

REVIEW AND REFOCUS OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN NIGERIA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND GLOBAL COMPETITIVENESS

Ruth Ejuwa Wike, Ph.D
Department of Educational Management, Faculty of Education
Rivers State University, Nkpolu-Oruworokwu, Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria

ruth.wike@ust.edu.ng

ABSTRACT

The study investigated review and refocus of higher education in Nigeria for sustainable development and global competitiveness. The study which adopted descriptive survey design was guided by two research questions and two hypotheses. The population of the study consisted of the three thousand, six hundred and twenty (3, 620) lecturers in the three public universities in Rivers State. A sample of seven hundred and twenty-four (724) lecturers comprising of 408 male and 316 female lecturers. The sample size drawn through stratified random sampling technique represented 20% of the population. Data for the study was collected with a questionnaire entitled "Review and Refocus of Higher Education in Nigeria for Sustainable Development and Global Competitiveness Questionnaire (RRHENSDBGCCQ)". The instrument which contained 18 items was properly validated and the test of reliability yielded 0.80 through Cronbach Alpha Method. Mean, percentages, standard deviation and mean set were used to answer the research questions while z-test was used to analyse the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The results showed that the justifications for review and refocus of higher education in Nigeria for sustainable development and global competitiveness include among others the need to review higher education curriculum, address funding, infrastructural, and management issues. While the strategies that could be adopted for review and refocus of higher education in Nigeria include among others; reviewing of programmes and curriculum; internationalization of higher education; and addressing funding and other issues facing higher education in Nigeria. Based on the findings, conclusion was drawn and the following recommendation was made among others: government should review academic programmes and curriculum of higher institutions in Nigeria in line with global demands for knowledge, skills and technology.

Keywords: Education, Higher Education, Review and Refocus, Sustainable Development and Global Competitiveness.

INTRODUCTION

Education is commonly recognised as the foundation of all social development. There is a good association between education and technology, health, agriculture, economics, and social development in most countries in the globe.

According to Akpa (2019), given the intricate relationship between education and the development of other sectors of the economy such as health, defence, industry, technology, population, environment as well as judicial and legislative systems, education deserves a pride of place in the development equation. It is a veritable means of solving virtually all the problems confronting various societies. It is expected that, higher education will equip its graduates with the required knowledge and skills for self reliance. To achieve all of these goals, our higher education system must be functioning and driven by well-conceived and articulated plans, policies, and administration that are visionary and responsive to the needs of society in particular.

The overwhelming issues confronting Nigeria's higher education system have resulted in inadequate inputs, processes, and outcomes. This has resulted in maladjustments, imbalances, and a variety of other issues with the system. We have received multiple complaints about insufficient facilities, insufficient manpower, and terrible working conditions in higher education institutions. We've seen multiple incidents of industrial action by various unions in higher education.

Sustainable development appears not to have any clear cut definition. This is based on the fact that different scholars have explained the concept as it appeals to them. Sustainable development has to do with the best possible ways of improving the standard of living of the citizens in a society, without compromising the survival of the future generation.

Global competitiveness refers to the ability of a nation to supply high quality goods and services at reasonable costs, resulting in satisfactory returns. It is the ability of a country to achieve sustained high rates of growth in gross domestic products.

A review and refocus of the current state of higher education will promote our economy's long-term development and global competitiveness. Against this setting, the researcher was compelled to conduct this investigation.

Statement of the Problem

The unemployment rate among Nigerian graduates from various higher education institutions rises year after year, owing to the fact that the majority of these individuals lack adequate employable skills. They lack the necessary skills and resources to become self-employed, and many of them are interested in white-collar professions, which are becoming increasingly scarce and competitive. The current scenario in our higher education institutions leads to a significant waste of human, material, and financial resources. As a result, the goal of this research is to look into the evaluation and refocus of higher education in Nigeria in order to promote long-term development and competitiveness.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

This study aimed at investigating review and refocus of higher education in Nigeria for sustainable development and global competitiveness. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. determine some of the justifications for review and refocus of higher education in Nigeria for sustainable development and global competitiveness.
2. ascertain some of the strategies that can be adopted for review and refocus of higher education in Nigeria for sustainable development and global competitiveness.

Research Questions

The following research questions provided direction for this study:

1. What are some of the justifications for review and refocus of higher education in Nigeria for sustainable development and global competitiveness.
2. What are some of the strategies that can be adopted for review and refocus of higher education in Nigeria for sustainable development and global competitiveness?

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant difference between the mean scores of male and female lecturers on the justifications for review and refocus of higher education in Nigeria for sustainable development and global competitiveness.

2. There is no significant difference between the mean scores of male and female lecturers on the strategies that can be adopted for review and refocus of higher education in Nigeria for sustainable development and global competitiveness.

Literature Review

Theoretical Literature Review

This study is anchored on the classical social process theory propounded by Getzel and Guba in 1967. The theory states that the different subsystems of a social system work independently but also together in order to achieve organizational set goals. It obtains its inputs from outside, transforms them, refines them into outputs and it finally empties them into the larger society. According to Kpee (2015) the outputs basically are refined and better than they were at the input stage. They are made up of people who have been shaped and altered to fit the demands of the society from which they were taken and the society back to. Beyond highly developed humans, outputs could also include good labour turnover, increased productivity and efficiency at work, and employee pleasure.

As a subsystem of a social system, higher education takes in students from the community and then shapes, refines, and transforms them to meet the needs of the community and help them become globally competitive and contribute to sustainable development.

Conceptual Literature Review

Higher education review and refocus is a dramatic change initiative or restructuring that is aimed at improving quality of education in higher institutions. According to Akpa (2019) The contradiction, maladjustment, and paradoxical problems that prevent the educational system from functioning will be addressed by the evaluation and refocus of the system. To address the issues impeding the higher education system's efficacy, efficiency, and responsiveness to societal and individual demands, a review and reorientation of the field are imperative.

It pays attention to the functionality of higher education. Functional higher education according to Asaju and Adagba (2014) is higher education that equips its recipients with the knowledge and skills needed for the performance of productive tasks. It's the kind of postsecondary education that supports people in meeting their needs for personal and societal growth. That means we require higher education of the highest calibre. The standard of something or the services rendered in relation to what is available elsewhere is referred to as quality.

Quality is related to a body of knowledge, about products, services and customer/client satisfaction. Arcaro (2005) sees quality as creating an environment in which educators, parents, government officials and community representatives work together to provide students with the resources they need to meet the current and future academic and social needs.

Roles and functions in education are determined by the state of society. Education and society are complementary. The needs of society are always changing, and with them must adapt the methods of instruction, the processes of education, and the subject matter. Educational managers must comprehend the dynamics of society and how it is predicted to change in order to review higher education. It necessitates a change from the issues the current method creates, which include the following:

1. **Individualistically Competitive:** The way our educational system is set up, it looks like the victor takes all. Individual achievement is prioritised in our school's reward and grading systems. This prioritises oneself over the group objective and puts a premium on credentials and prestige.
2. **Teacher- Centered:** One of the main features of Nigerian higher education nowadays is the "teachers' talk and chalk" dynamic. Students are frequently expected to pay attention and take

notes, and their evaluation results reflect how well they can recall the material covered in class. Not much emphasis is placed on critical thinking since everyone seeks instant solutions to problems in life..

- 3. Curricular -Centered:** The curriculum in schools is predetermined, leaving little to no opportunity for teachers and pupils to make changes. Curriculum modifications are typically implemented extremely slowly and after the fact. As a result, instruction and learning become outdated in light of the state of human development.

According to Akpa (2019) the curriculum is not enduring or having sustainable development relevance. It has not taken due cognizance of the enormous natural resources of the environment.

Other reasons that may necessitate the review and refocus of higher education according to Akpa (2019); Ojule (2020); and Jones (2020) include the following:

1. Unemployment in the face of shortage of manpower in key sector as well as graduates' skill gaps and employability, given the mismatch between theories learnt at school and the practical skills needed at work places.
2. In higher education, there is inadequate governance and weak leadership. Inadequate entrepreneurial potential, inadequate visionary and transformative leadership, poor inspectoral and supervisory services, and weak management ability all exist.
3. Poor resource allocation, management and utilization. There is gross ineffectiveness and inefficiency in the management and utilization of resources in higher institutions.

Review and refocus of higher education in Nigeria will address most of these issues and their ugly effects on the functionality of higher education in Nigeria. The following strategies have been suggested by some scholars.

Nigerian higher education institutions must redesign their curricula and programmes to better meet the needs of the local, national, and international communities. They ought to adapt to the demands of the community. Today's world is fueled by technology and knowledge. Science, technology, engineering, and maths (STEM) should therefore be prioritised, and pupils should be taught pertinent practical skills. According to Obanya (2010) this will require a paradigm shift in our teaching methods and strategies, providing a heavier dose of technology rather than theory.

The management of Nigeria's public tertiary institutions must stop engaging in corrupt activities and increase financing in order to review and refocus higher education in the country. Nwakudu, Boreh, and Ogbara (2014) claim that the system is plagued by numerous problems as a result of the education sector's declining funding, particularly for higher education. The appropriate mix of academic staff members—both in terms of number and quality—is no longer available for use by higher education establishments. Information and communication technology (ICT) integration into all facets of our higher education offerings.

ICT according to Hill and Solemn (2005) as well as Lucey (2010) provided valuable assistance with human resource management in people.

Ensuring that all public tertiary institutions in Nigeria have sufficient power and water supplies, a well-maintained road network, well-designed lecture halls and lecturers' offices, well-stocked libraries, labs, workshops, and studios should be given top attention.

The implementation of quality assurance procedures in universities that uphold integrity and transparency in the performance of their tasks is another crucial step. According to Hayward (2006), quality assurance is a deliberate and methodical procedure used by a programme or institution to assess whether or not acceptable standards for infrastructure, scholarship, and education are being reached, maintained, and improved. According to Okebukola (2004), quality assurance in Nigerian universities

refers to an ongoing process of raising the calibre of instruction and learning activities through the use of both internal and external procedures.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted descriptive survey research design. The population of the study consisted of all the three thousand six hundred and twenty (3, 620) lecturers in the three public universities in Rivers State. Source: Academic Planning Unit of the Universities (2022 Report). A sample of seven hundred and twenty-four (724) lecturers comprising of 408 male and 316 female lecturers representing 20% of the population was selected. This sample was drawn through stratified random sampling technique. The instrument for data collection was a self structured questionnaire entitled: "Review and Refocus of Higher Education in Nigeria for Sustainable Development and Global Competitiveness Questionnaire (RRHENSDBGQC)". The instrument which had 18 items was structured with Four Point Likert rating scale of Strongly Agree (4 points), Agree (3 points), Disagree (2 points) and Strongly Disagree (1 point). The instrument was well validated and reliability index of 0.80 was obtained through Cronbach Alpha method. Mean, percentages, standard deviation and mean set were used to analyze the research questions while z-test was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Research Question One: What are some of the justifications for review and refocus of higher education in Nigeria for sustainable development and global competitiveness?

S/N	Justifications for reviewing and refocus of higher education in Nigeria for sustainable development and global competitiveness.	Male Lecturers N = 408					Female lecturers N= 316					Mean Set	Decision		
		SA	A	D	SD	\bar{X}_1	STD	SA	A	D	SD			\bar{X}_2	STD
1.	To equip students with appropriate knowledge and skills required for self reliance and performance of productive tasks.	148 (36%)	164 (40%)	61 (15%)	35 (9%)	3.04	.67	107 (34%)	145 (46%)	34 (11%)	30 (9%)	3.04	.68	3.04	Disagree
2.	To review higher education curriculum in line with individual, national and global needs.	158 (39%)	166 (40%)	48 (12%)	36 (9%)	3.09	.65	118 (37%)	140 (44%)	32 (10%)	26 (8%)	3.11	.65	3.10	Agree
3.	To address funding issues facing higher education in Nigeria.	152 (37%)	162 (40%)	64 (16%)	30 (7%)	3.07	.68	120 (38%)	142 (45%)	34 (11%)	20 (6%)	3.15	.62	3.04	Agree
4.	The need to address the weak leadership and poor governance observed in higher institutions in Nigeria.	140 (34%)	158 (39%)	54 (13%)	56 (14%)	2.94	.75	116 (37%)	134 (42%)	30 (10%)	36 (11%)	3.04	.68	2.99	Agree
5.	The need to address infrastructural deficit and poor ICT deployment in higher institutions in Nigeria.	146 (36%)	154 (38%)	62 (15%)	46 (11%)	2.98	.72	120 (38%)	130 (41%)	33 (10%)	33 (11%)	3.07	.66	3.03	Agree
6.	The urgent need to review salaries and conditions of service of the staff of higher institutions in Nigeria.	146 (36%)	160 (39%)	54 (13%)	48 (12%)	2.99	.71	116 (37%)	146 (46%)	38 (12%)	16 (5%)	3.14	.63	3.07	Agree
7.	The need to strengthen international collaborations and partnerships between	140 (34%)	152 (37%)	64 (16%)	52 (13%)	2.93	.76	110 (35%)	128 (40%)	43 (14%)	35 (11%)	2.99	.71	2.96	Agree

	higher institutions in Nigeria and those in other countries.														
8.	The need to address the escalating antisocial behaviours experienced in tertiary institutions in Nigeria.	144 (35%)	156 (38%)	60 (15%)	48 (12%)	2.97	.73	112 (35%)	132 (42%)	42 (13%)	30 (10%)	3.03	.69	3.00	Agree
9.	The need to reduce enrolment in tertiary institutions in Nigeria	61 (15%)	98 (24%)	184 (45%)	65 (16%)	2.38	.80	32 (10%)	54 (17%)	169 (54%)	61 (19%)	2.18	.73	2.28	Disagree
	Aggregate mean and standard deviation					2.93	0.72					2.97	0.67		

Table 1: Mean scores, percentages, standard deviation and mean set of the responses of male and female lecturers on the justifications for review and refocus of higher education in Nigeria for sustainable development and global competitiveness.

Table 1 shows that all the items had weighted mean scores that were greater than the criterion mean of 2.50 except item number 9. Items 1 to 8 were accepted as the justifications for re-engineering higher education in Nigeria for sustainable development and global competitiveness. The aggregate mean scores of 2.93 and 2.97 for the male and female lecturers respectively which were greater than the criterion mean indicated that the respondents shared the same opinion on the reasons for reviewing higher education in Nigeria.

Research Question Two: What are some of the strategies that can be adopted for review and refocus of higher education in Nigeria for sustainable development and global competitiveness.

Table 2: Mean scores, percentages, standard deviation and mean set of the responses of male and female lecturers on the strategies that can be adopted for review and refocus of higher education in Nigeria for sustainable development and global competitiveness.

S/N	Strategies that can be adopted for review and refocus of higher education in Nigeria For sustainable development and global comp.	Male Lecturers N = 408					Female lecturers N= 316					Mean Set	Decision		
		SA	A	D	SD	\bar{X}_1	STD	SA	A	D	SD			\bar{X}_2	STD
1.	Review of the programmes and curriculum of tertiary institutions in Nigeria.	158 (39%)	166 (40%)	56 (14%)	28 (7%)	3.11	.62	114 (36%)	140 (44%)	30 (10%)	32 (10%)	3.06	.65	3.09	Agree
2.	Improving funding and curbing corrupt practices by management of public tertiary institutions.	154 (38%)	160 (39%)	52 (13%)	42 (10%)	3.04	.67	120 (37%)	138 (43%)	31 (10%)	31 (10%)	3.12	.60	3.08	Agree
3.	Adequate motivation of staff and improvement of conditions of service	156 (38%)	167 (41%)	54 (13%)	31 (8%)	3.09	.64	124 (39%)	140 (44%)	34 (11%)	18 (6%)	3.17	.59	3.13	Agree
4.	Addressing infrastructural deficits in public tertiary institutions in Nigeria.	160 (39%)	164 (40%)	56 (14%)	28 (7%)	3.12	.61	120 (38%)	132 (42%)	28 (9%)	36 (11%)	3.06	.65	3.09	Agree
5.	Institution of strong internal and external quality assurance units.	162 (40%)	166 (41%)	58 (14%)	22 (5%)	3.15	.60	122 (39%)	134 (42%)	32 (10%)	28 (9%)	3.11	.62	3.13	Agree
6.	Employment of adequate number of qualified and experienced lecturers	148 (36%)	170 (42%)	60 (15%)	30 (7%)	3.07	.66	126 (40%)	120 (38%)	36 (11%)	34 (11%)	3.07	.63	3.07	Agree
7.	Internationalization of public tertiary institutions in Nigeria.	150 (37%)	160 (39%)	62 (15%)	36 (9%)	3.04	.67	116 (37%)	132 (42%)	28 (9%)	40 (12%)	3.03	.66	3.04	Agree
8.	Massive deployment of ICT in teaching / learning as well as in administration.	146 (36%)	164 (40%)	64 (16%)	34 (8%)	3.03	.69	118 (38%)	134 (42%)	32 (10%)	32 (10%)	3.07	.63	3.05	Agree

9.	Dissolution Of various workers unions in public tertiary institutions in Nigeria.	52 (13%)	76 (19%)	108 (26%)	172 (42%)	2.02	,71	44 (14%)	60 (19%)	164 (52%)	48 (15%)	2.32	.68	2.17	Disagree
	Aggregate mean and standard deviation					2.96	0.65					3.00	0.63		

Table 2 indicates that all the items had weighted mean scores that were greater than the criterion mean of 2.50 except item number 9. Item 1 to 8 were accepted as the strategies that can be adopted for re-engineering higher education in Nigeria for sustainable development and global competitiveness. The aggregate mean scores of 2.96 and 3.00 for the male and female lecturers respectively which were greater than the criterion mean revealed that the respondents unanimously agreed on the strategies that can be adopted for re-engineering of higher education in Nigeria for sustainable development and global competitiveness.

Test of Hypotheses

Ho₁: There is no significant difference between the mean scores of male and female lecturers on the justifications for review and refocus of higher education in Nigeria for sustainable development and global competitiveness.

Table 3: z-test of difference between the mean scores of male and female lecturers on the justifications for review and refocus of higher education in Nigeria for sustainable development and global competitiveness.

Gender	N	\bar{X}	STD	Df	z-cal.	z-crit.	Level of sign.	Decision
Male lecturers	408	2.93	0.72					Ho ₁ not
Female Lecturers	316	2.97	0.67	722	0.771	± 1.960	0.05	significant

Table 3 shows a summary of the mean, standard deviation and z-test of difference between the male and female lecturers on the justifications for review and refocus of higher education in Nigeria for sustainable development and global competitiveness. the z-test calculated which was used in testing the hypothesis stood at 0.771 while the critical z-value was ± 1.960 at 722 degrees of freedom using 0.05 level of significance. The calculated z-value was by far less than the z-critical value. Therefore, the null hypothesis of no significant difference between the mean scores of male and female lecturers on the justifications for review and refocus of higher education in Nigeria for sustainable development and global competitiveness was retained.

Ho₂: There is no significant difference between the mean scores of male and female lecturers on the strategies that can be adopted for review and refocus of higher education in Nigeria for sustainable development and global competitiveness.

Table 4: z test of difference between the mean scores of male and female lecturers on the strategies that can be adopted for review and refocus of higher education in Nigeria for sustainable development and global competitiveness.

Gender	N	\bar{X}	STD	Df	z-cal.	z-crit.	Level of sign.	Decision
Male lecturers	408	2.96	.65					Ho ₂ not
Female Lecturers	316	3.00	.63	722	0.836	± 1.960	0.05	significant

Table 4 reveals a summary of the mean, standard deviation and z-test of difference between the male and female lecturers on the strategies that can be adopted for e-engineering higher education in Nigeria for sustainable development and global competitiveness. The z-test calculated which was by far less

than the z-critical and was used in testing the hypothesis stood at 0.836 while z-critical was ± 1.960 at 722 degrees of freedom using 0.05 level of significance. Since the z-calculated value is less than the z-critical value, the null hypothesis was retained. This implies that, there was no significant difference between the mean scores of male and female lecturers on the strategies that can be adopted for review and refocus of higher education in Nigeria for sustainable development and global competitiveness.

Discussion of Findings

According to the study, there are several reasons to reevaluate higher education in order to promote sustainable development and global competitiveness. Firstly, students must be prepared with the necessary information and abilities to be independent and able to execute productive jobs. Both Jones (2020) and Ojule (2020) corroborate this conclusion. This issue is widespread because Nigerian educational institutions' curricula fail to take into account contemporary realities and societal demands. It has to be reevaluated in light of the abilities, know-how, and technological advancements that power the worldwide economy. This is consistent with the assertion made by Akpa (2019) that the curriculum lacks relevance for sustainable development. As a result, it hinders the nation's progress in the knowledge economy and global competitiveness.

Inadequate funding, ineffective leadership, and bad administration in higher education establishments are among the other concerns that warrant a reassessment of Nigerian higher education. The entire scenario is exacerbated by the tertiary institutions' unscrupulous practices, weak leadership, and bad governance. Bad knowledge and skill development, inadequate ICT deployment, weak curriculum execution, inadequate facilities, inadequate lecturers, bad teaching/learning environments, poor infrastructural development, low staff motivation, and so forth are the outcomes of this. The aforementioned factors impede Nigerian higher education institutions from fulfilling their mandates. In order for Nigeria's higher education and service delivery to have a beneficial impact on sustainable development and global competitiveness, these concerns need to be resolved immediately. Some of the tactics that could be used to review higher education in Nigeria were highlighted by the study. A review of the curriculum and programmes for higher education is one of these tactics. In Nigeria's higher education institutions, entrepreneurship education ought to be incorporated into each and every programme. This result supports Obanya's (2010) assertion that a paradigm shift in our curricula is necessary, with a greater emphasis on technology and skills than theory.

The study equally revealed the need to improve funding of higher education. Government should increase their budgetary allocation to higher education according to Nwakudu, Boreh and Ogbara (2014).

The study also showed that establishing quality control units would be necessary to examine and refocus Nigerian higher education in order to promote sustainable development and global competitiveness. The input/output processes must be monitored by truthful, open, and accountable internal and external quality assurance units to make sure that every step satisfies accepted criteria. Quality assurance/control units will ensure that standards are met, maintained and enhanced through employing mechanisms that are internal and external to the institutions.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, the current state of higher education in Nigeria may not provide a functional and high-quality education necessary for sustained development and global competitiveness, it

might be concluded. Higher education can only be provided under well-defined and implemented conditions—curriculum, quality control procedures, sufficient finance, etc.—if it is to be functional and of high quality for sustainable development and global competitiveness.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The government should examine academic programmes and curricula at Nigerian higher education institutions through the various higher education regulatory organisations in order to ensure that they align with the demands of the global community for technology, knowledge, and skills.
2. Government should increase the funding of higher education in Nigeria in order to address infrastructural, facilities, manpower and staff motivation demands.
3. Regular and efficient supervision and monitoring of staff operations as well as programmes for quality assurance and efficient service delivery are necessary.

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