



Teaching and University Education in Nigeria: The Imperative of Repositioning For Global Competitiveness

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ABSTRACT

Teaching is one of the oldest and noblest professions and university education is acknowledged as the fulcrum on which high-level manpower is built. University education is a knowledge factor where individual capability and professional efficacy is built and nurtured for the development of individuals and society. In this paper, teaching and university education in Nigeria and the need for repositioning global competitiveness were raised and discussed. The challenges militating against university education for the attainment of global competitiveness were highlighted, among them are the paucity of funds, deficit in educational resources, and infrastructures and the inability of the university community to explore digital literacy and competence among others. The paper highlights ways for the attainment of global competitiveness as the integration of information and communication technology into the process and procedures of teaching and learning, the upskilling and reskilling of students and teachers in digital literacy, digital competence and the use of digital tools. As a way forward, the paper suggests a legal framework that will encourage all tiers of government to budget not less than 20% of their annual budget to education, redesign the curriculum to be in turn with global best practices, build global citizens, instil positive values, inculcate intercultural values and the mindset of a sustainable environment.

Keywords: education, global competitiveness, teaching, university education

1. INTRODUCTION

Education all over the world is recognised as a fulcrum for national development, thus nations ensure that the citizens have access not only to free education but quality and inclusive education. Education that will instil positive values and virtues, patriotism and national consciousness. To individuals, education helps to inculcate high-quality skills and knowledge that enable the recipients to navigate the challenges in a world of work. It exposes individuals to basic societal norms, and values of society and in the process make informed decisions. Education helps individuals to attain professional proficiency, and imbue individual dignity and self-respect.

Education can be classified into basic education, post-basic education and tertiary education. Tertiary education consists of universities and inter-universities, polytechnics, colleges of education, and schools of health and technology among others. Tertiary education is education given after post-basic education. (FGN, 2014). University education is the highest echelon in academic pursuit where professionals are nurtured and built. The essence of university education is the development of the high-level manpower needs for society. This is achieved through teaching, research and community services. The teacher

becomes the cardinal if the policy and goals of education at any level is to be achieved. The role of the teacher is not only helping students to learn but also as a counsellor, role model and surrogate parent among others. It is imperative to note that the primary function of a teacher is imparting knowledge to the student and this comes through teaching. Teaching is a conscious effort to help the learner to acquire certain skills, attitudes, and knowledge through planned activities. (Bwala, n.d) The author further asserts that teaching is influencing a desirable change in the behaviour of the learner for the betterment of the individual and society.

For teaching to be effective there are variables within and outside the school environment that will enhance the effective actualization of educational objectives. Some of these variables are teachers' competencies, availability of educational resources and infrastructures, the curriculum and government policies and availability of funds among others. A cursory look at university education in Nigeria depicts a far cry from the citadel of learning with infrastructural decay in universities. Agabi, (2014), opines that the infrastructural decay witnessed in education sectors, especially in the university is due to inadequate funding of the educational sectors. The paucity of funds inhibits the managers of universities from the needed resources to procure the necessary equipment that will aid effective teaching that is in tune with international best practices.

At this juncture, it becomes imperative to interrogate the university education in Nigeria to ascertain the efficacy of the products and their relevance in a global world. We need to ask, what kind of lecturers are in the universities. What is the nature of the curriculum and educational resources, does university education meet the needs of the society and the world? Are the university lecturers meeting the challenges of the modern and fast-developing world? These and others are questions this paper intends to answer. The researcher is of the view that in a global and competitive world where markets and economies of individual nations are interdependent on one another. Nigerian education must strive to meet with the pace of technological advancement to remain competitive.

2. Conceptual Clarifications

Teaching

Teaching is adjudged one of the oldest professions of mankind. It is a deliberate effort to instill in the learner certain skills, knowledge and positive values and behaviour that will cause a positive change in the behaviour of the learner. (Wordu, 2019). The primary duty of a teacher is to transmit the desirable patterns of behaviour that will aid the learner in the trajectory of challenges in a world of work and contribute to the development of the society. The teacher is perceived as a promoter of learning by helping the learner to learn. Obanya, (2007), observes that the teaching profession is usually regarded as a profession that impacts positively on the learner, the school and society. At this point, when we talk about the profession we are interested in highlighting those features that distinguishes teaching from other human enterprises.

To have a firm grip on teaching as a profession it is important to explore definitions of the concept by experts. Mkpe, (2006), defines a profession as a type of trade or occupation that need special skills or training and knowledge that are beneficiary to individuals and society. It renders useful services that are vital to the survival of individuals and society, and it is knowledge-based and problem-solving. (Akinduyo, 2014). From the aforementioned definitions, a profession is a systematic body of knowledge with specialized skills, knowledge and intellectual capacity that are used to solve problems that are relevant to society. (Yahiya, 2004, & Amaele and Amaele, 2003).

For any human enterprise to be regarded as a profession it has certain criteria that distinguish it from other organizations. Richey, (2016) itemized the following as the characteristics of the profession: expertise knowledge, members acquire a systematic knowledge that enables the practitioners to discharge their duties to society. And such knowledge is acquired through formal education that is recognized by the government. Professional code of conduct: any profession must have a code of behaviour that guide their relationship with one another. It consists of the ethos, values, norms and rules that ensure peaceful and harmonious relationships and encourages spirit de corps among members. Also, professionals are not only professionally organized but the association must be recognized by law, and the mode of operation known

by law. Other characteristics of professionalism are freedom to practice their trade that must be relevant to society and membership are not open to the general public except those with a distinguished body of knowledge.

University Education

Education can be approached from a different perspective, either by types or by levels etc. and in whatever ways education is approached the intention remains the same. It is expected to lead to the acquisition of knowledge, skills and manipulative abilities. (Afenikhe, 2022). It, therefore, presumes the existence of educational goals and objectives through which learning is accomplished. Uba and Agada, (1988) cited in Elekwu and Kwuluje, (2019), defined education as a powerful instrument that creates in the individuals a fertile ground for desired attitudinal change to occur and instills in them the competence of adaptability, flexibility of thoughts, and for political awareness and social emancipation.

University education is the type of education to which learners are exposed upon completion of post-basic education after the individuals have passed the prescribed examination. University education is the prestigious and the highest echelon on the ladder of academic pursuit. It is acknowledged as a knowledge organization where human capacities are developed and potentials nurtured for the benefit of individuals and the sustainability of society. (Wordu, 2019). University education is a knowledge factory where the raw materials of humanity are processed, refined, trained and honed to become leaders in all spheres of human endeavours. (Nwachukwu & Okoli, 2015). It is where professionals like educationists, lawyers, medical doctors, architects and other professionals are nurtured and developed to their full potential.

To this end, the National Policy on Education posits that university education should be conducted in such a manner that the programme develops the high-level manpower needs of the nation as well as “making the professional course reflect our national requirements”. (FGN, 2014p42). The policy further envisaged that these laudable goals will be achieved through quality intake of students, quality teaching and learning, research and development, and high-quality infrastructure among others.

Global Competitiveness

The concept of global means the whole and globalization means the interconnectivity of the world economy through the free flow of information, goods and services. Technology is the primary and crucial facilitator of globalization, which makes the world a small village through time and space. (Korotaev, 2013). Globalization involves the creation of one economy due to the speedy free movement of people, services, capital, goods, ideas and knowledge across borders. (Al’Abri, 2011). The upturn of information technology facilitates globalization and it has caused a fundamental change in human activities and affected the ways tasks are accomplished. It also affected how people related to one another and caused a social change that necessitated a change in skills, behaviour and knowledge. Globalization cut across all human activities and has been subjected to different interpretations and meanings based on the ideological bias of the writer. According to Adesina, (2012), globalization is a multifaceted concept that has generated controversy among scholars and therefore eluded a consensus opinion. Poppi, (1997) see globalization as vague and obscure as its reaches are wide and constantly shifting therefore difficult to have a workable definition. Globalization is a growing economic interdependency of countries as a result of the increased volumes of trade and services, and international capital flow as a result of the diffusion of technology and information. (Shenkar and Luo 2004). Therefore, globalization is about the interconnectedness of the world economy as a result of technology and the effect of human activity on the entire globe.

Global competitiveness is about active participation in a world that is interconnected, diverse and rapidly changing. It is about acquiring certain skills that enable individuals, especially youths to be productive and participate not only in their community but the world. The influx of information technology presents a vista of opportunism but it is not without challenges. The young must learn not only how to participate in a volatile environment besieged by an increase in population, cultural diversity, and interconnectivities but global competence that will help them navigate worldwide. Global competence becomes imperative and it is multidimensional skills that help individuals to appreciate and understand intercultural issues, and world views, respect other value systems and take responsibility for sustainability and well-being for all. (Ramos & Schliecher, 2018).

Global competitiveness is hinged on global competence, it is not only the ability to acquire skills that enable individuals to participate in the world economy but to effectively communicate across cultural boundaries civilly and respectfully. Understanding that people's point of view and value system is a determinant of their cultural background. Global competency is vital for harmonious living in a multicultural community, it is also necessary for the global job market and important in the achievement of sustainable development goals. (Zakaria et al, 2019). The authors further opined that schools play a vital role in helping students to cultivate global competency, build bridges across intercultural groups and promote cultural values. Education becomes the driving force for the attainment of global competence, especially university education.

University education as the highest echelon in education plays a critical role in instilling global competence and developing high-level manpower need of society. It becomes necessary that teachers should teach and encourage effective and responsible use of digital information and social media, and engage in intercultural activities and other activities that will foster an appreciation for the diversity of culture, language and belief systems. (Sinicrope, Norris and Watanabe, 2007). It is on this note that the next section will explore the importance of why Nigeria's education system should reposition for global competitiveness.

3. The Imperative of Repositioning University Education for Global Competitiveness

Globalization drives higher education and higher education is driven by globalization (Pereira, 2022). She further opined that higher education teachers are trained to teach, research and make innovations that will contribute to a knowledge-driven world. Globalization has created competition among nations competing to meet the fast-growing demands of employees with high-level skills and knowledge. (Yushau, 2022). Ensure that a nation's educational system remains relevant in the global economy has led to a change in educational policies not only to serve the national needs but accommodate the global context with a positive impact. (Marcel & Mkojera 2021). Therefore, for Nigerian universities to remain competitive there is a need to restructure the entire process with global competence. It is in line with these that this section of the paper will explore the inhibitors of university education for global competence.

The first point of emphasis is the school system, school is the veritable vehicle where teaching, research and innovations are generated for the betterment of individuals and society. School should be designed and organized so that the learning process will not only bring about positive change in the individual but on the perception of the world. (O'Sullivan, 2008). In the same vein, Yang, (2004) opined that schools are where skills and knowledge are acquired. The attainment of the goals of education is dependent on the quality of educational resources available to the institution and the ambience, ethos and working conditions of the environment. (Jacob, Jegede & Musa, 2022).

A cursory look at the Nigerian school systems depicts gross neglect and devoid of educational resources that can enhance global competitiveness. Fatuzzo (2017), observed that the academic staff are experiencing challenges in the attainment of educational goals due to inadequate or lack of teaching and research facilities among others. The Nigerian educational system is devoid of adequate information technology that will enhance global competitiveness. More disquieting is where the available manpower for the utilization becomes a challenge. The research was conducted on the availability and utilization of information and communication technology in universities for effective teaching and learning in Rivers State. The study showed that the electronic (smart) board are inadequate in both federal and state-owned universities, and underutilized because of a lack of experts and knowledge. With the use of archaic teaching methods, the use of chalk and chalkboard, and constant interfacing between the teacher and students in overcrowded classrooms. (ibid). This will encourage academic fallacy in the 21st century that is knowledge-driven, therefore, for the Nigerian educational system to remain relevant in the information epoch, there is a need to reskill and reposition the educational system for global competitiveness. Studies have shown that the integration of information technology is a panacea for global competitiveness and education is the driving engine for the realization. Eda, (2011), opined that information and communication technology helps in shaping the new global economy and producing rapid changes in society.

The bane of academic incompetence is the inability of the Nigerian education system to integrate into the international currency of information technology. Information technology is the application of computers and accessories, communication technology, and network technology that when connected or used singly will help to collect data, process, analyze, store and or disseminate to larger audiences. It is a computer-based tool that people use to work with information that supports the information and information processing needs of the organization. (Wordu, 2019; Okai, 2008).

Information and communication technology in education is the use of information technology in teaching, research, learning and the entire management of educational objectives to achieve education goals. It involves the typing of questions, passing of information through electronic means and evaluation of students, e-learning and other virtual modes of learning.

The importance of information technology in education cannot be overemphasised. Information and communication technology has been identified as a tool that accelerates information dissemination, promotes teaching and learning and makes students and teachers active and productive in the classroom. (Nwankwola, 2015). Through electronic learning, education is made affordable, accessible and inclusive to the vulnerable in society. The study has shown that to be successful in a knowledge-driven economy the teachers must be digitally competent (Karakose, Polat & Papadakis 2021). The onus is on the teachers and students to integrate technology into all educational services.

Another factor militating against the Nigerian educational system towards global competitiveness is the paucity of funds. It is imperative to mention that public universities are either owned by the federal or state government. The implication is that public universities are majorly financed by either the federal or state government. And the budgetary allocation to education is a far cry from UNESCO's 26% standard. Agabi, (2021), observed that Nigeria's economy for the past two decades has not fared well and this has worsened the underfunding of education in Nigeria. Underfunding becomes the catalyst undermining Nigerian university's attainment of global competitiveness. University education in Nigeria lacks the basic infrastructure that enhances effective teaching and learning in a knowledge-driven world.

Infrastructures are essential resources that aid the effective attainment of educational objectives and they compass the products, services and facilities that are needed for teaching and learning. (Sullivan and Sheffrin 2003). Studies revealed that there is a shred of strong evidence that high-quality infrastructures facilitate better instruction, improves student outcome and reduces dropouts. (Teixeira, Amoroso & Gresham 2017). They pinpoint buildings, classrooms, digital libraries, laboratories and other educational equipment are critical elements of a learning environment in schools and universities for the attainment of educational objectives.

Unfortunately, despite the proliferation of university education, there is an enormous deficit in infrastructure development thus undermining the attainment of global competitiveness. Studies revealed that most academic staff and non-academic staff lack a decent office with an internet connection to discharge their duties some of the lecturers lack office and lecture space that can propel effective teaching and research. The laboratories are obsolete and the furniture is in bad shape. (Jacob, Jegede, & Musa 2022). Considering the deficit in infrastructures and information technology in university education there is a need for government to rejig the education system for global competitiveness. It is in the realization of this that the next section is to explore way forward.

4. The Way Forward

Considering the quantum of challenges militating against university education in Nigeria for global competitiveness the study proffers the following solutions. The government should develop a legal framework that makes a budgetary allocation to education should not be less than 20% of an annual budget. The legal instrument should make it a crime against any government budget on education to be below the stipulated standard. The hallmark of global competitiveness is the integration of information technology into the educational system. The adaptation of virtual learning options and digital upskilling make the recipients of university education global citizens, therefore there is a need to instill digital education and skills in all spheres of education. This can be achieved through a robust awareness of the students and teachers on the use of digital technology. Furthermore, there is a need to upturn investment

in digital tools and make them available and accessible to students and teachers. The managers of universities in Nigeria should make the internet available to students and teachers twenty hours a day, it is achievable and it depends on the political will of school administrators. Also, the level of digital awareness, digital literacy, and digital competence in the university community should be raised and the evaluation of students should be computer-based in line with the National Policy of Education “that all levels of education in Nigeria shall be encouraged to migrate to computer-based test in assessment” (FGN, 2014 p69). The educational policy should be redesigned in line with global best practices with an emphasis on paperless administration. Universities should be allowed to restructure and redesign the curriculum in line with the needs of the environment and more importantly instil positive values and skills, behaviours that will build global citizens, inculcate intercultural values, and a mindset of a sustainable environment.

5. CONCLUSION

University education is the apex of academic pursuit and the primary purpose is embedding virtues and acceptable behaviour and knowledge that help individuals nurture their potential and contribute to the development of society. These laudable objectives are achieved through teaching, research and innovation. University education is the knowledge factory where professionals are built to provide the high-level manpower needs of society. It is incontrovertible that for the education system to be worth its salt in the knowledge-driven economy there is a need to integrate information technology into teaching and learning. It is also important that there is the need for adequate funding of education in Nigeria to enable the procurement of digital tools and the reskilling and upskilling of teachers and students in the use of digital literacy, digital technology and competence. The curriculum should be rejigged in line with global best practices by producing global citizens with global competence for effective global competitiveness.

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