

Enhancing National Development in Nigeria: The Imperative of Polytechnic Education

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Abstract

Education plays a pivotal role in the development of any country, because it serves as an instrument of training the human resources in a way that will engender the discovery, exploitation and utilization of the creative potentials and skills of the individual to improve himself/herself and for the general development of his/her society. On the other hand, polytechnic education which is the focus of this paper plays a vital role in the development of the human resources by providing skilled manpower which enhances industrial productivity and improves the quality of life. It is no gainsaying that a country cannot develop beyond its level of technological knowhow as it is in the world today, thus, polytechnic education is germane to national development. But unfortunately, the attention that the polytechnic education needed to take the country to a greater height has not been given to it. This paper therefore, examines the polytechnic education in Nigeria, its prospects and challenges in enhancing national development. It also makes suggestions on how to improve polytechnic education in the country.

Key words: National development, Education, Polytechnic education and vocational training.

1. Introduction

Development is all about improving a nation's infrastructural, educational socio-political, economic and natural resources in order to achieve overall national development. It is no gain saying that education is key to enhancing the desired national development because of the role that education plays in developing the knowledge and skills of the human resources in managing the available resources for the advancement of the country. There can be no maximal utilization of material resources for higher productivity without quality human resources. Education is the instrument of developing the human resources as the National Policy on education (2013) described education as the instrument of national development & social change which also maximizes the creative potentials and skills of the individual for self-fulfillment and general development of the society.

Polytechnic education as a tool of developing students in the acquisition of practical skills in such areas as engineering, survey, forestry, agriculture, craft e.t.c. has in no small measure contributed to technological advancement of the country. A country cannot develop beyond its level of

technological knowhow as is it in the world today. But unfortunately, the decline in the quality of polytechnic education in Nigeria has constituted a great hindrance in the polytechnics achieving this great goal. Thus, this paper seeks to examine the imperative of the polytechnic sector to enhancing national development with a special focus on polytechnic education in Nigeria, its prospects in enhancing national development in Nigeria; the challenges of polytechnic education and make suggestions on how these challenges can be overcome in order to lead to general advancement of the country.

2.Theoretical Framework

Institutional Theory

An institution can be defined as any persistent system of activities or any pattern of group behavior, more concretely, an institution has been conceived as offices and agencies arranged in an hierarchy, that institutional approach to political inquiry focuses on the formal structures and agencies of government. Political science research which is informed by this approach usually describes and classifies the agencies of government such as legislature, the judiciary, the executive agencies, party systems etc.

Institutions are social structures that have attained a high degree of resilience. They are composed of cultural-cognitive, normative, and regulative elements that, together with associated activities and resources, provide stability and meaning to social life. Institutions are transmitted by various types of carriers, including symbolic systems, relational systems, routines, and facts. Institutions operate at different levels of jurisdiction, from the world system to localized interpersonal relationships. Institutions by definition connote stability but are subject to change processes, both incremental and discontinuous.

According to Scott (2008), institutional theory is “a widely accepted theoretical posture that emphasizes productivity, ethics, and legitimacy.” Researchers building on this perspective emphasize that a key insight of institutional theory is ethics: rather than necessarily optimizing their decisions, practices, and structures, organizations look to their peers for cues to appropriate behavior.

Scott (1995) indicates that, in order to survive, organizations must conform to the rules and belief systems prevailing in the environment (Meyer and Rowan, 1977), because institutional isomorphism, both structural and procedural, will earn the organization legitimacy (Dacin, 1997; for instance, multinational corporations (MNCs) operating in different countries with varying institutional environments will face diverse pressures. Some of those pressures in host and home institutional environments are testified to exert fundamental influences on competitive strategy and human resource management (HRM) Corporations also face institutional pressures from their most important peers: peers in their industry and peers in their local (headquarters) community; for example, Marquis and Tilcsik (2016) show that corporate philanthropic donations are largely driven by isomorphic pressures that companies experience from their industry peers and local

peers. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and social organizations can also be susceptible to isomorphic pressures.

Polytechnic as an educational institution in Nigeria was established, designed and saddled with the onerous responsibility to train, instill and equip the students with the requisite skills, trainings, knowledge and vocations needed to be self-dependent, self-reliant and employable in order to be able to create wealth for themselves instead of waiting for the government for utterly non-existent or inadequate white collar jobs (Oluwatusin and Daisi, 2020) When citizens are active participants in the nation's economy, unemployment will be drastically decimated, majority of the people paying taxes to the government, this will inevitably increase the nation's Gross Domestic Product(GDP), promotes and enhances national development. The next chapter attempts detailed elaborations of concepts used in the study.

3. Conceptual Review

Education

Oluwatusin&Daisi (2020:13) viewed education as a process of developing knowledge ability in leaders in such a way that they use this knowledge to improve themselves and their societies. It is also the methodic development on training of the mind, capabilities or character by means of instruction or study. In the same vein Fafunwa (1974) describes education as the sum total of all the processes by which the development of abilities, attitudes and other forms of behaviours which are of positive value to the society are formed in a child thus, education prepares a child for a better future to enhance his/her welfare and that of the society at large from the economic perspective, Pidlisnyuk (2010 in Ehindero et al 2021:16) view education as “ an instrument for training human resources to optimize productivity by encouraging technical progress and promoting cultural conditions conducive to society and economic change”. Furthermore, the National Policy on Education (2013) describes education as an instrument for national development and social change which also maximizes the creative potentials and skills of the individual for self-fulfillment and general development of the society. Thus, from the foregoing, education is expected to be qualitative, inclusive, functional and pertinent to the needs of the society at large in order to engender national development. In Nigeria, the educational system is divided into pre-nursery education, nursery education, primary education, secondary education and tertiary education. All levels of education remain significant to the individual and technological advancement of the country.

Polytechnic Education

Polytechnic education is an integral part of technical education offered by polytechnic ranging from fine & applied arts to engineering. Polytechnic education in Nigeria evolved as a response to the technical needs of the colonialists to facilitate the execution of colonial works and realization of their exploitative objectives. This led to the establishment of Yaba Higher College in 1932 (which was later changed to Yaba College of Technology 1947) Kaduna Technical Institute in 1956 (now Kaduna Polytechnic) Polytechnic education is a type of education that is aimed at

developing occupational skills to live and work as a productive citizen in a given community. It is multi-faceted and multi-disciplinary and involves practical acquisition of vocational and technical skills which encourage higher productivity in a global society.

Lawal (2010) described technical & vocational education as the types of education that prepare people who could apply relevant practical skills to make positive changes in their society and become self-reliant. The National Policy on Education (2013) places great emphasis on technical & vocational education as an integral part of national development strategy. The goals of Technical & Vocational Education and Training (TVET) are:

- (a) Provide trained manpower in the applied sciences, technology and business particularly at advance craft and technical levels.
- (b) Provide the technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, commercial and economic development and
- (c) Give training and impart the necessary skills on individual for self- reliance economically (NPE, 2013:16).

National Development

Development in human society is a complex phenomenon. It has different meanings to different people and it has various forms- from physical development to mental development, others includes social development, economic/ political development etc. National development could be defined as the attainment of a number of modernization, material advancement industrialization, scientific progress, self-sufficiency, improvement in standard of living, gender equality, decrease in unemployment, availability of employment opportunities, attitudinal change and strong institutions. Okoro&Ibiam (2020:2) summarily describes national development as all components of a country be it political,. Social, economic, cultural which impact the life of the people and their contribution to global peace, well – being and advancement of their environment has to do with the improvement of the social welfare of the people and overall effect on a nation. It can also be viewed as an exploitation and effective utilization of both human and material resources to better the lots of a nation (Akinroluyo&Bankole, 2020: 1118)

4. Functions/Contributions of the Polytechnic

The functions of the polytechnic as stated in the Federal Polytechnic (Amendment) Act 2019 are highlighted below:

- (a) To provide full-time or part-time courses and training
 - i. in technology, applied science, commerce and management.
 - ii. in such other fields of applied learning relevant to the needs of the development of Nigeria in the areas of industrial and agricultural productions and distribution and for research in the development and adaptation of techniques as the council may from time to time determine,
- (b) To arrange conferences, seminars and study groups relative to the fields of learning specified in paragraph (a) above may serve to promote the objectives of the polytechnic.
- (c) To perform such other functions as in the opinion of the council

The specific goals of technology education which the polytechnic is to provide as stated in the National Policy on Education (2013:30) are:

- (a) Provide courses of instruction and training in engineering, other technology, applied sciences, business and management leading to the production of trained manpower.
- (b) Provide the technical knowledge and skills necessary for the agricultural, industrial, commercial and economic development of Nigeria;
- (c) Give training that impacts the necessary skills for the production of technicians, technologists and other skilled personnel who shall be enterprising and self-reliant,
- (d) Train people who can apply scientific knowledge to solve environmental problems for the convenience of man and
- (e) Give exposure on professional studies in the technologies.

From the above, the relevance of polytechnics in enhancing technological advancement of the country is brought to the fore as they provide competent and relevant technical manpower (through its practical nature); which in turn produce skilled labour force who are self-reliant and thereby sustain the national economy and reduce the rate of unemployment which will thereafter enhance national development. All Polytechnics across the country have centres for skill acquisition, entrepreneurial development, innovation development e.t.c. which also have various units where students are trained in the areas of their interests/specializations. Some of these units are agriculture, snailery, apiculture, textile design, block moulding, GSM repairs, baking & confectionery, welding and fabrication, crop production, soap production. All these have helped placed the polytechnics in a vantage position where its contributions to national development cannot be under estimated. Some of these contributions are itemized below:

- (i) Provision of entrepreneurship training and vocation career guide. One of the institutions where students are being trained to acquire specialized entrepreneurial skills (technological, engineering, business e.t.c.) is the polytechnic through its various entrepreneur and vocational centres.
- (ii) Innovation (ideas and concepts created and developed to meet the needs of people) and Creativity (the act of turning new and imaginative ideas into reality) (Adefidipe, 2022:128) which provide their students with life skills to become self-reliant and employers of labour and thereby enhance their productivity and national development.
- (iii) Welding/Fabrication of equipment and machines from locally sourced materials which include mini spraying machine, beans winnowing machine, pounding machine, palm kernel separator, vertical feed mixer, rice destining machine e.t.c. All these are produced in many polytechnics in the country including Federal Polytechnic, Ado-Ekiti. (See appendix)
- (iv) Agricultural production- engagement of students in direct food crops production such as herbs, vegetables, rice, palm fruits, sweet sorghum and animal production such as snail, fish, poultry and the likes.
- (v) Research and Development.

Since there can be no meaningful national development without technological advancement, the need for the government to give polytechnic education the required/needed attention cannot be over emphasized.

Table 1. List of Skills at CEDVS, Federal Polytechnic, Ado-Ekiti

Aquaculture	Fashion Design
Apiculture	Mushroom
Snailery	Beads and Hats making
Textile Design	Leather work
Crop production	Woodwork
Soap production	Photography
Poultry	Knitting and Crocheting
Simple Electrical Gadget Repair	GSM repairs
Welding and Fabrication	Barbing & Hairdressing
Ceramics, Arts and Craft	Rabbitry
Baking and Confectionery	3D Flooring
Block Moulding	Make up/Skin & Bridal Care Unit
Information and Communication Technology	Events Management and Hospitality

Source: Centre for Entrepreneurship Development and Vocational Studies, Federal Polytechnic, Ado-Ekiti (2022)

5. Problems of Polytechnic Education in Nigeria

April, 22nd2022, the federal government of Nigeria announced the approval of the establishment of three additional federal polytechnics situated in Abia, Delta and Kano States. Despite the astronomical increase in the number of polytechnics, they have not met the expected targets in the society: they have not mitigated the incidence of high rate of unemployment and under-employment as expected. Rather, they have continued to produce white-collar job seekers instead of job creators and entrepreneurs. Several factors account for this dismal state of affairs. Some of these are briefly explained below:

Table 2: Number of Accredited Polytechnics in Nigeria by ownership

OWNERSHIP	NUMBER OF POLYTECHNICS
FEDERAL	29
STATE	48
PRIVATE	55
TOTAL	133

Source: NBTE, 2021

Conceptual Problem: From the colonial era through the early stage of our nationhood, technical schools or colleges were perceived as inferior to grammar schools. Indeed, those who attended

technical schools were seen as intellectual never-do-well or less than average, who could not make it to Grammar schools. The implication of this is that technical education was seen as inferior to the education acquired in Grammar schools. A Federal-Ministry-of-Education document (2015) once noted this problem in a statement to the effect that “in general, perceptions of technical and vocational education have been that it is an area for drop-outs and failures from other schools.

Discriminatory Allocation of Funds by TETUND to the Polytechnics: The TETFUND disbursements to tertiary institutions are in different categories: Physical Infrastructure/Programme Upgrade, Academic Staff Training & Development, Conference Attendance, publication of Journal etc. Despite the fact that polytechnics are designed to promote science and technical educations by giving vocational training and skills required for national development, the funds to polytechnics are supposed to be released simultaneously and equal to other tertiary institutions in the country. But this is not always the case as polytechnics are discriminated against as lesser funds are disbursed to the sector, this largely responsible for shortage of funds and attendant poor infrastructure, dearth of science and technical equipment in the polytechnics. Figure 3 below depicts staggering sums of 25,998,255.57, 27,842,251.23 and 27,742,251 as disparities in the disbursements per university and polytechnic by Tetfund in 2021, 2020 and 2019 respectively (Tetfund, 2022)

Table 3. Tertiary Education Trust Fund Disbursements per University and Polytechnic in Five Years {2017- 2021} in Millions of Naira.

Years	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Universities	659,150,000	756,674,600	826,684,392	906,861,920	906,861,920
Polytechnics	450,800,000	517,628,900	566,701,842	628,439,401	628,439,401

Source: Tertiary Education Trust Fund, 2022.

Negative societal attitudes to polytechnic education: many admission-seeking candidates will choose the polytechnics only when they fail to secure university admission. According to a federal-Ministry-of Education Document (2016), “There is an overwhelming preference for university education with 74% of all enrolments in tertiary education in 2010 being in universities compared with 19% in polytechnics and 7% in Colleges of Education.” More than 60% of the students in the polytechnics in Nigeria are those who were unable to secure admission to the universities.

Relatively Shorter Career Ladder: Unlike the universities that offer continuous progression to their students from Bachelor through Masters to Ph.D., the polytechnics seem to be an academic *cul de sac*. One comes to the end of the road after one’s HND which, in principle, is now seen as the equivalent of B.Sc./B.A. any ambitious HND holder who desires a higher qualification is forced to seek admission into the university. Yet, this admission, which is not automatic, involves crossing the bridge of Post-graduate Diploma into the Master programme in a minimum time of one year. With such cross-carpeting, the candidate’s practical foundation is attenuated by the theoretical superstructure of university education.

As a result of lack of academic progression beyond the HND, the polytechnic helplessly draw their higher-level academic staff from the universities, or train their junior staff also in the universities whose mandate is different from that of the polytechnics. At the end of the training the staff come back more as great theoreticians than as great practical men and women (Uduma, 2015)

Financial Crisis: There is growing shortage of funds and learning resources in the polytechnic system. According to Oyeneye (2015) the major challenge facing the management of polytechnic system in Nigeria is inadequate funding, though Ajayi and Ayodele (2016) argued that there was an increase in the proportion of total expenditure devoted to education and preponderance of TETFund projects in the polytechnics lately but this has been considered to be rather grossly inadequate and shoddy execution of TETFund projects, considering the phenomenal increase in students enrolment and increasing cost of administration which has been aggravated by current galloping inflation. Besides, Ajayi and Ekundayo (2016) remarked that the Nigerian government over the years, has not been meeting the United Nations Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) recommendation of 26% of the total budgetary allocation to education sector. Aina (2007) posited that government priority to education is still very low. These researches show the extent to which the government itself is a contributing factor to the financial crisis in the system. The apparent shortage of fund available to the polytechnic system has been responsible for empty library, dearth of science and laboratory facilities in Nigerian polytechnics in recent years. This, in not in small way, makes the management of the system a herculean task.

Deteriorated Infrastructure: It may not be too far from the truth that Nigerian polytechnics are fast decaying as all the resources for education process are in gross inadequate and deteriorating. Lecture halls, laboratories, Workshops, students' hostels, libraries, journals and office spaces are all seriously in bad shape. This has left the equipment for teaching, research and learning either lacking, inadequate or in a bad shape to permit basic functions of academics. Polytechnic system by all intents and purposes require more equipment as it is practical- oriented in training contents and in all ramifications (Oluwatunsin and Daisi, 2020)

Brain-drain Syndrome: According to Ekundayo and Ajayi (2009), Brain-drain refers to widespread migration of academic staff from either the universities or polytechnics in the country to overseas universities where their services are better rewarded or exodus of lectures from polytechnics to universities in Nigeria for greener pasture. One factor responsible has been the relatively paltry remuneration for polytechnics academic staff during the past decade and the declining financial attractions of polytechnic employment in comparison to other opportunities in other areas. Another factor has been the rising workloads associated with deteriorating staff/student ratios. It must be emphasized that the brains are leaving the educational system; the broad aim of producing high level manpower from the system for national development is now doubtful.

Lack of Polytechnic Commission: To Ukpai (2008), the polytechnic education has been the only sector of the tertiary education that is overseen by a board. While the polytechnic counterparts (that is, universities and colleges of education) are managed by commissions duly established for that purpose, the polytechnic system is managed by a parastatal. The National Board for Technical

Education (NBTE).Ukpai added that the effect is that the problems of polytechnic education are not seen from tertiary level but are considered along that of other technical schools, which includes secondary schools. The board too, is saddled with so many other responsibilities which hinder it from concentrating on the problems and management of polytechnic education. Policy articulation and implementation are hampered by civil service bureaucratic red-tapism. This has seriously affected smooth running and development of polytechnic education.

Secret Cults: One of the challenges facing tertiary institutions in Nigeria today is how to handle the menace and aggressiveness of all cult members (Ekundayo and Ajayi, 2009). Never before has the potential for the destruction of lives and property on campuses been so great or escalated and as fast and horrible as now. In the same vein, Adegbite (2017) remarked that the issue of cultism among the students has opened a new and very dangerous dimension to the situation of things in our educational institutions. Smah (2015) posited that where cults exist, there is no guarantee that academics programmes and activities would run normally .Hence, the polytechnic may run the risk of being constantly closed or disrupted. The result of these cult activities as submitted by Smah (2015) have been feeling of fear on campuses, killings, deaths and campus disturbances/disruption in academic calendar.

Political Interference: It has been observed that polytechnic these days are not totally free from the hand of politics outside the institutions. Government of the day, most especially in the state-owned polytechnics, interfere a lot in terms of selection and choice of deans, departmental heads, directors of programmes and above all, the selection of rectors.

A situation whereby the staff of the polytechnics are not totally free to choose their leaders without government intervention has not augur well for the system. Some other problems in the management of the polytechnic system in Nigeria include rising cost of polytechnic education, the unmanageable demand for admission, sexual harassment, and examination malpractices, Discrimination based on catchment area and uncertainty in polytechnic sector.

6 Conclusion

This work began with an explanation of the concepts of development as improving a nation's infrastructural, educational and national resources. Education is viewed as a process of developing knowledge abilities in leaders such a way that they use this knowledge to improve themselves and their societies. Polytechnic education is saddled with the responsibility of teaching and equipping students to be job creators instead of seekers of white collar jobs. It highlighted the objectives and functions of polytechnics ranging from knowledge generation to manpower development. The paper focused on the labour market realities, in a bid to foster personal and career development. The paper suggested for introduction of mentorship education in polytechnic curriculum to bridge up the gap between polytechnic students and labour markets realities and constant review of curriculum to be in terms with the modern realities

The role of polytechnics in providing technology, science and practice- based education which leads to the acquisition of occupational life skills cannot be over- emphasized. If the needed

attention is given to polytechnic education, it will invariably widen the employment opportunities of polytechnic graduates and thereby leads to national development. The challenges staring at the face of the polytechnic sector are no doubt enormous, the next segment proffer workable, implementable and pragmatic recommendations that will make it fulfill its mandate to the nation.

7 Recommendations

- i. National redefinition of the concept of polytechnic education with a review to charting untrammelled career path for its graduates
- ii. Adequate funding accompanied by scrupulous monitoring of funds made available to the institution to ensure that they are judiciously expended.
- iii. Mentorship education should be introduced in polytechnic curriculum, to stand as a link between the students and marketrealities.
- iv. Periodic curriculum review to tailor their programmes and courses to the dynamic of our local, national and international socio-economics environments.
- v. Nigeria government should consider patronizing indigenousengineers and Technologists as consultants and contractors for higher level projects instead of engaging foreign contractors.
- vi. There must be provision of equipment and devices in various laboratories and workshops of engineering departments in Nigerian polytechnics such that Nigerian graduates could be well exposed to the practical contents of the engineering and technological curricula, the gesture is expected to make most of the graduates self-reliant instead of waiting endlessly to compete for the scanty job slot government employment.
- vii Indigenousexpertise in engineering and technology should be encouraged and foreign expertise should only be contracted when indigenousexpertise are not available and conserve foreign exchange.

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