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[Driving Policy of Higher Education in Nigeria Towards Relevance](#)

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Introduction

The educational system of a country remains the main source of human resources that when combined in the right quantity and quality would bring about the development of a nation (Nelson, 2002; Saint, 2002; Tettey, 2002; Nunn, 2005; Mouton, Boshoff, Kulati & Teng-Zeng, 2007). The implication of this is that the level of national development depends upon the quantity and quality of its human resources which in turn depend on the type of the educational system in operation.

In Nigeria, university education constitutes the cornerstone of higher education with respect to quantity, quality and capacity for development and self-advancement. As observed by Ijaduola (2009), the tendency exists to group all institutions of higher learning under the umbrella of universities. As he rightly noted, many of the colleges of education, technical and polytechnics for example, have become affiliated with existing universities or have emerged to form universities of technology.

Premised on this analysis, any earnest treatment of higher education in Nigeria could therefore focus on university education since it encompasses most higher education provisions, goals and objectives in Nigeria. Corroborating this fact, Igbuzor (2006) posited that universities are about the only institutions where higher studies are offered and about the only institutional structures legally allowed to grant higher degrees, such as postgraduate diplomas, masters and doctorates in various professional and academic fields. Moreover, in their constant endeavour to establish institutions of higher education for economic and social development, every state in the federation is advocating for the establishment of a university of their own.

According to Okorosaye-Orubile (2008) from one university college in 1948; universities have grown to become ninety-four in 2008. The universities prior to 1999 were established and owned by government alone; and from an initial four private universities, the number increased to thirty-five. As at the last count, colleges of education are seventy-six in number while polytechnics are more than sixty in number.

However, the creation of various levels of higher education has also necessitated the establishment of various supervisory bodies namely National Universities Commission (NUC) to take charge of all matters relating to university development, the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) for polytechnic education and National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) for the Colleges of education. As noted by Oyebamiji (2005), the expansion of the system has widened access to

students at various levels of the higher education system. Consequently, the purpose of this paper is to x-ray salient issues relating to the policy of and effectiveness cum efficiency in higher education.

The concept of educational policy

In the view of Kezar and Eckel (2004), policy is the thinking at a high level of abstraction which expresses the goals and means of achieving them. It is the basis of day-to-day administration and serves as a guide to administrators when deciding the lines along which the system should be conducted. According to the New Penguin English Dictionary (2001), the concept of policy is explained as a definite course of action selected from among alternatives, especially in the light of given condition. Ijaduola (2006), explained policy as an overall plan and action which consist in general goals and procedures intended to chart and guide meaningful decisions. In its own version, the Encarta dictionary (2006) perceives policy as a course for action, that is, a programme, or the set of principles on which they are based. The dictionary goes further to define policy as shrewdness of prudence, especially in the pursuit of a course for action. Policy is therefore summarized as an established course of action or plan reflecting the general goals and procedures and intended to guide and determine decisions (Abdulrahiman & Ogbondah, 2007).

Educational policy on the other hand has assumed a puzzling dimension, making it nebulous even among the practitioners of education. This situation might have infomed why Abdulrahman (2007) and Ijaduola (2008a) submit that many writers use the term loosely as being synonymous with educational change, educational innovation, educational planning or educational reform.

However, Onipede (2003) and Igbuzor (2006) agreed that education policy is the statement of intentions of the government and the envisaged means of achieving those aspects of the national objectives that have to rely on the use of education as a tool. In this regard, Ijaduola (2008b) argued that educational policy denotes the determination of major objectives, the selection of methods of achieving these objectives and the continuous adaptation of existing policies to the problems that face a government. In his own contribution, Owolabi (2005) stressed that policy does not necessarily involve the formulation of new objectives, it could involve the allocation of greater resources to increase the possibility of realizing existing objectives.

It is pertinent, however, to emphasize that no education policy can be formulated without first identifying the overall philosophy and goals of the nation (FRN, 2004). Nigeria as it is today, resulted from an amalgamation of two British protectorates of Northern and southern Nigeria by sir Fredrick Lord Lugard in 1914. As a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-linguistic nation of the sub-Saharan Africa, it is expedient that a philosophy be imbibed first as a heterogeneous entity, second as a natural member of African continent.

Consequently, the 1999 constitution of the Federal republic of Nigeria and the 4th edition of the National Policy on Education – 2004 reveal the overall philosophy of the country as thus:

- to live in unity and harmony as one indivisible, democratic and sovereign nation founded on the principle of freedom, equity and justice.
- to promote inter-African solidarity and world peace through international cooperation and understanding (FRN, 1999 & FRN, 2004).

Significantly, there are five main national goals of Nigeria, which have been endorsed as the necessary foundation for the National Policy on Education for the building of: a free and democratic society; a just and egalitarian society; a united, strong and self-reliant nation; a great and dynamic economy; and a land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens (FRN, 2004).

Having looked at the concepts of policy and educational policy, it is germane to have a cursory look at the policy of higher education with a view of drawing a plausible correlation between it and the foregoing discourse.

Policy of higher education

The policy for higher education in Nigeria is embedded in the National Policy on education, as well as other issues approved from time to time by the National Council on Education (NCE) which is the highest decision-making body of education related matters and other policies legislated and passed into law in respect of higher education operations and management in the country. The policy for higher education in Nigeria is based on what the government approves as the practice to be promoted in Nigeria or what the government of the day legislated within the overall goal of higher education. According to the National Policy on Education, higher education is expected to:

- (i) contribute to national development through high level relevant manpower training;
- (ii) develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of the individual and society;
- (iii) develop the intellectual capability of individuals to understand and appreciate their local and external environments;
- (iv) acquire both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to be self-reliant and useful members of the society;
- (v) promote and encourage scholarship and community service;
- (vi) forge and cement national unity and
- (vii) promote national and international understanding and interaction.

The national policy on education document also specified how these goals shall be pursued by higher educational institutions in Nigeria. These include teaching, research and development, virile staff development, generation and dissemination of knowledge, a variety of modes of programmes including full-time, part-time, block-release, day-release, sandwich, etc, access to training funds such as those provided by the Industrial Training Fund (ITF). Students Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES); maintenance of minimum educational standards through appropriate agencies; inter-institutional cooperation, dedicated service to the community through extra-mural and extension services.

Thus Nigerian universities are expected to be centres of higher learning, which should draw students and teachers from various parts of the country and indeed from different parts of the universe. This universal composition is a prelude to cross-fertilization of ideas and culture, and culture and learning. At the national level per se, the federal character in the composition of the universities is expected to

enhance national integration. The importance attached to national integration by the federal government is contained in the national policy on education which clearly states that for universities to serve as effective instruments for cementing national unity:

- (a) The quality of instruction in Nigerian universities will be improved with a view to further enhancing objectivity and tolerance.
- (b) University development will ensure a more even geographical distribution to provide a fairer spread of higher educational facilities
- (c) Admission of students and recruitment of staff into universities and other institutions of higher learning will be on a broad national basis.
- (d) Universities will be required to develop teachers' and students' exchange programmes to improve both inter-university communication and knowledge of the country.
- (e) Widespread ignorance among Nigerian ethnic groups about themselves will be remedied by instituting a compulsory first-year course in the social organization customs, culture and history of various people. The award of degrees will be made conditional upon passing of the paper in this course.

Towards further pursuance of the philosophy and objectives of Nigerian universities

All that has been discussed hitherto as regards higher education policy in Nigeria is a tip of the iceberg compared with what readers will meet in the following paragraphs. According to Banjo (2004), in pursuance of the philosophy and objectives of Nigerian universities, they (universities) perform several functions:

First and foremost, the university system brings students from varying socio-cultural, political and economic backgrounds and lecturers of different political and ideological orientations together in a single academic community, thereby contributing to national consciousness and unity as well as to international understanding.

It mounts courses at both the undergraduate and postgraduate levels in agriculture, arts, physical and social sciences, engineering, medicine, pharmacy, education, law and so on. In this regard, as opined by Nwosu (1990), high-level and specialist manpower are produced for agriculture and food production, housing, drugs, chemical and textile industries, transport, communication, water, energy, gas, breweries, mining and quarrying. Other sectors where the university graduates are useful are the civil service, bank, insurance, health, religion, judiciary, army, hotel and catering management, estate management, railway, shipping, journalism, and university services.

Besides, it engages in research studies in all fields of human endeavour including agriculture, arts, social science, education, the professions, trade etc; for the purpose of solving human problems. As observed by Mitwa (2005), most of the significant breakthrough are done by the university or university trained people.

Moreover, university offers courses in non-degree areas through various institutes and extramural extension services for various certificates and diplomas in all fields including education, arts, science,

agriculture, social science, medicine and others. In the words of Tierney and Minor (2003), the university diploma and certificate holders are employed in the different sectors of the economy for the purpose of manufacturing goods and producing the services needed by members of the society.

In the same vein, it offers short and refresher courses, mounts workshops and conferences to update workers skills in their jobs and to enlighten the general public to educate and entertain. These are organized on a continuing education basis particularly during long vacation in July to September.

Never-the-less, university absorbs its own products into the university service – the Vice-Chancellors, the deans, directors, Professors and Lecturers, the Registrars and Administrative officers are university products. Apart from this, the university recruits the products of other institutions for its own service – accountants, mechanics, artisans, craftsmen, clerical staff, typists, stenographers and secretaries, thereby not only helping to solve unemployment but also to raise the standards of living of the people.

Similarly it actively contributes to the work of national development in various ways: university products serve as state Governors, Federal Ministers, State Commissioners, Chairman, Directors and members of statutory corporations and other statutory bodies in both the public and private sectors. The National Youth service Corps, compulsory for all fresh graduates, is an outstanding contribution by the universities in Nigeria.

University engages in consultancy services as a device to offer expert advice to members of the public.

Finally, university undertakes the production of textbooks, learned journals, occasional publications, monographs and others to disseminate knowledge. The relevant question at this juncture is: What has been the cog in the wheel of successfully accomplishing the aforementioned goals, philosophy and objectives of higher education? Answers to this question are provided in the discussions hereunder.

Impediments to the implementation of the laudable policy of higher education

The philosophy and objectives of higher education are currently facing implementation problems despite the achievements of the university system in Nigeria in the recent past. As observed by Middlehurst (2004) and UNESCO (2004), for instance, the quality in terms of diversification and depth of our researches are hardly currently capable of realizing the philosophy and objectives of higher education. While the philosophy of performing services to the community is laudable, Oderinde (2003) and Aluede (2006) remarked that it is doubtful if the products are of high quality.

Similarly, Nigerian universities are well armed with adequate curricula and technical know-how, but are grossly deficient in the provision of infrastructure for teaching and learning, coupled with the continued demand for admission and training, thereby compromising the quality and the mission of higher education (Enoh, 1996; Ijaduola, 1998; Oluwatayo, 2003; American federation of teachers, 2002; UNDP, 2004; New Nigerian Newspaper, 2007 and Omolewa, 2007).

Never-the-less, the economy and politics have conspired to undermine the quality of Nigerian universities. Ijaduola & Adenaike (1999) and Emmanuel (2008) posited that military and civilian politicians have dealt deadly blows on university autonomy and academic freedom. The aftermath of this is that standards have been compromised and the hope for adequate funding remained elusive for

Nigerian universities. It should be remarked however that the Education Tax Fund (ETF) has been helping to sustain the funding of education when government spending would have reduced considerably. Tables 1 & 2 attest to this remark.

Table 1: Revenue generated through ETF

Year	ETF Revenue	Growth rate of ETF Revenue	Total government Revenue	Proportion of revenue from Education Tax
1997	907.40		96,962.60	0.94
1998	2,655.10	192.61	143,202.50	1.85
1999	3,621.70	36.41	168,990.10	2.14
2000	7,528.70	107.88	359,072.40	2.10
2001	16,213.60	115.36	573,548.20	2.83

Source: Calculated from CBN Annual reports and statement of accounts, 2001.

Table 1 shows that the growth rate of revenue from ETF grew by 192.61 percent between 1997 and 1998. Although there was a decline in the amount collected in 1999, the revenue accruing to the fund has since then been increasing at more than 100 percent annually between 1999 and 2001. The importance of ETF can be seen from its contribution to the total current revenue of the government. While the fund only contributed less than one percent in 1997, the proportion of revenue attributable to ETF was more than 2.8 percent in 2001. The increase in the revenue generated by ETF has significant impact on the amount of funds allocated to the educational sector.

Table 2: Growth rate of education expenditure

Year	Recurrent Education	Capital Education	Total Education	Growth rate of exp. On Education	Total Fed. Government expenditure	Total Education Exp. As proportion of total Fed. Government Exp.
1997	12,983.10	3,808.20	16,791.30		92,686.30	18.12
1998	14,034.80	10,579.30	24,614.10	46.59	143,168.80	17.19

1999	23,047.20	8,516.60	31,563.80	28.23	167,896.10	18.80
2000	39,034.00	10,529.20	49,563.20	47.03	359,670.60	13.78
2001	39,884.60	19,860.00	59,744.60	20.54	596,956.40	10.01

Source: Calculated from CBN Annual reports and statement of accounts, 2001.

As indicated in Table 2, expenditure on the education sector increased by 46.6 percent between 1997 and 1998 and rose further by 57 percent between 1999 and 2000. This declined further to 20.5 percent between 2000 and 2001. Incidentally, the proportion of total federal expenditure spent on education declined from 18.8 percent in 1999 to 10 percent in 2001. An explanation might be that government realizing that ETF can also generate money for education spending reduces the proportion of funds to the educational sector, which implies that ETF might also be experiencing some reduction effects on the proportion of education spending by the federal government.

One wonders what would have happened to the expenditure in the education sector in the absence of ETF. Here 2 situations have been examined. First is total education spending including ETF spending while the second is total education spending without ETF spending. Education spending without ETF spending is calculated by deducting education tax spending from total education spending. The annual growth rate of the expenditure was then calculated when education tax spending has been deducted. This is compared with the annual growth rate when education tax spending is included.

Still on the impediments, the idea of using higher education as an instrument for national integration appears to be a mirage. Gusen & Olarioye (2007:13) rightly observed that:

For political reasons, ethnic state balancing in the distribution of amenities entered into the education system. The euphemistic phrase “Quota system’, neglected and deprived areas became entrenched in the admission of students into higher institutions. Well-qualified and bright students are sometimes denied admission into Nigerian universities on the grounds that they come from ‘privilege area’ where educational facilities

have existed for a long time and where many indigenes have already benefited from higher education. The effect of this practice on the citizenry will be rather disintegrating than integrating.

Moreover, the rapid expansion or proliferation of universities coupled with the current economic recession in the country led to the production of an army of unemployed and underemployed graduates. These individuals are hardly useful to themselves or the community, thus defeating one of the objectives of higher education in Nigeria.

Rather than centres of teaching and research, some of the universities have almost become glorified secondary schools. There are inadequate staffing and research facilities for staff and lack of basic academic and physical facilities for students. Funds are hardly available for the building of classrooms and laboratories and their expansion.

Finally, apart from erosion of national unity or national integration, universities on ethnic and state considerations tend to create the problem of discrimination against students from 'advantaged' states. Besides, students of the same state tend to predominantly attend the university located within their state because of the 'catchments area' concept. How will this practice enhance that remedy of widespread ignorance of one another among Nigeria groups? Emphasis on state of origin and state universities tends to give university education in Nigeria a narrow outlook. The question now is: How could higher education policy be disentangled from all the aforementioned anomalies? The remainder of this write-up is directed at answering this question.

Driving policy of higher education towards relevance: some panacea

First and foremost, government, being the initiator, formulator and implementer of the policies should take a more proactive responsibility for nurturing these policies by providing everything needed to get the policies work – funding the aspects that require money, provide enabling environment where necessary, institute legislation and be practical, sincere and serious in its overall implementation.

Institutions should encourage the establishment of income-generating projects for Nigerian students. They should make deliberate and concrete efforts to introduce practical strategies that could alleviate the problems of under-employment and unemployment.

Moreover, prudence, transparency and discipline are very important in the financial dealings of public officials in charge of education. Corruption should be eschewed, siphoning of resources meant for educational development be avoided.

Besides having attitudinal change will go a long way to ensuring the workability of the policies, the culture of maintenance to be adopted. People should equally refrain from thwarting government's efforts; they should avoid sabotaging the government's efforts in the policy implementation. This is achievable when everyone is dedicated and committed to doing what is right and observe holistically

the rules and regulations guiding the development and promotion of education in the country.

With increased access to higher education in Nigeria becoming a theory issue to both governments and planners, there is urgent need to develop a differentiated higher education system with fresh range of institutions and study options supported by the development of career advice programmes for schools as well as students' entrench programmes. Universities themselves should also work hand-in-hand with the governments to devise alternative solutions.

In order to ensure quality, Nigerian universities should continue to adequately finance higher education, but the universities should also seek support from the private sector whilst parents and students should play a cost-sharing role.

Nigerian universities, in the face of stringent economic policies, should prioritize their training needs with foresight into the next millennium. Quality and relevance should be the principal operative words for higher education.

Conclusion

From the foregoing discussions, it can be safely concluded that what Nigeria needs now is not the establishment of more universities but the consolidation of existing ones, having them properly staffed and equipped so that they can perform their legitimate function of providing the nation with useable and saleable researches.

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