustainable development can be achieved by planning and setting realistic goals, implementing comprehensive curricular to foster creativity that will improve the quality of its citizenry.

Keywords: higher education, sustainable development goals, quality, quality assurance

1. Introduction

Higher education is the education given after secondary education in universities, colleges of education, polytechnics, monotechnics including those institutions offering correspondence courses as stipulated in the National Policy on Education (FGN, 2013).

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For higher education in Nigeria to attain sustainable development goals, there is need for value reorientation. Ariguzo (2018) observed that over the years, the government initiated reforms and innovations in education with the aim of making education more functional for sustainability, from all indications, Nigeria has not earned pass mark yet. The tertiary level of education is regarded as the key sector in the transformation and development of many nations. Higher education is the prime engine for any positive development. Quality in education system should therefore focus on optimal development of skills, knowledge, values, attitude, morals and capabilities of the recipients with emphasis on those relevant to the individuals and the Nigeria society. (Oduma, 2013)

Sustainable development is a form of enacted change that is planned and is intended to bring significant change and improvement in how higher education is managed. Higher education in the context of sustainability is expected to provide solution to the challenging situation in this country. The management of higher education is a germane to attaining sustainable development goals of any country. Higher education is the surest way and means to sustainable development goals. The increased awareness of the importance of higher education for national development and achievement of sustainable development goals has necessitated the unprecedented demand for quality in tertiary institutions.

In order to make the educational system more responsive and functional to the recipients and the society in general, there is need to redress the practices in the system especially now that recipients are no longer finding it easy to cope with the present economic challenges.

2. Concept of Higher Education

Higher education is essential in promoting sustainable human development and economic growth. Higher Education particularly in Nigeria is associated with producing high level man-power that will drive the economy to sustainable development. Unfortunately, this dream has not been actualized, due to poor planning, over politicization, mismanagement, poverty, and misplaced priority. These factors have adversely affected the growth of the economy in terms of human and material resources.

A sound higher education is required to produce skilled workers who can deliver the right quality services for sustainable development. The goals of Higher education as spelt out by the National Policy are: to contribute to national development, through high level man-power training; to develop the intellectual capability of individuals to understand and appreciate their local and external environment; to acquire both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to be self-reliant and useful members of the society; to promote and encourage scholarship and community service; to forge and cement national unity; and to promote national and international understanding and interaction.

All these goals are beautifully worded on paper but there is need to work conscientiously towards actualizing it. In the history of Nigeria critical decisions have

never been taken to move the country to the next level of development. There can be no meaningful development without funds and trained personnel. There is urgent need to re-access the input of government in higher education in Nigeria. Nigeria's development and progress are heavily linked to access to quality inclusive and equitable universal education for all. We cannot downplay on the role of tertiary education in achieving SDGs.

3. Concept of Sustainable Development

In this era of globalization, there is need to key into the developmental efforts of sustainability. This can only be achieved through Education. The core objective of education for sustainable development according to UNESCO (2003) is the promotion of values and ethics through education at different levels. Sustainable development as asserted by David and Heathier (2010) is that development that meets the need of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Sustainable development as defined by Ekong (2002) involves economic and social development that meet the people's needs of the present generation without endangering the ability of the future generation, satisfying their needs and choosing their lifestyle. Sustainable development is the organizing principle for sustaining limited resources necessary to provide for the needs of the future generation. It is the process that envisions a desirable future state for human societies in which living conditions and resource will continue to meet human needs without undermining the integrity, stability, and beauty of the natural biotic systems.

Sustainable development is all about achieving a level of quality life that is socially desirable and economically viable. To achieve this goal, education has to play its constructive role. In this regard, higher education is at the fore front. Higher education is expected to create needed human capital with enhanced skills that can lead to sustainability. The quality of education students receive at this level is of utmost importance. Their skills, knowledge and ability will go a long way in fitting the nation in its proper place as far as sustainable development is concerned.

Uche and Osaat (2018) noted that the most important role of higher education apart from teaching, are to carry out research, advance learning and disseminate new knowledge. Higher education carries out basic, applied and other functional research activities in different fields and the findings are developed to solve societal problems, improve products and services in industries and institutions. From the above statement, research breakthroughs constitute the basis for technological advancement and economic development of any nation.

Higher education in all ramification is a key player in the achievement of sustainable development goals (SDGs) and economic development. It is a truism that higher education in Nigeria has stepped up efforts to support sustainable development, the system introduced new programmes like entrepreneurship education and other relevant programmes in other fields of study, but the country is yet to feel the impact positively. Sustainable development goals (SDGs) officially known as "Transforming our

World” is on board presently, Nigeria as a developing country need to work hard and draw measures that will help to make it realizable within the shortest possible time.

The official document to this effect was adopted on the 25th of September 2015. This document for sustainable development has 92 paragraphs with the main paragraph (51) outlining the seventeen sustainable development goals and is associated with 169 targets. (Ohanaka, Udeogu and Agucha, 2016).

Table 1: The 17 Sustainable Development Goals and Some of their Targets

S/N	Goals	Targets
1.	Goal 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> by 2030 eradicate extreme poverty for all people living below 1.25 dollars a day, by 2030 reduce at least half of proportion of men, women and children living in poverty, implement appropriate protection systems and measures for all including the poor and vulnerable, by 2030 ensure that all men and women, particularly the poor and vulnerable, have equal rights to economic resources, ensure significant mobilization of resources from variety sources to provide adequate means for developing countries to implement policies to end poverty, etc.
2.	Goal 2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> end hunger by 2030, end all forms of malnutrition, double the agricultural productivity, enhance sustainable food production, maintain the generic diversity of seeds, plants and domesticated animals, increase investment through international co-operation etc.
3.	Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> reduce the number of deaths and illnesses from pollution related diseases, by 2030 end preventable deaths of new born and children under five, by 2030 end the epidemics of AIDS, TB, malaria and neglected tropical diseases, reduce premature mortality from communicable diseases. Strengthen die prevention and treatment of substance abuse etc.
4.	Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> by 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes, by 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development care and pre-paring education so that they are ready for primary education, by 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical vocational tertiary education including university, by 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of educational and vocational training for the vulnerable -by 2030, ensure that all growth and a substantial proportion of adults achieve literacy and numeracy.
5.	Goal 5: Achieve Gender equality and empower all women and girls.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> end all forms of discrimination against all women and girls,

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres including trafficking, sexual and other types of exploitation, eliminate all harmful practices such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation, ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance of international conference on population and development, undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, enhance the use of enabling technology to promote die empowerment of women, adapt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women and girls.
6.	Goal 6: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> by 2030, achieve universal equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water, by 2030, achieve access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all and end open defecation, by 2030, improve water quality by reducing pollution eliminating dumping and minimizing release of hazardous chemicals and materials by 2030 substantially increase water efficiency across all sectors and ensure sustainable withdrawals and supply of freshwater to address water scarcity and reduce the number of people suffering from water supply, by 2030, protect and restore water-related ecosystems, including mountains, forests, wetlands, rivers, lakes etc. support and strengthen the participation of local communities in improving water and sanitation.
7.	Goal 7: Ensure access to affordable, reliable sustainable and modern energy for all.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> by 2030, ensure universal access to affordable. reliable and modern energy services, by 2030, double the global rate of improvement in energy efficiency, by 2030, increase substantially the share of renewable energy in global energy mix, by 2030, enhance international cooperation to facilitate access to clean energy research and technology, including renewable energy, energy efficiency and advanced and cleaner fossil-fuel technology and investment in energy infrastructure and clean energy technology, by 2030,expand infrastructure and upgrade technology for supplying modern and sustainable energy services for all developing countries.
8.	Goal 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full of productive employment and decent work for all.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> sustain per capita economic growth and at least 7% per annum in the least developed countries, achieve higher levels of economic productivity through diversification, technological upgrading and innovation, promote development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, encourage micro -small and medium enterprises, by 2030 achieve full production, employment and decent work for all people, by 2030 reduce the proportion of unemployed youth,

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to eradicate forced labour and modern slavery, human trafficking, child labour by 2025, protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environment.
9.	Goal 9: Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> develop quality reliable sustainable and resilient, infrastructure, including regional and trans-border infrastructure to support economic development and human being, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization by 2030, increase the access of small-scale industrial and other enterprises in particular in developing countries, support domestic technology development, research and innovation in developing countries, increase access to information and communication technology and provide universal and affordable access to internet.
10.	Goal 10: Reduce income inequality within and among countries.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> by 2030 empower and promote the social economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic, ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome, including by eliminating, discriminatory laws, policies and practices adopt policies especially fiscal wage and social protection policies and achieve greater equality -improve the regulation and monitoring of global financial markets and institutions, facilitate orderly safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including the implementation of planned and well managed migration policies.
11.	Goal 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> by 2030 ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums, by 2030, provide access to safe, affordable accessible and sustainable transport systems for all, improving road safety, expand public transport by 2030, enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanization and capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement, planning and management strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard cultural and natural heritage, by 2030, reduce the adverse per capital environment impact of cities including by paying special attention to air quality and waste management, etc.
12.	Goal 12: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> implement the 10-year framework of programmes on sustainable consumption and production, by 2030, achieve sustainable management and efficient use of all-natural resources, by 2030, halve per capita global food waste at the retail and consumer levels and reduce food losses, by 2030, reduce waste generation through prevention, reduction, recycling and reuse, encourage companies, especially large and transnational companies to adopt sustainable practices and to integrate sustainability information into their reporting cycle, etc.
13.	Goal 13: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts by regulating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disaster in all countries,

	emissions and promoting development in renewable energy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> integrate climate change measures into national policies, strategies and planning, improve education, awareness-raising and human and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warnings, promote mechanism for raising capacity for effective climate change-related planning and management in least developed countries.
14.	Goal 14: To conserve and sustainably use the Worlds, oceans, seas and marine resources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> by 2030, prevent and reduce marine pollution of all kinds, by 2020, manage and protect marine and coastal ecosystems to an adverse impact, minimize the impact of ocean acidification, by 2020, effectively regulate harvesting and end overfishing, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and destructive fishing practices, by 2020 conserve at least 10% of coastal and marine areas, provide access to small scale artisanal fishers to marine resources and markets, etc.
15.	Goal 15: Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial eco-systems, manage forests, combat dissertations, and halt and reserve land degradation and biodiversity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> by 2020 ensure the conservation and restoration of terrestrial and inland fresh water ecosystems and their services, by 2020 promote the implementation of sustainable, management of all types of forests, halt deforestation, restore degraded forests, increase reforestation, by 2030 combat desertification, restore degraded land and soil, by 2020 reduce the degradation of natural habitats, halt the loss of biodiversity and prevent and protect the extinction of threatened species, to end poaching and trafficking of protected species of flora and fauna and address the demand and supply of illegal wild life products, etc.
16.	Goal 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere-end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against children, promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and equal access to justice, substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all their forms, develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels, ensure responsive, inclusive participatory and representative decision making at all levels, by 2030 provide legal identity for all including birth registration etc.
17.	Goal 17: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> strengthen domestic resources mobilization including international support to developing countries to improve domestic capacity for tax and other revenue collection enhance policy coherence for sustainable development encourage and promote effective public, public-private and civil society partnerships, building on the experience and resourcing strategies of partnerships. By 2020, enhance capacity-building support to developing countries including for least developed countries and small island developing states, etc.

A close look on the demands of the seventeen sustainable development goals shows that it requires a well-coordinated effort of skills and knowledge from graduates. The acquisition of these skills is very important for human resource development, nation building and for the promotion of sustainable development which underpins the 17 SDGs. The SDGs were adopted by world leaders as a successor development goals to the millennium development goals MDGs. The SDGs is a universal call to end poverty, ensure inclusive and equitable quality education, safeguard the planet and ensure that everyone enjoy prosperity and peace by 2030. It provides clear guidelines and targets for all countries to adopt in accordance with their respective development priorities. Orelope-Adefulire (2018) posits that quality education is the foundation to improving people's lives and a key to sustainability, thus, it has a standalone goal (SDG-4) as a means of achieving the SDGs.

The SDGs emphasized access to inclusive equitable quality education from early childhood education through tertiary level of education. The essence is to equip everyone with skills of productivity and economic growth. In view of this, the economic role of higher education in advancing the economy of this nation cannot be over emphasized.

Higher education according to Uche and Asaat (2018) raises recipient's level of productivity, creativity, initiative and innovation. It provides the required manpower to meet the economic needs of the society. Investment in higher education is a key contributor to economic growth of many nations. In view of this, higher education is expected to play a transformation role in the nation's development. The sustainable development goals otherwise known as global goals is geared towards poverty alteration, protecting the planet and ensuring that everyone enjoys peace and prosperity. In light of the above, there is need to maintain standards in higher education; this is because the development of a nation is dependent on the quality of its human resources and the quality of human resources depends on the type of education that is received especially at the higher level.

4. Quality and Quality Assurance in Higher Education

Quality education is a critical component for economic development and sustainability. The state of tertiary institutions in Nigeria has generated heated debates in terms of its role in the economic development of the nation. Qualitative education is a condition through which development of nations and individuals can be attained.

The quality of higher education can be measured in terms of ability of graduates to meet the goals of a nation. Olaitan, Nwachukwu, Onyemachi, Igbo and Ekong (1999) opined that quality is expressed as the functional attributes of the entire components of higher education, namely curriculum, teachers, facilities, instructional methods and students. Quality in Nigerian university education is a multidimensional concept that should embrace all its functions and activities; teaching and academic programmes, research and scholarship, staffing, students, buildings, facilities, equipment, services to the community and academic environment (UNESCO, 1998). According to Maduiewusi in Odoemenam and Ominyi (2012) quality in academics is the concept of the quality of

educational input and output in its entirety. Also, Adeogu (2001) emphasized that, availability, relevance and adequacy of resources contributes to academic achievement. Thus, for quality to be achieved in higher education, proper management is important. This has to do with formulation of policies and programmes with a view of achieving educational goals. To attain quality in education, the input of the society, government, policy makers, teaching force, curriculum planners and infrastructures is a spring board for its realization. The activities of everyone must be monitored to achieve the expected result.

Quality assurance is the fitness of an organization in accomplishing the goals for which it is set up and also maintaining comparable standards. Quality assurance in higher education according to Okebukola (2004) is a continuous process of improvement in the quality of teaching and learning activities that will be achieved through employing mechanisms that are internal and external to the universities. Oduma (2013) sees quality assurance in education as a process of monitoring, assessing and evaluating all aspects of the education activities and communicating the outcome to all concerned with a view of improving the products of the education system.

Giving credence to the above assertions, quality and quality assurance is a magic wand that can transform this nation and lead to sustainable development. It is worthy to note that quality education will raise well informed leaders, promote the right kind of values and ensure that the right kind of students that will bring about sustainability are produced. Olaniyan (2001) is of the view that quality education is a basic activity of mankind because it is the process by which individuals acquire effective knowledge and skills. Higher education is expected to create needed human capital with enhanced skills that can lead to technological innovation, productivity and growth within the economy. This means that quality human capital has direct impact on the development of a system. Quality higher education will equip the recipients with the necessary skills that will enable them to contribute maximally to the development of the nation. It should be noted that the products of higher education are capital investment which will overtime, lead to the development of the country. The fundamental mission of higher education according to Brubacher (1982) is to promote the life of the mind through intellectual inquiry and to generate, store and transmit specialized knowledge and sophisticated expertise, higher forms of culture and ethnical bases of conduct. Universities pursue this mission through teaching, research, publication and community service. Higher institutions contribute to the advancement of civilization through setting standards for the rest of the population. For this reason, the business of providing quality education should be a collective responsibility of all stakeholders in the education sector. If the stakeholders are able to identify their roles and be alive to their responsibilities, qualitative higher education will help to lead this nation to achieving sustainable goals.

5. Factors Affecting the Quality of Higher Education in Nigeria

In most developing countries, there are several challenges that hinder the achievement of expected goals in education. These challenges need to be addressed to promote quality education. Among the challenges are the following:

- a) **Lack of Adequate Financing of Educational Programmes:** The greatest obstacle to realizing most goals in education is fund. This affects provision of quality education, staff development and access to modern technology that will enhance advancement at all levels. Higher education in most African countries are underfunded, this makes it difficult for the recipient to take full advantage of global opportunities.
- b) **Lack of Quality Control Measures:** Most the higher institution in the country lack quality control measures that will help in maintaining standard in the system. The need for quality in the higher education is considered imperative due to the challenges of globalization and capital-intensive nature of higher education especially in developing countries.
- c) **Over Population:** A special characteristics of the tertiary institution in Nigeria is over enrolment of students. It is difficult to maintain quality with the continuous expanding enrolment when resources are declining. Nigeria as a growing nation has continuously witnessed unprecedented increase of students in higher institutions. This has overstretched lecture rooms and facilities. Increase in population in higher education without corresponding increase in the number or quantity of available facilities may have implications for effective teaching and learning.
- d) **Incessant strike actions:** Strike has become a household name in the country due to the fact that no year passes without any segment of higher education sector embarking on a very long strike, as noted by Emenalo (2016). This evidence abounds in most universities, polytechnics, colleges of education, etc. This disruptive and disjointed exercise has affected the quality of graduates in the society.
- e) **Lack of adequate infrastructure:** One widely accepted fact about educational facilities and infrastructures is that it brings about professional growth. As opined by Ewart, Isah and Ileuma (2009) infrastructure is an important aspect of production of sustainable development. Infrastructural facilities according to Ezeaku and Ughamadu (2013) are provided for the enhancement and promotion of teaching and learning. Most schools do not have enough classroom blocks, hostels, libraries to match with the number of the students. The absence of adequate infrastructure affects the quality and standard of graduates. For example, most students that study computer science do not have the opportunity of operating the computer system. Most of them cannot explain the details of the keyboard. This is a minus in the technological advancement of this nation. For them to be absorbed in any workplace, they need to go for computer training in order to acquire the relevant skills that will help them to operate the computer.

5.1 The Way Forward/Suggestions

In the view of the prominent role played by higher education in the realization of sustainable development goals, the following suggestions were made:

- a) Government should play the fundamental role of providing enabling environment. Facilities should be made available to students, teaching and non-teaching staff. This will help them improve their professionalism.
- b) Students should be encouraged to travel to advanced institution to interact with their counterparts.
- c) Educational planners should plan and set realistic goals that can lead the nation to achieving sustainable developing goals.
- d) There should be sincere effort to implement comprehensive curricular to foster creativity that will improve the quality of the citizenry.
- e) There should be adequate financing of education to give room for quality education.
- f) Government should invest in research, science and technology this will lead to the production of goods and services and also will help to reduce poverty and increase the economic standing of the nation.
- g) Education at all level should be practical and functional. This will increase the level of understanding of students. It will help them to be creative and innovative.

6. Conclusion

Quality education is a condition through which development of nations and sustainable development goals can be achieved. There have been several efforts to ensure access to quality education in Nigeria. This is because of the place of education as a primary agent towards sustainable development and increasing people's capacities to transform their vision into reality. All the goals of higher education are geared towards sustainable development and nation building, for this reason, there should be adequate provision of funds, recruitment of qualified personnel, provision of adequate infrastructure, monitoring and evaluation of the entire system for improvement. All these and more will help to put Nigeria on the road for sustainability.

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