

Quality and Standard Balancing in Nigerian University Education: Implications for the Attainment of the Millennium Development Goals

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Abstract

Education is very crucial in human capital development for the attainment of excellence in the vision area of macro economic, population growth, equity, and natural resource and environmental management. Thus for education to remain “instrument per excellence” (NPE 2004), it must be of high quality with an acceptable standard tone. This paper took its conceptual framework from existing practice ennoblement assumptions, the educational variables that can be utilized to attain quality and standard balance in Nigeria universities. Also, this paper constructively matched operative issues found to be constraining quality and standard in university education in Nigeria with strategic solutions in order to balance sustainable system on theory and practice. It argues that there still exists educational policies such as quota system and government non-chalant attitude to education, thus there is need for a review of higher education policies in the light of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). This paper therefore posits that for positive reflection of the MDG in higher education, the government should consider the review and implementation of these educational variables in universities.

Introduction

Sundry scholars when depicting the state of education in Nigeria have used the terms quality and standard interchangeably. But, while quality tells us how good or bad something is, standard tells us about the level of the goodness in relation to what is generally or internationally considered acceptable. Quality and standard are simply two faces of the same coin. They bother on effectiveness and efficiency. This is because while quality is all about showing how well the system is working to producing the intended results (effectiveness); standard reflects the extent to which available resources have been fully utilized to produce the intended results (efficiency). However, Tawari (2002) considers quality and standard as a “before and during the event process”. That is, quality and standard balance is aimed at preventing faults from occurring in the first place. This is what Crosby, (1979), referred to as ‘zero defect’ approach. Crosby, the chief proponent of fault free products believes that if the organization has the will, all the negative factors such as waste, errors and failures can totally be eliminated from the organization. This notion of zero defects is very attractive to providers of educational services because elimination of errors implies that students failure, as well as expenditure of systems resources could be eliminated. Okoroma (2006) also notes that quality and standard aim at providing “zero defect”

products or services by getting things done right at the first time and every time.

Theoretically, the basis of investment in education according to Ahunanya and Ubabudu (2006) is the theory of human capital development. They noted that Jerome-Forget traced the origin of human capital theory to the 1960's as the relationship between education and earnings, after which he noted that in the 'new growth', human capital is the key determinant of economic growth. Lambropoulos and Psacharopoulos (1992) in the same study are said to have affirmed that education is a form of investment that yields high private and social returns. To Samuel (1987), human capital is the provision of skilled labour force strengthened by educational training, involving meaningful training which enables an educated person to acquire specific skills necessary for his or her efficient functioning in the society. Furthermore, the human capital theory emphasizes that education increases the level of cognitive skills possessed by the workforce (Adedeji, 2002). Consequently, the provision of education in every country especially the tertiary education is seen as a productive instrument in human capital development. Development challenges have become very critical at local and global levels, hence the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDG).

It was on the basis of this paramount importance of education as a vehicle for human capital development for the attainment of Millennium Development Goals that led to the establishment of the National Universities Commission (NUC) in 1962. The NUC is responsible for ensuring quality and standard balancing in all Nigerian Universities. The commission has since its establishment been striving to develop and sustain local qualitative and international standard in University Education. But the more it strives, the more Nigerian University Education seems to be eviscerated. The underpinning issue that is non-incident but consequential to poor performance of University education is the failure to design quality and standard into the process from the beginning to ensure that the product or service meets a predetermined specification (Okoroma, 2006). Besides, there is need as well to understand at this point that attainment of quality and standard balance in Nigerian universities is a function of some germane educational management variables. These variables according to Etuk (2006); Okoroma (2006); Ahunanya and Ubabudu (2006), include facilities; curriculum modification, strategic planning of programmes, programmes accreditation, standardizing carrying capacities (internal factors); funding; issue of federal character policy; and attitude of government to education.

Balancing through Provision of Adequate Facilities

Facilities are motivators to teaching – learning activities. They are lubricants in the operation wheel of school and educational programmes. The Webster Dictionary (1993) defines facility as anything that promotes the ease of any action, operation, transaction or course of conduct. The provision of facilities especially in information and communication technology for academic activities creates the appropriate enabling school environment needed for efficacious teaching and learning activities that guarantees quality and standard balance in Nigerian Education when compared with what obtains internationally in the occidental states of the world.

According to Ahunanya and Ubabudu (2006), the facilities required at Nigerian educational institutions to attain quality and standard ranges from chalk/marker-

board to the latest information and communication technology facilities used in the teaching-learning processes. Classroom and office blocks, laboratory blocks and materials, engineering workshops and equipment, electricity, water and neat university environment with adequate and appropriate sewage system, etc are as well among the facilities needed at Nigerian educational institutions. The quantity and quality of facilities available in school have been found to have positive relationship with both teachers' effective job performance and students' academic performance. For example, a functional digitalized library akin to that of University of Lagos guarantees faster sourcing of data from other parts of the world for research; effective teaching and learning; and achievement of other educational/academic feats.

Balancing through Modification of Some Relevant Internal Factors

Quality and standard balance in Nigeria's University Education, which is the interest of this paper, hinges also on the extent to which some relevant internal operation determinants are modified to meet the present day global demand for education. These determinants (Etuk, 2006) include the curriculum, strategic planning of university programmes, standardization of carrying capacities of individual universities; and accreditation of university programmes and departments.

Balancing through Strategic Planning

Quality and standard balance activities centre around strategic planning which, according to Etuk (2005), requires heads of departments and deans of faculties to state the objectives of their academic programmes, show what graduates of those programmes would be capable of doing in concrete terms or show how they can contribute to the economy when they go out into the world of work; spell out in great details what they see as their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (in what is known as SWOT analysis); detail how much they think they require to achieve their visions and how much of their needs they could raise through their own internal resources. In effect, strategic planning requires universities to show why they should attract government funding for their different programmes. It is about "bridging the gap between where we are and where we want to be" (Sallis, 2002).

Balancing through Prospective Product Valuation

Due to the present poor economic conditions and dwindling government funding of education, most universities all over the world have been making desperate attempts to generate funds from other sources. Involvement of industries in university research activities is one major proposals that has gained considerable publicity and success especially in the advance countries. The results of two separate studies by Nnabuo & Uche,(1999) and okorie & Uche, (2004), indicate that there is need for grater awareness of and involvement in university-industry research (contract research) among university lecturers to generate fund for universities and for themselves.

In the same vein, the incumbent governor of Central Bank of Nigeria - Chukwuma Charles Soludo one of his lectures, (in Etuk, 2006) particularly emphasized the issue of competition and entrepreneurship by universities in Nigeria. He urged universities to source for revenue from Foundations, from the private sector and from endowments;

to get their staff wealthier through non-salary earnings without sacrificing academic excellence; to achieve more with less and be efficient in resource use. He intimated that the Federal Government spends 50 plus more than 20 percent of the total budget of the consolidated public sector (Federal, State and Local Government) spending on education. He maintained that these much spending on University Education is like a pittance and he expressed doubt that reserving 26 percent of the total budget of the Federal Government to the education sector, as mandated by the United Nations (UN), which has been the apple of discord between the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) and government, would neither be sufficient for education in Nigeria, nor would it add value to its products and technologies. According to Etuk (2006), the content of Soludo's lecture leaned strongly towards privatization of University Education as a means of relieving the Federal Government of the huge financial burden of supporting the litany of public universities, which earlier administrations founded.

Balancing through Accreditation of Universities and their Programmes

Quality and standard balance activities also centre on accreditation of universities and their programmes. Every two to five years; spaces, faculty members, facilities, the examination and grading systems are subjected to scrutiny by a team of professors in that discipline, selected from other universities by the National Universities Commission (NUC). At the end of the exercise, a university programme is put into any of three categories - full accreditation, partial accreditation and no accreditation (Etuk, 2006). According to Etuk, a programme that is given full accreditation status is rated to be relevant and qualitative. The team of accreditors will revisit such a programme after a period of five years. A programme that is partially accredited is given two academic sessions to recoup before re-visitation. A programme that is given no accreditation is not allowed to admit new students in two subsequent sessions during which time it recoups towards the team's re-visitation. After the above efforts, the issue is that something more meaningful has to be always done as a follow up to rectify the findings made during the visits and scrutiny of the universities and their programmes in order to improve, solidify and stabilize their quality and standard.

Balancing through Global Competitiveness Benchmark

Moreover, universities are subjected to national and international rankings based on the quality of their academic staff. In the most recent years, the best public university was found to be the pioneer university of Nigeria - the University of Ibadan, which scored 49 points. When it came to international ratings, the best university in Nigeria had a very low ranking-taking the 166th position or thereabouts (Etuk, 2006).

Besides, University Faculties/Departments (Etuk, 2006) are mandated to showcase products from their researchers through exhibitions and fares specifically designed for that purpose. Human and material products from academic establishments are expected to be relevant to industries. For this reason, the performances of individual universities in the fares and exhibitions are graded and ranked. The first three universities in the rank are awarded undisclosed cash-prizes. Regrettably, all these have not enhanced the quality and standard of Nigerian universities internationally. One of the reasons

for this is that most of the researches conducted in Nigeria are not as potent as those conducted in occidental universities due to poor funding of research; lack of data; university professors becoming more politically minded than academically conscious (Uche, 1998).

Balancing through Curriculum Modification

Quality and standard balance through modification of the curriculum of university education started in the 1985/86 session, with the addition of new courses called General Studies (GST) and through detailed descriptions of courses which every Tertiary Education Faculty was mandated to mount for its students (Etuk, 2006). The General Studies courses, according to Brochure for General Studies Unit, University of Port-Harcourt, are university-wide courses, which every university student in Nigeria must take. They are core courses designed to give students general knowledge about the environment, knowledge of the world around; good communication and versatility in information and communications technology (ICT). Etuk further noted that the GSTs are spread in the Faculties and they include themes like, "Use of English", "The Nigerian People and Culture", History and Philosophy of Science", Computer Studies and Citizenship Education. By 2005, the University of Lagos prospectively included COST 307 and 308 (Entrepreneurship and Corporate Governance) to add market value to her products. All these according to Chukwurah (2005) are attempts directed at shaping up universities, their programmes and personnel working in them towards meeting higher-level needs characteristics of the modern world. This is because the universities are meant to meet the standards of the modern world and become enhanced Centres of excellence (Chukwurah, 2005). The curriculum generally is expected to respond positively to modern trends of events through emphasis on innovative knowledge and skills, which are variously referred to as "daily-living skills, survival skills and life-coping skills" (Etuk, 2006).

These skills according to Obanya (2002) are becoming scarce among Nigerians. Also, Ugwu (2003) who in his study examined the relationship between the need of industries and the products of Nigerian universities underscored the dearth of the above skills (daily-living skills; survival skills; and life-coping skills) among contemporary graduates of Nigerian universities as a serious challenge to quality and standard balancing in Nigerian University Education.

Balancing through Appropriate Staffing and Academic Personnel Motivation

The National Policy on Education, 4th edition (2004 p 38) states that: "...no education can rise above the quality of its teachers". Also, the Director General of UNESCO – Federico Mayor (1991) in support of the above statement notes that none of the reforms in education will result in a significant improvement, if they fail to assist teachers perform their task effectively (Obebe, 2000 p 239). Teachers at all levels of our education system have been neglected so much. They remain victims of Nigerian leaders' myopic undervaluation of education and its implementing agent (the teachers). Obviously, it is among the teachers that you have people with the best of academic qualifications, yet they feed from the crumbs that fall off the banquet table. With this lackluster and unremorseful attitude of Nigerian governments toward addressing

the issues surrounding teachers' working conditions in the country, efforts toward balancing quality and standard in Nigerian education system remain frustrated. In support of this assertion, Ozigi (1982) notes that one of the factors that contributes most significantly to the success or failure of any organisation (including the school) is the quality and strength of its staff. In terms of academic qualification, the teachers at Nigerian public schools are more than qualified. Therefore, what makes them tick for now has nothing to do with academic qualification but with morale and motivation. The teachers believe they are deprived of their constitutional rights in terms of not being appropriately motivated especially when compared with their colleagues internationally and in other professions in the country. Consequently, they appear demoralized, depressed and psychologically incapacitated to perform their regular duties effectively. It is therefore high time Nigerian governments realized that quality and standard in Nigerian education cannot be attained without properly and appropriately addressing issues bothering on the working conditions of the teachers. When this is done, teachers will really be nudged to be effective; after all when a witch doctor is paid more than he expected or bargained for, he wouldn't mind to use his teeth to uproot roots in the evil forest.

Balancing through Adequate Funding

Okoroma (2006) asserts that the acceptance and implementation of the Ashby Commission would have averted the present crises in the education sector. According to him, the Ashby Commission Report had proposed that "every available penny will have to be invested in education". Perhaps the Commission did not foresee the enormous oil revenues that were to accrue to Nigeria in later years hence this recommendation. On its own part, the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) recommends after one of its punctilious researches in education that every nation of the world needs to invest a minimum of 26 percent of its annual budget in education so as to maintain a minimum acceptable standard. This is a clear improvement on the Ashby Commission recommendation. Rather than spend every kobo on education, Nigeria like other nations is expected to invest 26 kobo out of every 100 kobo or N26.00 out of every N100.00 in education. The nation would still have 74% of its resources left for investment in other sectors whose functionality will usually depend on the level of education available to the society (Okoroma, 2006).

Nigeria (Okoroma, 2006) has failed to take an advantage of the UNESCO recommendation so as to restore quality and assure the sustainability of attainable standard in its educational system. The situation is even more deplorable in respect of higher education especially University Education, which carries out teaching, research and development. Akinola (1990) being worried about the funding situation of University Education in Nigeria comments thus:

Our tertiary institutions are in dire need of money... to cater for both their capital and recurrent needs. For a few years past, the budget has been cut back from year to year by the Federal Government. This cut recurrent expenditures. In many tertiary institutions, capital projects embarked upon a few years ago, are yet to be completed due to lack of adequate funds (17).

The table below gives a further clear illustration of the funding situation in the Nigerian education sector.

Table 1: Federal Government Expenditure (Recurrent and Capital) and Federal Allocation to Education Sector (Million ₦)

Year	Total Expenditure	Allocation to Education	% Allocation to Educ.	UNESCO Norm (26% of Total Exp.	Amount of Under-Funding	% of Under-Funding
1985	15,369.1	823.4	5.4	3,996.0	2,172.6	79.4
1986	12,642.0	999.0	7.9	3,996.0	3,172.3	79.4
1987	22,018.7	448.7	2.0	5,724.9	5,276.2	92.2
1988	27,749.5	1,786.7	6.4	7,214.9	5,428.2	75.2
1989	41,028.0	3,399.0	8.3	10,667.3	7,268.3	68.1
1990	61,149.1	2,819.1	4.6	15,898.8	13,979.7	82.3
1991	66584.4	1,166.0	1.8	17,311.9	16,145.9	93.3
1992	93,835.5	2,756.0	2.9	24,397.2	21,641.2	88.7
1993	191,228.9	6,331.5	3.3	49,719.5	43,388.0	87.3
1994	160,893.2	9,434.7	5.9	41,832.2	32,397.5	77.4
1995	248,768.1	12,172.8	4.9	64,679.7	52,506.9	81.2
1996	337,257.6	14,882.7	4.4	87,687.0	72,804.3	83.0
1997	428,215.2	16,791.3	3.9	111,336.0	94,544.7	84.9
1998	487,113.4	24,614.1	5.1	126,649.5	102,035.4	80.6
1999	947,690.0	31,563.2	3.3	246,399.4	214,835.6	87.2
2000	701,059.4	49,563.2	7.1	182,275.4	312,712.2	72.8
2001	894,200.00	62,600.0	7.0	232,492.0	169,892.0	73.1
2002	1,188,634.6	109,455.2	9.2	309,045.0	199,589.8	64.6
2003	1,225,956.7	79,436.1	6.5	318,748.7	239,312.6	75.1
2004	1,377,340.7	85,580.8	6.2	358,108.6	272,527.8	76.1
2005	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA

Source: Central Bank of Nigeria, Annual Report and Statement of Accounts, July, 2002 and Central Bank of Nigeria, Annual Report and Statement of Accounts, December, 2002.

Table 1 shows Federal Government’s budget allocation to education from 1985 to 2005. The highest allocation of 9.2% was in 2002, while the lowest allocation of 1.8% was in 1991. Comparing these percentages with the recommendation of 26% minimum by UNESCO, shows that successive Nigerian governments never considered education as a major priority for the growth and development of Nigerian economy.

Balancing through alternative source of fund (Internally Generated Revenue - IGR)

Table 2: Federal Universities Level of Dependency on Government Grant (2000)

Universities	Total releases	Local income	Total income	Dependence rate
Ibadan	2,509,890,969	196,575,448	2,706,466,144	82.2
Lagos	1,955,127,150	349,502,258	2,314,629,408	81.6
Nsukka	2,512,793,291	98,141,298	2,610,934,589	96.1
Zaria	2,567,587,409	73,210,330	2,640,797,739	97.1
Ife	2,304,114,896	40,031,187	2,344,146,083	98.3
Benin	1,949,126,834	155,172,424	1,381,534,347	92.0
Jos	1,332,970,023	487,444,424	1,381,534,447	96.3
Calabar	1,227,113,256	105,939,905	1,333,053,161	91.4
Kano	81,801,3231	54,218,393	1,036,019,716	94.5
Maiduguri	1,098,099,496	137,149,440	1,226,248,936	87.4
Sokoto	651,927,799	39,025,328	590,93,127	94.0
Ilorin	1,472,655,002	65,816,425	1,538,471,427	95.5
Port Harcourt	1,266,403,040	110,415,425	1,376,818,465	91.3
Abuja	402,154,078	84,674,828	486,828,906	78.9
Uyo	1,013,481,643	86,674,190	1,099,957,833	91.5
Awka	801,835,913	34,694,556	836,533,469	95.7
Owerri	611,326,365	29,751,258	641,077,823	95.1
Akure	545,315,202	35,855,281	581,170,483	93.4
Minna	417,130,171	20,549,000	437,679,171	95.1
Bauchi	446,280,147	17,268,097	573,548,244	96.9
Yola	499,590,326	21,962,043	521,552,369	95.6
Total	26,669,544,060	1,815,176,627	26,484,270,687	93.2

Source: Okebukola O. (2003) "Funding University Education in Nigeria" in *Education today*, Vol. 10, No. 1, pp. 27-32

Table 2 shows both dependency rates of Federal Universities and Federal Government grants to them in the year 2000. From the table it could be discerned that Abuja has the lowest dependency rate of 78.9%. Comparing this rate with the 7.1% allocated to the entire education sector in the same year (Table 1). This simply reveals the unpalatable funding attention given to University Education in this country. It is, therefore not surprising the way things go bananas today in Nigerian Universities in terms of inadequate facilities, poor maintenance of available facilities; etc.

Of necessity, funding of education in Nigeria has to be premised on the UNESCO standard of a minimum of 26% of every nation's annual budget. This is based on the fact that the 26% funding minimum is a product of research which established, that any expenditure on education below that minimum will not meet acceptable quality (Okoroma, 2006). Thus, any funding formula for Nigerian education should take cognizance of the UNESCO recommendation. Besides, on the basis of UNESCO recommendation of 26% of Nigeria's annual budget to be set aside for education in the country, this paper in line with the postulation of Okoroma (2006) proposes a format for education budget allocation to the various levels of education (Universal Basic Education, Senior Secondary Education, and Tertiary Education – University

Education and Colleges of Education/Polytechnics) in Nigeria. The format suggests that as a foundation level of education spanning over a period of nine (9) years, 8% of the education budget (26%) should be allocated to UBE. This is predicated on the fact that the basic level of education is faced with the large population of pupils, personnel and infrastructural requirements. Senior Secondary Education should get 4% as it is apparent that the challenges at that level are comparatively less than at the basic level. The main task is to build on the foundation already laid and prepare the students to transit to tertiary education. The required resources will therefore be less. Tertiary Education has been separated into University Education with the allocation of 8% and Colleges of Education and Polytechnics would be allocated 6%. This gives a total of 14% to Tertiary Education. The justification for the 8% allocation to University Education is premised on the importance and objectives of University Education which according to the National Policy on Education (NPE, 2004, p 38) include the acquisition, development and inculcation of the proper value-orientation for the survival of the individual and society. The development of the intellectual capacities of individuals to understand and appreciate their environments. The acquisition of both physical and intellectual skills, which will enable individuals to develop into useful members of the society and the acquisition of an objective view of the local and external environments.

From the above it is obvious that universities have a great role to play in the development of high level human resources needed for the development of all sectors of Nigeria's developmental aspirations. Morealso, Okoroma (2006) notes that emphasis on university degrees and demand for university education in Nigeria has combined to place the issue of funding university education as a matter of great national importance that requires a serious attention and commitment (Okoroma, 2006). According to him the increase in the demand for University Education (see Table 3) as well as poor quality and standard constitute the factors supporting the need for appropriate funding of University Education in Nigeria.

Balancing by matching capacity with social demand for university education**Table 3: Demand and Supply of University Education in Nigeria (1985-2004)**

Year	No. of universities	Applications	Admissions	% Admitted	Unsatisfied Demand
1984/85	27	201,234	27,482	13.7	86.3
1985/86		212,114	30,996	14.6	85.4
1986/87		193,774	39,915	20.6	79.4
1987/88		210,525	26,356	17.3	82.7
1988/89		190,135	41,700	21.9	78.9
1989/90		255,638	28,431	15.0	85.0
1990/91	31	287,572	48,504	16.9	83.1
1991/92		398,270	61,479	15.4	84.6
1992/93		357,950	57,685	16.1	83.9
1993/94		420,681	59,378	14.1	85.9
1994/95 **		-	-	-	-
1995/96		512,797	37,498	7.3	92.7
1996/97		376,827	56,055	14.9	85.1
1997/98	37	419,807	72,791	17.3	82.7
1998/99		321,268	78,550	24.4	75.6
1999/2000		418,928	78,550	18.8	81.2
2000/01	47	467,490	502,77	10.7	89.3
2001/02		842,072	95,199	11.3	88.7
2002/03		1,039,183	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
2003/04	53	838,051	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.

Source: Oyebade, S.A. (2005) "Privatization of University education in Nigeria; Implications for education management" in G. O. Akpa; S. U Udoh and E. O. Fagbamiye, (Eds) *Deregulating the provision and management of education in Nigeria*, pp.235-244

N.A. – Not Available

** Admission not processed due to prolonged ASUU strike in 1994.

Nevertheless, to ensure quality and standard balance in Nigeria's University Education through appropriate funding, there must be stern legislation against frauds on Educational Resources. According to Okoroma (2006), inadequate funding is only an aspect of the problems that have confronted University Education in Nigeria over the years. The misappropriation of available funds according to him is a more challenging problem. He inferred lamenting that if the low allocations to education were properly utilized, the quality of education generally in Nigeria would have appreciated (Okoroma, 2006).

In support of the words of Okoroma, a former Head of State of Nigeria, General Yakubu Gowon who also spotted the problem of fund misappropriation in education notes that, "Poor funding may not have been responsible for the decay in the (education) sector. Rather, mismanagement of the enormous resources pumped into system, which has produced a demoralized citizenry awaiting or ready for re-

colonisation “(Gowon, 2005,7).

Also, the Executive Director of Centre for Human Rights Empowerment during the 15th Anniversary of the Global Declaration of Education for All (EFA) emphasized the problem of fund misappropriation in education thus:

The twin problems of corruption and gross mismanagement of resources are blamable for the deplorable state of the country’s education system. As a result of these two factors, the sector has consistently witnessed scarcity of resources, to the extent that less than 20 percent of eligible children are enrolled into secondary schools. Only 0.3 percent of Nigerian youths have enrolment into higher institutions (Ejiogu 2005,10).

Consequently, this paper would therefore not be accused for strictly proposing legislation with stiff penalties against any misuse, abuse and corrupt enrichment by managers of educational resources as well.

Federal Character Policy and Quality/Standard Question

The federal character policy has its root from section 14 of 1979 constitution and re-enacted in section 14 of 1999 constitution and states that the composition of the government of the federation or any of its agencies and conduct of its affairs shall be carried out in such a manner as to promote rational unity, and also to command national loyalty, thereby ensuring that there shall be no predominance of persons from a few states or from a few ethnic or other sectional groups in that government or in any of its agencies (p.10). This constitutional statement depicts that public authorities, educational institutions and private sectors should ensure fair representation of states, local government area and even ethnic groups in position of authority and power, admission into schools etc. In the process of implementing the above policy in the education sector, meritocracy was dropped (in terms of admission) for mere representation of states/regions in a quest for egalitarianism. Also, in collaboration to the new policy, the National Policy on Education (1981,24) states that, “For universities to serve as cementing national unity.....admission of students and recruitment of staff into universities and other institutions of higher learning, should be on broad national base”.

This notion led to the introduction of educational policies such as the quota system of admission, the indigene/non-indigene dichotomy and the provision of equal opportunity to university education. The quota system comprises three important elements namely, academic merit which is determined by UME score and is allotted 45 percent. The second element is Educationally Less Developed States (ELDS) with 20 percent and Catchments areas with 35 percent (NUC, 1999). The Joint Admission and Matriculation Board is, therefore, guided by these provisions in the admission process each year. One major problem with the quota system is that the quota has to be filled and this most times leads to the lowering of cut-off points in many university departments in order to have enough candidates to fill the quota. The issue here is that the federal character policy implies that a candidate with UME score of 300 out of

400 from Akwa Ibom State (Educationally Advantaged State) may not get admission but his/her counterpart from Cross River State (ELDS) with UME score of 201 out of 400 may be admitted. Thus, the quota system a sort of created avenues for penalizing those from states described as educationally advantaged.

The irony of the situation is that the quota system is simply a cheap compromise of the quality and standard of our University Education; as the quality and standard of Nigerian University Education is slaughtered and sacrificed each year on the quota system's altar of mediocrity. It is also to this end that Yoloye (1989) notes that the quota system of admission is a reasoned compromise. Onyene who is also worried about the negative impact of quota system on our education system notes that:

The use of quota reduces the chances of highly qualified candidates from being admitted. People are discouraged and frustrated out of the system where their best talents could have been adequately harnessed. This no doubt, affects the quality of educational opportunity available to the citizenry as well as encourages stifling qualitative development in education (Onyene, 2000, 275).

However, the question is do we really want a qualitative and standard University Education in this country? If we do, the quota system policy in conjunction with other related policies should be abrogated and admissions into Nigerian universities simply be based on merits. With this move, most of the fundamental problems associated with university admission in Nigeria will be positively addressed.

Political will towards attainment of National Objectives of Education

One of the major factors militating against the quality and standard of University Education in Nigeria is the nonchalant attitude of successive Nigerian governments toward education which clearly manifests in the poor financial commitment of these governments to education in the country. Akumah (2005) points out that any government that does not give education a priority consideration in its expenditure plans every year does not regard education as an investment and will definitely reap woes as dividends in all directions. The poor attitude of Nigerian governments to education could be attributed to greed, egocentrism, corruption, insincerity and impropriety of Nigerian leaders who prefer financial embezzlement and squander mania; political trivialities and tommyrots to productive and innovative spending that would better the lot of the Nigerian body polity. Denga and Denga (2004) describe such government leaders as people interested in awarding contracts that only favour their avaricious illicit "10%" demand. These leaders view education as not profitable and as such commands little or no attention of theirs (Dada, 2004). In this regard, we conclude that for quality and standard in University Education to be attained in this country, Nigerian governments should change their nonchalant and ignominious attitude to education and start giving education the all round attention it deserves.

Implication for the Attainment of Millennium Development Goals

Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa with the highest proportion of her people living in poverty; with nearly more than half of its population living below the international poverty line of \$1 a day. This means that millions of Nigerians face daily struggle of surviving on less than the aforementioned income per day. Olusegun Obasanjo's government endeavoured to fight the monster – poverty in Nigeria through its “poverty alleviation programme” but ended in staggering foot because of the periwinkle performance of the economy during his regime. However, many scholars have ascribed the high level of poverty in Nigeria to high level of illiteracy among Nigerians. This postulation is predicated on the fact that education, no matter the purpose for its demand, that is, whether for investment or consumption purpose, adds value to the purchaser intellectually, affectively and psychometrically. When this is done, the problem of poverty is half solved as the person has been equipped to actualize his or her potentials and function effectively in the society. It is when these educationally acquired skills and potentials are appropriately applied when interacting with the environment that guarantees ones freedom from poverty. Inversely, a situation where education lacks its potency to really equip its beneficiaries with the appropriate skills for entrepreneurship and or the world of work the products of education become impoverished. Education therefore is a prominent instrument for human resource development toward the attainment of Millennium Development Goals including meaningful alleviation of poverty, fair income distribution, and enhanced economic productivity. Hence, the need to balance Nigerian education at all levels, especially the tertiary education particularly the University Education which is at the forefront of equipping individuals with values and functional skills that devoid them of poverty.

Conclusion

Trends in university education had shown qualitative education cannot be compromised in order to sustain the socio-economic development of the nation. Strategies for quality standard balancing should be adopted in the universities as a step towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals. The Federal Government should also engage in quality standard balance activities in a pragmatic manner.

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