Improving Quality in Higher Education Practices for Sustainable Growth, Security and Development through Effective Curriculum Implementation in Universities in Rivers State

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Abstract

This paper explored improving quality in higher education practices for sustainable growth, security and development through effective curriculum implementation in universities in Rivers State. The concepts of quality in higher education, sustainable growth and security, development and curriculum implementation were discussed. The paper discussed the factors to consider in improving quality in higher education practices in universities in Rivers State, how to ensure sustainable quality growth for development through universities practices in Rivers State as well as correlation between improving quality higher education and state security. The paper concluded that since change is the only constant thing in life and higher education is given to change resulting from the dynamism of the society, thus, university practices should be made amenable to societal changes in order to make today's people relevant tomorrow. The paper then recommended that school administrators should look for ways to bring about quality in higher education practices in universities in Rivers State, curriculum implementers should be given to regular research and retraining programs for improving themselves, university students should go beyond what is taught in classroom to other areas in order to improve on their skill set for the future etc..

Keywords: Quality higher education, sustainable growth and security, development, curriculum implementation

Introduction

To improve means to embellish, make better, upgrade and/or to raise standard of a thing. This means that it goes either direction, that is, that a thing or object of discourse is developed and serving its purpose but that there is need to serve more purposes or to work faster or better. Otherwise it means that the object under consideration is performing below expectation and there is need for an upgrade in output, hence, the need for improvement or improving on it. Improving quality on the other hand is not far from the description above except that again a particular level of functionality already exists and there is need for raise in what is obtainable currently.

Quality is connotatively used to describe the viability, fineness, beauty and the extent of aestheticism observable from an object of discourse. According to Dicker, Garcia, Kelly & Mulrooney (2018) the term quality is a concept that is hard to define. In other words, it is

rather described than defined. This perhaps is as a result of the relative nature of the term. The perception above is presented in the way it is because different people have use of the term quality based on the area of focus at a time. For example, when the term quality becomes an object of a discussion, its multidimensional value comes to play, its dynamic and contextual relevance is called on, and the various perceptual approaches would not be left out. Therefore, in higher education practices, just as the institutions of higher learning are diverse, this may be how the level of quality improvement needed by each could also differ.

The idea behind improving quality is coming on the ground that there are lots of areas in higher education that possibly have lost grounds or are crossing grounds, thereby leading to inefficiency or ineffectiveness. Bork (2017) described the challenge for improving quality of higher education as resulting from higher graduation number increasing without commensurate higher learning capacity or value addition index growth to the students. This conveys that while more graduates are churned out from the higher institution of learning, there seem to be less learning and knowing taking place in the learners as evident in the quality showcased often by newly employed graduates. The above presupposes that there is a drop in the level of substance that higher education now offers in terms of quality.

Therefore, improving quality in higher education practice may mean to improve the quality of interaction process in the teaching-learning encounter, improvement in quality of the environment in which learning occurs, better instructional materials and aids, higher quality of well-trained and retrained teachers/staff, greater security of lives and property in the institutions among others. According to (Mampane, 2017) quality improvement in higher education would guarantee effective teaching, higher economic growth, innovations in technical practices and advancement in social welfare of the people and nation. This presentation indicates by inference that when a higher institution grooms her learners properly, it would bring about higher productivity for self and society, it would curb all manner of social insecurity as well develop in the learner value for life and others around. The essence of taking a part on improving quality in higher education practices is to ensure for sustainable growth which could be construed as that which is able to be sustained over a longer period and that it does not have any negative after-effect. Though this term is an economic term but it has also found relevance in education, thus, economics of education (Amadioha & Akor, 2020). MBN (2020) describes sustainable growth as that growth which continues over a longer time without leading to any difficulty in the future. Applying it in education, it may mean that it should see to the course of pushing for such growth in education that has unlimited benefit and value addition to education practices and particularly because higher education is where the minds of men are trained to solve majority of the prevailing teething world problems in the society, thus, it becomes very crucial that higher education should gun for sustainable growth in its practices particularly in its curriculum implementation approach considering that this is the only opportunity learners and teachers have with each other and relevant stakeholders to interact, and mainly, it is the only way development of the people's mind and societal betterment or improvement could be guaranteed.

Curriculum implementation according to Amadioha (2010) is the realization of the intended change needed in the learner. While Akor & Pepple (2019) describes curriculum implementation in a broader sense as the process of facilitating teaching and learning for the purpose of bringing about the needed change expected in the behavior of the learner. The process described above by deduction does have a lot of intrigues in that it is polymorphous, so that a lot of things go on simultaneously in the education process whether in the classroom or outside the classroom (co-curriculuar activities) and for emphasis, it best of all is in the development of social skills in the learner. This multifaceted act called curriculum

implementation would demand that the practioners imbibe certain characteristics that would make their job easier. These features may include competence for creating and sustaining a better learning atmosphere, well planned physico–terrain, conducive learning climate, determining acceptable and expected behavior of the leaners, planning activities to support learning by doing etc (Eze, 2009). When these factors are properly considered and given their appropriate allocation, then, there would be assurance of security in all spheres of human existence in terms of value for life, food security, health security, social security, economic security and political security among others not just the universities but by extension it would flow down to the wider society. However, the challenge seem to be that these many characteristics of quality curriculum implementation practices are to be lacking or undermined in the methodical delivery of contents to learners in higher education practices in Nigeria. The question then should be what led to this and how can it be remediated?

On the issue of what may have brought about this?, it may not be far from some of the experiences of higher education in recent years to include: higher education students giving lesser and lesser time to their studies, absence of basic skills in those who have graduated already, ill-preparedness of students towards academic work, higher education teachers not giving enough time to prepare their students in the bid of chasing affluence, poor teaching and learning facilities in the school among others, therefore the need to remediate this prevailing circumstance which is why the study on improving quality in higher education practices for sustainable growth, security and development through effective curriculum implementation in universities in Rivers State is being undertaken.

Concept of Quality in Higher Education

Quality in higher education is a conglomerate of characteristics that represents innovation, dynamism, contextual and emotional perception as to what is perceived aesthetic enough to be referred to as qualitative. This is coming on the backdrop of the understanding that the term quality is relatively used by those who are involved with it. It is a picture associated more with educational outcome than it is with the programme document, hence, the teachers have a different idea of it, students believe that a qualitative higher education should enable them become employable just upon graduation while the society believes that qualitative higher education should prepare individuals for them to be capable of bringing development to the society such that are observable and measurable. Therefore, quality in higher education could mean the perception of staff and higher institution of what they have to offer to their students that are of more value than the previous contents delivered or a content that is relevant to the ever-changing trends in societal needs, problems and aspiration while the students view it as that which prepares them to make them grow and productive members of a given society. Humphreys (2018) sees quality in higher education as that which prepares school leavers with competencies to function adequately and suitably in a given society. EU (n.d) believes that when a higher education process is able to equip its recipients with transversal skills in association with capabilities for skillful career life, then such could be regarded as quality higher education.

Higher education simply represents post-secondary education offering degrees, certificates and/or both of varied programme areas which benefit both the recipients and society at large (Latour, 2020). Latour further differentiated higher education into types: as vocational higher education or trade schools, institutes of technology, schools of health technology, arts and designs schools, liberal arts schools, universities, online schools. In Nigeria, there is the monotechnics, polytechnics, universities, higher study centres etc (Okorie, 2001). According to FRN (2013) higher education is the same thing as tertiary education, in that it is the education one may receive just after secondary school education. The major aim of this type

of education:

a. Contribute to high level manpower training.
b. Develop and inculcate real value for survival.
c. Develop intellectual capability to appreciate local environment.
d. Forge and cement national unity.
e. Promote national and international awareness etc.

This perhaps is why (Ada, 2012) outlined the target of higher education to include:

1. Development of new knowledge.
2. Drive towards a better economy.
3. Development and provision of resources.
4. Development of the individual into a finer person.
5. Provision of opportunity for all.

These itemized facts show higher education, of course, quality higher education as having the capacity to engender and encourage sustainable growth for and any society who has security of life and properties at heart.

Concept of Sustainable Growth and Security

Sustainable growth is that type of growth in the national or society life of a people that does not have a detour. This type of growth is progressive and increasingly unabated. Sustainability as a concept is dependent on building for the future today yet ensuring that the activities programmed towards building the future does not have a negative implication for the present and future developments and even survival of the people (Amadioha & Akor, 2020). This then means that higher education has the capacity to bring about sustainable growth considering that one of its major pursuit is to develop and inculcate real value for survival in the individual, thus, the learner in this situation would have been fully prepared to pursue an education lifestyle that can stand the test of time. According to ANN (2018) it was divulge that the place of higher education in economic and social development gain placement year in, year out as higher education capacity to continually focus on enhancing innovation and building of higher level skills which enhances the capacity of the people and society at large. Higher education gain drives productivity, competitiveness and sustainability and this may be because it is always looking for ways to better itself there by ensuring security.

Security according to Amadioha & Akor (2018) is not just being safe but it is also a feeling of safety. This when linked to higher education potends that higher education represents a form of security for those who acquire it for future purposes.

Jobs security is one of the promises of higher education. Infact (TCA, 2019) pointed out that job security is one of the major reasons why higher education exists since it equips students or learners with the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values needed by them for the job market. Besides, once someone is engaged in a profession that enables him/her to earn a living, the tendency for such an individual to be part of any act of criminal and criminality would be reduced drastically if not completely eradicated. This shows that quality higher education has the potential for sustainable growth, security which leads to development.

Concept of Development

Development has different dimension to it, however, the area that concerns the society and her people usually has to do with economic and social development. While economic development deals more with revenue or income generation and proper utilization, social development is much more encompassing and embracing of a lot more areas of life and general welfare.

In the context of this discourse, social advancement or development is a main pursuit which deals with the enhancement or quality of life of the human and one way by which this happens is by getting involved with higher education which does the liberation of the human mind and creation of awareness for a better life and a better society. This can be index using the culture, wealth, education, health care, opportunities available to the people etc. (Emily, 2019). However, the UN in Amadioha and Akor (2018) measures the development of a nation based on three factors – life expectancy, literacy/education and standard of living. Nonetheless, the issue of development is a continuum just like education, an indices of development is, therefore, for as long as quality change and the building of opportunities for such change to take effect exists, then development would continue to thrive. Thus, Israel (2018) has asserted that what would drive actual developments are targeted policies aimed at diverting resources as well as social and economic movement percolating the various strata of societal life but the main means through which these could be achieved is by quality higher education driven by effective curriculum implementation.

Concept of Curriculum Implementation

Curriculum implementation is that approach tended towards the actualization of the curriculum document. Akor (2019) had already defined it as the process of facilitating teaching and learning for the purpose of achieving the needed change in the learner. Jeremiah & Alamina (2019) describes curriculum implementation as the interaction between the teacher and students, thereby bringing about productive individuals and productive societies. This means that it could also be captured as the actual teaching and learning process that takes place often in the classroom. It is a stage of the curriculum that puts into consideration the following: Drawing out of lesson, selection of the most suitable method and instruction pattern, classroom management, evaluation procedure and actual teaching process.

Therefore, owing to the dynamic nature of the society, the curriculum implementation practices for higher education also needs change considering how it has progressed from teacher – centered, to learner – centered, then the innovative methods which is a blend of the earlier approaches adopted, all aimed at achieving the most acceptable and appreciable results that there is. On the whole regularly, there is need to point out the growth observable from the practices in higher education which would lead to sustainable growth, security and development of our universities, societies, state and nation Nigeria, and the only means by which this can happen is through improving quality in higher education.

Factors to consider in Improving Quality in Higher Education Practice in Universities in Rivers State

Factors to consider are more or less the indices to look out for which may be used in determining the extent of improvement that has taken place. For instance, a whole improvement would demand a wholistic factor analysis, comparison as well as association. Some of the factor to be considered when the issue of improving quality in higher education

mainly in the universities in Rivers State is brought to the fore may be in areas like academic features, teaching qualification, globalization mindset, management support, availability and utilization of instructional materials, educational aim or target and the learners/students.

1. **Academic features:** This factor is multifaceted in that it touches the academic capacity and competence of a university; it also deals with the issues of the environment. However, it is more of an environment issue than academic because the atmosphere under which learning takes place affects learning more than imagined. Researchers have proven that a conducive learning environment influence greatly the way and extent of learning that takes place in the learner (Akor & Osaye, 2018). Thus, it becomes imperative that the provision of conducive learning terrain among the students is vital and one of the ways to achieve this intent is for the government to increase her subvention from the piecemeal allocation to the education sector and the higher education sub-sector and in particular the universities system so that necessary facilities are made available to institutions of higher learning and that the idea of lower percentage budgetary allocation of 5.24% in 2004 to 10:93 in 2015 and even the approximate 8% for 2020. (Jeremiah and Alamina, 2017, TVC, 2019) should be upgraded to at least half (13%) year on year basis, considering the international agreement with UNESCO by the Nigeria government, perhaps, this could reduce some of the difficulties being experienced with higher education and its practice currently.

2. **Teaching Qualification:** According to Yaghoubi, Salimi and Zarandi (2018), the qualification of the teaching staff in the university ranks highest when it comes to quality improvement. Hence, they are of the opinion that professors should be given more opportunities to perform and work, this is because they are responsible the usefulness or otherwise of higher education programmes, they are responsive to societal and learners needs and aspirations, they are the major asserts of the universities, therefore, should be put on display for functionality, they are the engine room of ethical, moral, practical and conceptual practices of the universities but above all, they are the closest to the student and are responsible for impacting them with the actual and hidden curriculum, this makes them an important factor in this consideration on improving quality in higher education practice in universities, so that when those of them practicing in Rivers State are equipped and empowered, then qualitative education would be guaranteed for the learners and the society at large.

3. **Globalization:** The effect of globalization on education and in higher education especially in the universities cannot be overemphasized because globalization effects spans from cultural, political, economic, financial, technological to education which is where higher education belong. Without consideration for globalization in higher education practices, a lot would suffer and this may include that the students and teachers be cut-off from their counterparts in other parts of the world, that is, these individuals not being able to access information and communication technology (ICT); application of retrogressive education policies because of their backwardness, inability to access direct foreign investment as they would be classified as backward in thinking etc (Amadioha & Akor, 2018). Globalization mindset should be brought into higher education, of essentially in universities education in Rivers State.

4. **Management Support:** No effectiveness would be obtained from a curriculum that is dependent on nothing. Just like the issue of teacher qualification, management support require that all that an educational institutes needs to function optimally be provided for it in order to ensure that the aim of education and curriculum implementation which is the realization of the intended change in the learner is achieved. Adequate learning opportunities support with commensurate provision of facilities should be done, leaving resources for dissemination of information in the most appropriate manner and

skillfulness be employed and as provided and even teachers should have the privilege of networking and sharing of ideas with their counterpart in neighbouring states. This can only happen if there is good leadership and the will to better the system of university education practice than the way it was met (Jeremiah & Alamina, 2017).

5. **Students:** There is need to place emphasis on the learners because they are at the receiving end of this discourse. The learners are particularly being harped on because without them being available to learn the aim of education would be defeated. Hence, their needs and interest and especially their relationship with learning and the learning environment should be given adequate attention in order not to have a student return to the larger society worse than he/she went to the university just because of the practice he/she met. This is important as examples abound on students who went without an idea of cultism but came back home and to society as hardened criminals. The environment should be friendly, accommodating, the teaching approach should be acceptable to the students, thus, his/her characteristics should form an object of consideration for every action or inaction in universities in Rivers State.

How to Ensure Sustainable Growth for Development through Universities Practices in Rivers State

There are practices that could bring about growth and there are those that could repress it. Our concern here is to outline a few things to do for sustainable growth in Rivers State.

1. Give higher education (universities) students academic work that would have direct effect on their interest and translate to productive societal personalities (Bok, 2017).
2. Partnership between employers and higher education should be firmed up in order to creatively train students towards employability and self sustaining skills or reliant skill and whatever future that is ahead of them (Akareem & Hossain, 2014).
3. The selection procedure for admitting students to departments should be standardized and the idea of catchments areas and regionality should be set aside if the best of the best would be obtained for studentship.
4. Qualified teaching and support staff must be recruited and the ideas of political interference during recruitment exercises must be waved off if the most qualitative desire for improvement in higher education practices in universities would be achieved.
5. Full financial support should be made available to universities, in the past there were grants, scholarship awards that were common, educational stakeholders provided facilities and other supports but now they seem to be all gone. Improving quality in higher education and emphatically university practice has a lot to do with these and more.

Correlation Between Improving Quality in Higher Education and State Security

There is a relationship between improvement in quality of higher education in universities and the actual security of the state for further development. This is observed thus :

1. Improving quality in higher education brings economic security, thereby freeing young people from stealing, kidnapping etc.
2. Improving quality in higher education bring educational and social security (Zafar, Hmedat & Chaubey, 2019). This simply conveys that a socially aware human person would rather be involved with acts that enhances development and productivity than with image denting issues.
3. Improving quality brings job security and food security as the educated would be willing and able to produce more than he/she needs.
4. Improving quality higher education leads to innovative practices with unique

characteristics that may be far-better than the old (Siemens, Dawson Lynih, 2013).

5. Improving higher quality increases leadership output and products which guarantees security (OECD, n.d).

Conclusion

It can only be concluded that improving quality in higher education practices in universities should be observed as a constant because the only thing which is constant in itself is change and because the society we live is amenable to per second by second changes, then, the higher education practice in the universities that would facilitate these changes to come about quickly should be the first to gain the attention of leadership who can bring it about and when it comes, it should be declared that the latter changes are better than the former, thus, the growth, security and development of man and the society he lives is owed to the level of improvement made to the quality of higher education, its practices in the universities and finally its products. To make today's people relevant tomorrow.

Recommendations

The following are the recommendations supporting this research.

1. School administrator should look out for every way to bring about improving quality in higher education practices universities in Rivers State.
2. Curriculum implementers should be given to regular research and retraining programs to enhance their capabilities and output.
3. Students should go beyond what they are taught in the classroom to studying more in other areas to increase their skill set for the future that is ahead of them.
4. Let there be a re-invention of the grant and scholarship awards opportunities of the past in order to encourage quality improvement in the practices of university as higher education to aid research and studentship.
5. Government should do regular needs assessment in order to boost the facilities capacity of named higher institution to enable them live up to their names.

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