

**REPOSITIONING HIGHER EDUCATION RESEARCH FOR INSTITUTIONAL
SUSTAINABILITY AND DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA**

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Abstract

This paper canters on contemporary issues that deals with repositioning of higher education research for institutional sustainability and development. The major argument of the paper is that higher institutions of education are the engine room for researches that other sectors of the society depends on for new knowledge, innovations and advices on developmental policies and issues in the country. This is because the institutions are the ones with postgraduates and undergraduates who are researchers and with other independent researchers who study and come out with unique scientific information for societal consumption. Thus the paper looks into the responsibilities of higher education institution, challenges of researches, implication and suggestions on how to improve and sustain the act of research in the higher institution of learning.

Key words: Higher institution of learning, higher institution research, Sustainable development, Sustainable research.

Introduction

The pursuit for a meaningful and relevant education system, content and strategies has been seen as a contemporary challenge to scholars, policy makers and educational clients. This is because of the dynamic nature of human society and the constant demand by social changes and its features for educational innovations, adoption and adaption of new initiations or innovations to developmental issues where necessary. Both human and institutional needs transcend conventional wisdom or common speculations to proffer solutions to social (family and religion) educational and political advancement (Busco, 2009; Meyer, Ward, Coveney, & Rogers, 2008). The higher demand of educational contents in this era of knowledge economy, professional individuals and experts, research outcome, improved societal strategies for sustaining inherent values has made educational institution more tasked than ever imagine.

To meet up with the rising demand of education, societies and sub-institutions venture into constant redefinition of education (policies, contents, strategies, philosophy), redirection of its philosophy and goal, restructuring of its operation system and re-strategizing how to attract clients and for them to accept education end products (graduate, skills, Knowledge) (Agerbo, 2007; Mullen, Goyette, & Soares, 2003). Perhaps, this argument is why educational pursuit and its direction remain vague and perennial in nature. Educational values in societies are not debatable, this is why every nation conclusively invests in education, researches, innovation and development. According to Ekaette, Owan and Agbo, (2019), UNESCO posits that, to have a better education, it is expected that nations invest up to 26% of their annual budget into education.

But, there are some mistakes or higher sense of compromise along the way in some African countries where the budget is very low and education institution suffers a second class recognition in dealing with issues of higher institutional researches and sustainable development. For instance, Nigeria budget ₦17.126 trillion and only ₦65.3 billion was for education in 2022, which is not up to the expected 8.4 percent by UNICEF, showing clearly a huge sign of educational challenges. In the same take the country is having about 170 universities out of which 79 are private and 43 are federal and other 48 are state owned and about 69 research institutes.

Many other societal errors have the same particular direction of types of education, which in Nigeria is more of educating for training white collar job graduates and neglecting other components of education i.e., informal and non-formal. It will not be out of place to argue that the general slow nature of development in Nigeria is due to single or huge direction of education to formal and non-skill or entrepreneurial abilities (Bozeman, Fay, & Slade, 2013; Duze, 2011). Thus, the present global knowledge economy would have been a competitive moment of education process, where higher education will be for dual certificates (recognition), both in contents and practical skills (trade) but, the real focus on formal and one directional nature of education has long affects citizens' conventional public interest to stands the chance of having total development of individuals (Held, McGrew, Goldblatt, & Perraton, 2000; Munshi & Rosenzweig, 2006). This will allow individual to be functional and remain productive to sustain existing institutional values and promote development in society (Bastas & Liyanage, 2019; Sterling, 2001).

To sustain existing structures and improve them for a global higher institutional research challenges the graduates of higher education needs to be functionally knowledgeable, resourceful, skilful, rational and be certificated where and when necessary (Araujo & Taveira, 2009; Bastas & Liyanage, 2019). If the educational plan and philosophy cannot sustain institutional and societal goals and pave ways for integrated development, then it need to be revisited. And even though where the country education system is strong and vibrant with higher education budget, committed professional and conducive learning environment, functional graduates, to set its features for global knowledge challenges, it thus need to constantly be revisited as time changes for update and revalidation for relevance (Martynenko & Menshykov, 2017; Olaniyan & Okemakinde, 2008). Despite the fact that the country is having about 170 universities out of which 79 are private and 43 are federal and other 48 are state owned, with programmes in pure and applied sciences, and Arts and Humanities across board. These are both at the graduate and undergraduate level. But the alarming question is how effective are the programmes sustaining research and ensuring educational development This is because higher education is bent on improving social, economic, political and science oriented environmental issues using research findings (Ali, Sidow, & Guleid, 2013; Budría & Moro-Egido, 2008). As it has been posited that, the existence of higher education is to unveil the developmental challenges of institution and society and proffer a solution using the findings from researches (Kendall et al., 2003; Mac Iver, 2011). Thus, educational institutions are societal engine room for research and the findings are expected to go a long way to help scholars, policy makers, industries, institutions and society to improve, develop and sustain progressive values. This will lead to healthy social and educational development that will not alter the original goal of higher institutions and their subs in interdependency and development in other sectors of society.

Conceptual Clarification and Interdependency

Education as a concept has outgrown many of its daily or common sense interpretation and explanation. But despite its numerous interpretation, education does not discard its ideal purpose of teaching, learning, empowering, innovating, developing and sustaining all types of productive social values (Adesola, 1991; Adeyemi & Adeyinka, 2002). What remain successful

in education in all societies is the changes and development of strategies to withstand the contemporary natural and artificially created human challenges of society and its development. Therefore, education can still be maintained as posited by Sharma (2007), as the total development of the individual. This concerns the individual's physical, mental, social and spiritual development. With these factors, the individual is expected to be fully prepared for the social challenges as he or she must have attained the level of self-realization. Subsequently it implies growing into the full potentials of contributing to sustain positive values of the society (Quinn et al., 2005; Whiteley, 1995). When education is summarised as character, nurturing and development, it implies that the individual is being prepared for a total preparation to face and work in the sectors and workout strategies for social challenges of society from all kinds of industries and social group.

Higher education institutions are engine rooms for the incubation and delivery of highly complex idea that are tied to science, technological research and findings for human development. Higher education are designed research centres where investigations are carried out by means of diagnosing human and environmental problems and seeking solutions in a manner of research output for sustaining human environment(Akhtar, 2012; Cloete & Maassen, 2015). It is for knowledge exploration, capacity building and training of researchers for the development and preservation of scientific knowledge and skills. The aim is to identify social, environmental, economic and political issues, proffer solutions to them and ensure that the strategies did not contradict human ethics for societal development.

Higher education institutions are built primarily for researches, as the society advance and challenges growth become dynamic, humans devised means of engaging the environment through researches. Therefore, research is an act of investigation, exploration, seeking, enquiring knowledge for the purpose of solving socio-economic and political challenges. Research is an act of showing the level of educational engagement in society and higher institutions of learning (Babbie, 2013; Bozeman et al., 2013). Because teaching and learning centres of research act for the sustainment of better ways of improving human challenges. Therefore, education, educational institutions and research activities are chained together and their aim is for knowledge improvement, problem solving and societal development. In this argument, the notion of education and research entails (pure and applied science, arts and humanities) the sustainment of human environment.

Higher Education Research

The constant development of education from one particular stage to another is due to the fact that educational institutions are meant for continuous development which must be sustained. The sustainment of institutional pride and qualities are demanding and this must be based on its philosophy. Therefore, higher education research can be sustained using productive programme that is attractive to clients and forms the quest of changing time. The National Republic of Nigeria (2013) posits that higher education, which in other concept known as tertiary education encompass the educational contents provided and given after secondary school. Either in the Universities, Colleges of Education, Polytechnics, Monotechnics and other institutions offering related courses. The large and complex tasks of higher education in Nigeria integrates the fact of development, policy making and formation of other socioeconomic, political and developmental factors. To this background, the FRN (2013) expands the higher education policy by the following tasks:

- a. Contribute to national development through high level relevant manpower training;
- b. Develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of the individual and society;

- c. Develop the intellectual capacity of individual to understand and appreciate their local and external environment;
- d. Acquire both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to be self-reliant and useful members of the society;
- e. Promote and encourage scholarship and community service;
- f. Forge and cement national unity; and
- g. Promote national and international understanding and interaction (FGN, p. 36)

Going by the broad goals of higher education to society and its education objectives to the institutions are a portrait of the fundamental centre or tools to be used for all issues regarding national development including; individual empowerment, production of human capitals, experts to all institutions and the possibility of planning the future of a nation, by constantly engaging in pre-cautioner research, solutions research and researches for sustaining existing challenges, findings and their weaknesses. It is the higher education responsibilities to engage in exploring problems and solution through research and teaching for the sustainment of ideal relationship and improved tasked oriented existence.

Coupled with the above and more Cox (2000) outline the following as the responsibilities of higher education research to the public; improving human capital, in which the individual can render social services in all work place. This will be by the use of acquired knowledge, skills, training, leadership development and education. It is posited by the philosophy of higher education that the individual should be able to improve in social network, improve client trust in social work relationship and be reliable in structural delivery of services (Frink et al., 2008; Olaniyan & Okemakinde, 2008). There will be higher improvement in human abilities to develop and sustain structures of modern marketing, transportation and other economic infrastructures. Higher education research will unveil weaknesses in social relationship, develop questions and hypotheses, work to resolve the identified issues and challenges and finally experiment outcome for improvement and means of sustaining them.

For effective implementation of the goals of higher education research and to sustain the possibilities of its manifestation to society, the strategies must be scientific i.e. coordinating investigation that will carefully use qualitative, quantitative or mix-mode to observe and raise hypotheses or research questions that will guide finding (Akhtar, 2012; Cloete & Maassen, 2015; Fetalver Jr, 2013; Saint, Hartnett, & Strassner, 2003). Higher education main objective is research and its ideal strategies must be in line with global standard. This is because the ethics of research and its objective establishment in funding and reporting will develop the confident of experts who awaits institutional research outcome.

Purpose and Strategies for Higher Education Research

Purpose and strategies for higher education research comes in different forms. While some researches are for immediate solution to problems, others are meant for sustaining existing practices or predicting futuristic position for an enhanced social, political and economic solution to problems. Research has no single strategy or design and this can be justified by viewing qualitative, quantitative or mix-mode approaches to investigation. Research is an act of advancing knowledge and solving problems by means of having better answer to; new or discovered problems, existing answers in an improved manner or to reaffirm already agreed answers in an improved manner (Creswell, 2009; Morse & Niehaus, 2011). However, there are always unanswered questions and those with answers that need to be constantly verified and revalidated for sustainability. So therefore, research in higher education helps to provide and improve individual critical thinking skills, improve the understanding of problems and why

they need to be researched on, to advance in types of research and why one do need the skills (Akhtar, 2012; Arnott, Wilson, & Arnott, 2007). Going by the philosophy of higher education research which centred on generating fundamental knowledge (Basic research), real-world questions and application (applied research), research to determine the merit and worth of any intervention programme (evaluation research), to solve immediate problems that people face in an environment (action research) and research that is focused on reducing inequality (orientation research). Thus, the higher educational institutions are ideally made to generate knowledge either through research, experiences using empirical evidence which integrate ideal reasoning (thinking and understanding). However, in trying to justify the position of higher education research for sustainable development; there will be need to integrate psychological, social and sociological factors in dealing with institutions, human and environment for integration and inter dependency. Thus, every intended research has purposes and some interlarded ones are as follows:

- To initiate an objective and evidence based research which will in turn create chance for sustainable knowledge, facts and figures to be used for designing social policies. This refers to a knowledge that will be open to criticism and evaluation by end users or beneficiaries. Researches are equally targeting the abilities to strengthen other researches and researchers by means of independent and inter dependency in research through collaborator of institution.
- Researches are meant to unfold social chances of scholars and institutions interrelationship where knowledge sharing will be the basis for enlightenment and a constructive will and programme for capacity building. This is a strong avenue for sustaining inter dependency of higher education researches within institutions.
- To diagnose teaching, learning and research challenges and providing knowledgeable solutions where the reflection will perhaps be rooted to academic theories, research strategies, purpose, findings, implementation and the evaluation for further research. By implication, solutions to social, political and economic and or scientific based problems will be from scholar and institutional findings.
- To help with information for the training and empowerment of the manpower of society, for all sector or sub-sector. Objectively this must have undergone a skilful designed educational or knowledgeable program. With this nature of practice there is no doubt that education institutions will provide the chances of ensuring professionally based graduate for labour market. The goal will be competency, productivity, trustworthiness and respect professionalism.
- Research will encourage higher investment in education with higher expectations from educational institution research as the engine room for sustaining productive social democracy and improve chances for independent and interdependent practices between and within institution for professionalism. This will enhance democracy in research and the provision of chances for objective practices.
- A knowledge based research with full consideration of ethics, skills, knowledge, professionalism, purpose and proper dissemination of information (findings), is not only helping institutions or research scholars but it is to actively contribute the preservation of human resources and national development.
- Perhaps research in society is like a mirror of reflection and a guide for a direction and where it is missing, a major component for human diagnose is missing and it will lead to catastrophe in all sectors and institutions of society (Akhtar, 2012; Blaikie, 2010; Bryman, Teevan, & Bell, 2009; McMillan & Schumacher, 2001).

Challenges of Higher Education Researches

There is no doubt that research in general is very important to human existence and development, but yet it is facing different types of challenges. These are not limited to individual, technical, professional, institutional, government, industries, content knowledge and finance based challenges. However, students and scholars in tertiary institutions in Nigeria still strive to learn and sustain the ideal practices of research as part of the pre-requisite for graduation in different programmes. There are various reasons for conducting researches, i.e. improving or bridging knowledge, solving identified or diagnosed problem, identifying solutions to ongoing or predicted social challenges or sustaining existing practices (Babbie, 2013; Blaikie, 2010). Some of these challenges are strongly associated to the following:

- Lack of knowledge for the purpose of research and low or absence of research knowledge (the why, how and where). This is mostly with both graduate and undergraduate students.
- Lack of proper understanding of research ethics, issues relating to patent right, plagiarism and proper recognition or citation of other scholars or research values.
- Misplacement of research priority, a situation of conducting research where it's not relevant due to political or bias factors and the outcome might not be of any relevance to individual or community. Perhaps is either money or politically motivated.
- Unprofessional use of research findings by policy makers, members of the public, industries and government agency. And this influences the compromise of ideal research findings for an alternative weak interest factors in society.
- Total lack of use of undergraduate research findings due to poor quality, plagiarism and unethical challenges associated to it.
- The post graduate research in many institutions is full of poor supervision, poor funding, and low quality of research activities and poor experimentation due to absence or poor laboratory equipment and the compromise of ideal scientific research ethics.
- On macro scale, the equipment and their agencies are not adequately and objectively sponsoring research. Where research is supported or sponsored, its findings might not be integrated into policies. And where they are used (findings), they might either be given to nonprofessional for interpretation, execution and adoption or adaptation where necessary.
- Allocating research task to unprofessional i.e. non-educational experts conducting educational research to identify challenges and proffering solution is a serious setback in a country. This is lack of respect for professionalism in research which affect quality and objectivity of the grounded knowledge and theory to be created.
- Many other researches today are gross repetition of what has been done, this is due to poor ethics of research by either government individual researches or scholar or agencies involved (Hamersley, 2006; Koul, 2009; Makinde, 2005).

Strategies for Sustaining Higher Institution Research

There is no doubt that the ethics and values of social and scientific researchers are facing set back in higher institutions, due to higher level of compromising objectivity. But to improve on the ideal standard of higher education research and to reposition it to its productive glory the following are urgent suggestions:

- The institutional based challenges and solutions, here the experts are needed, conducive teaching and learning environment and factors for teachers, students, laboratory technicians. Modern and equipped laboratories, sustainable electricity, the commitment

of institutional authority to the development of research, the zeal for collaboration with other national and international research agencies and institutions.

- Knowledge of research, researchers i.e. students, graduates and undergraduates activities and attitudes towards research. Lack of interest to abide by the principles; ethics of research make studies to be weak and most of the findings and reports doubtful. In some instances low level of research knowledge i.e. what to do in research, why and how. In this case students find it difficult to identify if the research is either for building or supporting existing theory or more. In general, lack of research knowledge is at both graduate and undergraduate level and this is affecting the nature for sustaining higher education act of research professionalism.
- Marketing and acceptability of research findings. Researchers need to employ all available strategies to improve the attitudes of conducting all nature of study so as to attract agencies, governments and research centres. This will therefore strengthen access and patent right of finding for marketability and recognition.
- Government attitudes towards researchers and outcomes for consumption. Institutions of learning are expected to be tasked by society and government to seek solutions to social, political. Economic and environmental challenges. This is because it's the higher institutions that are the engine room for initiating research to uncover causes and solutions to identify problems and possible solutions for prevention in the future.

Implications for Sustaining Higher Institutions Research in Nigerian Society

1. That the activities of all sectors will be tied to the decisions and advices of professionals as a result of consultations from research findings.
2. The market drive and production from all sectors will equally be as a result of research finding and professional advices.
3. Higher institution and its activities graduate students and create more jobs opportunities: with the increasing rate of unemployment in the country, establishment of more universities will create more job opportunities for Nigerian unemployed youths.
4. Higher education increase the production of skilled manpower: Universities education is for the production of highly skilled manpower, as a result there are more skilled manpower.
5. Improve in economic activities in the country and the environment where those institutions are.
6. Increasing in universities funding on the part of government is expected to increase. The universities need to be funded and be sustained, where public higher institutions are not adequately funded, their quality will be compromised.
7. Increase in the demand for educational facilities such as teaching and learning resources, building (school physical plants) classroom, lecture theatres, offices, hostels, teaching and learning materials such as whiteboard, markers, pens, papers, and more.

Conclusion

In the light of the entire discussion and positions, it will be understood that a society that neglect its higher institutions innovations and advices to run its affairs will definitely not have a social competitive sustainable development. Perhaps, the society and its sub sectors over ages relies on referring to knowledge, verified wisdom, history and findings from scientific researches to run government, train manpower, build economic, develop societies and even defends its integrity. Therefore, higher institution research need to be maintained

and be sustained by means of improved professionalism, dedication by all stakeholders in the conduct of research and to attract consumers of the studies output.

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