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A QUALITATIVE INQUIRY TOWARDS ENHANCING UNIVERSALITIES' EFFECTIVENESS IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The role of the university towards the development of individuals as well as the society has remained the focus of every university stakeholders and, as such, becomes imperative in making sure that the university achieves its roles for which it was created to meet. This study was carried out to find out how university education in Nigeria can be enhanced towards achieving its stated goals. This study adopted a generic qualitative design to collect data through semi-structured interviews from eight participants, including a deputy vice-chancellor, deans, head of departments, and lecturers that were purposively selected. Data collected were analysed using thematic analysis with Nvivo (version 10). The findings of this study revealed that university effectiveness could be enhanced through increased funding, policy and institutional reforms. The results from this study imply that government alone cannot strengthen the effectiveness of the university system in Nigeria, and as such, all stakeholders have some roles to play.

INTRODUCTION

In this era of the knowledge economy, the university system worldwide has been recognised in its role towards societal development, and for the university system to play its part, it has to be effective and quality-focused. Even though the denotations and importance ascribed to quality are numerous, it has been a problematic and vague term to describe (Magutu et al., 2010; Pieffer & Coote, 1991). There is no general agreement about its meaning, but all definitions are tailored towards the final product or the processes in which such products or the services being rendered are produced.

The university system in Nigeria, as contained in Section B, sub-section 59 of the National Policy on Education are entrusted with the contribution to the development of the nation through appropriate work force training; improving and instilling correct standards towards individual and community continued existence (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013). According to Olasehinde-Williams (2012), as laudable as these objectives are, very little progress has been made in actualizing them because the potential of university education to produce high-quality graduates in Nigeria has been compromised. In a study conducted by Agabi, Obasi, and Ohia (2012), there is substantial evidence that prospective employers of skilled labor considered university graduate practical skills, professional ethics, management ability and entrepreneurial skills as mostly inadequate. Thus, these graduates are only competent in theoretical knowledge.

Despite the considerable turn-out of graduates annually, Nigeria is still not able to meet the essential needs and aspirations of the generality of the population. Employers of labour worry that numerous graduates today are generally unemployable, except they are first put through a crash remedial programme (Okojie, 2013). The pressures encountered by universities in their drive to be more competitive, efficient and better adapted to the needs of their stakeholders, according to Morrison (2010), have all led to a growing and unprecedented level of interest in the performance evaluation of the university system.

Moreover, the study, according to Dabalen, Oni, and Adekola (2001), reveals that Nigerian university graduates are not adequately trained, and this makes them unproductive in their job. Besides, graduate skills are gradually deteriorating since the last ten years and, low competency, most especially in written and oral communication, are the prevailing situations. Inadequate practical and technological skills of our graduates constitute a vast knowledge gap. This was reported by the National University Commission (NUC) (2004) in their study on evaluating the expectations of university graduates by employers of labour. The results of that study showed that many unemployed graduates are roaming the streets and more embarrassingly, those who were fortunate to get employment had to go through remedial training to bridge the vast knowledge and skills gaps left over from university education. Thus, this study was conducted to proffer possible ways of enhancing university effectiveness toward societal development.

METHODOLOGY

This research adopted a generic qualitative inquiry method as the focus of the study is towards enhancing the effectiveness of public universities in Nigeria, and the investigation is not guided by an established or specific set of philosophical assumptions. According to Percy, Kostere, and Kostere (2015), the generic qualitative inquiry method is appropriate when a researcher is

investigating senior-level managers regarding their experiences about a phenomenon. As this research is conducted to find solutions towards enhancing the effectiveness of public universities in Nigeria, asking one or two questions may expand the previous knowledge. As such, a generic qualitative inquiry approach is appropriate (Percy et al., 2015).

This study adopted a semi-structured interview, as suggested by Percy et al. (2015) that semi or fully structured interviews are always adopted for data collection in a generic qualitative inquiry study. An individual face to face interview (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011) which lasted for about 20-30 minutes through interview protocol was conducted among eight participants including a deputy vice-chancellor, two deans/provost, three head of departments, a registrar and a lecturer from five public universities in Nigeria towards enhancing universities' effectiveness. This is congruent with Krueger (2007) who recommends between six to nine respondents in generic qualitative research. A purposive sampling technique was adopted to gain insightful feedback from the participants for the semi-structured interview conducted for this research. These participants were selected because of their vast knowledge and experience in the university system coupled with the position they occupied in the university.

Trustworthy is used to determine the validity and reliability of qualitative research (Suter, 2012), which are examined viz-a-viz credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. These signify means by which the investigator checks for the accuracy of the findings using specific techniques (Creswell, 2009). The researcher asks most of the participants in the study to check the accuracy of the transcribed document for verification to establish the credibility of the results as the researcher may have done everything possible to fulfill his role as the main instrument, but bias influence could still occur in the data (Creswell, 2012). Therefore, three participants were given the draft copy of the transcribed data showing the themes generated as a means of feedback and confirm if what the researcher has done is in line with their views (Kayode, 2016).

Furthermore, the researcher involved the researcher's supervisor, who is an expert in a qualitative study with a singular focus on the process of data analysis to attain a clear view of the analysis process as well as the formation of themes for the study. Also, colleagues using a qualitative approach were also consulted to seek their opinion in reviewing the tentative themes established by the researcher to ensure its acceptability. This strategy involves questions and answers between the researcher and his colleagues relating to the study where the themes were modified severally to be aligned with the focus of the research.

The researcher also ensures that he jotted down daily activities right from data collection until findings, and this assists the researcher in keeping abreast of his predictions, thinking and formation of intuitive ideas from onset (Creswell, 2012). As an ethical practice, copies of the consent letter were given to all participants to seek their consent to participate in the study before the initial

interview and those who decline were replaced by other participants who show their willingness. The researcher, to establish a good rapport with the participants, went back to see them after they agreed to partake in the interview.

To data collected were analysed using thematic analysis. Percy et al. (2015) suggested that generic qualitative inquiry is best explained using a thematic analysis and analysing qualitative data using thematic analysis involves six phases which are acquaintance with the data; generating preliminary codes; probing for themes among codes; swotting themes; naming and defining themes and; producing the final report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The thematic analysis was done using computer software packages for qualitative data analysis called Nvivo 10 which was generated from the transcripts of the audiotapes recorded during the interviews, and the research question in this study guided it.

As suggested by Sekaran (2007), ethical procedures were applied in the research settings. The researcher ensures that the participants are engaged voluntarily, and the researcher briefly described the nature of the research and the expected duration of the interview. Furthermore, the researcher ensures the anonymity of the participants, and this was explained to them that information obtained from them would be treated as confidential which will solely be used for academic purposes.

FINDINGS

Demographic Profile of the Participants

This qualitative study gathered information from eight participants with a semi-structured interview. The selected participants are academicians and administrators in either state or federal universities. The participants cut across the five geopolitical zones of the country as the sixth zone was not captured because of the security situations in that zone. Pseudonyms were used to refer to the participants.

Table 1 *Demographic profile of the participants*

S/No.	Pseudonyms names	Rank	Experience
1.	Prof. Ami	Professor and deputy vice-chancellor	28 years
2.	Prof. Bam	Professor and Dean of a faculty	30 years
3.	Prof. Colli	Professor and Former HOD	20 years
4.	Prof. Dorc	Professor and HOD	17 years
5.	Prof. Elere	Professor and HOD	23 years
6.	Dr Fag	Senior Lecturer and Ag. HOD	10 years
7.	Mr Gbodo	Lecturer I	10 years
8.	Prof. Has	Professor and Director of a Unit	15 years

To answer the research question in this study, the researcher transcribed the recorded views of the participants on issues hindering the effectiveness of public universities in Nigeria. However, the emphasis has now been moved in this section to identify a feasible way out to issues inhibiting university effectiveness. The cross section of the respondents gave diverse views on how effectiveness can be enhanced in public universities in Nigeria.

The various ways of enhancing institutional effectiveness, as suggested by the respondents, were equally arranged in themes. Although this section does not apply theoretical analysis in its thematic analysis, a slightly inductive study was adopted as no predetermined idea or ways of improving the university's effectiveness. The findings from the interview revealed many ways in which institutional effectiveness can be enhanced which were subsequently collapsed into three themes, namely: institutional reform, increased funding and policy reform. Figure 1 is the graphical representation of how institutional effectiveness can be enhanced as opined by the participant.

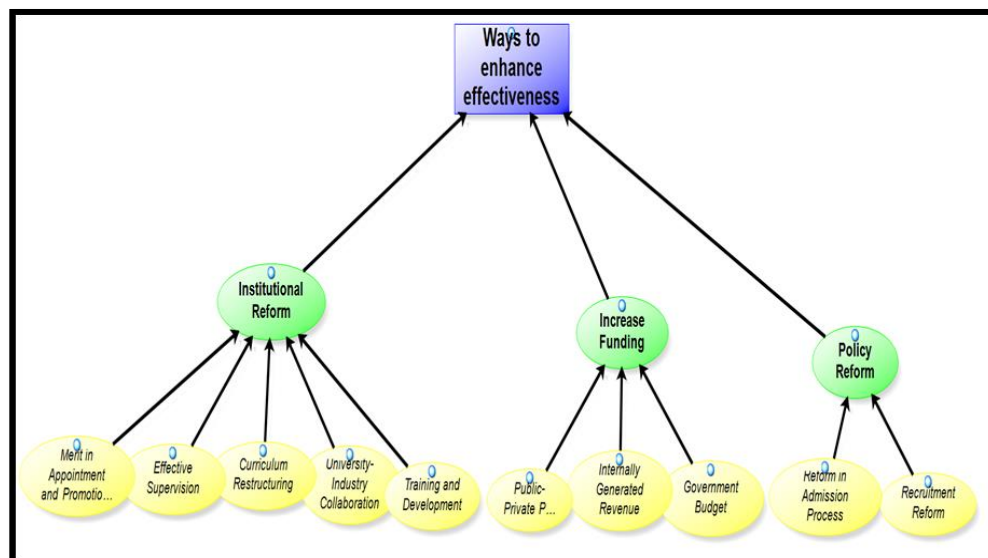


Figure 1. Ways of enhancing universities effectiveness

Institutional Reform

Institutional reform is an action or process of improving unsatisfactory practices within the university system. The result of the analysis of the interview conducted for this study identifies institutional change as one way to address the identified problems confronting the university system. The participants highlight curriculum restructuring, staff training, and development, adequate supervision, university-industry collaboration and merits in the admission and promotion process as a way forward in enhancing institutional effectiveness (see Figure 2).

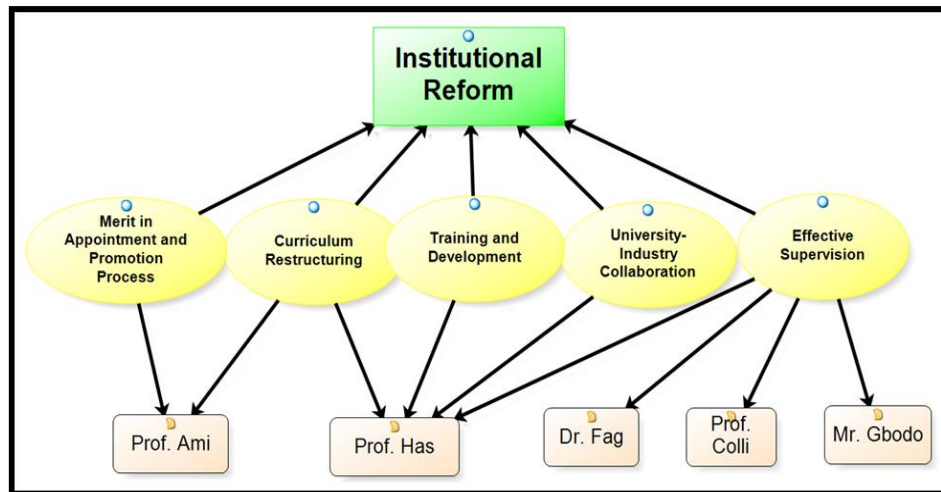


Figure 2. Institutional reform as a strategy for improving universities effectiveness

Merit in Appointment and Promotion

Merit in appointment and promotion has been identified as a way of enhancing the effectiveness of the university system. This is because the quality of lecturers and the student absorbed into the university system matters in the class of graduates that will be produced. According to Prof. Ami, “we need to look into the quality of teachers being employed at all levels, particularly at the foundation level.” Prof. Ami further said, “if the promotion of staff is not based on merit, this can reduce the productivity of committed staff,” and as such, to encourage commitment, productivity and staff effectiveness which will result in institutional effectiveness; the promotion of staffs should be based on merit.

Curriculum Restructuring

The curriculum, according to Tyler (1949, 2010), is defined as all learning experiences which a learner is exposed to under the supervision of the lecturers. Therefore, the curriculum is a means by which the lecturers realize his ideals or objectives in his classroom. According to the participants, if the university system wants to catch up with the global demand for higher education, there is a need for curriculum restructuring.

According to Prof. Ami:

there is no way National Universities Commission can exonerate itself; the kind of curriculum we are using now needs to be radically amended in a way that it can fit modern challenges especially on science and technology (Prof. Ami).

This was buttressed by Prof. Has who said:

A total restructuring of the curriculum to match the need of the industries or the employers as well as developing them to be self-employ after graduation. This will help to reduce the problem of unemployment in the country, which resulted in various social vices in the country (Prof. Has).

Training and Development

Lecturers' training and development have been identified as paramount to the success or effectiveness of any university. As stated in the National Policy on Education (2004) that no nation can rise above the quality of its teachers. According to Prof. Has:

Mentoring is nothing to write home about in the university system as even the supposed mentors are not making themselves available and also the mentees are not yet ready to be mentored. That is another problem that affects the classroom instructional practices, which affect the universities' effectiveness; the school management needs to enhance the mentoring process in the university system (Prof. Has).

Furthermore, as identified by the informant that most school management does not really show interest in their staff training and development as they manipulate the accreditation process by hiring ad hoc staff during accreditation. Prof. Has, therefore, suggested that, "to encourage staff training and development, there is a need for national university commission to include that as part of their measures in university accreditation." The NUC should always ask for the list and evidence of staff training and mentoring programme as this has a significant influence on institutional effectiveness.

University-Industry Collaboration

Collaboration between the industries and the university system have been identified as critical for students' skill development, knowledge acquisition, and adoption as well as enhancement of entrepreneurial skills (Guimón, 2013). The collaboration effort could also help the university system acquire themselves with the skills needed by industries in different fields of study and thus focus student training in such direction.

According to Prof. Has, "the Centre for Industry-University Collaboration should be worked upon to enhance graduates having a prerequisite experience in their area of specialization." The SIWES unit in every university should take up the challenge of addressing the increased graduate unemployment through solid partnership in the training of the students through an internship as well as placement after graduation.

Effective Supervision

Adequate supervision has been acknowledged as one of the management

elements in achieving organisational goals. The findings from the interview conducted identified proper monitoring of resources in terms of human, material, and financial resources as a determinant of institutional effectiveness in the university system. As highlighted by Dr Fag:

I think the government has much to do to put the university management on their toes to make sure when the policy is made, they follow it and when money is made available for any plan, these funds should be utilised towards attaining the goals of which the government make the fund available (Dr Fag).

According to Dr Fag:

a broader game in terms of collaboration of stakeholders and the fact to the government is the provider of funding for this system is the largest provider of the financing for this system, they have to intensify their monitoring capacity so that the universities system can achieve their objective of providing the world-class graduate and contributing to the society in a better way (Dr Fag).

This was further supported by Mr. Gbodo who said: "government needs to increase its supervisory role that after making the facility available, it must develop a system of monitoring to ensure that what was allocated was utilised for that purpose." The informant went further, stating that "i think there is the need for a change of attitude among both the academics and non-academics to produce high-level manpower needed." This was bolstered by Prof. Has who said:

The attitude of the lecturers and the students' needs is also a matter of concern. The management needs to put measures of supervising lecturers' activities both within and outside classrooms. Some of us are in the academic profession but are not ready to meet up with our expectations, and therefore, the universities have a role to play here (Prof. Has).

Therefore, to enhance the effectiveness of public universities in Nigeria, adequate supervision of the usage of resources available in terms of human, material, and financial resources and effective implementation of policies will be a welcome development to the university system.

Increase Funding

The participants have identified increased funding both from the government and private sector as a measure towards enhancing universities' effectiveness in Nigeria. According to them, improvement in the government budget, internally generated revenue by the school and public, the private partnership will be a welcome development towards institutional effectiveness. (See Figure 3).

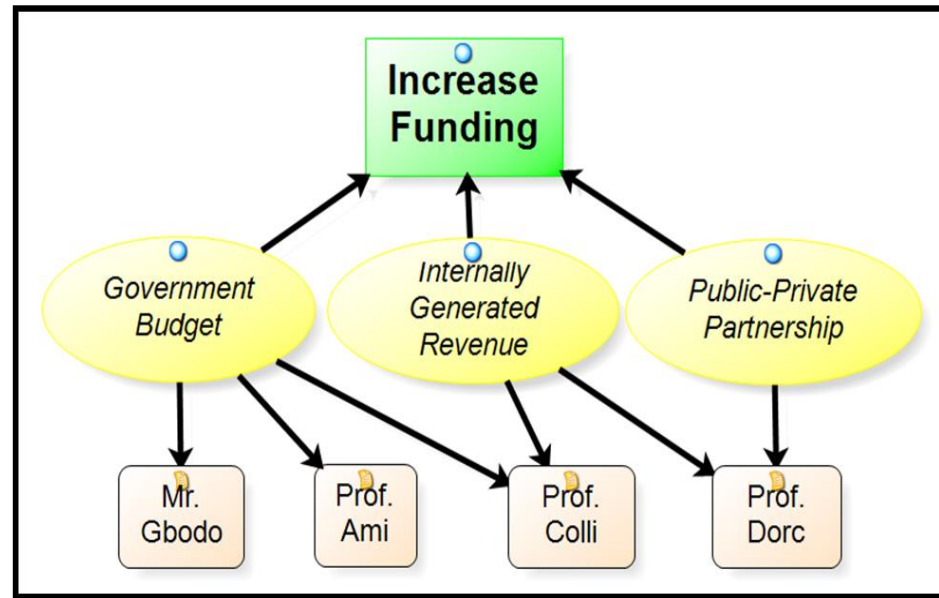


Figure 3. Increase funding as a strategy for enhancing universities effectiveness

Government Budget

The qualitative findings in this study also revealed that one of the major factors impeding university effectiveness is funding, and as a result, the informant recommended improvement in government allocation to the educational system through their budget. According to Prof. Ami, “the government needs to show more interest in education by funding education at all levels adequately at least merely adequately if it can be put that way, they need to do more in short.”

This was also supported by Prof. Colli, who said:

The government will be ready to increase the funding to meet at least basic minimum standards in the university and stop unnecessary politicising of universities whereby you start establishing universities every year even when those on the ground cannot stand (Prof. Colli).

However, according to MrGbodo, “there has been an observation that despite all these governments has been responding to agitations for an increase in allocation to the universities and there has been some reasonable and considerable response of the government to these.” The government could still do better by meeting up to the UNESCO standard 26% of the government budget should be spent on the education sector.

Internally Generated Revenue

Internally generated revenue (IGR) has been identified to improve the devastating government funding of university education in Nigeria. As pointed

out by Prof. Colli, “most classified universities in the world are privately own universities whereby the consumer pay for the services rendered. So, do we have the government that is ready to take the risk by increasing fees in the universities”? The only alternative to provide the needed resources into the university system to have a global competitive capability is through a considerable increase in tuition fees.

Furthermore, Prof. Dorc equally suggested that “the universities can help themselves by introducing some money-raising ventures, like internally generated funds like creating shops, selling agricultural produce, many things they can do to help.” Therefore, IGR was identified as a measure of funding the university system in this era of economy lumps.

Public-Private Partnership

The university system is a social good that is set up for human and societal development. Thus, it is perceived as both public and private or individual rights. Therefore, as the government is investing in education, the private sector needs also to be committed to investing in university education for the common societal future. Such contributions could include sponsoring a research chair and provision of necessary facilities. Therefore, as suggested by one of the participants, there should be cooperative involvement among public and private sectors towards university education. According to Prof. Dorc, “The private enterprise should be involved in the provision and maintenance of school buildings and facilities.” This will go a long way in reducing the inadequate and decay of facilities in the university system.

Policy Reform

The participants towards universities' effectiveness have identified changes in government and institutional policies. Such policies, according to them, include student admission and staff recruitment (See Figure 4).

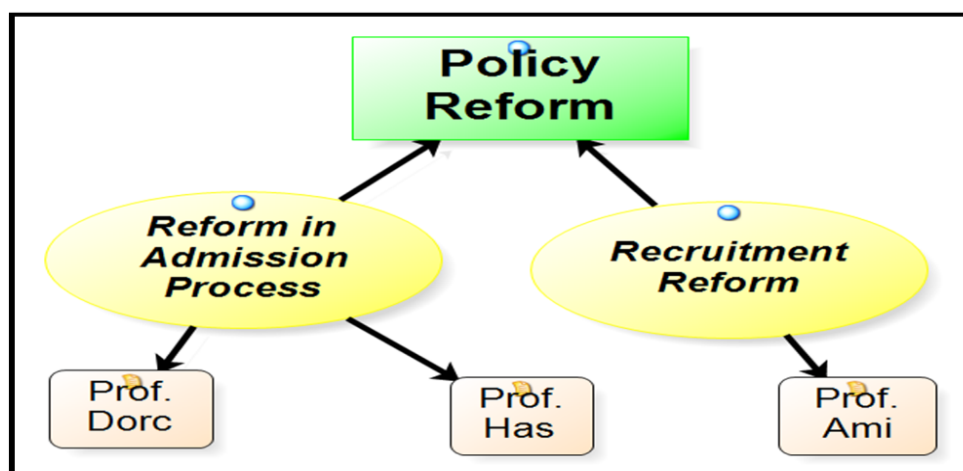


Figure 4. Policy reform as a strategy for enhancing universities effectiveness

Reform in Admission Process

Improving the unsatisfactory admission process within the university system has been identified to strengthen university effectiveness. According to Prof. Has:

Some policies have also not favour merit in the university system which hurts the quality of the university system and society at large. For instance, 40% of the applicants to the university system for the undergraduate program are only for merit why the remaining 60% is based on merit. Although the catchment area and education less-developed state is essential to be considered for equity, the proportion of merit is deficient, and it is better to increase it to at least 50% (Prof. Has)

Furthermore, Prof. Dorc also suggested that “the quota system can also be increased so that more students can be admitted into the university.”

Recruitment Reform

Reform in the recruitment process was also suggested to enhance the effectiveness of public universities in Nigeria. According to Prof. Ami:

The manner of recruitment into the teaching profession needs to be severely corrected, just picking relations or politicians and so on to man our classrooms are not suitable for the system. And this goes on even into the tertiary levels, so that's one of the things the government needs to do; they need to show the political will to reform education. If you want to be one of the big world economies in the year 2020, the government must pay serious attention to the quality of teachers in the classrooms because there is no way we can transform society without good teachers in the classrooms (Prof. Ami).

Furthermore, Prof. Ami also suggested that: “we need to look into the quality of teachers being employed at all levels, particularly at the foundation level.” This goes with a saying that we cannot give what we don't have and as such, the quality of the lecture presented by a lecturer is a reflection of his attributes.

DISCUSSION

The thematic analysis of the semi-structured interview conducted using the inductive analysis approach revealed that institutional reform, increase funding, and policy reform are suggested by the interviewees towards enhancing the effectiveness of public universities in Nigeria.

Institutional Reform

According to the participants interviewed for this study, merit in appointment and promotion, effective supervision, curriculum restructuring, effective university-industry collaboration, and staff training and development were identified on how institutional reforms can enhance the effectiveness of public universities in Nigeria.

The outcome of this study is in line with Kpee, Oluwuo, and Baridam (2012), who suggested that Nigeria universities curriculum should have local content and home-based cultural assets while accommodating and absorbing the global knowledge economy as well as technology that will not alter the local content to produce and support the development of individuals and the society as a balanced local citizen.

In other words, the university curriculum should be structure to develop the student intellect to be in tune with unique self, local, and global environment. As argued by Matlay and Rae (2007), employability is a curriculum issue. For instance, the introduction of entrepreneurship education into all higher institution of learning is a welcome development, but it can be useful when every student in their different field of study can be trained and exposed to various entrepreneurial activities in their respective area rather than teaching everybody theories that may not work in many fields.

Furthermore, according to Barrett and Breyer (2014), to meet the increasing demands of teaching and learning in schools due to the undercurrent negative environment faced by the staff such as satisfaction, poverty, instruction and salary, the university leaders are expected to find innovative ways through which academic performance can be improved, developed, nurtured and effective lecturers retained (DuFour & Mattos, 2013). When lecturers' working environment is conducive, it boosts their morale towards enhancing their productivity which results in institutional effectiveness.

Moreover, effective university-industry collaboration was equally suggested as this will help the student in their process of service learning. All parties involved in the process of student internship should be up and doing so that the purpose of sending the student out as intern will be achieved. It was observed that both lecturers and even the trainers are not taking internship training severe and as many such students see it as a process of whiling away time. The lecturers should be reimbursed to carryout adequate supervision, and the trainer where the student is doing their internship should be involved in the student evaluation process to encourage all parties involved to be serious with the scheme.

As student training is essential, so also the staff retraining is paramount to the effectiveness of any university system. Training and mentoring for new and early career staffs will improve his/her productivity which will also enhance university effectiveness. According to Ekwevugbe (2014), the deficiency in the

quality of lecturers can be improved through training as well as mentoring for newly employed staff.

However, adequate supervision was also suggested to awake every member of the university community work towards achieving the university goals. According to one of the respondents, the university management needs to put in place, measures of supervising lecturers' activities both within and outside the classrooms. The university management should set up internal quality assurance and monitoring of lecture unit to enhance quality instruction delivery.

Increase Funding

Other measures suggested by the participant are increased funding in terms of a public-private partnership, improvement in internally generated revenue and an increase in the government budget. As indicated by UNESCO, the federal government should increase its funding on education by meeting up the recommended 26% spending on education, which will help in revitalising the university system. Finance is the bedrock of any organisation, and for the university system to meet up with the society expectations, they need to be properly funded. Aside from government funding, university management should devise means of generating funds to carry out their activities. As noticed, no proper education comes without a cost. The tuition fees in the Nigerian university system is too small compared to every other part of the world. A bit increase in tuition fees can be another source of revenue to the school to provide need facilities to the students.

Furthermore, there is a massive burden on the university system to remain the leading edge in this era of evolution in new knowledge. The required resources to meet up with this task become s challenging, and public-private partnership is therefore encouraged (Hagen, 2002). For instance, the university system as the leading knowledge producer is seen as the facilitator for developing a process for dissemination of new knowledge in the society. The private sector can partner with the university system in sponsoring a chair. This will help the university system to be glocalised. They can also get involved in the provision of facilities to the school as well as training of the undergraduate student to gain practical knowledge in their course of study.

Policy Reform

The participant identified policy reforms in terms of admission and recruitment processes as one of the ways to address the issues impeding university effectiveness in Nigerian public universities. There is general impression according to Ekwevugbe (2014) that policies are formulated to ensure the proper functioning of the university system and as such, there is the need to manage the outcomes of policies that have been initiated to get the best out of the plan.

As suggested by the participants, there is a need to review the criteria for admission into the university system by giving more chances to merit. The current 40% merit for students' entrance into the university system should be reviewed by at least increasing merit to 50%. This will give room for a more competent student to be admitted into the university system. Furthermore, the manner of recruitment into the university system should be closely monitored as the teaching staff in any university are supposed to be among the best produced from universities who are competent and knowledgeable in their subject area. Politics and nepotism should be reduced if not eradicated in the appointment of staff into the university system. According to Akinmusuru (2009), the low quality of graduates in Nigerian universities can be credited to little attention given to teaching effectiveness and as such institutional policies in the university system are not made towards making student learning precedence. What assures quality teaching in the university system is the skills, knowledge and attitudes possessed by a lecturer as well as being enthusiastic of their work and also execute leadership role (Ololube, 2005). As such, every policy by the university system should be tailored towards appointing and retaining quality personnel into the system.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

This research was carried out to address the challenges confronting university system in Nigeria. As the whole society is focusing on the university system in tackling most of the societal challenges, it becomes imperative for the university system to be effective in achieving its predetermined goals of their establishment. The findings from this study reveal that increased funding, institutional and policy reform will put the university system in Nigeria at a point of competing globally and addressing the societal challenges.

The policy makers who are the directioner or drivers of the university system are expected to reform the policy guiding the university system in terms of addressing the federal character act which gives every citizen in every state and every geopolitical zone the opportunity to be employed in government owned universities in Nigeria. Therefore, university management must prioritise excellence over the catchment area and other factors during the appointment and promotion of staffs. The 40% merit used during the admission process into the university system should be reviewed to at least 50%. This will give room for more brilliant students admitted into the university system. It is high time that the policy makers should be aware that university education is not meant for everyone and such, the best candidate should be given a place in the university system to meet the yearnings of the society.

The curriculum of the university system should be thoroughly reviewed to address the needs of the recipient and that of society. For instance, more attention should be paid to Therefore and entrepreneurship education. This could be achieved when there is a mutual collaboration between the universities and industries. Therefore, the centre for university-industry

collaboration should be established in each university to address inadequate practical knowledge of the students after graduation and also to enhance graduate unemployment.

A policy should be put in place to encourage staff training and development in the university system. For instance, every lecturer must participate in one or more training programmes annually, and proper supervision should be put in place to ensure compliance. There should be an annual survey to gather areas of staff needs for training and development as this will assist the university system in organising workshop and programmes that will address staff inefficiency. This justifies why it is stated in the national policy on education of the federal public of Nigeria that no nation can rise above the quality of its teachers, as such, the quality of lecturers is a massive determinant of quality of students that will be graduated to the society.

It is a well known fact, finances play a major role in any organisation and as such, there should be an improvement in the resources available to the university system. For instance, the percentage of fund earmarked for education in the annual budget is very small and from the small fund released, very little is budgeted for university education, and this makes it challenging to execute most of their plans and programmes. It is therefore imperative that more funds are needed in the university system to keep them functioning as expected. It is therefore suggested that tuition fees should be introduced in the university system to augment the little that is coming from the government as there is no free university education anywhere in the world.

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