Higher Education in Nigeria: The Development and Problems

Bello Hafeez Husain1,2 Bin Yan1* Oladapo Muhammad Moyosore2
1. School of Civil Engineering, Central South University, Changsha, Hunan, 410075, China
2. Department of Civil Engineering, Faculty of Engineering, Ahmadu Bello University Zaria, Kaduna State, 810211, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The higher education institutions in Nigeria particularly the Universities, have drawn a considerable amount of scholarly attention, critics, and sympathizers alike. With so much available documentation, giving a detailed report on the development of higher education in Nigeria will be more appropriate in the form of a book. This paper aims to capture a summarized version of available documentation on the subject. The paper traces briefly the history and development of higher education in Nigeria from colonial to the present (post-colonial) Nigeria. Also, a brief discussion on the methods or systems of education that was present in pre-colonial Nigeria. Universities (public universities) as institutions of higher education shall be the focal point of this paper. This is because they are the point of reference globally whenever the terms higher education or higher institutions are mentioned. For the viability of the nation’s development, efficient performance of the higher education system is required. Therefore, the economic impact and the problems facing the development of higher education were also discussed.

1. Introduction

Education can be considered as the transmission of values and knowledge to a new generation [17]. In this light, it can be said that the goal of the system is to promote the culture and traditions of society by helping the younger generation develop these intangible skills. In Nigeria, there are various types of universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education which are collectively termed as higher education (HE) institutions.

Globally, socio-economic development is propelled by the advancement and practical application of knowledge. Higher education is a fundamental component of the development of a knowledge-based economy (World Bank, 1999). The establishment and growth of these educational institutions in Nigeria have long been hindered by factors such as competency, governance, and funding. Thereby, failing to achieve the responsibility of socio-economic development in the country [32]. Most recently, the world was brought to its knees in wake of the COVID-19 virus pandemic. Economies shook, schools closed, borders shut, production halted and lockdown protocols were initiated in countries around the world. When schools were shut, the learning methods had to be revised and solutions provided. These solutions were mostly in the form of the development of online learning platforms to take the place of conventional classes. Compared to the developed countries, these online solutions still are threatened by the same problems of, funding, administration, etc., in Nigeria.

The most valuable resource in the 21st century is no

*Corresponding Author:
Bin Yan,
School of Civil Engineering, Central South University, Changsha, Hunan, 410075, China;
Email: binyan@csu.edu.cn
longer oil, but knowledge. Knowledge gives a country an edge in the global economy. Organization for Economic Co-operation OECD countries have made massive investments in intangible assets in recent years, including research, education, software, and patents. These investments now dwarf those in other forms of capital, including traditional forms of concrete capital such as factories and machines. In contrast, emerging economies, while affected by these transformations, are yet to gain from the benefits. Due to disparities in the capacity of nations to generate, share, and build upon knowledge in the interests of sustainable development and improved living standards, equal development is not possible. Nigeria, though with 20% of the continent's population, it has only 15 scientists and engineers engaged in research and development per million people. This compares with 168 in Brazil, 459 in China, 158 in India, and 4,103 in the United States.

The education system in Nigeria as well any other country has gone through different stages and changes in the process of development. The idea that education is the biggest industry that touches on every human endeavour can be affirmed by Professor Blaike's statement that “education is the biggest industry that touches on every fabric of human endeavour.”

The latest figures from the National Universities Commission (NUC) show there are now 202 registered universities in Nigeria, with 49 owned by the federal government, 54 by the state governments and 99 by private owners. Nigeria's higher education is governed by the Federal Ministry of Education. There are three types of higher education institutions in the country: universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education. The country uses the traditional three-tier degree system of bachelor, master's, and PhD degrees. The universities award specialized master's degrees such as Master of Architecture, Master of Engineering, Master of Business Administration, Master of Fine Arts, Master of Education, Master of Laws, and Master of Public Administration in addition to Master of Art and Master of Science degrees.

2. History of Education in Nigeria

Education as a social institution is different from education as a subject of study. It refers to the entire system of passing down a people's culture from generation to generation to ensure social and cultural survival. As a result, every human community has a system of cultural transmission that can be found in their socialization system and spans all ages from childhood to adulthood.

The cultural system of education can be dated back to pre-colonial Nigeria. In the Northern parts of the country, among the Hausa, Fulani, and Kanuri, they already had an education system in place, and this system was built on the knowledge, morals, and principles of Islam. In the Southern parts, children were educated to compete among the Igbo, whereas the Yoruba emphasized the development of what they call Omoluwabi, i.e., a well-developed personality capable of standing on his or her own in all fields, with a solid moral foundation.

2.1 Traditional System of Education Nigeria

As described by [9], this may be used to characterize the many forms of education that existed as part of various peoples' cultures, particularly in pre-colonial Nigeria. Although differences between and among different socioeconomic, religious, and ethnic groups were to be expected, these differences were only in minor details, and we may thus describe an educational system in Africa and Nigeria before the introduction of the current western-style school system. Indigenous societies in Nigeria were known to be cohesive in the sense that they shared similar beliefs and rituals, and individuals identified with their family groups, which functioned as the society's primary unit and had strong links. Because of this tight bond, people of the same social groupings and communities acted in concert.

Due to the communal way of life, there was a focus on preparing young people to participate in the community life of the people. Children were raised in an extended family compound, which consisted of a cluster of small structures or apartments connected by a shared walkway or balcony and a big corridor in the middle that served as a playground under the careful eyes of the elders. They only knew and related to dads, mothers, brothers, and sisters as relatives. They were also taught to exhibit loyalty and interest in the communal values, norms, beliefs, and traditions that had been passed down through the generations, with a focus on reverence for the ancestors and courtesy to parents and seniors. The overall focus was on the development of a sound character and strong societal responsibility.

Geographic and environmental variables such as relief and drainage impacted the curriculum of traditional schooling in indigenous societies. People who grew up in riverine environments, for example, learned to swim and canoe at a young age and grew up understanding creeks, their inhabitants, and surviving and making a life on the river. The people of the savannah region grew up to work in animal husbandry as well, learning and adjusting to the complex echo system. Traditional education began at home, but it did not stop there. Parents, brothers, and sisters served as teachers in home education, which is akin to basic or primary education of the conventional western
sort, which came considerably later. The next step was
neighbourhood education, which enlisted the help of other
residents. This was the indigenous peoples’ secondary lev-
el of education, whereas the next stage was communal ed-
ucation, which was given by all members of the commu-
nity who had been designated for that reason, and might
be regarded as the higher level of education. The ultimate
step was represented by education gained through secret
societies that were only open to initiates and contained
information about the society’s secrets and power.

2.2 Islamic System of Education in Nigeria

This system was unique to many communities in Ni-
ergia, particularly among Muslim believers in the north
of the Niger and Benue rivers, as well as in southwestern
Nigeria. Islam is a full way of life for its adherents, with
injunctions encompassing all aspects of life and living, in-
cluding worship and prayers, the form of dress, food, and
drink, marriage and divorce, public etiquette, child train-
ing, inheritance, and others. The religion of Islam came
with its peculiar system of education and was dispensed in
schools called Madrasah (Arabic) or Makaranta (Hausa),
also in Masjid (Mosque) and Majlis (gathering). Access
to it is not age-restricted, as a child of eight could be seen
learning the same books and topics in the same mafils as
a man sixty years older than him, withdrawal is also not
age bound, no fees are charged, and the Quranic teacher
or Mu’alim (Arabic) or Mallam (Hausa) relies on gifts or
other sources of livelihood, and it was not based on com-
petition. It was not competition based because people ad-
vanced on their terms (capabilities), and as a result, there
was no need for a formal examination before graduation.

The curriculum was mostly centred on the Qur’an, Ha-
dith (Prophetic traditions), Islamic literature, law, and the
learner was not bound to a particular teacher as long as
the teacher possesses sound Islamic creed. Another aspect
was that it could accommodate more males than females,
as the religion stressed that males and females should
not mix indiscriminately and that every woman should
be respectable and responsible, as well as safeguarded
from all internal and external dangers. The methodology
was mainly through drill, recitation, and memorization.
Nigerian Islamic education has been chastised for falling
short of the standards set by Islamic civilization’s centres
of learning, including Damascus in Syria, Baghdad, Ku-
fah, Cairo, Turkey, Mecca, Medina, and a slew of others.
Philosophy, calligraphy, astronomy, mathematics, and
other disciplines, including medicine and technology,
were emphasised in these areas, and famous scholars such
as al-Ghazzali, ibn. Rushdi (Averroes) d.1198, al-Kindi,
Khaldun d. 1332.

Islamic education has made a significant contribution
to world civilization and culture. The academics resurrect-
ed science during a time when Europe was mired in the
Dark Ages, compiling excellent lexicons and philology,
establishing the world’s first university (Al-Azhar in Ca-
iro), and paving the road for scientific inquiry to be freed
from theological dogmatism. They invented algebra, de-
veloped geometry, trigonometry, especially the sine, tan-
gen, and cotangent, invented the pendulum and advanced
the world’s knowledge of optics, discovered potash, silver
nitrate, nitric and sulphuric acid, practised scientific farm-
ing and devised good irrigation systems, artistic versatility
in the construction of mosques, palaces, tombs, and cities,
and bequeathed mumification to the tyrants [6].

2.3 Western System of Education

In Nigeria, Western education has a long history. Slaves
and children of slaves who were exposed to western edu-
cation overseas, as well as those educated at home, were
the earliest beneficiaries. According to [23], the first recor-
ded effort was some sort of educational institution in the
palace of the Oba of Benin in 1515, while the major open
attempts were made in 1842 and 1843 by The Methodist
Missionary Society and Rev. Birch Freeman, followed by
Church Missionary Society and Rev. Henry Townsend,
and Mr and Mrs De Graft of The Methodist Mission in
Badagry. Other prominent Christian Missionary organi-
sations completed the pioneering work, with the first sec-
ondary school, CMS Grammar School, Lagos, established
in 1859.

Nigeria is home to many ethnic groups, the most well-
known of which are Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba. Universal
Basic Education (UBE) is a substitute for Universal Pri-
mary Education (UPE) in Nigeria’s primary education sys-
tem. It aims to improve the first nine years of schooling.
The official education system in Nigeria consists of six
years of elementary schooling, three years of junior sec-
ondary schooling, three years of senior secondary schools,
and four years of university education, all of which lead to
a bachelor’s degree in the majority of subjects. In Nigeria,
the school year lasts ten months and is divided into three
ten- to twelve-week periods for the primary and secondary
stages of education: primary, junior secondary, and senior
secondary.

Over the previous 30 years, the Nigerian education-
al system has undergone significant structural changes.
Before and after Nigeria’s independence in 1960, the ele-
mentary and secondary educational systems paralleled the
British system, with 6 years of primary school, 5 years
of secondary education, and 2 years of higher level/A levels.
The educational system was changed in 1973 to the 6-3-3-4 (6 years primary, 3 years junior secondary, 3 years senior secondary, and 4 years higher education) system, which was modelled after the American system. The first National Education Policy was established and implemented in 1982. Since then, there have been several alterations and improvements to the educational system at various levels. 

3. Development of Higher Education in Nigeria

Several critical publications have examined the University System as a whole, including an early one edited by O. Ikejiani (1964) and subsequent ones by Okafor (1971) and Fafunwa (1974). Sir Eric Ashby is the most well-known external critic (1960 and 1964). Fafunwa in his introduction to “The Universities of Nigeria” in the 1974 Commonwealth Universities Yearbook, provides a comprehensive synopsis. With so much available documentation, providing a detailed report on the development of higher education in Nigeria will not be necessary, but what is required, is to provide a summary of the journey so far of HE in colonial and post-colonial Nigeria.

3.1 The Colonial Background

Between 1882 and 1929, an era highlighted by intense missionary activity and development in southern Nigeria could be described as the commencement of contemporary education in Nigeria. For obvious theological and political reasons, Northern Nigerians were less enthusiastic about Western education. However, in the era under focus, 1882-1929, the Colonial Authority paid little attention since its major attitude to Africa was just to create a profit for the colonial government. Nonetheless, as change is one of life’s most continual events, the colonial government’s stance could not have remained steady for long. As a result, the government began to intervene through a variety of legal means. The first Nigerian Education Ordinance, for example, was passed in 1887. The Phelps-Stoke Commission was established in 1920 to review the need for native education rather than western education, and the Elliot Commission on Higher Education in West Africa was established between 1943 and 1945 to report on the organisation and facilities of existing higher education centres in British West Africa, as well as to make recommendations for future development in that area.

Nigerian authorities desired a university as a tool of emancipation before the country’s independence in 1960. It was critical for their goals that such a university be equal to British universities in every manner. The colonial overlords were cautious themselves. They preferred government-run vocational schools such as a Survey School, a Marine School, a Railway Workshop, a School of Agriculture, and Schools of Pharmacy, Engineering, Medicine, and Education. The Higher College in Yaba was the last one. Opposition to the College’s limited goals became a rallying point for nationalist leaders, and the College’s ceremonial opening in 1934 became a watershed moment in Nigeria’s independence drive. Higher education was viewed more liberally by the Asquith and Elliott Commissions, and as Margery Perham said in 1946, “in the university sphere, we have to offer almost everything. We must give what we value most highly and keep nothing back”. This mentality was more in line with the aspirations of nationalist leaders, and therefore, the University College, Ibadan, was established in 1948.

The goal to maintain university standards that are equal to that of other respected universities has remained a constant throughout Nigeria’s higher education development. As a result, every Nigerian university is required by law to maintain the system of external examiners. The requirement for expansion and adaption has not hampered the tradition of maintaining high standards in Nigeria.

3.2 Nationalism and Regional Competition

The nationalist leaders’ aspirations moved from liberation to the hunt for nationalist character and geopolitical stability as soon as the goal of self-government was accorded to them. Nationalist and regional causes frequently supported each other, but they also opposed each other to the point of near-self-destruction. They have left an indelible effect on Nigeria’s HE growth.

Universities were considered as critical determinants in the continual academic, economic, and political strength of the regions throughout the decade of decolonization and heated regional rivalries, 1955-1965. While the Federal Government planned to build a second university in Lagos, each of the three regions wanted to run their university and use it as a tool for regional development. In the east, the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, was founded in 1960, and in the north, Ahmadu Bello University was founded in 1962. The overwhelming report of the Ashby Commission, which proposed that the University College at Ibadan serves the requirements of the West, missed the necessity to manage universities as regional development instruments. As a result, the West established the University of Ife, while the Midwest, soon after its creation in 1963, began to evaluate the need for its university. The Civil War caused it to be postponed until 1970.

These new universities did not lose the legacy of high standards or the worldwide scope of universities, but they did emphasize the importance of cultural identity. One of
the most pressing issues in the growth of higher education in Nigeria is how to combine the urge for each region, and now state, to govern its university with the notion of effective and planned development [4].

3.3 Planning for Development

In April 1959, a commission was established under the chairmanship of Sir Eric Ashby of Cambridge University, the United Kingdom, to investigate Nigeria’s post-school certificate education demands during the next twenty years in preparation for an about to be independent Nigeria. The Commission recommended that a university be built in Lagos, Nigeria’s capital, with a focus on evening and correspondence programmes; a university be built in each of the three regions (North, East, and West); that each university be free and independent in its operations [4].

Based on the Ashby Commission’s recommendations, Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria (North), the University of Lagos (former country capital city in the west), and the University of Ife were established in 1962 (West). The East already had its university, the University of Nigeria Nsukka, which was founded in 1960. These, along with University College Ibadan (U.C.I.), which became the University of Ibadan (U.I) in 1963, and the University of Benin, which was founded in 1970 for the newly designated Mid-west region, are regarded as the first generation institutions today [5].

The Federal Military Government of Nigeria founded seven universities by decree in the Third National Development Plan (1975-1980), including Ado Bayero University, Kano, Universities of Calabar, Ilorin, Jos, Maiduguri, Port Harcourt and Sokoto. These universities are regarded as second-generation universities [4].

Universities founded between 1980 and 1990 were classified as third-generation universities. Namely, the Federal Universities of Technology at Akure, Bauchi, Makurdi, Owerri and Yola respectively. State (regional) universities in Imo, Ondo, Lagos, Akwa-Ibom, and the Cross River States were also formed during this time. Almost all of them got their beginnings on temporary facilities [4].

Those founded between 1991 and the present are regarded as fourth-generation universities, the majority of which were built without proper planning or feasibility assessments. [10] Nigeria now has 202 universities (49 federally funded, 54 state/regionally funded, and 99 privately funded) [8].

Even though public universities have led Nigeria’s higher education landscape for decades, their inability to cope with admission pressure became more apparent in the 1990s. In 1990, more than 250,000 people sought admission, but only 50,000 (or 20%) of those who applied were accepted. In 1992, about 300,000 people sought admission, and about 50,000 people (17%) were accepted, however in 1994, out of 400,000 people who applied for admission, somewhere around 50,000 people (13%) were accepted into various Nigerian colleges. As [14] affirmed, “access to higher education and the system’s inability to accommodate the large number of students seeking admission to higher education institutions continues to be a severe challenge. For example, it was estimated that over 320,000, or nearly 80%, of the 400,000 Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) students seeking university admission will be unable to get admission to any one of Nigeria’s 37 universities. The JAMB figures clearly show that the situation has not improved. According to JAMB estimates, just 147,000 of the approximately 800,000 students who sat for the 2005 examination were awarded places in existing universities, accounting for only 18.4% of those who applied [15].

3.4 Education Policy in Nigeria

In Nigeria, education is more of a public industry that has benefited from the government’s active engagement and intervention (the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1981). Nigeria’s education strategy is based on the belief that education can be used to achieve national development. Because education is a tool for change, Nigerian education policy has evolved as a result of a succession of historical events [7].

Nigeria’s National Policy on Education was established in 1977. Self-realization, individual and national efficiency, national unity, and other goals of the policy are aimed at attaining economic, cultural, political, social, scientific, and technological growth. The policy’s goals were expanded in 1985 to include, among other things, free basic education. This policy has been periodically reviewed (Anyanwu et al., 1999).

In 1999, Nigeria’s first democratically elected government took office, bringing with it programmes and reforms to address the country’s long-standing higher education problems. Indeed, the current administration has implemented more policy and structural reforms in higher education than the previous two decades’ governments combined.

Higher education, or tertiary education, was described in Section 6 of the National Policy on Education (NPE, 1998) as education provided after secondary school at colleges of education, monotechnics, polytechnics, universities, and institutions offering correspondence courses. A further statement on the definition of higher education is that it may be regarded as a system that encompasses...
much of the country’s research capability and reproduces the bulk of the skilled professionals necessary in the labour market. As highlighted by the NPE (2004:36), the followings are some of the tertiary education goals that are required for system effectiveness:

- Assist in national growth by providing high-quality, relevant workforce training.
- For the individual’s and society’s survival, develop and inoculate appropriate values.
- Individuals’ intellectual capacity to perceive and appreciate their local and external contexts should be developed.
- Develop both physical and mental abilities that will enable people to be self-sufficient and helpful members of society.
- Scholarships and community service should be promoted and encouraged.
- Promote national and international cooperation and interaction through forging and cementing national unity.

These objectives highlight the fact these institutions of higher education should engage in teaching, research, development programs, and maintain the educational standards. This forward-thinking policy framework delegated complete responsibility for institutional administration to university councils, including the nomination of senior officials; restored block grant funding to universities; limits the National Universities Commission’s (NUC) authority; enables university senate to decide on curriculum; grants universities the right to determine admission requirements and choose students; and establishes minimum acceptable academic standards.

3.4.1 Regulatory Bodies

To achieve the aims and objectives of higher education in Nigeria, Nigeria’s federal government established certain entities to oversee and promote programmes in Nigeria’s higher education institutions. Among these organisations are:

- The Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB): Established in 1978, the JAMB was tasked with ensuring a standardized process for conducting the matriculation examination and placement of qualified applicants into the nation’s Universities. However, shortly after, the legislation that formed JAMB was amended to include the conduct of monotechnics, polytechnics, and colleges of education matriculation examinations to address issues of lack of standardization in admission processes, as well as multiple application by students.

- National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCCE): Established by Decree 13 of 1989, the NCCCE was created as a parastatal of the Federal Ministry of Education. The Commission was established as a result of the Federal Government placing a high value on quality teacher education. Since its creation, the Commission has been dedicated to ensuring the quality of teacher education. It has regularly examined and standardised the curricula of colleges of education across the country through course accreditation, which is done once every five years for all federal, state, and private colleges of education that fall under the Commission’s jurisdiction.

National Board for Technical Education (NBTE): Established by Act No. 9 of 1977, the NBTE is a Federal Ministry of Education parastatal tasked with overseeing all elements of vocational and technical education outside of the university settings. The Board oversees and governs the academic programs by technical schools at the secondary and post-secondary education levels through an accreditation procedure. It is also engaged in the financing of Nigerian government-owned polytechnics.

National Universities Commission (NUC): founded in 1962, the NUC is a parastatal under the Federal Ministry of Education. The Commission was founded to establish and supervise Nigerian university education. Its responsibilities include approving all academic programmes in Nigerian universities, approving the creation of all higher educational institutions conducting degree programmes, and assuring the quality of all academic programmes in universities by periodical accreditation. The Commission currently oversees academic programmes in all Nigerian universities. The NUC plays an important role in system performance. It performs the following functions as an external accreditation and quality assurance board for the Nigerian University System:

- Counseling the Federal Government on university creation and location, as well as the creation of additional facilities and post-graduate programmes
- Counseling the government on the university’s most basic needs.
- Developing periodic plans for the overall programme to be followed by university faculty and staff.
- Developing periodic objectives for the university’s overall programme.
- Accepting and allocating grants from the federal government to the federal universities.
- Creating and maintaining academic basic standards.
- Accreditation of the degree programmes and other academic programmes conferred by HE universities.

In their study on the development impact of higher education in Nigeria, noted that Institutional audit reports of all universities and affiliated parastatal bodies, the withdrawal of the vice-chancellors’ former authority of directly selecting 10% of each year’s student enrollment, the
reconstruction of all university governing councils with greater representation, and the exemption of university staff from public service salary scales and regulations, and the university system saw a 180% boost in the financing, bringing per-student grants from $360 to $970 annually are among the government’s more notable actions [26]. On July 21, 2000, a new “Government Policy on Autonomy for Universities” was announced, which culminated in these efforts [23].

A National conference on higher education was organised in March 2002 to look at specific policy challenges stemming from the government’s goal of institutional autonomy. Academic staff, employers, government, management, parents, and students were among the 1,200 people who attended. Management, funding, access, curricular relevance, and social issues were all discussed [23]. The Federal Executive Council adopted and forwarded to the National Assembly for debate a series of legislative recommendations aiming to alter existing higher education regulations and establish a permanent legal framework for these reforms in May 2002. According to reports, the proposals would give university councils responsibility for setting institutional policies, hiring top management, and forwarding institutional budgets; give institutions control over their student admissions; limit the role of the NUC to quality assurance and system coordination; limit employees’ right to strike; and legally de-link universities from the public service, thereby ending their adherence to government regulations regarding academic freedom (Guardian, 2002). These indicate that in terms of higher education, Nigeria is on the ascent.

3.4.2 The Present Higher Education System

Nigeria is home to Sub-Saharan Africa’s largest university system. Although South Africa has more tertiary students, Nigeria has more institutions. Its university system supports several graduate programmes (9% of enrollments) and acts as a beacon for students from surrounding countries, with 48 federal and state institutions admitting over 400,000 students.

The system encompasses a large portion of the nation’s research capability and creates the majority of the country’s qualified professionals. Although it is ostensibly under the Federal Ministry of Education, the NUC oversees it, and JAMB conducts national university admittance exams and notifies universities of applicant results as explained in the previous section [7]. Academic excellence scholarships and student loans are provided by the National Education Bank (previously the Nigerian Student Loan Board). The World Bank stated more than a decade ago, after assessing this structure and its institutional frame-works, that “the institutions exist in Nigeria, more so than any other country in Sub-Saharan Africa, that might enable for a logical and sustainable growth of university education” [61].

In reality, unfortunately, the university system has evolved less logically than expected. During the 1990s, enrollment in federal universities (34% female, 59% in sciences) increased at a quick rate of 12% per year, reaching 325,299 students by the year 2000. The South-South region has the highest enrollment growth rates, then the North-East Region. As demonstrated in Table 1, overall growth rates substantially surpassed government policy recommendations.

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Source: Hartnett, 2000

Growing student numbers resulted in an admission proportion of 340 per 100,000 people (compared to 650 in Asia and 2,500 in South Africa) and a staff-to-student ratio of 1:21 on average (education 1:25; engineering 1:25; sciences 1:22; law 1:37). Engineering and the sciences had the highest proportion of admission growth among academic disciplines. As a result, engineering and science enrollments increased from 54% in 1989 to 59% in 2000, meeting national policy objectives [30]. Most of this increase took place in the South-East, where engineering and the sciences grew at a combined annual pace of 26.4%, outpacing the rest of the country.

Nigeria’s recent education distribution shares are significantly different from regional and global norms. This disparity begs to be explained. According to the UNESCO World Education Report 2000, education expenditures in 19 other Sub-Saharan African nations averaged 5.1% of GDP and 19.6% of overall government expenditures. These countries spent an average of 21% of their education allocation on tertiary education. Nigeria’s education funding effort is less than half as strong as that of other African countries, and its budgetary preference for education is lesser, but higher education receives a far larger share of these comparably lesser amounts of national resources.

3.4.3 The Progression of Different Higher Education Levels in Nigeria

There is a progression of higher education levels in
Nigeria. Figure 1 depicts three different ways to get enrolled in a university. The first path implies that a graduate attended NCE before proceeding to university. The other two paths are those of those who went directly from secondary school to university and those who passed through polytechnics to get to university, and these are the most prevalent. This assumption is based on labour market experience and the number of years of schooling required for each higher education level, which prioritizes university, polytechnics, and NCE in that order. Second, and as an alternative to secondary education, additional higher levels of education (Nigerian colleges of education and polytechnics) are available, and is illustrated in Figure 2.

Amaghionyeode and Osimhii[7] analyzed the benefits of an extra year of schooling at the higher education levels based on the first premise. They were able to assess the yields on higher education with lower levels of education using the second proposition, and then compare the yields of the three higher education paths. The most common path of educational attainment, out of the five options, is B, which leads from primary school to secondary school and then to university. This is because this approach takes less time and costs less than any other route to reach an educational goal (university). The majority of students who complete secondary school and enrol in a polytechnic for Ordinary National Diploma (OND) or a college of education do not stop there; they continue their education by enrolling in a university. The amount of students enrolled in these higher education institutions supports the popularity of route B, which is followed by E, D, and A.[7]

![Figure 1](image1.png)

**Figure 1.** Paths to higher education in Nigeria.

![Figure 2](image2.png)

**Figure 2.** Substitute paths to higher education in Nigeria.


Higher education is a significant kind of human capital development investment. It can be thought of as a high-level or specialised type of human capital that makes a major contribution to economic progress. It is properly referred to as the “development engine of the new world economy”[16]. Higher education contributes to development in a variety of ways. For example, it aids rapid industrialisation by providing workers with professional, technical, and management abilities. Higher education contributes not only the educated workers but knowledge workers also to the economy’s growth in the current context of nations’ transformation into knowledge economies and societies.[7]

The relationship between higher education and economic growth in Nigeria was estimated by[7] using models borrowed substantially from the studies of[12] and as modified by[11]. The equation used was a vector error correction model. For the study, the education-growth relationship was the point of interest. Exogenous variables such as human capital, government spending, and foreign inputs were assumed to affect total factor productivity in the model. The premise was that rather than entering the production function as a factor, an educated labour force has a significant role in determining productivity levels. Education spending was anticipated to have an impact on the quality of human capital, resulting in increased total factor productivity. Furthermore, having more human capital accelerates the incorporation of foreign technology, which is predicted to close the knowledge deficit that exists between developed and developing countries.[14]. Consequently, they regarded the technology variable in the second model as a non-constant, allowing it to change over time.

In the second model, where human capital affects the productivity variable, rather than the first model, where human capital enters as a production function factor, it was assumed that the level of human capital, rather than growth rates, plays a key role in determining the growth of output per worker. Before estimating the model, the nature of the time series was evaluated to see if they were stationary or non-stationary, as well as their sequence of integration. This would allow them to figure out the long-term link between the factors. The Phillip-Perron unit root test was used in this process. The occurrence of a linear combination of non-stationary variables that are stationary within the series was then examined using co-integration. When there is no co-integration, the linear combination is not stationary, and the variable does not have a mean to which it returns. However, the presence of co-integration implies that the series has a fixed long-run connection.

In conclusion, the study looked into only two routes via which human capital can influence growth. Although it
may be difficult to distinguish between the two routes, the findings demonstrate that a well-educated workforce has a favourable and considerable impact on economic growth via factor accumulation and the evolution of total factor productivity. A well-developed human capital foundation can thus be linked to an economy’s outstanding performance in terms of per capita growth. A fundamental policy conclusion of their findings is that authorities should make a deliberate effort to raise Nigeria’s human capital level. Therefore, the studies by [7,11] supports human capital as a source of economic growth hypothesis.

Similarly, [60] sought to determine the type of co-integration that exists between Nigeria’s educational and fiscal advancement, as well as its causation impacts. They came to the conclusion that there exists a long-run co-integration between education and economic growth based on the results of the Johansen Co-integration test. The Pairwise-Granger Causality Tests, on the other hand, show that education spending and the gross enrollment ratio of higher education in Nigeria have no causal effect on economic growth and vice versa. These empirical findings support the notion that Nigerian education investment is insufficient. The number of children not enrolled in school vastly outnumbers the number of children who are enrolled. In other words, illiteracy is fast increasing and severely impacting economic progress. They further recommended that the nation’s policies should be centred on improving various higher education institutions to stimulate economic growth.

5. Problems Facing Higher Education in Nigeria

The development of HE has always been plagued with a set of recurring issues, each of which is in some way linked to the others. The two major issues are administration/governance and inadequate funding which have resulted in further issues. Administration/governance, insufficient funding, academic corruption, brain drain, inadequate learning and research facilities, overpopulation, academic calendar instability, insecurity, changes in telecommunication technology, and, most recently, the COVID-19 pandemic are some of the major issues confronting higher education in Nigeria. All of the problems, except for the COVID-19 pandemic, may be directly attributed to the administration and inadequate funding, as can be observed from the above-mentioned issues. Also, with adequate funding and a lack of good administration, the system will still be in jeopardy, as mismanagement of funds and corruption will be on the rise. Regardless, if Nigeria is to take its place among the world’s great nations, both intellectually and economically, these concerns must be addressed quickly.

5.1 Institutional Administration and Performance

According to [60], appointed leaders in some colleges are ineffective, disorganised, and lack administrative abilities. Many higher education administrators, he claims, do not take into account beliefs, cultures, system motivation, cost, or quality while managing and performing higher education. Most people, including professional educators, incline to concentrate on the internal university environment characteristics when assessing and explaining the effective administration and performance of educational institutions. Institutional administrators, for example, continue to perceive themselves as residing in the golden tower and have no commitments outside of the system. Others have pointed out that higher education administrators are tyrannical, corrupt, and inflexible when it comes to school governance. These issues frequently lead to disinterest, ineptitude, quarrels, and bad interpersonal interactions to maintain the system.

Similarly, [56] opined that many higher education system administrators lack the charisma and interpersonal skills necessary for proper and effective leadership. A lot of programmes of activities are not conducted in such institutions as a result of poor leadership and ineffective administration, such as the provision of research grants and publications, neglecting staff welfare, no adequate control of staff and students, and no vision for the University. Such leaders are also uninterested in monitoring and supervising institutional activities. On the other hand, [60] was of the view that such appointees should have administrative skills and should lead by example. The leader must be trustworthy, knowledgeable, and employ contemporary management leadership techniques. He or she must have the foresight and be willing to adapt to changing circumstances in the system. The administrator’s performance should be maintained by making proper use of material and human resources to meet the institution’s goals and objectives. When a leader exhibits these attributes, it has a favourable impact on the system’s performance and eliminates a casual attitude toward work, resulting in the system’s long-term sustainability and consistency of strong performance. Clearly, the Nigerian higher education system requires visionaries as leaders who can propel it to new heights of achievement and advancement.

5.2 Inadequate Funding

This is a serious and major issue confronting Nigeria’s higher education development. It is particularly peculiar to government-funded public universities. This is unsur-
prising given that government revenues have plummeted in recent years, and the national economy is in shambles. Due to the collapse of the oil market and the necessity to satisfy substantial and escalating debt payment commitments, the government, which is obligated to pay for higher education in the country, is now facing tight budget limitations. Between 1980 and 1992, actual federally collected revenue, net of external debt payment commitments, fell at an annual rate of 2.2%, from N14.925 million to N12,886 million [57]. Education is no longer a top priority for the government, and government financing for institutions is rapidly dwindling [41].

In their work, [60] pointed out that a lack of finances has an impact on job performance and the institution’s growth. Without finance, higher education institutions will not be able to perform optimally. To maintain the tempo and expansion of the education business, both the government and educational stakeholders must enhance their funding initiatives. The Nigerian government’s unwillingness to objectively accept and apply UNESCO’s 26% financing formula for education has a negative influence on higher education performance and sustainability. They went on to say that Nigeria’s disregard for the funding formula is harmful to higher education institution performance and growth goals, as quality performance is the veritable tool for an education system’s survival. This neglect has exacerbated issues throughout the higher education system, like good teaching, and research is no more taken seriously [60].

On this issue, [5] commented thus: “our higher education institutions are in desperate need of funds to provide for both their capital and recurring needs. The federal government has decreased funding in recent years. Both capital and recurrent spending have been impacted by this reduction. Many higher education institutions have yet to complete major projects that began a few years ago due to a lack of sufficient funds”. The summary of the situation as described by [28] is that the Nigerian educational system is severely underfunded. As a result, he proposed that education has the highest budgetary priority.

Underfunding educational institutions has resulted in many years of confrontations between the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) and the federal government, which continues to this day (2022). The strike actions and threats by ASUU have long been going on, the most recent strike action being in the year 2020 during the first phase COVID-19. ASUU declared four weeks of total strike action on February 14, 2022, during the preparation of this report, in response to the federal government’s failure to fulfil previously negotiated MOUs and agreements. Regardless of these measures, the end consequence is the same: an unconcerned government, a fatigued staff association, underfunded higher education institutions, and a disgruntled student body, which leads to another problem of brain-drain [60].

5.3 Academic Corruption

Corruption is a societal threat that has infiltrated every institution. Academic corruption is defined as the bizarre or deviant behaviour of people in higher education institutions who break ethical standards. The government’s funding, which is already restricted, is used for programme development, research, infrastructures, and other purposes, but it is diverted for personal gain by those in power. The Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TET Fund) has accused academics across the country’s public tertiary schools of diverting research money to build homes, buy automobiles, and participate in other frivolous activities, according to the Premium Times (2020). The presence of corruption in institutions of higher education is seen as a threat to education’s essential ideals at this level.

In their study, [8] highlighted some forms that corruption takes in these higher education institutions. Students, professors, non-academic personnel, and administrators were among the dimensions of corruption discovered. They said that public money intended for lecturers to perform ground-breaking and demand-driven research aimed at resolving Nigeria’s socio-economic and even political problems are plundered by those in power. In addition, teachers requested large sums of money, sex from female students in exchange for excellent scores, and so on. Bribing lecturers for undeserved grades, cultism, examination malpractice, attacks on lecturers for preventing students from engaging in examination malpractice, and financial extortion from innocent students by fellow students who characterise themselves into “lecturers’ boys” were some of the forms of corruption among students. Corruption among non-teaching staff included financial extortion from students before they can see their results, demanding money from unsuspecting parents under the guise of lecturers with the promise of securing admission for their children/wards, and acting as intermediaries for lecturers, accepting money from students in exchange for better grades after an examination.

5.4 Brain-drain

Brain-drain is defined as the mass migration of highly educated individuals or professionals from one country, economic sector, or field to another, usually in search of
better income or living conditions. This has had a significant impact on not only higher education institutions, but also several sectors and the economy as a whole. Nigeria’s higher education institutions have lost a large number of bright students to international colleges. The large migration of these lecturers, professors, and researchers has left massive shortages in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) that may not be replaced for a long time. Research data showed 1000 lecturers quit Nigeria’s federal university system between 1988 and 1990 [33].

Some of these factors were provided by Saint et al. (2003) in their progress report on higher education in Nigeria. One factor has been the surprisingly low level of academic salary over the last decade, as well as the waning financial appeal of university work when compared to alternative options. Another factor has been increasing workloads as a result of declining staff-to-student proportions [34]. Professor Joseph Stiglitz, the 2001 Nobel Laureate in Economics, mentioned at the inaugural Dr Pius Okadigbo memorial lecture series in Enugu, that there is one university in the United States that has over 25 Nigerian professors. He asserted that the preceding observation is pertinent for any administration that is serious about dealing with the issue of brain drain [34].

It is important to note that while the greatest minds are leaving the university system, the overall goal of developing a high-level workforce for national growth cannot be met. It will be impossible to nurture a younger generation of bright minds and professionals to lead the country’s development unless this is curbed or minimized at the very least. Thus, the academic and socio-economic development of the nation will be greatly affected.

5.5 Insufficient Academic Staff

Many institutions of higher education do not have enough professors to manage all of the different institutions’ classes. The poor level of academic instruction and learning in most Nigerian institutions of higher education is due to a lack of qualified instructors. In November 2012, the Federal Government received the summary report of the needs assessment. According to the report, one of the main reasons why Nigerian colleges have so far been unable to compete favourably with institutions in many other regions of the world is a lack of qualified manpower. Also, the steep fall in academia in Nigerian colleges is attributable to a mix of infrastructural and staffing difficulties. In terms of staff deficits, the report stated that there were 37,504 academic staff in Nigeria’s 74 public institutions as of November 2012. The analysis found an untenable lecturer-to-student ratio when comparing the amount of academic staff to the student population. To illustrate, the academic staff-to-student ratio at Lagos State University was 1:144, at the National Open University it was 1:363, and at the University of Abuja, it was 1:122. Kano State University, which was 11 years old at the time of the needs assessment report (2012), had one academic professor and 25 lecturers with a PhD, while Kebbi State University had two professors with a PhD and five lecturers with a PhD. These figures revealed significant differences between Nigerian universities and those in other regions of the world. Harvard University, for example, has a staff-to-student ratio of 1:4, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) has a ratio of 1:9, and the University of Cambridge has a ratio of 1:3. Disparities in the deployment of academic staff were also discovered. In universities, men made up 83% of the academic staff while women made up 16%. The university system was facing a problem of staffing or manpower after further categorization of academic staff by qualifications and rank. For example, only 16,127 academic personnel at universities have doctoral degrees, accounting for 43% of all university academic staff less than the NUC’s desired 75%. Only 16,502 people (44%) fall into the category of senior lecturers and professors. Surprisingly, just seven of Nigeria’s 74 public universities have up to 60% of their teaching personnel having a PhD. As a result of these flaws, many universities are forced to rely solely on part-time and underqualified scholars, which has a significant impact on the quality of education provided by the institutions [35].

5.6 Deficient Learning and Research Facilities

Classrooms, lecture halls, research laboratories, staff offices, sports facilities, power, and a good road network within the institution are examples of facilities. In the majority of the country’s higher education institutions, these resources are insufficient. Inadequate facilities will obstruct effective teaching, learning, and research, resulting in low educational quality.

According to [3], there is a widespread view that the state of a school’s learning environment, particularly infrastructure, has a significant influence on students’ academic achievement and effectiveness. Sufficient power, water supply, an effective communication system, improved transportation, adequate classrooms, libraries, laboratories, and sporting equipment are all needed to promote effective learning in an educational facility. The academic standard, which is a measure of the school’s quality standards, is heavily influenced by infrastructural quality. The pursuit of adequate infrastructure in Nigeria’s higher education sector cannot be ignored because it is the foundation of growth and is critical for efficacious and quality
education. Infrastructure improvement can help people relax and feel better, as well as lower crime. Infrastructure has always been important in bringing economies together in a region. Infrastructure that is properly developed and efficient is critical for a region’s economic development and progress. Infrastructure is viewed as a regional public good that transports components of production within and across nations in a dynamic concept. As a result, the region will be able to achieve greater productivity and growth.

A survey (questionnaire) carried out by across Nigerian colleges to determine the role of infrastructure in preserving quality. Data were obtained from a random sample of 800 final year students taken from federal (300) and state (500) colleges across the country using a 20-item self-designed questionnaire and Available Infrastructure Checklist (AIC). The t-test statistics and descriptive statistics were used to analyse the data. There is no substantial difference in infrastructure development between state and federal colleges, according to the findings.

As a result, it is suggested that the government enhances funding for infrastructure development. Universities should also adhere to suitable infrastructure maintenance requirements and admit only students for whom they have sufficient facilities.

5.7 Academic Calendar Instability

The different trade union groups within the institutions also contribute to an unstable academic calendar. They frequently go on strike in protest of the government’s handling of welfare concerns. According to Nigerian universities had a very predictable academic calendar before 1980. Staff and students were forced to engage in repeated strikes due to downward pressure on salaries and onerous working conditions. Students at the University of Ibadan rioted for almost three months in 1972 over alleged subsstandard food, and students at the University of Lagos rioted for four months over the implementation of the National Youth Service Scheme (NYSC). Again in 1978, the students across the country rioted when the government raised the cost of student’s meals from 50 kobo to 1.50 naira.

ASUU engaged in strike actions in 1981, 1986, 1994, and 1995, each time for 3 months and pushing for better working conditions. In 1996, non-teaching employees went on strike for three months, demanding pay parity with teaching employees. In 2001, 2002, and 2003, ASUU went on strike for three months each time, protesting the government’s lack of funding for universities, as well as wage disparities, lack of autonomy, non-payment of allowances, and early retirement age. It should be noted that between 1993 and 2012, ASUU strikes shut down public (government-owned) colleges for a total of 177 weeks. Strikes continue to halt academic operations, lengthen course durations, and confuse students and instructors alike. Currently, the association (ASUU) is on a month-long warning strike against the federal government while this report is being written.

Strikes in institutions of higher education have posed a significant danger to effective learning. In 2009, there were strikes in all higher institutions; and these recurring strikes in the public institutions increase the brain drain dilemma. A study by Okwa and Campbell revealed that 80% of the respondents in their study “choose private institutions because of frequent strikes in public institutions”. Another key problem affecting the quality of education is the non-accreditation of several of our tertiary institutions’ programmes.

In his study, looked into the causes of the erratic academic calendar in Nigerian higher education institutions. Academic staff union of universities/Non-academic staff union of universities (ASUU/ASU) strike, students’ election, community crises, school price hike, cultic conflict, and public holidays are reasons responsible for the erratic academic calendar of higher education institutions in Nigeria, according to the findings. It was also discovered that an inconsistent academic calendar produces underdeveloped graduates, insufficient covering of curriculum, wastage of resources, and students’ delayed graduation years. It was then suggested that the government endeavour to honour any deal struck, avoiding extended strikes if required efforts are done to develop a healthy relationship between the two parties.

5.8 Insecurity

Many institutions of higher education have been destroyed by the expanding banditry and insurgency in northern Nigeria, as well as cultism, armed militants, and other issues in the south. As a result, their academic curriculum has been disrupted, students have been killed, and infrastructure for teaching, learning, and research has been destroyed. The insurgents have damaged many school facilities, from primary to higher education. Insecurity has hampered the deployment of ICT facilities and management at many educational institutions across the country, particularly in Borno State in the northeast.

It was reported by that, due to the lack of proper security in most facilities, these facilities have been either burned down or destroyed by militants during crises. This report by Abubakar agrees with the call by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) urging the Nigerian government to provide
more protection and enhance training on school safety and security in northeast Nigeria. The 2018 UNESCO Global Education Monitoring (GEM) report shows that Boko Haram has killed 2,300 teachers, destroyed 1,000 schools, and 19,000 instructors have been displaced throughout the region since the start of the insurgency in 2009, posing a threat to access to education.¹⁰

Education needs assessment carried out in 2019 discovered that of 260 school sites in total, 20% had been set on fire deliberately, 28% had been damaged by bullets, shells, or shrapnel, 29% had armed rebel groups or military nearby, and 32% had been looted. He¹¹ went on to say that the school administrators were outspoken in their criticism of the degree of implementation of the national educational policy on ICT and the implementation of intervention projects. They also believe that the government is doing everything possible to ensure that these facilities are available, and they attribute the unfavourable developments to a lack of basic public amenities, security, a lack of external assistance, and improper policy implementation.

Insecurity and terrorism, according to¹²,¹³, have been a great challenge to the Nigerian government in recent years. The operations of the Boko Haram (terrorist sect) have resulted in the loss of lives and property across Nigeria, particularly in the northeast. Bombs, suicide bombings, random shootings of defenceless residents, burning of government buildings, kidnapping of schoolchildren, and other vile acts. Abductions, armed robbery, rape, political crises, senseless murder, and the damage of petroleum facilities the Niger Delta militants, as well as attacks by the Fulani Herdsmen on specific towns in the North and South, have all contributed to the country’s instability. Nigeria has been labelled as one of the world’s most terror struck countries. Countless lives and belongings have been lost, and thousands of people have been displaced. Children have become orphans, men have become widowers, and women have become widows as a result of the deaths of their loved ones. This has far-reaching repercussions for the entire country’s development.

5.9 COVID-19 Pandemic

Since the onset of COVID-19 and the closure of Nigerian educational institutions, it has greatly impacted Nigeria’s higher education institutions. In her study,¹⁴ aimed to discover undergraduate students’ perspectives on the impact of the COVID-19 epidemic on higher education growth in Nigeria’s Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. The descriptive research design was used for this study. All higher education institutions in the Federal Capital Territory of Nigeria were included in the survey. A stratified random selection method was used to choose a sample of two higher education institutions from this group. From the 2,005,878 undergraduate students in the sampled two higher institutions, 200 undergraduate students in their final year were chosen. A questionnaire named “Perception of Undergraduate Students on the Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Higher Institutions Development Questionnaire” was used to collect data for the study. The instrument’s reliability was determined utilising test-retest reliability methodologies. The instruments were distributed using online media. Simple percentages were employed to examine the data, and the Chi-square test was utilised to evaluate the hypotheses. The findings revealed that 100% of respondents agreed that the COVID-19 pandemic affects the academic schedule of higher institutions; 90.5% of respondents agreed that the COVID-19 pandemic would hinder the execution of higher institution’s financial budget for 2020; 94.5% of respondents agreed that the COVID-19 pandemic has a direct correlation with the decline of manpower in higher institutions; 100% of respondents agreed that the COVID-19 pandemic is linked to the cancellation of academic conferences at higher education institutions, and 89% agreed that learning online is a viable alternative to conventional classrooms, teaching, and learning in the event of a pandemic in the future.

6. Conclusions

The paper has attempted to provide a brief report on the development of education in Nigeria. From the above discussions, it can be understood that what started as a means to a people’s emancipation, has evolved into an important tool of nation-building. With many problems shackling the higher education system in Nigeria, it is far off from what was intended in its inception. Most of the problems or factors that have long held back the development of the higher education are directly or indirectly as a result of the funding, policies, and administration.

Proper administration, reform policies, and adequate funding of the higher education institutions will yield great results. This is apparent from the effects of COVID-19, if the system had been well prepared, online learning would have been easily adopted. The government should create policies that will improve the quality of education for all. The Pairwise-Granger Causality Tests demonstrate that education financing in Nigeria is insufficient and due to human capital being a source of economic growth, therefore, there should be a major increase in government financing in the education sector. The number of youngsters who are not in school greatly outnumbers those who are enrolled. Precisely, illiteracy is on the rise and harms economic growth.

Finally, not all problems are caused by the government.
If the country wants to reach the heights and grandeur envisioned by the founding fathers, students and the general public must play a role in nation-building by adhering to these policies and providing support in their capacities.

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