**THE ROLE OF RESEARCH IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN NIGERIA**

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**Abstract**

The paper examined the role of research in the development of higher education in Nigeria. The paper identified the state of higher education in Nigeria to include poor quality of education and research, inadequate training of manpower, and inadequate educational infrastructure. Research leads to the discovering of new knowledge for the development of higher education, serves as an avenue to generate funds and improve institutional visibility. The paper identified challenges such as poor attitude to research by higher education educators, poor research skills, heavy workload as factors hindering effective research activities. The paper concludes that there is a need for training and retraining of higher education educators on innovative research skills.

**Key Words: Development, Higher Education, Research and Role**

**Introduction**

Higher education is the fundamental tool for the production of a knowledge economy and the development of human capital all over the world Nigeria inclusive. Higher education can be referred to as an education acquired by an individual after completion of secondary school or technical colleges. Asiyai (2017) views higher education as the education obtained by individuals after secondary schools in colleges of education, mono-techniques, Polytechnique, universities, and other higher institutions offering correspondence courses. The growth in the number of higher institutions in Nigeria has led to a mass increase in the production of graduates most of whom are unemployed. This growth has occurred against inadequate development. Higher education is widely known as the root of every development in any country but unfortunately it has taken the back seat in Nigeria. This is largely due to poor infrastructure facilities and poor funding. To improve the situation, higher institutions are called upon to invest and conduct researches since the major preoccupations of higher institutions all over the world are research, teaching, skills development, and community services. Higher institutions must conduct innovative, quality, and timely researches to proffer solutions to the problems facing higher education in Nigeria. The paper, therefore, seeks to examine the roles of research as a bedrock of higher education in Nigeria.

**State of Higher Education in Nigeria**

Higher education is the powerful force of the socio-economic, political, cultural, and industrial development of Nigeria. Nigeria cannot achieve sustainable development in all sectors without the contributions of higher education. The Federal Ministry of Education (2004) outlined the aims of higher education in Nigeria to include the followings:

* Contribution to national development through high-level manpower training
* Development and inculcation of proper values for the survival of the individual and the society.
* Development of the intellectual capabilities of the individuals to understand and appreciate their local and external environment.

It must be emphasised that Nigeria has made progress in the growth of higher education.. According to National University Commission, as of 2020, there were 43 federal universities, 48 state universities, and 79 private universities. In addition to universities, the National Board of Technical Education recognises 28 federal polytechnics, 43 state polytechnics, 55 private polytechnics, and 27 monotechnic (22 federal, 3 states, and 2 private monotechnic) and over 400 colleges and vocational institutions. In the same vein, the National Commission for Colleges of Education recognises 89 colleges of Education that serve as training colleges for would-be teachers. Higher education has helped in the industrialisation of most parts of Nigeria. Olonko (2012) emphasised that higher education has provided the needed manpower who man the various sectors in the country such as economic, socio and political, and cultural sectors. Higher education has also enabled several citizens to become responsible citizens.

Despite the growth and development of higher education in Nigeria, it is still in a gory state. Nigeria's higher education is lagging compared to other institutions in countries like South Africa, Egypt, Thailand, Turkey, and Brazil. Mba (2019) stated that Nigeria Universities lack prestige for according to the 2019 Times Higher Education World University Ranking, only two universities in Nigeria Covenant University and University of Ibadan made the best 1000 universities in the world.

Also, higher education in Nigeria is underperforming, especially regarding research. Mba (2020) noted that Nigeria’s universities produce only 44% of the research outputs of South Africa and 32% of Egypt. It must be emphasised that Nigeria has four times and 6 times more universities than South Africa and Egypt respectively. Another big challenge to the quality of higher education in Nigeria is the problem of brain drain. There has been a mass exodus of talented students and lecturers to other sectors and various countries for work and studies. According to Asiyai (2017), Nigerians studying in higher education in the USA rose by 5.8% to 13,423 in the 2018/2019 academic year from 12693 in the 2017/2018 academic year. The implication of this is that Nigeria is losing its youthful populace to other countries. Mba (2019) emphasised that this would not have been a problem if Nigerians can also attract foreign students to study in higher institutions.

Another challenge faced by higher education in Nigeria is the issue of training. Most Nigeria higher education institutions lack staff training development programmes. Training and retraining of staff are important to have a vibrant, competent, and dedicated workforce. Asiyai (2017) stressed that higher education in Nigeria has taken the back seat due to poor educational infrastructural facilities such as poor funding, inadequate classrooms, poorly equipped laboratories, and libraries.

**Role of Research in Development of Higher Education in Nigeria**

The importance of research to the development of higher education cannot be overemphasised. It is the major ingredient for the sustainability of higher education. Research is a careful study of a subject, to discover new facts or information about it. Haruna (2010) defines research as a process of finding out new information, new methods of doing things, and extension of the boundary of knowledge. The main purpose of conducting research is to find solutions through a courteous and systematic approach which involves the collection, analysis, interpretation of pertinent data, and dissemination of findings.

Against this background, it becomes necessary to reflect on how research can lead to the development of higher education in Nigeria. Through research, higher education in Nigeria can prove itself as a center of learning committed to the quest of excellence to push the frontier of knowledge forward and to seek new and better ways of doing things, especially as regards education. Furthermore, through research, higher education educators can teach effectively especially in the formation of students, and make them lifelong learners. This view was corroborated ted Pramodini and Anu (2012) who noted that research has ensured that the purpose of higher education is not just to produce learners to provide skilled manpower into specific jobs but to prepare students to become lifelong learners to live in an unpredictable and complex world.

Research work leads to improvement in quality education. Nwakpa (2015) maintained that adequate research leads to the discovering of new techniques, ideas, and new ways of doing things which result in wealth creation and development of the curriculum. Research is also a source of funding for the administration and maintenance of higher education in Nigeria. Examples of research-generated funding sources are intellectual property rights, patenting, and commercialisation of research findings and grants. These sources of funding can be used to develop laboratories, classrooms, and equip libraries.

Through participation in research fairs and competitions, higher institutions are also able to showcase their contributions to knowledge to other nations of the world and may lead to desired attention of some funding agencies all over the world. Research holds the key to the development of higher education in Nigeria. To improve the quality of higher education syndicate research groups are formed within institutions, nations, and outside Nigeria. This enables institutions to conduct collaborative and multidisciplinary research and with these, mentors and ideas are developed and nurtured for the overall development of higher education. Collaborative research also helps researchers and institutions to improve their popularity and visibility. Ponti (2010) believes that collaborative research is striving in higher institutions because researchers can gain experience and apprentice researchers acquire research training from experienced researchers.

**Challenges**

There are several constraints to research as a source of higher institution development in Nigeria. The poor attitude of higher educators to research is seriously militating against giving research a place of pride in the development of education. Higher education educators are interested more in the number of researches carried out against the quality of researches they undertake. Also, as regards poor attitude to research, the government is not left out. Most of the universities are underfunded and are faced with poorly equipped laboratories, libraries, and poor remuneration of academics and research assistants. Lack of information on utilisation of research findings is another problem hindering researches in most higher institutions in Nigeria. Most of the research findings are not publicised to stakeholders. Also, even when publicise, research policies are not implemented.

According to Directorate for Research Innovation and Development (2016), the heavy burden of academic staff in Nigeria which is on average over 100 students per course for at least three courses and up to over a thousand students per course is affecting academics in conducting quality research. It is pertinent to mention that apart from teaching, academics are also involved in administrative responsibilities. Another major factor affecting research development in higher education in Nigeria is poor research skills. Most higher education educators are not well skilled in conducting research. Ajayi (1999) opined that although many higher education educators publish and get promoted as professors, some even become Vice-Chancellors presiding over other people’s promotion when they have had little or no experience of what research is about.

**Conclusion**

Research remains an important factor that facilitates and accelerates higher education development. To strengthen research in higher institutions in Nigeria there is a need for training and retraining of higher education educators on innovative research skills. There is a need for the Nigerian government to improve funding for university education. Such fundings could be used to purchase equipment, equip libraries, and for self-development such as attending seminars, conferences, and workshops. Also, there is need for the training and retraining of academic staff on modern research practises and skills. To change the attitude of faculty members towards research government need to stimulate interest in research by introducing incentives such as enhanced reward system for deserving researchers who conducts ground breaking researchers in their institutions.

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