

INTEGRATING SUSTAINABILITY INTO THE MANAGEMENT OF NIGERIAN POLYTECHNICS: ISSUES AND STRATEGIC OPTIONS

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Abstract

The study is focused on ways sustainability and optimal performance can be achieved in Nigerian Polytechnics especially in this era of the global pandemic with dwindling revenues in the nation. With the economic challenges brought by the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the educational sector, it necessitates the need to adopt appropriate management skills and educational strategies to enable the diversification of the sources of education funding in order to be self-sustaining and adapting to changing circumstances in the next normal. Extant literature relating to the study was expansively reviewed in line with self-sustenance and strategic agility. The paper which uses content analysis and secondary data was anchored on the Performance Management theory in its theoretical framework. It was gathered from the study that Managers of the Polytechnics should think out of the box to explore the enormous untapped potentials that can help to leverage the higher education sector for superior performance and in the realization of global best practices in academics. Conclusively, the study calls for a re-evaluation of the internal capabilities of Polytechnics for productivity gains as reliance on only one source (government) of revenue can inhibit sustainable educational growth, global competitiveness and improved performance.

Lastly, the study suggested that the management of public Polytechnics should embark on a strategic rethink and develop possible initiatives for proper repositioning for positive impact and service delivery thereby exploiting to their advantages the unique opportunities available in entrepreneurship, innovation, marketing and the global knowledge space.

Keywords: Higher Education, Management, Self-sustenance, Sustainability, Strategic options

1.1 Introduction

Recent years have witnessed significant growth and investment in Nigeria's higher education sector with a focus on areas of sustainable educational advantages. Interestingly, the acquisition of technical/vocational education has been identified as the most veritable and comprehensive tool for technological growth, national and socio-economic development, individual socio-economic empowerment and poverty alleviation in Nigeria (Okafor, 2014). Hence, the Polytechnic education sector has in the last three decades experienced expansion of access through increase in enrolments and establishment of additional

institutions in both the public and private sectors (Rowell & Money, 2018).

However, present economic realities in the sector has continued to reveal unsatisfactory results as most Nigerian public Polytechnics tend to be mired in a survival strategy rather than advancing beyond boundaries in order to thrive in a changing world. Despite having 123 Polytechnics, Nigeria is still described as a technological backward country and the poverty capital of the world, suggesting that technical education achievements has remained abysmal (Otache, 2019). More so, it is an acknowledged fact that most Polytechnics in Nigeria are experiencing major challenges which are threatening the attainment of good quality/functional education especially in the issues of under-funding, little autonomy, neglect, stigmatization and total dependency on the government for their utmost survival, sustainability and the realization of the Polytechnic mandate and purpose (Lawal & Atueyi, 2017). This has resulted in the continuous blame game of poor performance and slow growth between Administrators of higher institutions and the Government/stakeholders in Nigeria (Ogwo, 2012).

Sustainability is a mainstream issue in a world where the limited resources needs to be maintained or preserved. It focuses on meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Belz & Peattie, 2012). The concept of sustainability is composed by three pillars – economic, environmental and social. Thus, with education being a vital ingredient in national progress and development of any country, there is need, critical and urgent to develop an alternative and comprehensive strategy that will help to re-position the Polytechnic education for better delivery on its objectives and goals in order to remain viable, make impact and be sustainable (Torkaa, 2010). Hence, in recent times, self-sustenance and strategic agility are approaches that are receiving increasing attention as today's

Polytechnics are expected to evaluate their internal capabilities for productivity gains especially during challenging economic times as the COVID-19 Pandemic and the global crash in crude oil prices.

Hence, the objective of this study is to examine the implications of inadequate funding of public Polytechnics on one hand and sustainable management on the other hand; with a view to understanding the underpinnings of possible strategies that seek a synergistic combination for total or partial self-sustenance. This is the crux of the study.

2.1 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1.1 An Overview of the Nigerian Educational System in the 21st Century

The 21st century higher education is noted to be flexible, creative and challenging with its landscape being driven by growing complexities. It addresses a rapidly changing world filled with fantastic new problems as well as exciting new possibilities of creativity and innovation in the sector (Patel, 2003). Regrettably, the Nigerian educational system is plagued with a malady of disastrous confluences; issues of gross under-funding, decayed infrastructure, poor quality staff and students, lack of relevant facilities/equipment, worsening unemployment of its graduates and inept and poor leadership, thereby them to schools in crisis (Peretomode & Chukwuma, 2007). More so, many institutions of higher learning in Nigeria are unable to build enough lecture halls, students' hostels, equip laboratories and workshops and pay staff salaries, research grants, allowances and medical bills as and when due (Olannye, 2014). The acute shortage of educational facilities in institutions of higher learning in Nigeria due to under-funding has led to decline in the quality of higher education in the country.

Precisely, the Federal Government spending on education is below 10 percent of its overall budget. In 2002 it was 9.2%, 6.5% in 2003,

6.6% in 2004; 8.206% in 2008 and increasingly slightly to 13% in 2008 while in 2012, only 8.42% of the national budget was allocated to education (Education Sector, 2020). In this year 2020, only 6.9% of the national budget was allocated to education indicating the failure of the government to prioritize education in Nigeria. Even though policy makers are quick to say that education is given second highest priority in the budget, this level of allocation is far below the 26% recommended by UNESCO.

From the foregoing, the Nigerian government have not showed enough commitment towards adequate funding of higher education for its survival, growth and global competitiveness as the above percentage (6.9%) for 2020 has been further reduced to 6.7% due to the current pandemic ravaging the world. Again, while it is a fact that inadequate funding is not peculiar to Polytechnic institutions alone, it is being observed over the years that Polytechnics are usually the less funded in the tertiary sector, not minding the fact that technical and vocational education is capital intensive.

2.1.2 The Concept of Self Sustenance and Strategic Agility

Self-sustenance (self-reliant, self-sufficient) is seen as a situation where a person or an organization needs little or no help from others in running the affairs of its core business (Gutza & Jessica, 2005). It is a conception of development in which people of a given society are mobilized in order to transform their physical, technological, political, administrative, economic and social environments, for their general well-being and those of other humanity. Also, in the views of Nwankwo & Nwosu (1988) cited in Pobish & Torkaa (2012), self-reliance is a veritable tool and a development strategy which relies mainly on people's ability to bring about self-generating and self-sustaining socioeconomic and political system which is problem searching, problem learning and problem solving.

On the other hand, strategic agility is referred to as learning to make fast turns and being able to transform and renew the Institution without losing opportunities and also as integration of technology, human resources and organization by creating infrastructure, granting flexibility, speed, quality and making it possible to respond quickly (Samer, 2013) cited in Otsupius & Akintaro, 2020. As astutely posited by Maja (2015), adopting agility as a strategy helps in the transformation of internal operations as only the implementation of both the operational and strategic perspectives of agility may lead the Institution to the outstanding performance and high patronage to ensure competitive advantage in today's dynamic business environment. Thus, in a study by Onyema and Akanbi to investigate the influence of strategic agility on the perceived performance of manufacturing firms in Nigeria, it was gathered that strategic agility is measured by strategic sensitivity, collective commitment and resource fluidity.

Thus, a system is self-sustaining and agile if it is strong, can adjust and adapt quickly to changes, can maintain itself and be able to survive alone without much support from other parties. In contemporary years, most Nigerian Polytechnics' efforts are geared towards seeking possible options of survival via thinking out of the box and embracing creativity and innovation. However, to be in a healthy state without outside assistance (total or full self-sustenance) requires a strong drive for new possibilities geared towards rethinking sustainability which should be clearly mapped out for superior performance.

2.1.3 Re-thinking Strategies for a Sustainable Future for Nigerian Polytechnics

The notion of "re-thinking" refers to re-consideration, re-evaluation, review or re-examining a decision or conclusion that has previously been made in order to change or improve it (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020). In the context of this study, it points in the direction of insufficiency or inadequacy of

existing approaches adopted in the management of higher educational institutions thereby necessitating a re-think of a more robust and sustainable approach. Thus, higher institutions need to do everything within their power to keep positive images with their various constituents, and one way to do this is to make use of the opportunities innovations, entrepreneurship and strategic alliances present. With the Nigerian institutions of higher learning undergoing various reforms to expand and access quality and efficiency in the educational system, understanding the concept of sustainability/strategic agility and integrating them for improved performance should be a top priority.

2.1.4 Approaches to Self-sustenance and Strategic Agility in Nigerian Polytechnics

Below are some focused activities that could lead to sustainability in the public Polytechnics as identified by Dung-Gwom (2014); Okafor (2014) & Otache (2019); they include but not limited to:

- Agriculture: Poultry, Piggery, cattle rearing, Fishery, Palm Trees (self-sustaining oil), Apiary (bee hive), Cassava (garri and starch production), Special specie of cassava for Pharmaceutical Industry, Processing of agricultural products etc.
- Big Business Center
- Private School – Early years (Montessori), Primary and Secondary.
- ICT – Website for effective communication and reputation management
- Printing Press
- BookShop
- Rentals (Canopies, bouncing castle, play toys, chairs and tables)
- Event centre – renting and management
- A viable Block Industry (blocks, inter-locking etc)
- A well-equipped Mini-mart with assorted products.
- Fruit extraction – Mangoes, pineapple, oranges, paw-paw and other fruits that

generally waste away at the peak of their seasons

- Generation of own power – renewable energy (solar energy/wind energy)
- Tailoring and fashion outfit to meet and exceed the Polytechnic community's needs.
- Outfit for duplicating paper/office files production for internal use and sales.
- Outfit for tissue paper production.
- A Business School with Business/Management Consulting Unit.
- Outfit for Tie & Die (Locally produced fabrics)
- Investments in Arts, Sculpture and Painting for sales/exhibitions

All of the above are viable alternative sources of generating incomes internally if well planned and executed.

To integrate sustainability in the management of public Polytechnics, the following are critical nuggets to adopt:

- Adequate funding of Polytechnic education to promote practical teaching and procurement of state-of-the-art equipment/tools
- Appropriate and conducive environment for both staff and students that will engender proper monitoring and evaluation of all projects.
- Operating model should be based on transparency and meritocracy.
- Engagement of tested and experienced members of staff in leadership positions and not by favouritism, nepotism or tribalism.
- Capacity building (training and re-training of staff) to enhance shared knowledge, interactions, expertise and best global practices.
- Procurement and installation of technical labs/workshops/studios with contemporary equipment/tools
- Acquisition of ICT and other critical tools to makes the Polytechnics products (students) competes with their contemporaries globally.

- Value re-orientation with an open communication system that spreads developmental ideas among all staff
- Quality assurance of teachers and teaching of all courses with a viable and well-motivated Quality Assurance team in place to ensure compliance.
- Adequate compensation/recognition of self-motivated and committed Polytechnic staff to boost commitment and contentment within the institution
- Management of Polytechnics should take concrete steps also intensify the war against indiscipline and corruption from the highest to the lowest levels.
- Advocating a paradigm shift from “sharing the cake” to “baking the cake”, and this re-orientation should cut across government official in charge of higher Institutions, the Management, staff and students.
- Government must avoid neglect, stigmatization, under-funding that inhibits the educational environment from effective teaching and learning.

2.2 THEORETICAL FOUNDATION OF THE STUDY

2.2.1 Performance Management Theory

Increasing complexities in the functions of organizations led to the emergence of new and comprehensive concepts in organizational management. Thus, performance management theory has gained strong attention to improve results in the midst of challenging economic conditions. Performance management has been defined as management’s systematic application of processes aimed at optimizing performance in an organization.

Fig 1 - Performance Management Process



Source: The Essential Management Toolbox of Performance Management (published by John Wiley and Sons UK, January, 2008)

Many organizations instead of waiting for external improvements such as market growth and technological advances, they looked into their internal capabilities for performance and productivity gains. Hence, performance management is the means by which an organization ensures that their employees understand how they can contribute to the organizational strategic goals. It focuses on the effective management of people in line with the organizational goals and objectives to enhance performance; and guarantees the creation of a working environment that will allow and enable people to perform their duties and responsibilities to the best of their abilities

However, there is no single universally accepted model of performance management as various experts have explained the concept in their own ways. For the purpose of this study, we shall adopt the Goal setting theory of Performance Management:

The Goal Setting theory: This theory was proposed by Edwin Locke in the year 1968. This theory suggests that organizations should adopt a process for establishing a shared understanding about what is to be achieved, and how it is to be achieved, and an approach to managing people that increases the probability of achieving superior performance.

The theory further underscore the relevance of three contextual variables – culture, climate and the strategic integration of human resource management as they are also related to more positive performance management outcomes.

Thus, the theory believes that people or organizations can be characterized or defined according to the volume of awareness they have towards their problems and the degree to which they seek suitable solutions. Hence, it is useful for the study.

3.0 Conclusion and Policy Implication

To achieve accelerated growth in the higher education sector, the focus of today's higher

institutions must of necessity shift to achieving self-sustenance and strategic agility facilitated by a strong corporate culture based on long-term growth strategies. Moreover, to achieve global competitiveness and sustainable development, it's important to take cognizance of the current economic realities.

Thus, given the global realities of technological advancement and the next normal due to the pandemic, the Nigerian Polytechnics need to do everything within their powers to keep positive images with their various constituents/stakeholders. To do this, effective avenues of internally generated revenue and proper utilization should be prioritized in order to avoid over dependency on external sources. The study therefore suggests that the management of public Polytechnics should embark on a strategic rethink and develop possible initiatives for proper repositioning for positive impact and service delivery thereby exploiting to their advantages the unique opportunities available in entrepreneurship, innovation, marketing and the global knowledge space.

Lastly, for Polytechnic education to contribute to the attainment of sustainable national development, it must continue to optimize the key sources of growth, expand its investment in critical areas, build a highly skilled world-class manpower, achieve total transformation through strategic consulting and co-creation; while consolidating on the gains achieved in the past years.

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