

Diversification Management at Tertiary Education Level: A Review

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Abstract

This paper examines the concept of management of diversification at tertiary education level in view of the growth of national secondary education system which vested high scramble for tertiary education was made in relation to question of access and expansion. This paper examines management of diversification at tertiary education level as a means by which tertiary education prepares itself to cope with the challenges that result from mass enrolment of primary and secondary schools. It reviewed that, often, a straightforward relationship is presumed between the growth of students' body and the expansion of tertiary education levels and between the growth of students' numbers and the diversity of such within the concept of its carrying capacity. Quality and standard of tertiary education, irrelevance of curricula to community aspirations, employability of school graduates, the continued reduction of financial resources and growing accountability measures imposed by governments on tertiary education were identified among others as probable problems of diversification of tertiary education in Nigeria. The paper also explores probable solutions to problems of diversification in tertiary education levels in Nigeria. For best practice to be obtained in our tertiary education, the paper recommends that strict adherence to the provision of the tertiary education autonomy using the yardstick of global best practices; diversification of funding by attracting private sectors; updating and restructuring institutional curriculum to meet national and globalised market demands and setting up effective monitoring system should be put in place by educational stakeholders.

1. Introduction

Tertiary education according to the provisions of the National Policy on Education (2004) is that education given after secondary education, in universities, colleges of education, monotechnics and polytechnics owned by either the Federal or State Governments, corporate bodies or individuals. While diversification is a deviation from a uniform and rigid system to a flexible system that can accommodate varying demands within a country from a multiplicity of providers in terms of aims and operations or an increase of variety in higher education system (Teichler, 2008).

Globalization and the growth of education at primary and secondary levels have implications for diversification of tertiary education level. In compliance with the recommendation of the World Conference on Education held in Jomtien, Thailand in 1991 "Education for All" (EFA), Nigeria launched the Universal Basic Education (UBE) in September 1999. The UBE was launched with a wider scope which provides a nine year universal, free and compulsory education covering primary and junior secondary education. These led to the multiplicity of requirements for placement in universities, polytechnics and colleges of education which were hardly met by the traditional institutions.

To cater for this, tertiary education in Nigeria needs to deviate from its normal practice (diversify) in terms of admissions requirements, length of study, ownership, funding, curriculum, and cost-sharing as obtain in Azerbaijan, Chile, the Republic of Korea, Malaysia (Varghese, 2014) focusing on entrepreneurial education (technical/vocational) as a means of improving the employability of tertiary education graduates. On the importance of diversification of tertiary education level the New World Bank Report (2002) observed that tertiary education is necessary for the creation, dissemination and application of knowledge as well as for building technical and professional capacity.

Therefore, the crux of this paper is to examine diversification as a means by which tertiary education prepare itself to cope with the challenges that result from mass enrolment of primary and secondary schools. The phenomenon of globalization, which has changed various sectors of world economy, has also had some remarkable impact on education students' option for tertiary education which is no longer limited by national boundaries.

1.1 Concept of Diversification at Tertiary Education Level

Varghese and Püttmann (2011) defined diversification as the process by which a system becomes more varied or diverse in its orientation and operations. It reflects a deviation from a uniform and rigid system to a flexible system that can accommodate varying demand within a country from a multiplicity of providers. Diversification at tertiary education level also refers essentially to the growing variety of its aims and operations (Varghese, 2014).

Diversification can be seen in terms of many different institutions offering opportunities for secondary

school graduates to pursue tertiary education in terms of providing varied study programmes and different forms of ownership and control (Fairweather, 2000). Though in support Teichler (2008) said such management should be evident in structural and cultural aspects linked to missions or academic programmes of institutions.

Some authors such as Birnbaum (1983) cited in Varghese (2014) attribute diversity at tertiary education level to an extensive range of factors. They include structural diversity reflected in organizational aspects; programmatic diversity reflected in curricula; procedural diversity reflected in modes of teaching; reputational diversity reflected in perceived differences in status and prestige; constituential diversity reflected in the types of students served; and values and climate diversity reflected in the internal cultural and social environment. At times it is difficult to identify and classify institutions or systems based on these attributes, as diversification may reflect a combination of these factors.

Diversity can exist either within or between institutions. The above accounts as Varghese (2014) revealed focus mainly on diversity between institutions (referring to mission, student clientele, size, the source of control, resources, and the question of whether or not an institution is part of a State system and the strength of its ties to this system). Intra-institutional diversity relates to instructional and research practices, curricula, and degree programmes and their quality.

Management of diversification at tertiary education may result in differentiation (Neave, 2000). Differentiation implies the splitting up of units and the emergence of new units within an existing system (van Vught, 1996). When a tertiary education system becomes diversified, its institutions might be expected to become increasingly differentiated. Diversification also results in differentiation in the organizational sub-units (Teichler, 2008), such as departments or research units, and their functional sub-units, such as study programmes, within the (national) system of higher education. There are also other dimensions such as horizontal and vertical differences, formal and informal elements, and other characteristics such as institutional size and range of disciplines. All these elements lead to a definition of diversity in terms of the existence of distinct forms of tertiary education levels and groups of institutions within a State or nation. These institutions have different and distinctive missions, different styles of instruction, and educate and train students for different lives and careers. They are also organized and funded differently, and operate under different ministries.

1.2 Reasons for Diversification at Tertiary Education Level

Though it is difficult to ascertain whether expansion caused diversification or whether diversification led to the expansion of the system but the relationship between expansion and diversification seems to be bi-directional and mutually supportive (Mohamedbhai, 2008).

Teichler (2008) in Varghese (2014) attributes diversification of tertiary education to 'drift theories' (the drift towards vocational courses), to increased flexibility (towards soft models and broad study ranges), and to cyclical theories, assuming that some structural patterns and policies come and go due to different factors of influence. Cerych and Sabatier (1986) attribute diversification at tertiary education levels to the labour requirements resulting from technological developments and conditions arising from a move from elite to a mass higher education. Varghese and Püttmann (2011) revealed the following as reasons for diversification of tertiary education:

1. *Diversification due to academic drift from 'knowledge as knowing' to knowledge as operational:* With the emergence of the knowledge economy, it is widely believed that the future growth potential of the economy depends on its capacity to produce knowledge. The knowledge economy relies strongly on knowledge and places greater value and emphasis on knowledge production – that is, research and development (R&D) activities (*University World News*, 22 February 2010).

But the immediate demand is, perhaps, more for the use of knowledge in production rather than for knowledge production per se. This represents a shift in conception of 'knowledge', from 'knowing as contemplation to knowing as operation' (Barnett, 1994:15), and this shift in emphasis towards operationalism has institutional implications in terms of training and knowledge use.

'Operationalism' implies managing knowledge as a commodity to be transacted in the marketplace and graduates as products to be used in the production process. This process of close interaction with the productive sectors will ultimately reshape higher education curricula. Thus, the new order demands that students both know things and know how to do things. In this view, operational knowledge transmitted by tertiary institutions helps to widen market operations.

2. *Diversification due to democratization:* Tertiary level of education is no longer perceived as an elitist privilege, but rather as a right and even an obligation (Neave, 2000). The egalitarian and democratic values prevailing in most societies promote the equality of opportunities not only at the entry level but also in the attainment of a degree. As the demands of students from different socio-economic groups and their immediate reasons for seeking higher studies shifted from the notion of higher education as an intellectual pursuit to its market value, the type of courses offered and the programmes of study developed in universities began to evolve (Trow in Varghese & Püttmann, 2011).

Multiplicity of requirements could hardly be met within traditional institutions. Therefore, diversification is seen as a means by which tertiary education prepare itself to cope with the challenges that result from a diversified curriculum, forms of instruction (ICT), clientele and demand. Trow (1974: 4) cited in Varghese and Püttmann (2011) notes that ‘as the system grows, it emerges from obscurity of the relatively small elite system with its modest demands on national resources, and becomes an increasingly substantial competitor for public expenditure’.

3. *Diversification due to globalization:* With the transition towards knowledge-based production, economies are increasingly realizing the importance of tertiary education in promoting knowledge production (i.e. R&D), and absorbing technological advances (Johnstone, 1998). The gains in international competitiveness are the result of a highly qualified and trained pool of professionals. The reliance on a knowledge economy is also associated with a shift in employment prospects from manufacturing to service sectors and an increase in the qualification levels of employees.

It can be argued that when production became more knowledge intensive, the demand for higher educated persons in the labour market increased, and this in turn increased demand for higher education (ILO, 2004). Supporting, Hanson (2008) assert, the persons considered most qualified for employment were not then primarily the liberal education graduates, but rather graduates of a programme imparting practical, applicable knowledge, and knowledge-based technologies.

4. *Diversification due to the expansion of secondary education:* The success of the Education for All (EFA) movement in fostering enrolment in primary and secondary education has led to even greater pressure for higher education to expand. This is sometimes referred to as the ‘pipe-line effect’ (Goedegebuure and Meek, 1997:309). This pressure is especially important in developing countries where primary and secondary levels of education are fast expanding and a growing proportion of school graduates decide to join tertiary education institutions. The expansion of education at the secondary level increases the social demand for higher education, and, as we have seen, this demand is leading tertiary education level to diversify.
5. *Diversification due to growing specialization:* Diversity could also be related to the growing specialization of the academic field, which may be institutionalized either within or outside the tertiary education structure. Higher education systems need to respond to prospective changes and future challenges, and develop greater capacity for innovation. The capacity to respond to new developments, foreseeable or not, becomes more important for every post-secondary education system and each single institution. Diversification is a means to reach this, based on the assumption that a diverse system with differing institutions bears the greatest potential for various and adequate innovations. Specialized institutions can respond to these specific requirements faster than others.

2.0 Importance of Diversifying Tertiary Education Level in Nigeria

Diversity in education provides a number of opportunities to persons who want to expand their knowledge. It entails a wide number of disciplines and subject areas including all kind of learners. The impact has improved education of persons from different background as they are able to get access to education. The main benefits for diversification as opined by Johnstone (1998) and Ojedele and Ilusanya (2006) include:

1. *It improves illiteracy levels:* Prior to education diversity, many people believed they were being denied the right to better education. In addition, those who were fortunate to get opportunities were not able to study their area of interest. However, diversity in education mission, programmes, curriculum etc, would allow individuals from different backgrounds to study various disciplines and subjects of their choice.
2. *It creates variety of disciplines:* Diversity in tertiary education level creates subject diversification allowing learners to engage in different disciplines. More courses would be available to individuals regardless of their age bracket, market, clientele etc.
3. *It improves learning:* Diversity of education encompasses various learning preferences. Though the mainstream of learning is through formal education, a variety of new methods can also be discovered. This improves learning as individuals are able to engage in different fields. In the past few years, learners were shunned if they were not able to fit into the formal learning system. However, this has changed over the years due to diversification in education (Johnstone, 1998).
4. *It improves attention:* Many individuals who are not able to fit into the formal learning mainstream require a greater deal of attention. In the past years, only a few schools were ready to spend extra time with their students. Nonetheless, currently, there are specialized institutions and education boards that offer alternative learning abilities.

3.0 Problem of Diversification of Tertiary Education Level in Nigeria

In a discourse on the specific challenges that face higher education development in its diversification drive,

Omolewa (2001) noted that, generally, higher education's challenges in Nigeria among other African countries are related to:

...Its effective deployment to liberate the poor, empower the weak and give hope to the hopeless, encouraging all of these to acquire self-confidence and pride in themselves and the capabilities..., produce a regenerated and profoundly revived people who would learn to live in harmony with one another... such education ..., must be consistently geared towards the pursuit of excellence and high quality without regard to differences in equity, human rights and justice (p. 81).

In view of the above generic challenges, Ndabawa (2003) in Egenti, Oghenekohwo and Iyunade (n.d) identified the higher education diversification challenges to include among others issues: quality and standard for which Okebukola (2000) was worried that "...improvement in higher education quality has been doubtful" (p. 90). In terms of relevance of curricula to community aspirations, Ndabawa (2003) assert that, the sheer lack of renewal of the curricula creates a seeming mismatch between what the society expects and what higher institutions offer.

The programmes of higher education today are hardly ever based on the needs of the society. Also related is the concern of academics with employability of school graduates where a focus on the synergy or lack of it between school and work is a growing challenging factor. Ndabawa (2003) also noted staffing and staff development initiatives, reform of academic function-teaching, research and publication, funding and infrastructure development, generation of partnership with community, adapting to the era of Information Communication Technology ICT, widening of access through open and distance learning, collaboration or partnership with local and international development partners as well as the democratization of higher education institutional administration. These challenges as observed by Egenti, Oghenekohwo and Iyunade (n.d) are real, cogent and demanding in institutional diversification and the need for sustained collaboration and partnership in resource allocation and utilization provides a link to closing the gap.

On a similar note, UNESCO (1998) provided five major issues which are of particular relevance to the current debate against the insistence of continued pressure from donors on basic education investment at the expense of higher education. These issues represent the core of the diversification challenges and contemporary changes in tertiary education level. Among other things; UNESCO notes with concern;

- i. the continued demand for access which has doubled and even tripped in some countries (including Nigeria) necessitating a shift from elite to mass higher education;
- ii. the continued reduction of financial resources and growing accountability measures imposed by governments;
- iii. the maintenance of quality and relevance and the measures required for their assessment. This problem (challenge) will grow since student numbers could reach 120 million by the year 2050;
- iv. the on-going problem of graduate employment which is forcing reassessment of academic degrees and diplomas; and
- v. the growing reality of internationalization in higher education teaching, training, and research which deals with the mobility of both people and knowledge (globalization)(p.6).

These challenges also mirror the 2015 8-point expectations of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which are to address poverty, illiteracy, infant and maternal mortality, gender equity, sustainable environment and partnership in development.

4.0 Solutions to Problems of Diversification at Tertiary Levels of Education in Nigeria

Taking a cue from the Nigeria experience, higher education has six goals, although it may vary in other African countries, yet the focus may also be interlinked. The Nigeria National Policy on Education NPE (2004) provides that higher education is expected to:

- i. contribute to national development through high level relevant manpower training;
- ii. develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of the individual and society;
- iii. develop the intellectual capability of individuals to understand and appreciate their local and external environments;
- iv. acquire both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to be self-reliant and useful members of the society.
- v. Forge and cement national unity; and
- vi. Promote national and international understanding and interaction (Ojedele & Ilusanya; 2006:49-50).

The above national expectations may not be significantly distant from what obtains in other African countries in terms of their policies on higher education. Thus, tracking the challenges of higher education will rely on diversification of institutional mission and vision within the context of new dimensions which according to Egenti, Oghenekohwo and Iyunade (n.d) will take into consideration:

- i. Strict adherence to the provision of the tertiary education autonomy-using the yardstick of global best

- practices;
- ii. Diversifying funding by attracting private sector funding (without funding agencies dictating or directing the programmes of fund allocation), and considering more appropriate pricing of higher education facilities and services;
 - iii. Update and restructure curricula to meet the demands of national and globalised competition for development;
 - iv. Setting up effective monitoring (through quality assurance) of tertiary levels of education to ensure strict adherence to standard; and
 - v. Decentralizing the competitive structure of higher education for performance enhanced reward system.

5.0 Conclusion

Nigerian tertiary education currently exhibits a variety of internal differences. Yet there are, at the same time, strong incentives towards the homogenization of existing higher education on several dimensions. To the extent to which institutional diversity is desirable, one must first define the dimensions of diversification while avoiding, at the same time, absolute dimensions or the reduction of the entire process to a single type of diversification. The public policies to be advanced and then implemented by the authorities before diversity can be achieved have a number of available challenges to reach their objectives. Each of these challenges has its specific reasons and drawbacks and any efficient policy application must consider them in order to limit the range and impact of unintended adverse consequences.

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