

## EMPIRICAL EVALUATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

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The paper examined the impact of higher education on economic development in Nigeria. The study adopted a descriptive survey design and is guided by a research questions and one hypothesis. The sample consisted of academic staff and non-academic staff randomly selected from Federal Universities in South- West, Nigeria. The Universities and Economic Development Questionnaire (UEDQ) rated on 4-point response modes was the instrument used. The face validity of the instrument was ascertained by four experts made up of two senior academic staff and two senior non-academic staff. The internal consistency of the instrument was established using Cronbach Alpha. It yielded a coefficient of 0.76. Descriptive statistics (frequency counts and percentages) and t-test statistic were used to analyze the data. The result indicated that there are differences in the perceptions of academic staff and non-academic staff on the impact of higher Education in ensuring Economic Development in Nigeria but most importantly higher education has positive impact on economic development. It also showed that entrepreneurship, vocational and technical education were not fully integrated into the higher education curriculum for economic development. Based on the findings, it was recommended that higher education should aim at workforce development and education, entrepreneurship, and quality-of-life factors that will enshrine an economic development process.

**Keywords:** Higher Education, Economic Transformation, Economic Development

## INTRODUCTION

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Education has for long been recognized as a basic tool for economic development of any nation. This is predicated on the notion that it empowers any nation to rise to the challenges of social and economic growth as well as technological change. In developing countries, the huge investment in education is premised on the expectation of its influence in contributing to social reconstruction and economic development as well as creation of sustainable economic growth. Improving the economy for sustainable development cannot be complete without education because it has a link with nation resources building and economic development.

According to the World Bank (2018), despite the high economic growth reported in official statistics, Nigeria is yet to find a formula for translating its wealth of resources into significant welfare improvements for the population. Job creation and poverty reduction are not keeping pace with population growth, implying that the number of underemployed and impoverished Nigerians continue to grow. Notably, Isuku and Enumenu (2010) found that the foundation of economic growth and success has been linked to Education. In recent times, most countries including Nigeria are making frantic efforts to develop their higher education system to meet the emerging economic insecurity challenges.

### Statement of the problem

Education is central to economic development processes and is essential for sustainability, al-be-it, it has often been overlooked in the past as part of the re-evaluation strategies for poverty reduction. In Nigeria, stakeholders have successfully advocated for an increase in the share of public resources allocated to states and local governments in a bid to promote sustainable development. However, poverty programmes not linked to economic transformation through education may fail to yield the required results. It has been observed that there is a decline in the level of inclusive education at the higher education level which has really affected graduate output especially in their contributory effort to eradicate poverty and create sustainability.

More often than not, sustainability focuses on two dimensions, environment and economy. Grilo (2012) argued for a third dimension which is social sustainability and a fourth dimension which is institutional development. It may be argued that the growing demands and challenges spur up the responsibility for the environmental, economic and social contexts to response to the increasing pressures from stakeholders. Consequently, in the pursuit of sustainable devolvment, the society rely more on the interaction between the three dimensions and emphasis was however, placed primarily on ecology, business sufficiency and socio effectiveness rather than with institutional

effectiveness. Arising from the above position, the roles of the higher education as a higher education institution were questioned. It is against this background that the study sought to examine the role of higher education in economic transformation and sustainable development.

Several studies have been carried out in the past on this subject. But the review of previous empirical literature revealed a lack of consensus in the research findings of past researchers which indicates the existence of a research gap. This study examined how higher education impact economic development on a broad view specifically the short and long run impact between higher education and economic development in Nigeria. Therefore, the need for this study to answer the following research question “To what extent has higher education contributed to economic development in Nigeria?” and hence the following null hypothesis

(Ho) “Higher education has no impact on economic development in Nigeria.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

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### Concept of Higher Education

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) all over the world are centers for educating, analyzing data, creating information, imparting knowledge which is of utmost importance for development and management of the future for sustainability in different societies (Alufohai, 2012). Higher education had in different dimensions contributed to the advancement and application of knowledge with its basic fundamentals in the construction of knowledge economy to sustain the nation. In the face of challenges linked to economic growth, the role of higher education in bringing about sustainability cannot be over emphasizes. Otoh (2012) found higher education to be a correlate of socio-economic development and most especially a vital process in economic growth all over the world with its attendant effect on improved productivity, social welfare and empowerment.

The Nigerian higher education system comprised the universities, polytechnics and colleges of education. They are primarily owned, controlled and funded by the Federal Government, State Government, or Private individuals. In this study the focus is on the higher education system. The higher education as an institution of higher learning has an intellectual function of teaching and research. Thus, higher education education facilitates creation and sharing of knowledge for the overall socio-economic development.

## Sustainable Development

The concept of sustainable development was made prominent among countries in the Bruntland Commission report of 1987 and its aim is to meet human needs while ensuring the sustainability of natural systems and the environment, so that these needs can be met not only in the present, but also for generations to come.

The expansion of education has been one of the main factors influencing the economic and social advancement of the country. Government has been working towards building Nigeria as a knowledge hub centre by expanding access to the world class higher education by enhancing research, development and innovation. It is important for developing countries, of which Nigeria belongs, to develop higher skills, professional capacity and advanced knowledge and to make optimum use of technology to address sustainable development and challenges if they are to sustain growth in a globalised context. Through enhancing quality, widening access, increasing research and development, generating new knowledge and innovation, Nigeria strives to become an active player in the international higher education market.

It is with this objective that the government in Nigeria is placing high importance on knowledge driven growth and innovation for its future development. Major investments are being made by the government to develop higher education. Furthermore, reputable tertiary education institutions are being encouraged to operate in Nigeria. While some of them already have branches in Nigeria or are working in partnership with local institutions, the open learning is expected to play a significant role in creating higher education opportunities through the newly established open higher education of Nigeria

Higher education holds the keys to sustainable development in Africa. Despite gains made under both the Millennium Development goals and the decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014), Africa continues to face deep-rooted challenges to sustainable development. In 2011, the United Nations Higher Education Institute for Sustainability and Peace (UNU-ISP) hosted an international symposium on the role of higher education for sustainable development in Africa, at UNU Headquarters in Tokyo to consolidate their work with universities in Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa and Zambia which aims to develop postgraduate programmes on 'integrated moral development', 'sustainable urban development' and 'management of mineral resources'. These programmes are now one step closer to implementation, following the signing of memorandums of understanding (MOUS) with eight African universities in the margins of the symposium. The symposium brought together over fifty leading experts in education and development in Africa and Japan, including four chancellors

from leading Africa universities. It aimed to share lessons from UNU-ISP collaborative initiatives to help African universities to develop postgraduate education programmes for sustainable development.

### **Impact of Higher Education on Economic Development in Nigeria**

A stable government by its nature is supposed to be a key element in the development of the nation. This assertion was anchored on the belief that an elected government would be able to facilitate security for the generality of the people, as well as provide conducive environment for the safety of the economic and social capital investment, through the instrumentality of the law (Adeniran, 2013). Any government that seeks to achieve economic transformation against the background of acute food shortage, population explosion, low level of production and per capita income, low technological development, inadequate and ineffective public utilities, and chronic unemployment, as presently experienced in Nigeria, has a false sense of economic security. Going by the Nigerian situation, the study of Adeniran found that the real threats to economic stability are poverty, inequality and exploitation. One can also posit further that real sustainability must rest on economic prosperity.

Economic transformation forms the basis of dynamic changes in the structure from a planned economy to a market-oriented economy. According to Soludo (2011), it is the process that guarantees greater prosperity and quality of life for the average citizen and these are form part of the pillar of sustainable development. On the other hand, sustainable development is aptly defined as development which focuses on using pattern of resource to meet human needs while preserving the environment so that these needs can be met in the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (United Nations, 2004). This definition reinforces the need for each generation to progress to more desirable state now and in the future.

Special attention is given to quality of teaching and learning programmes, this is intended to consolidate the quality assurance at all levels of the tertiary education sector, through upgrading of qualification of faculty members, peer review of teaching and by increasing research and innovation as well as in increasing employability of graduates through effective linkages with the private sector to obtain key information on labour market needs. The ultimate objective is to develop the knowledge sector as a new pillar of the economy and increase its current contribution of 2.7% of Gross Annual Product (GAP) to about 10 percent by 2025.

Higher education development needs to be sustainable and should consider how to incorporate Africa's cultural richness and traditions of living in harmony with nature. Initiatives should be supported to integrate sustainable development into higher education. This requires an increase in education funding, reconciliation of current discipline based educational structures with the trans-disciplinary requirement of education for sustainable development. A new educational model is needed to develop skills required to respond to complex social, environmental and economic change. The strategy and plans of the Nigerian government for creating and improving capacity for sustainable development rests on the development of a blueprint for economic security which also rests on a vibrant, innovative and creative Higher Education sector, capable of proffering solution to the country's myriad of growing national developmental problems.

### Empirical Review

Bossert and D'Ambrosio (2013) averred that economic insecurity is a multi-faceted issue aroused by anxiety resulting from inadequate economic safety and significant potential economic losses. Economic insecurity, which can also be referred to as financial insecurity, is the condition of not having stable income or other resources to support an individual's standard of living now and in the foreseeable future. It includes probable continued insolvency; unpredictability of the future cash flow of a person or other economic issues such as a country's unemployment or job insecurity, poverty and inflation. Adedeji and Eziyi (2010) affirmed that economic insecurity is the inability of a country to mobilize all its intellectual, human, military, legal, financial and other resources to defend its economic interests effectively. Though, economic insecurity has now come to characterize life in developed countries too, the chronic insecurity rooted in poverty spread across the developing countries that is more damaging from the viewpoint of the overall human welfare (Ike-Obiora, 2008). According to World Bank estimates (2009), the country has a total population in excess of 154 million, of which almost 70 percent live below the international poverty line. This is in consonance with the affirmation of Adedeji and Eziyi (2010) that the connection between economic insecurity and poverty is in vicious circle. However, it turns out that population explosion and abject poverty which appears to be undisputed features of developing economy predominates in Nigeria (Ike-Obiora, 2008). Paradoxically, Nigerians now have to contend with harsh socio-economic conditions leading to the deterioration in their living standards.

Unemployment is a state of an individual or group of people being out of job and is also one socio-security challenge that successive governments, over the years, have

identified and acknowledged. Changes in unemployment depend mostly on inflows made up of non-employed people starting to look for jobs, of employed people who have lost their jobs and in search for new ones and of people who stopped looking for employment because the sectors driving the economic growth are not high job creating sectors. Successive governments in Nigeria have identified the threat posed by high unemployment and had taken several steps to combat it by training youths in relevant skills in order to generate employment. The Federal Government has initiated the Youth Enterprise with Innovation in Nigeria (You WIN) Programme, in collaboration with the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Communications Technology, the Ministry of Youth Development and the Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, in line with the FG drive to create more jobs for the Nigerian youths. Among the goals of the programme is the launching of an annual Business Plan Competition for aspiring young entrepreneurs, in partnership with the Nigeria private sector, who are to provide funding, support and mentoring for the aspiring young entrepreneurs.

Unfortunately, government's efforts appear not to be making the desired positive impact as unemployment rates have been steadily increasing and Nigerian youths are increasingly finding it difficult to gain employment (Adedeji and Eziyi, 2010).

Ikhide and Alawode (2010) observed that homegrown strategies were employed by the civilian administration to revive the economy. Examples of such strategies are the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), Youth Empowerment Scheme, Rural Infrastructure Development Scheme, Social and Welfare Service Scheme and Natural Resource Development and Conservation Scheme.

Hence, this study intends to elucidate on issues pertaining to higher education and its implications for economic development in Nigeria and the relevance of higher education in the attainment of an economically viable nation.

## **METHODS**

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This study investigated the impact of higher education on economic growth. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The population comprised 16 public universities (federal and state) in south west Nigeria. The stratified and random sampling techniques were used to select eight universities (five federal and three states) out of the total population of 16 public universities. A total sample of 1003 comprising 506 academic and 497 non-academic senior staff were randomly selected from a total of 1005 and 9946 respectively, representing 5% of the population from the eight universities. The Universities and Economic Development Questionnaire (UEDQ) rated on 4-point

response modes was the instrument used to elicit responses. The face validity of the instrument was ascertained by four experts made up of two senior academic staff and two senior non-academic staff. The internal consistency of the instrument was established using Cronbach Alpha. It yielded a coefficient of 0.76. Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) and t-test statistical tool were used to analyze the data.

#### Reliability of the Instrument

The reliability of the instrument used for the study was ensured through a careful selection of the sample units unto which research instruments were administered. To ensure that the instruments were reliable, sample units, that is, respondents were categorized using different characteristics that were essential features of the variables being used for this study. This categorization served as the impetus needed for capturing the unique responses that were relevant to the study. The uniqueness of such responses is what guaranteed the reliability of the research instrument. To further determine the reliability of the instrument, the test-retest method was adopted whereby the instrument (that is, the questionnaire) was administered to a small group of respondents. Later the same questionnaire was administered to the same group of people again and the responses received were comparably the same.

## RESULTS

### Research Question 1

To what extent has higher education impact economic development in Nigeria?

**Table 5** The Extent to which Higher Education Impact Economic Development in Nigeria

<u>S/N</u>	<u>Items</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>Remark</u>
1	Involvement of my institution in Public Private Partnership has helped in enhancing economic development.	3.37	0.88	High Extent
2	Creation and sharing of knowledge for overall socio economic development.	2.41	0.80	Low Extent
3	Enhancement of innovation through research activities	3.41	0.92	High Extent
4	Improving teaching and learning through mainstreaming into the traditional curricula	1.77	0.66	Low Extent

	new interdisciplinary courses			
5	Contribute to the development of human capital and skills through the provision of graduates for the labour market.	3.24	0.91	High Extent
6	Provision of technology assistance to potential entrepreneur through technology and vocational education.	2.08	0.72	Low Extent
7	Mobilizing the resources of the higher education towards sustainable development.	1.74	0.66	Low Extent
8	Transform the society by instilling changes associated with holistic development of the individual	3.39	0.92	High Extent
9	Development of skill and values and creation of awareness on economic sustainability.	1.86	0.68	Low Extent
10	Enriching the quality of life of individuals by providing them with expertise, assistance and economic power.	1.60	0.63	Low Extent

In Table 1, three items 1, 3, 5 and 8 had mean rating above the criterion mean of 2.50 while all other items (2, 4, 6, 7, 9 and 10) had mean ratings below 2.50. Responses to Item 1, 3, 5, and 8 indicated that the higher education had to a high extent contributed through partnership, research and human capital development to transform the society. Other items with low extent indicate that there are some other areas where the higher education is lacking in promoting sustainable development.

### Hypothesis

1. There is no significant impact between higher education and economic development in Nigeria.

### Table 2

Impact between higher education and economic development in Nigeria.

	<u>N</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>Df</u>	<u>t-cal</u>	<u>t-crit</u>	<u>Decision</u>
<b>Academic Staff</b>	506	8.24	3.01				
				1001	2.53	1.96	Reject

<b>Non-teaching Staff</b>	497	7.32	3.05				
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Table 2 shows that the calculated t-value of 2.53 is greater than the table value of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance and 1001 degree of freedom. This means higher education has significant impact on economic development in Nigeria. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected.

### Discussion

The study revealed that to a high extent, higher education has significant impact on economic development. It further showed that government efforts in terms of reforms and strategies have not helped in sustaining the momentum needed for transforming the economy. These findings are in tandem with the finding of Adeniran (2013) that the real threats to economic stability are poverty, inequality and exploitation. Ike-Obiora (2008) affirmed that the chronic insecurity rooted in poverty is more damaging to the economy from the viewpoint of the overall human welfare. The probable reason for this result is not far fetch, this could be as result of the monolithic nature of the country’s source of income and overdependence on a single primary product, crude oil, has made its economy highly volatile and susceptible to vulnerabilities in the global market environment. These findings have implications for the enhancing access to social and economic infrastructure that can help to transform the economy.

Also revealed is the extent to which the higher education has contributed through partnership, research and human capital development to transform the society. However, they are lacking in the areas of mainstreaming into the traditional curricula new interdisciplinary courses, and enriching the quality of life of individuals by providing them with skills, values, expertise, assistance and economic power. This finding corroborates earlier study of Otoh, 2012, that higher education is a correlate of socio-economic development. Furthermore, in congruence with this finding is the assertion of Etesike (2011) that higher education has failed in their role of enriching the individual learners with informed curriculum necessary to fit into the labour market. This finding has implication for higher education reform and improvement.

The findings revealed a significant influence between the perceptions of academic and non-teaching staff on the roles of higher education in ensuring economic development.

The reason adduced for this finding is the difference in scope of purview. That is, the academic staff view the role of the higher education from academic angle in term of curriculum, teaching and learning while the non-academic staff focused on the administrative aspect and community relations which are not directly related to the production of human capital required to balance and transform the economy. This finding has implication for review of the impact of higher education in economic development. This is because investment in education is premise on high socio-economic returns and social reconstruction which will help to create a sustainable economic growth.

### **CONCLUSION**

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Reforming higher education and improving teaching and learning through mainstreaming into the traditional curricula disciplines holds positive implications for promoting enterprise business development and growth. Higher education institutions have the essential role of imparting knowledge, skills and changing attitudes and values of people for the purpose of developing the society and bringing about sustainable development in the nation. As such, rethinking higher education so as to promote knowledge driven institutions that will continue to produce the critical human capital required for sustainability is necessary. It is imperative that stakeholders in higher education, most especially universities integrate various ways to become involved in knowledge sharing, exchanges and partnership for sustainable development. In this sense the universities will be able to play a more profound role than they have in recent years, that is, not just a provider of knowledge but an active partner in economic collaboration and be able to address in more coherent ways the challenges of economic development.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

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1. Higher Education should be seen as the fundamental mechanism for innovation and attainment of sustainable economic development as well as societal progress.
2. Based on the findings, it was recommended that higher education should aim at workforce development and education, entrepreneurship, technical and vocational education, ICT and quality-of-life factors that will enshrine a sustainable development process.
3. Governments and the private sector need to give top priority to Higher Education in terms of funding and patronage.
4. More than ever, the world needs effective global leaders and stronger higher educational systems that prepare the current and future generations of

entrepreneurs, workers, teachers, managers and individuals with the skills needed to succeed and promote economic development.

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