

IMPROVING THE SYNERGY BETWEEN FORMAL AND INFORMAL EDUCATION: CHALLENGE TO ADMINISTRATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN 21ST CENTURY, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Education is a veritable instrument for the reawaking of the consciousness of man towards a better society. Formal education consists of basic, post-basic and higher education. They involve the process of receiving and giving instruction within a confirmed environment for the attainment of learning outcomes. Informal education is the learning acquired outside the school environment like in religious houses, markets and banks among others. The study discusses improving the synergy between formal education and informal education, and the challenges of administration of higher education in the twenty-first century. The paper looks at the synergy between higher education and Public-Private Partnerships, Industrial Attachment and SIWES. Also, explained some of the challenges of collaborating with the private sector as the inability of the administration of higher education to have a firm control of the programmes and projects thus loss of accountability. The study opines that there is a need to improve the synergy between formal education and informal education for higher institutions to remain globally relevant in the world of work and competitive in the twenty-first century. The study suggests among others that the government should provide guidelines that will help the effective implementation of industrial attachment and SIWES.

Keywords: formal education, informal education, administration, higher education

Introduction

Education at the inception of man and society is acknowledged as a veritable instrument for the emancipation of man and the environment. Education is used for the reawaking of the consciousness of man and how to improve the environment for the betterment of man and society. Education is the process of acquiring the skills and potentials that help to discover the environment and subdue and conquer it for the sack of humanity.

The acquisition methods of skills depend on the mode of education and the level of learners. Getting hold of these skills depends on whether structured or unstructured system of education. Structured educational systems are the planned systems of education with a defined programme, and instructional material to achieve a given learning outcome. This is formal education with a systematic learning process with a given learning objective and under the tutelage of a trained teacher.

It is imperative to note that before the introduction of formal Western education in a pluralist state later called Nigeria there were indigenous educational systems in the Northern and Southern parts that were skewed to the customs and traditions of the people. This was the kind of educational system that prevailed in the country before the advent of the missionary and the introduction of Western education that was saddled with the responsibility of ensuring that the recipients were able to read the Bible in English and local languages. This is the genesis of formal education in a defined environment, pedagogical contents and within a given period. Today formal education consists of basic education, post-basic education and tertiary education.

Non-formal education is another mode of learning that is structured but achieved outside the normal school setting. It is a planned educational setting that is outside the formal education setting established to provide education for those unable to attain formal educational institutions. It is geared towards meeting the needs of certain individuals and helping to solve certain life obstacles. Informal education is the continuous and incidental learning an individual acquires in the trajectory of the work of life. It is a lifelong learning process an individual acquires in the interaction among people in daily activities.

It is interesting to note that to achieve lifelong learning in a technology-skewed environment, the 21st century, there is a need for a robust synergy between formal, non-formal and informal education. It is globally accepted that education is a costly venture and the government alone cannot adequately fund education especially higher education where the human potential is identified and honed for the socio-political development of society. The interesting thing is that advanced economies have explored the synergy between formal education and informal education to provide funds and other educational resources like the building of educational infrastructures and resources, execution and implementation programmes among others.

A cursory look at higher education in Nigeria, it appears that formal education has yet to fully explore the situation for the betterment of educational facilities and the improvement of learning outcomes. It seems that managers of higher education are yet to explore the relationship with the private sector in providing quality education with adequate financial resources that will aid the attainment of educational goals. Instead higher education keeps producing graduates who roam the street soliciting and seeking jobs without employable skills that will fit the demands of the 21st century market. In the same manner, the informal sector seeks qualified manpower to fill vacant positions. It seems there are gaps between theory and practice, and the questions that are begging for answers are: Is the curriculum and its implementation at variance with the work of life? Is it true that Nigerian university graduates are unemployable? What is the cause of unemployment of university graduates? It appears that the relationship between formal education and informal education is not yielding the desired learning outcomes. It is against this background the paper discusses ways of improving the synergy between formal and informal education, and the challenge in the

administration of higher education. The paper is structured into several segments, after introduction, clarification of concepts, the synergy between higher education and informal education, challenges of administration of higher education and informal education, conclusion and suggestions.

Concept of Formal Education

The concept of Nigeria's formal education could be traced to the contact of Nigerians with European missionaries who came for the propagation of the gospel of Christ in the 19th century. The missionary started with the establishment of primary schools and later included secondary and higher education. Formal education is a structured learning pattern that is carried out under the guidance of a trained teacher. It is a lesson that takes place inside a classroom with defined curriculum contents. (Johnson, 2017). The National Policy on Education structured the formal educational system into three cohorts namely the basic-education, post-basic and career development and tertiary education (FRN, 2014). The basic education consists of the nursery, primary and the post primary education which consist of one year of pre-primary, six years of primary and three years of junior secondary education. The policy averred that one of the essences of this level of education is to ensure that the learners are provided opportunities to develop manipulative skills that will enable the learners to function effectively within the realm of age capacity.

The post- basic education is the second level of education after the completion of ten years of basic education. It consists of the secondary education and vocational education acquired after basic education. Tertiary education is the third level of education that is saddled with the responsibilities of producing the needed manpower for the development of man and society. It is acquired after completing post-basic education and the willingness and ability to further the educational pursuit. It consists of universities, inter-universities, colleges of education, health, sciences and technology. It is enlightening to note that tertiary education offers opportunities for undergraduates, graduates and vocational and technical education. The hallmark of formal education is that it usually leads to the award of diplomas and certificates. Higher education is the knowledge factory where the manpower needed for the development of the state is identified, honed and developed to meet the manpower needs of society. It is interesting to note that formal education comprises private and public schools. The public schools are usually tuition-free, but other charges are levied for administrative purposes. Private schools charge a substantial amount of school fees based on the level of development, location and facilities.

Informal Education

Informal education was the first indigenous system of learning before the advent of Western Education. It is a lifelong form of education whereby people learn from their personal experiences or the experiences of others. It is imperative to note that informal learning or education is practice-based and task-oriented learning. (Decius, Damowsky&Schaper, 2022). The authors averred that the informal learning process involves observation and trial and error. In the process, the learners acquire vocational, technical, cultural, linguistic, behavioural and problem-solving skills. It can be deliberate or unintentional with no defined curriculum, no textbooks, and no pre-planned syllabus but a natural way of passing skills and knowledge without a trained instructor. Informal education is not confirmed in the classroom

but can take place anywhere in the market, street, bank etc. Mary (n.d), opined that informal education is a traditional method of passing knowledge without a syllabus, but provides an in-depth learning setting that provides a better and more extensive experience. Informal education can be acquired through parent-to-child or by reading books from the library or educational websites. The greatest advantage of informal education is that children are inclined to learn faster through informal ways than in formal settings. It is important to note that informal setting no certificate is awarded but skills and knowledge are inculcated to learners that enable them to solve problems and contribute to the development of society. .

Administration of Higher Education in the 21st Century

The administration is one concept that has elicited various definitions from scholars and it beholds the researcher to examine the definition. Peretomode (2013), defined administration as the act and science of getting things done most effectively and efficiently. By implication, the above definition means that the administration is involved in ensuring that policies, programmes and decisions of the organization are achieved proficiently towards the attainment of organizational goals. In so doing, it involves making decisions, and policies and coordinating the activities of human and non-human resources to achieve given goals.

Higher education is post-secondary education that consists of universities, inter-universities, polytechnics like specialized training institutions, colleges of education, health, science and technology. It includes educational institutions and online learning platforms that make use of digital technology in the dissemination of skills and knowledge to learners.

The essence of higher education is the development of human resources that will ignite social and economic development. Higher education helps to inculcate virtue and positive values that make the learners acquire skills and knowledge that make life a productive venture and contribute to the development of society. It promotes political participation, democratic values, and multiculturalism and cements national unity. It helps the individual for self-actualization and better quality of life and healthy living. These laudable goals are achieved through teaching, learning and community development. The pivotal role is knowledge generation, transmission and storage of the information for generational use. The researcher is of the view that to achieve these commendable goals there is a need for an improved synergy between administration of higher education and informal education.

Administration of higher education is the use of men and materials in the attainment of educational objectives. It involves ensuring that the policies and programmes of higher education are effectively and efficiently implemented. In the process of implementing policies and programmes of education, the administrator needs to plan, organize, coordinate and evaluate the process and ensure that the goals of education are achieved. It is imperative to state that in the administration of higher education, there are various faculties, departments, units, centers and institutions that collaborate in taking decisions. The Vice-Chancellor of the university is the person saddled with day to day administration of the university and the chief academic and administrative officer. (Wordu, 2021). Despite the position, no individual makes decisions alone. The internal management of higher education is teamwork between the staff and students who interact daily with the status of the institutions. (Obayuwana, 2021). In the same way that Okai and Wordu (2019), opined that a university consists of faculties, departments and schools working towards the attainment of university goals, and this has made committee system of governance the most desirable for effective and efficient

in the attainment of university goals. Interestingly, the law that established the university is also the law that empowered the university to set committees with the powers and functions clearly defined. The University administration revolves around two main committees namely the Governing Council and Senate or a joint committee of the two committees. The committee system of administration is an administrative strategy used for the effective and efficient attainment of educational goals. The committee system is all-embracing in school administration, implementation of policies and programmes, research, scholarship and community services. The committee system becomes inevitable in the administration of university institutions.

With the upturn of technology and globalization in the twenty-first century it becomes necessary for the administrators of higher education to integrate digital tools not only in the process of teaching, learning and research but also in the process of administration. The integration of digital tools in higher education will make education accessible, and affordable with a flexible learning pattern that will reach the unserved and the vulnerable in society. Wordu (2021), averred that the integration of digital technology in teaching and learning helps the learners and the teachers for maximum achievement of educational goals. In a knowledge-driven economy knowledge and information are vital for socially inclusive and productivity while connectivity is pivotal for global competitiveness. (Okere&Nwankwola, 2019).

It becomes incumbent on the managers of higher education to learn twenty-first-century skills to enable students and teachers to navigate the world of work. The twenty-first-century skills are those skills that are critically important in a technological-driven society and help students and lecturers in the trajectory of life. They include but are not limited to critical thinking, communication skills, digital and information literacy, collaboration skills, creativity and problem-solving (Buckle, n.d). The onus is on the administrator to adopt strategies to build and integrate twenty-first skills into lecturers who in return will use it as a core in the mode of instruction.

The synergy between Higher Education and Informal Education

There are various ways of acquiring skills and knowledge, either through structured learning or unstructured learning patterns and it is never one way. It can be acquired in the classroom setting, through day-to-day activities or at the office. It is important to note that at the centre of education is the act of teaching and the act of receiving knowledge from someone. Both through planned and systematic process or through happenstance but in all, the hallmark is the acquisition of skills and knowledge that will make the individuals live a productive life and contribute to the development of society. It becomes incumbent on the administrators of higher education to cooperate and improve on the synergy between higher education and the informal settings.

Synergy in this context means having a robust relationship between the higher education management and informal education settings with the view of seeking ways to improve the relevance, performance, cooperation and collaboration in the attainment of goals of education. In this arrangement, higher education will provide the structure and the classroom setting with in-depth knowledge of understanding the concepts and theory while the informal settings will provide the practical knowledge and skills that will be applied in higher education. This symbolic relationship is of paramount interest for the attainment of

educational goals and making the students relevant in a technological-driven world. It is imperative to emphasize that the symbolic relationship will not only bridge the gap between theories and practice but also, enhance the capabilities of students in the world of work.

Higher education in Nigeria is facing immense pressure to provide quality education in the face of dwindling resources of government and inadequate funds for education. This has resulted in a plethora of challenges like dilapidated infrastructures, classrooms, lack of accommodation for staff and students, and digital educational resources among others. This brings to the fore, the Public Private Partnerships (3Ps), industrial attachment (IT), and SIWESS. 3Ps is a collaboration between the government agency and Private Sector Companies to finance, build and operate projects like hostels, classrooms, public transportation, parks etc. (Sharma, Gupta, Chowhan, Srivasta and Modi, n. d.). In a similar vein, Bukola and Sasere (2019 p51), defined 3Ps “as a conceptual arrangement between public and private sectors to achieve well-defined and shared objective in a cost-effective, efficient and sustainable manner”. For higher education, it is the cooperation between the managers of higher education and the private sector or non-profit organization to finance educational facilities, and share skills and knowledge in the provision of instructional facilities and delivery of educational services.

It is in cognition of the importance of 3Ps that the Salvation Ministries Port Harcourt built a 300 million naira female hostel and donated it to Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, a Rivers State-owned university. (Nnaem, 2019). In a similar situation, the University of Ibadan Alumni Association, built a 54-bedroom hostel worth NGN 200 million for post-graduate students, while Aliko Dangote, the Chairman of the Aliko Dangote Foundation also donated a 2,160-bed hostel worth NGN 1.2 billion to the Ahmadu Bello University Zaria. (Bolaji, 2023).

It is instructive to note that in 3Ps the private partner bore substantially the financial risk and at times the management of the infrastructures. This to a large extent helps to relieve managers of education non-academics issues and enables them to devote more time to issues relating to academics. In the past, the non-government organization has built various academic facilities like lecture halls, endowments, grants for research and buying of cars for staff.

Other benefits of the 3Ps are that it provides an opportunity for risk sharing between the managers of education and the private sector and the process helps in the cross-fertilization of ideas, skills and knowledge. Without a doubt, the intervention of private partnerships in providing service delivery will integrate innovation, effectiveness and efficiency in service delivery. (Ulayi, Arikpo, Anthony and Tawo, 2022). In cognizance of the aforementioned benefits, it becomes imperative for synergy between higher education and private partners if higher education institutions will remain competitive and globally relevant.

Industrial Attachment is another platform where there is synergy between the administration of higher education and informal sectors. There is this notion rightly asserted or wrongly that there is a wide gap between theory and practice. It appears that some Nigerian graduates are unemployable due to the skills acquired in educational institutions are at variance with the world of work. It is against this background that industrial attachment is of great concern among scholars and educationalists. Industrial attachment, IT is a process where undergraduate students are posted to industries to familiarize the students with the world of work. It is an essential component of training that does not only help students to assimilate theory into practice but also to expose students to unfamiliar technology,

workplace expectations, work schedules and organizational structure. (Kiplaget, Khamasi and Karie, 2016). The benefits of industrial attachment cannot be overemphasized, namely, make student employable and allow them to share their experience with others, help to improve communication skills and boost their confidence in the world of work. It is on this note that the managers of higher education are obliged to increase the synergy between higher education and the industries to enhance the attainment of educational goals.

Another informal training programme that is worthy of discussion is the Student Industrial Work Experience Scheme SIWES, which is a part of the minimum academic standard of universities and a requirement in various degree programmes for all graduates must pass through before graduation. It is a skills training scheme to expose the students to a real work situation that the students may likely see on graduation. SIWES is understanding and cooperation between schools and industries for undergraduate students to be exposed to industrial activities during their stay in the school. SIWES is organized by the Federal Government of Nigeria through the Industrial Training Fund and in collaboration with the National University Commission (NUC), the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE), the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) and Industries (Oladian, Benjamin and Aiyellabowo, 2012). Like industrial attachment, it is expected to bridge the gap between theory and practice and expose students to the use of technology that they are not exposed to in school settings.

Challenges to the administration of Higher Education with Informal Education

The greatest challenge in the collaboration of higher education administrators and the informal sector is that it consists conglomerate of people with different values, morals, cultures and organizational ethos who decided to pull their resources and knowledge for better attainment of educational goals. Higher education has an organizational structure that is embedded with bureaucracy and a committee system while the private sector has a flexible system therefore building a partnership is very challenging and time-consuming. Again, the private organization is profit-oriented while the public service is service-oriented, critics have argued that such a partnership will increase the price of products since the investor would like to recoup the money invested in the project. If the private partner are unable to recoup their money will lead to poor-quality delivery.

Another criticism against such a partnership is that higher education will lose control of the project. Critics have argued that partnership with the private sector participation is the easiest way of losing control of the management and control of educational facilities. More importantly, since the major financier of the products is usually sponsored by private partners, they argued that it would go a long way to erode the already battered institutional autonomy. This means that the decisions on how to manage and control the facilities will be determined by non-educational actors.

Furthermore, the level of accountability becomes in doubt whether the management of the university or the partners. Therefore it becomes difficult to hold any person responsible for any act of omission in the management of the resources.

Another area of partnership between the higher education and informal sector is the industrial attachment/ SIWES. Like any other project, the industrial attachment and SIWES have their challenges. Some of these challenges are a result of the inability of students to secure private companies on time for industrial attachment while some are inherent in the programmes in

which students are helpless. Some of these challenges are: Rejection of students for industrial attachment, Lack of adequate orientation and supervision by the school authority. It is observed that the school management emphasizes more of the report and defense over the supervision of the students while in training. Finally the inability of the industry to take cognizance of the welfare of students in training and the laziness of students to attend regularly and punctually.

Conclusion

Education is globally acknowledged as a veritable instrument in the reawakening of the consciousness of man, redefining the environment, and subduing and revamping the environment for the benefit of individuals and society. The process of acquiring various skills and knowledge are of various dimension and never one way. It could be through structured and planned or unstructured and happenstance. Structured and planned are formal education where learning and teaching are provided in a given and confirmed environment with expected outcomes. Informal education is the learning acquired in everyday activities, in religious houses, markets and banks among others. The formal education consists of the basic, post-basic education and higher education. The former is where the manpower needs of society are honed and developed for the betterment of individuals and society. For the attainment of the lofty goals of education, there is a need for synergy between formal and informal education for effective and efficient attainment of educational goals. But unfortunately, the relationship has not yielded the desired result and some graduates are still unemployable due to a lack of relevant skills and knowledge that enhance the world of work. It is against this backdrop that the researcher is of the view that there is a need to improve the synergy between the former education and the informal education in the implementation of pedagogy, the building of educational facilities, and the integration of digital technology in educational institutions among others. In so doing, higher educational institutions will remain globally relevant and competitive.

Suggestions

Based on factors inhibiting the synergy between formal education and informal education the following suggestions are proffered.

1. There should be a policy guideline by the government to regulate the activities of the industrial attachment for effective implementation with incentives like tax rebates and punitive measures for non-acceptance of students for SIWES.
2. The school management should effectively supervise and monitor students of industrial attachment to ensure that the objectives are not jeopardized.
3. Concerning the importance of SIWES in bridging the gap between theories and practices, the management of tertiary education should upgrade SIWES to a directorate status for effective orientation, monitoring and supervision.
4. The administrators of tertiary education should resurface and equip the laboratories, studios and workshops with modern digital tools in line with international best practices

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