

MARRIAGE OF TOWN AND GOWN: ROLE OF UNIVERSITY IN HUMAN CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT FOR SUSTAINABLE NATIONAL GROWTH

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ABSTRACT

Universities are viewed from different perspectives as entities dispensing knowledge that expands the life of the human mind for various reasons. In essence therefore, universities all over the world engage in three principal functions, these are teaching, research and community services. These three functions are essentially what make the universities an academic environment where scholars have the opportunity to formally and theoretically carry out their intellectual activities for the development and growth of the nation. This paper focused on the roles played by universities in human resource development for sustainable national growth. The university is seen in this paper as avenue for empowering individuals with adequate capacity for nation building. To this end, the paper stressed the need for university programmes to be environment relevant in order to solve societal problems. The paper justified the marriage of gown and town in the symbiotic relationship existing between the two entities for national growth. Recommendations made for increasing developmental rate include but not limited to: a purposeful harmonization of the university programmes to be environment relevant for meeting the needs of the society; exploration of various resources in the larger society for proper channelling for improved economic returns; involving students in income generating projects for the university and the larger society in order to development and be seen as avenue for the society to renew itself; giving a new orientation to students to reduce over reliance on certificates.

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KEYWORDS: University; Sustainable National Development; Town/Gown relationship; Human Capital Development

INTRODUCTION

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

Naturally, a university is one of the avenues for human capital development and social education in which medium and high level personnel are produced to meet emerging challenges in the society. According to Synder (1993), a university is an institution which people attend to further their education, it is also a place of employment for people to

work as faculty members or staff. This process addresses the challenges of resource management and the generation of ideas that will collectively improve the standard of living of the people through efficient and effective application of these resources to create wealth. Against this background, the university is expected to develop curricula and policies that address knowledge in the society as well as generate ideas for the continuous growth of the nation.

In the views of Brown and Ward (2008), a university serves as a focal point for countless benefits to the community. In this regard the town is explained as a geographical location where people co-exist, guided by set of values and expectations. The town has the presence of the government and boundaries. The gown on the other hand represents university education or all academic programmes and activities experienced by those who passed through the university. The gown is the symbol of academic excellence which is usually worn symbolically by students on their matriculation and convocation days to signify the beginning and the end of their academic programmes. The marriage of gown and town therefore represents the relationship that exists between the university and the larger society. Hence, the application of the quality of knowledge and experience acquired by university graduates on their immediate environment and by extension, the larger society translates to the pace of development nationally and globally.

DeFillipi and Arthur (1994) observed that in the post-modern world, various changes in the social context and global perspectives have changed the properties of careers tremendously. Careers are now described as mobile, self-determined, employer independent and free of hierarchy as the case may be. More than ever before, universities are expected to churn out professionals with more than just one academic career who can multi task and fit into various societal situations as the need may be. This condition invariably taxes the universities on the relevance of the programmes offered in the university in general. To this extent, how environment relevant are the courses offered in the institutions of higher learning? It is not gainsaying that most universities in Nigeria still prepare students for the work situations which no longer exist. It is obvious that the concept of how students are being prepared for work place is outmoded and inefficient.

It is greatly expected that a symbiotic relationship should exist between the university and the larger society because the university is expected to be established to meet the needs of the society through the programmes offered. This is where the question of environment relevant university programmes becomes imperative.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

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

Education and National Development

Reiterating Socrates' idea of value education, which should be seen as 'desirable knowledge' that is continuous, cumulative and a highly interdependent process touching on all the aspects of personality. And it should be taught right from birth throughout the life of an individual. Such an individual must have a solid foundation from home before he can benefit from any other learning he is exposed to in future. Education should be a continuous process that always focuses on what will improve man and his environment.

On the other hand, Plato (428-347 BC) sees education as the search for truth, identifying it and applying it as the only way by which a nation can develop and grow positively. Identifying value education as the right type of knowledge essential for the growth of the individual and the nation, the World Bank report of World Development 1998/1999 made references to Korea's celebrated success in economic growth and social development being attributed to her ability to harness and use the right type of knowledge.

Every country can achieve social development and economic growth if the right type of education is given to her citizens. Corroborating the opinion of most philosophers of the world on the need for value education or right knowledge, Nash (1990) submitted that "no real progress towards improving American education can occur until everybody realizes that an education that ignores moral and religious beliefs cannot qualify as a quality education". He says further that recently no less a person than Mikhail Gorbachev admitted that the

major reason his nation is in such trouble is because his people are ignorant of moral and spiritual values.

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

Human Capital Development

Capacity building is explained as a series of actions directed towards equipping an individual in increasing knowledge, skills and understanding needed to bring about developmental changes in them. In a submission of World Bank (2015), capacity building is referred to as a planned development of (or increase in) knowledge, skills, and other capabilities of an organization through acquisition, incentives, technology, and / or training. This submission describes the various means by which an organisation including the university can equip individuals for the roles they need to play in the development of their nation.

This has been identified as one of the major global challenges which have hampered the developmental rate of many parts of the world. Of all the means of achieving the targets of the international protocols, human capacity tops the list. No development can be achieved without adequate human capacity. Industrialization is believed to be the solution to the challenges of the world, however this may be difficult to achieve if the present situation of environment relevant university programmes is not well addressed. Obviously the major driver of industrialization is quality human capital which still appears as a myriad in major parts of the world, Nigeria in particular.

Sustainable National Growth

193 countries of the United Nations General Assembly adopted the 2030 Development Agenda titled "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" on 25th of September 2015. This agenda has 92 paragraphs. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals were outlined in paragraph 51 with the associated 169 targets. Unlike the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which were concentrated on the paths to achieving the set goals of the millennium, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) deal with the causes of the world problems, how to achieve development and at the same time sustain such development. The SDGs open up channels of connectivity to all the global challenges and provide step by step approach to achieving each identified target. Some of the many global challenges identified by SDGs is the over dependence on natural resources which have been declining for decades now,

inadequate human capacity among many others. This paper is centred on Goal 4: Quality Education and Goal 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure.

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

THE TRADITIONAL ROLE OF THE UNIVERSITY

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

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

The function of educating the citizens of a society is one of the responsibilities of the university. The university teacher disseminates knowledge to students in order to educate them while they themselves develop by researching and expanding their horizon to cater for the dynamic nature of the society they live in. This is buttressed by the statement made by Oyesiku (2005) that the university, being an institution of

higher learning with power to grant degrees, has three principal functions to carry out; these are teaching, research and community service. These are essentially what make the university an academic environment where scholars are given the opportunity to formally and theoretically carry out their intellectual activities for the development and growth of the nation.

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

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

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

As observed by Obanya (2002), the major problem Nigerians have faced is disruption. The Nigerian society has evolved without continuity, lack of planned systematic development which was caused by lack of stable government. Since Nigeria has not enjoyed a stable government, there was no time to really evolve a national development path leading towards defining the right educational philosophy which identifies the right type of education. In effect, the non-existence of a clear-cut national philosophy on education translated into the absence of national goals for higher education.

As a result of these incessant disruptions in government, the universities have faced challenges and setbacks such that affect the general roles they should be playing in societal development and growth. Most universities now focus on how to increase internally generated revenue to augment what is given by the government. A lot of irrelevant courses are taught in Nigerian universities, and graduates of such courses find it difficult to be employed or start something on their own. Even intellectuals are frustrated out of the university system because of the incessant disruptions experienced by the system. The instability in the society has given birth to various forms of social ills. Citizens become desperate to the extent that some falsify certificates in order to look for greener pastures outside the country. The few who have hope, work in an uncondusive environment where physical facilities are deteriorating and the means to carry out real teaching and research are non-existent. The standard

of living increases every time such that the majority of employees in the universities have to eke out two to three more other jobs to make ends meet. All the above, only end up leading to lack of focus. The university has lost focus and derailed from the original path of developing the nation.

What Should the University Do In a New World of Work

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

In the last two decades according to Boulton (2009), higher education the world over has moved from the surface to the centre of governmental agendas. According to him, universities globally are now seen as crucial national assets in addressing many policy innovative thinking, providing skilled personnel and credible credentials. The universities are seen to be capable of attracting talents as well as business investments; they are also agents of social justice and mobility. They contribute to social and cultural vitality as well as determine health and social well- being. The universities according to him create economically valuable intellectual resources thus – skilled human resources and knowledge resources are two of the most important factors for upgrading national competitive advantage.

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

ROLES OF THE UNIVERSITY

This section provides the roles to be performed by both the university and students in producing quality human resources for improving industrialisation for sustainable national growth.

Changing Career Development in the Nigerian Universities

The significance of an appropriate and adequate supply of human capital for economic development cannot be over emphasised. In the same vein, the needs to enable industrialisation as well as reducing unemployment remain the two major challenges facing Africa, Nigeria in particular. In meeting the above mentioned needs, a lot more is required for university graduates to be competitive in the labour market. The most important step to take in preparing students for the 21st century is to synthesise theory and practice. Here various career training courses (entrepreneurship programmes) should be integrated into the students' general curriculum from the beginning of their programme of study to the end. This is expected to assist the students to develop saleable skills alongside their course of study. There are a lot of situations where graduates of universities have been found engaging in other trades apart from what they studied in school. Against this background, opportunities should be available to students to choose from a long array of vocations for which entrepreneurial skills are developed.

Career-Focused Critical Thinking and Communication Skills Development

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

Actualising Chosen Goals

a. Determining and defining Brand/Service

Universities should train students to define their products or service i.e. what they have to offer to the public. Students should be trained on how to find uniqueness in their chosen career. Branding in any field of human endeavour is important and is strongly based on reputation and relationship. Students need to have a clear sense of what makes their service unique.

b. Articulating Brand/Service

Students should be trained on how to articulate what they have to offer the public. This could be done orally, could be written and distributed and it could be done online. It should be noted here that none of the processes of articulation can be carried out successfully without a very good measure of

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

c. Selling the Product/Service

Combating unemployment in Nigeria is a serious task for both the government and the institutions of learning. Tailoring the career curriculum towards employers' needs is the 21st century task for the university. The students should be trained to understand what the employers are interested in. Every career has its own organisational need areas and these should be made known to students in order for them to develop themselves in those skills for better job placement. Organizations hire people who best fit their team not necessarily best person interviewed. This is where attitude plays a great role. Education or training should not be devoid of value orientation. Honesty, trustworthiness, hard work etc. are all appreciated by all organizations. Creativity is equally appreciated and is very necessary for growth. An employer expects an employee to get something done even in the remotest circumstance.

d. Ability to network

Students should be trained to study their environment to become players in it. The Granular Database according to Austin (2014) serves as a system which supports and encourages people to stay in contact with those who can patronize them, hire them or refer them for work. This relationship is based on how well an individual knows the people and how well the people know such person. The quality of time spent by the parties determines the quality of relationship that exists between them and also serves as a base for job opportunities. The university should train and encourage students in the acquisition of interpersonal skills and its application in order to sustain relationships that are beneficial for their career.

CONCLUSION

The society whether the immediate or the larger expect specifically that the university caters for some germane needs of the society by turning out quality graduates who have the moral consciousness of the expectations of their society on them as well as the use of the result emanating from the various types of research carried out in the university by the staff and students as well as the various type of trainings received.

Finally, for the university to continue to make a different in the area of human capital development, the curriculum programmes should be reviewed as often as necessary to keep abreast of current trend as well as being relevant to the

environment such programmes are offered. It has often been said that no nation can rise above the quality of her education system.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) It is also recommended here that the university faculty members should pay more attention to developmental research especially in the areas of poverty reduction, income generation and sustainable development so that the people of the university communities can benefit from this service while the credit goes to the university.
- 2) The university management and the governing council of the university should ensure avenues for proper funding of educational programmes.
- 3) The university should always see itself as an avenue for proffering solutions to social challenges and as such update the frontiers of knowledge with current issues affecting humanity and how such could be eradicated through the courses offered in the university.

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