



Managing Diversification of University Education for Poverty Alleviation Among University Output in Cross River State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Diversification is seen as essential means to new developments while university education could respond to prospective changes and develop greater capacity for innovation. This study was undertaken to find out the nature of diversification in university education, determine the means of diversification in empowering university output for income and employment generation, among the university output. The research was designed to provide a baseline information on managing university education in alleviating poverty and meeting immediate requirements of the production sectors. It adopted a descriptive survey design while the research area was Cross River State, Nigeria. A stratified random sampling technique was used to select 300 university academic staff out of the academic staff population of 1120. Data was collected using a researcher designed questionnaire. Percentages and tables were applied to statistically analyze data collected. Results obtained revealed that diversification of university education could not guarantee poverty alleviation among university output in Cross River State of Nigeria. It was concluded that proper management of diversification of university education was critical for effective human capital utilization towards poverty alleviation and national development. It was recommended among others that, moral and material obligations were required by government and university management for poverty alleviation among university output in Cross River State, Nigeria.

Keywords: Poverty, university, diversification, output, management.

INTRODUCTION

A paradox of diversification of university education and increasing poverty among the university output tends to indicate human capital under-utilization. This made the issue of poverty alleviation to be attracting increased attention from academic researchers and policy practitioners in Nigeria. Educational output under-utilization in workplace is define as the situation where graduates are with or without abilities but do not use them (Ekanem, 2014). The persistent defects in productive capacity tend to be inversely related to this education level as university education is a potent instrument for the transformation and empowerment of individuals through shared values to a common goal. Diversification of university education relates to opportunities to pursue academic programmes and enthronement of manpower for a nation's development agenda. Such development agenda include income generation and employment generation towards poverty alleviation. However, education at this level is not likely to function up to its expectation in producing graduates employability towards wealth creation and employment (UNDP, 2002). On the basis of this administrative challenge, the researcher becomes curious in investigating diversification of university education for poverty alleviation among university output in Cross River State, Nigeria.

Poverty is a condition of being poor. A state is poor because a fair proportion of her population (educated and uneducated) lack basic needs of life such as high caloric intake, quality education, accessible housing and social facilities. Though there is no agreement as to the definition of poverty (Muo, 2007 and

Ekanem, 2013); incidence of poverty in Nigeria is perceived as effects of mal-distribution of disposable resources to support minimum standard of life. Durujaiye (2010) and Ekanem & Emanghe (2014) see poverty in Nigeria as a general form of unacceptable economic deprivation which is as a result of income distribution inequality in the society. It also include other dimensions such as poor infrastructures amenities, like educational institutions, health facilities and roads networks (Babalola, 2011). Properly planned and organized diversity of university education results in quality education graduates with diverse opportunities. They are expected to be empowered with salable skills and career image to actively reduce the highly contagious challenge of poverty.

Poverty is a major microeconomic problem facing Cross River State and indeed Nigeria as a whole. In the National Bureau of Statistics as espoused by Ekpo (2014), Nigeria records a robust macroeconomic management with positive growth projective of almost 5 percent but with poverty incidence in 2010 of 69 percent, unemployment of above 25 percent and Economic Performance Index (EPI) of 71.5 declining to 67.6 percent in 2013. This recent positive growth spells in Nigeria have not transferred into income distribution and solid employment creation as critical means of poverty reduction. Also, poverty is a measure of Human Development Index (HDI) and it considers educational attainment through diversity within institution. Other considerations may be longevity (life expectancy) and living standards (GDP/capital) which may assist macro-economic stability and drive development in Cross River State of Nigeria.

Diversification of university education is the process by which university system is made to be varied in orientation and operations. It is the process of making university system to deviate from the conventional uniform and rigid system for flexibility towards accommodating varying demands from multiplicity of providers in the society (Teichler, 2008). According to Fair-weather (2010), flexibility in higher education system aimed at achieving structure and culture, ownership and control, study programme and clientele and opportunities to pursue education. These systematic achievements represent the nature of diversification since university system contributes significantly within the context of sound macroeconomic and political environment to growth of the society.

Diversification and system expansion in education seem to be bi-directional and mutually supportive (Mohamedbhai, 2013). The mode of delivery and provision of university education services becomes diversified in Cross River State through multiple university campuses, post-secondary affiliations and distance learning centres. It accommodates the increasing social demands for university education. The basis of this are increased flexibility of soft models and broads study ranges (drift theories) couple with the influence of structural patterns and policies (cyclical theories) towards labour requirements (Cerych & Sabatier, 2014). These attributes ultimately affect poverty alleviation among the products of university education. However, impressive the diversity of university education may be, not much attention has been paid to this issue inspite of the need for poverty alleviation and inclusive development in Nigeria.

Managing diversification of university education involves the process of restraining or directing an influence over diverse university orientation and operations for improvement. Management in the view of Obanya (2011) is a process of allocating human and material resources to a given task to help achieve a given objective. In this study management refers to activities carried out in a more varied university system to ensure poverty alleviation among the university graduates or products of the university education.

The performance gap to be filled by educational administrators is to meet target objectives of academic drift, globalization, growing specialization and democratization towards poverty reduction among university graduates in Cross River state of Nigeria. The university graduates should be influenced by diversity through operational knowledge, professionalism, academic researches and equality of opportunities. The university system is to make institutional investment, increase opportunities in cognitive domain, and improve students' interactions and consciously achieve employability skills for income generation and distribution (Ekanem & Emanghe, 2014). More so, the diversification ensures a shift in employment prospect from knowing as contemplation to operations through qualification levels of the graduates. The employment generation may be guaranteed by employability skills, effective university labour market linkage, public private participation, university quality assurance, entrepreneurship

education and information technology application. These account for improvement in the productive capacity of university graduates in the state (Psachoropoulos, 1973).

The significance of the study will be seen in its acting as an inspiration for public universities to be committed to meeting the immediate requirements of the production sectors among other potential benefits of the research. The study will be useful in knowledge-based production considering the prevailing insensitivity attitude of public university education providers. Government, educational administrators, students and parents will equally find the study useful as university system prepares itself to cope with the challenge of diversified clientele vis-à-vis competencies and growing specialization in the academic fields.

The scope of the study is delimited to university teachers' assessment of diversification of public university system for poverty alleviation among university output in Cross River state of Nigeria. This is because public university system has intimate close tie to national socio-economic and political developments. Diversification of university education being one of the means to achieve poverty alleviation and socio-economic development in the state, this investigation wishes to contribute to filling of the gap and hence to bring added knowledge to the literature.

Statement of the Problem

University education basically aimed at higher manpower development of the nation and it is a strong source of human capital development. The human capital seems to be underutilized with the reason of either lack of capacity (knowledge and skills) or deliberate unwillingness of the university output to perform in workplace. The consequences is poverty among the university output. Observed issues are university graduate unemployment and inability of the graduates to create income to meet up the basic needs of life. Diversification of university education in terms of diversity to accommodate societal needs, flexibility of the university system, structure and culture or institutional mission, ownership and control of resources provision and clientele satisfaction could assist in solving this problem of human capital underutilization by university graduates.

Nigerian government in recent times brought out elaborate poverty alleviation programmes such as National Economic Reconstruction Funds (NERFUND) and National Action Plan on Employment Creation (2009 – 2020) aimed at wealth creation and self-employment of educational output. Despite these programmes, Nigeria (including Cross River State) still remain poverty stricken because of the problem of human capital under-utilization especially among the university output. This study therefore aimed at solving the problem of human capital under-utilization by assessing the University system expansion and the empowerment of the university output in Cross River state for income and employment generations. This can alleviate poverty among the university output in the state. The question remains: can effective management of diversification of university education guarantee poverty alleviation among the university output in Cross River State of Nigeria? This study is design to find an answer to this poser.

Research Questions

Three research questions were formulated to guide the study:

1. What are the characteristic nature of diversification of University Education for poverty alleviation of university output in Cross River State, Nigeria?
2. In what ways do diversification of University Education empower university output for income generation?
3. In what ways do diversification of university education empower university output for employment generation?

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive survey design. The research design was most appropriate because it collects data from members of a population in a bid to determine the currents status of the population with regard to one or more variables. The study area was Cross River State, one of the states in the south-south geo-political zone of Nigeria. It covered two universities located therein, one owned by the federal government and the other by the state government in Calabar, the state capital. A sample size of 300 academic staff of faculty of education was drawn from the population of 1120 academic staff in the same

faculty using a stratified sampling technique. The stratification was based on the federal and state universities. Further breakdown of the sample showed that 150 members of staff were drawn from each of the two institutions and used to assess the diversification of university education for poverty alleviation of the university output.

The instrument used for the study was 18 item questionnaire titled “Diversification and Poverty Alleviation of Output Scale (DPAOS)” developed by the researcher. The instrument was designed to find out relevant information in diversification for solving the problem of human capital under-utilization through poverty alleviation among cohorts of university output. Section A of the instrument require demographic information from the respondents. Section B measured poverty alleviation of the university output. The four-point rating scale of Strongly Agree (4 points), Agree (3 points), Strongly Disagree (2 points) and Disagree (1 point) was adopted to score the instrument. The questionnaire was face-validated by two experts in Educational Administration and Educational Measurement Evaluation Department of University of Calabar. The reliability test was ascertained with test re-test method using Spearman Rank Correlation to give 0.82 with an interval of two weeks. This value indicated that the scale was reliable for use in achieving the research objectives.

The administration of the instrument was done by the researcher and one trained research assistant. The questionnaire copies were returned without any mortality rate. Data collected were analyzed using statistical technique of percentage analysis to answer the research questions.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The information gathered from the university teachers were subjected to descriptive statistics using table and percentage. Data collected from the questionnaire were analyzed according to the research questions and shown in Table 1, 2 and 3.

Research Question 1

What are the characteristic nature of diversification of university education for poverty alleviation of university output in Cross River State, Nigeria?

Table 1: University teachers’ percentage response to characteristic of diversification of University education for poverty alleviation among university output

S/N	Variation source	Yes Agreement	No Disagreement	Total Percentage
1.	Diversity to accommodate the needs of the society.	67	33	100
2.	Diversity to flex university system for wider educational opportunities.	28	72	100
3.	Diversity to structure and culture for institutional mission.	66	34	100
4.	Diversity to own and control for adequate resources provision.	31	69	100
5.	Diversity to study programmes and clientele for knowledge/skills.	23	77	100

N = 300 in all cases

The results of the data analysis presented in Table 1 have shown a generally that the sampled university teachers exhibited negative opinion towards the nature of diversification of university education for poverty alleviation among university among university output. For example, 28 percent agreed that the on-going diversification of university education could flex the system for written educational

opportunities. Others include 31 percent for resources provision and 23 percent for knowledge and skills of students. All other statements in Table 1 attracted percentage of agreement rating from 66 percent to 67 percent from the respondents indicated positive opinion to the on-going characteristics of diversification of university education for poverty alleviation of university output in Cross River state, Nigeria. The implication of the finding was that the university management did not effectively plan and coordinate the diversification of university education and therefore, not achieving the desired results.

Research Question 2

In what ways do diversifications of university education empower university output for income generation?

Items 6 to 9 in the questionnaire were used to answer the research questions.

Table 2: Percentage response to diversification of university education as mechanism for university output income generation empowerment

S/N	Variation source	Yes Agreement	No Disagreement	Total Percentage
6.	Diversification for greater institution investment in human materials	33	67	100
7	Diversification for education opportunities in cognitive domain towards productive work capacity	21	79	100
8.	Diversification for hard and soft skills in graduate employability	27	73	100
9	Diversification for institutional mission in improved students levels of interaction and participation	68	32	100

N = 300 in all cases.

The finding of analysis in Table 2 showed that the percentage representing university teacher general opinion on the diversification as instrument for university output employment of income generation were below average in almost all the variables under consideration. Diversification of university education has failed to be a useful tool for greater institutional investment in human and material resources (33%), for educational opportunities in cognitive domain towards production capacity (21%) and for hard and soft skills in graduate employability (27%). The only positive result indicated 68 percent for institutional mission in improved students' levels of interaction and participation. The implication of this finding was that diversification of university education in Cross River State, Nigeria provided opportunities for narrowly trained graduates, who lack the breadth of proper understanding to confront the complex problem of poverty through income generation.

Research Question 3

In what ways do diversifications of university education empower university output for employment generation?

Table 3: Percentage response to diversification of university education as mechanism for university output employment generation empowerment.

S/N	Variation source	Yes Agreement	No Disagreement	Total Percentage
10.	Diversification for graduates employability skills diversification	22	78	100
11.	Diversification for public private participation in university education financing	54	46	100
12.	Diversification for effective linkage between universities labour market demands	36	64	100
13.	Diversification for interplay of university quality assurance and effective social support	42	58	100
14.	Diversification for entrepreneurship education	41	59	100
15	Diversification for effective application of information technology resources	29	71	100

N = 300 in all cases

Table 3 revealed the possible ways diversification of university education can be used to empower university students on graduation. The finding was that diversification has failed to be a useful tool in effective engagement of the university output. This was reflected in the university teachers negative opinion of diversification for university graduate employability skills (22%), effective linkage between universities and labour market demands (36%), interplay of education attainment and social support (42%), entrepreneurship education (41%) and effective application of information technology resources (29%). The only positive opinion of 54 percent was indicated in public-private participation in university education. By implication, the findings revealed that the university graduates lack relevant knowledge and employability skills in the respective society programmes for the achievement of graduates' employability and stimulate growth for the improvement of their standard of living. This was because individuals without quality education suffer from poverty of ideas, non-employment generation and subsequent labour productivity reduction. Education being the main plank for economic development was unable to ensure that human knowledge in the university academic fields stimulated creativity and sustained societal development.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The results of the study in Table 1 revealed that diversification of university education for poverty alleviation among university output were low. The finding means that the university management did not effectively plan and coordinate the diversification of university education and therefore was unable to achieve the desired results. As such, the university teachers have low level of perception in the flexibility of the university system, ownership and control of resources and satisfaction of the clientele in the various study programmes. However, there were high perception in the diversification to accommodate societal needs, structure and culture towards institutional mission.

Empirically, the measure of diversity of university education in the finding focused on the business of university education such as teaching, research and community development were not effectively achieved. Other aspects of low business measures included a university learning mode in terms of its

flexibility, institutional ownership and control of resources provision, clients' satisfaction in the degree awarded. The management of the diversification was not effective in meeting the quest for quality, market competitiveness and challenges of the education output to reduce poverty in recent times. This finding was in agreement with AAU (2004) which stressed that universities should be managed to meet the changing world towards meeting the contemporary needs of their products. The ability of universities to face these challenges depended on the operational standards and development of such universities towards, globalization. The university managers in this study lack the forward looking behaviour to develop a vision, defined desirable nature of diversification and achieve the provision and knowledge in development among the upwardly mobile population of the university graduates (Teicher, 2008).

The research question two showed that diversification of university education lacked proper knowledge and operational skills necessary for the educational output to generate income. The institutional investment in human and material resources revealed that contributions of university education in Cross River State Nigeria were plagued with low Human Development index (HDI) and high ratio of dependency based on high population. This resulted in the low level technical manpower that cannot put the state economy on the path of sustained growth and development (Babalola, 2010 and UNESCO, 2002). There was no good educational research environment. Hence, low level of educational opportunities in cognitive domain to operational knowledge as market goods and a saleable commodity that could help to widen market operations in the state. The finding was in consonance with Babalola (2011) that education and research were the bedrock of national transformation. Also in agreement with this finding, Obanya (2011) pointed out that higher education would aid the benchmarking areas of investment as a good strategy for national economic transformation. Thus, it enhanced the educational environment and drive universities as major economic institutions in the mainstream of production for effective empowerment of the university graduates.

The institutional mission embraced university curriculum vis-a-vis the national values and nationalism in current political structures. However, the implementation of the policy on education revealed a lost of erstwhile cherished values and norms as critical factors fuelling income generating for poverty reduction. The finding conformed with Ekanem & Emanghe (2014) that Nigerian universities failed to progressively and vigorously keep abreast with the development in the world to influence aspiration, interest and financial ability of income generation by the products of the university. More so, lack of combined hard and soft skills in graduate employability couple with weak flexibility of the university system worsen the situation. Development of the university system (which was not a linear process) involved ups and downs as well as struggles among contending social forces of those who could change the system to better the intellectual pursuit of the university output.

The analysis of research question three showed that diversification of university education as a tool for university output employment generating was low. This means that the university output had poor idea in the study programmes, non-employment generation and low-labour productivity. The educational output failed to stimulate high level creativity and effectively sustained development. The fallout of this was in the greater proportion of unemployment of youth (Durujaiye, 2010). The youth who were in active class failed to contribute to the national productivity in the labour market. University education attainment by these youth was unable to provide job since the university system could not diversify as instrument of new and foreseeable development. Cross River State of Nigeria economy faced the challenge of economic loss in terms of the productivity of the unemployed (Ekpo, 2011).

This study was in agreement with the finding in Ekpo (2014) that unemployment in Nigeria affected most the age bracket 15 – 24 (16%) followed by 25 – 47 (48%) across the age group in 2010 – 2011. These age brackets represented the university output age groups. The implication was that most of them were unable to earn money to meet their basic financial commitment. This became worrisome with negative effects of malnutrition, unacceptably deprivation, stress, depression and loss of self-esteem (Jaiyeola & Atanda, 2007). The university graduates depended on their aged ones which in most cases were with limited economic resources. No wonder the federal government of Nigeria's National Action Plan on Employment Creation 2009 – 2020 aimed at tackling unemployment for poverty alleviation which was the right steps in the right direction. Education in Cross River State needed to be effectively managed to

reduce the high and persisted unemployment of university output which was considered a state crisis with economic insecurity.

CONCLUSION

The study has been able to establish that diversification of university education cannot empower the university output for income and employment generations in Cross River State of Nigeria. However, the diversifications positively favors the culture for institutional mission and also, accommodate the societal needs of Cross River State, Nigeria. The universities were the prime human capital development institutions for prospective changes and capacity building toward innovations. The diversification of university education in the state was an essential tool for driving development. The university output was to benefit from the desirable human capital development derivable from the system expansion of the universities to empower themselves for income and employment generations towards poverty alleviation. Therefore, poverty alleviation among university output in Cross River State, Nigeria was guaranteed by effective management of diversification of university education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Diversification of university education should be encouraged in Cross River State, Nigeria because it has certain atmospheric aura which transforms and empowers individuals both physically and intellectually. The university management are to consciously plan and coordinate its operations for positive outcome.
2. Government's specific fiscal policy should consider diversity of university education towards targeting challenges of unacceptable deprivation of university graduates. This is in terms of pro-poor budget which will have clearly stated programmes designed for unemployed graduates.
3. Government should undertake to insulate the university output from negative consequences of macroeconomic shocks. This includes the design of the social safety nets to ensure that the poor households (including unemployed graduates) are able to maintain minimum consumption levels and have access to basic social services especially during the periods of austerity.
4. Diversification of university education management and its inherent system flexibility must be towards poverty reduction among the university output. This include conscious effort by government and university management in the provision of scholarship for education, subsidies for health, fee waivers, food subsidies, public work programmes and transfer to compensate for income loss.
5. Macroeconomic objectives should include income generation and increase employment as obvious strategies for poverty alleviation in a challenge to development vis-à-vis diversification or university. This is because, poverty alleviation among the university education output is a function of economic growth, distribution and change in the distribution. It requires a moral as well as material obligation.

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