

SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY IN NIGERIAN TERTIARY EDUCATION SYSTEM: THE ROLE OF EDUCATIONAL MANAGERS

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Abstract

Social sustainability plays a distinctive role in tertiary institutions in drawing their attention to their commitment to society and its members. It enables them to create a positive and equitable environment that accommodate social equity, inclusivity, community engagement as well as people wellbeing by understanding what people need for their sustainable development in the society. This paper describes the concept social sustainability and sustainable development goals (SDG). The paper posits that corruption, educational inequality, lack of relevance, insecurity and strike actions by unions are among the contemporary challenges of social sustainability in Nigerian Tertiary institutions. The paper identifies the role of educational managers in ensuring social sustainability in Nigerian tertiary institutions as community engagement, inclusion, curriculum development, students' motivation and security and health service. Thus, the paper suggests that Educational managers should enhance equal access to education and create educational environment that will accommodate social equity and community engagement as well as wellbeing of people in the society, tertiary institutions should collaborate with security agencies and create school and community security forum so as to reduces criminals activities in and outside school environment and Government should improve staff members working condition of tertiary institutions by implementing their agreement so that striking actions by unions will become thing of the past.

Keywords: Social Sustainability, Sustainable Development, Tertiary Institutions, Educational Managers

Introduction

The creation of conducive learning environment to schools is an integral part of success of any educational system regardless of its level or type. There is need for the creation of educational environment that accommodate social equity, inclusivity, community engagement as well as wellbeing of both teachers and students. Implementing sustainable practice of inclusivity, fostering community engagement, supporting holistic development

of personnel in education system can significantly lead to a more just and resilient society. Nigerian society is no longer practicing many of its values which include: justice, freedom, respect, responsibility among others. All these values can be restored through education especially tertiary education, because education is the most powerful instrument for societal change. According to Skrefsrud, (2023). The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all United Nations member states in 2015, holds education to be essential to achieving a sustainable future and realizing all 17 sustainable development goals. He further said "Goal 4 of the agenda is focused on education, aiming to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all". There are many contemporary challenges regarding social sustainability in Nigeria which include: "inadequate access to education and good health care, imbalance resource allocation and limited social protection, persistence poverty. Moreover, insecurity and its effects have a strong connection to social life. All these challenges call for a rethinking of education. Schools are established in order to achieve educational goal which are linked with national growth and development. According to the national policy on education document revised in 1981, 1988, 2004 and 2013 respectively, the five national goals through which Nigeria's philosophy of education draws its strength are:

- a. A free and democratic society;
- b. A just and egalitarian society;
- c. A united, strong and self-reliant nation;
- d. A great and dynamic economy; and
- e. A land full of bright opportunities for all citizens. (NPE,2013)

Nigerian tertiary institutions (Monotechnics, polytechnics and universities) need to learn the best sustainability operating system that will be practiced through establishing a comprehensive and well-integrated sustainable programme in their various institutions by enforcing policies that promote equity in access to educational resources and academic programmes regardless of student's background. Also to implement diverse curricula that will reflect the above mentioned five national goals.

Education is seen as a vehicle through which knowledge, skills, values and attitude are acquired for the purpose of proper functioning of the society. Tertiary education is regarded as bedrock of development of any nation that why it requires purposeful and carefully planned strategies for nation sustainable development. Nigerian tertiary institutions need to implement policies and programmes that accommodate social equity, inclusivity, community engagement as well as wellbeing of people especially youth for sustainable development. The future of nation social sustainability lies with the quality of tertiary education. If the system is poor, it will affect the lives of the people and this in turn affect the entire growth and development of the nation. In view of this, there is need for educational managers to use holistic approach for the implementation of programmes that engage social equity, inclusivity, community engagement. The educational managers should engage themselves in addressing inequalities in their respective schools and have a fair distribution of resources by ensuring that resources and opportunities are distributed in a way that addresses the needs and aspirations of people in society. For without addressing

the needs and aspirations of people in society the social sustainability would not be achieved.

Sustainability and sustainable development are complex concepts that also require interdisciplinary understanding. Therefore, the social view must be included in education at all levels. (Wolff & Ehrström, 2020) Education systems in Nigerian tertiary institutions reinforce inequality based on socio-economic status, race, regional differences, political influence and ethnicity. Disparities are evidence in resources allocation, teacher quality, infrastructure and even opportunity for some professional course in higher education. Wealthier families have access to better school, resources and opportunities while poor families often struggle with inadequate facilities and limited access to professional courses in tertiary institutions. Goal 4 of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals particularly focuses on the equal right for all to receive an education: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. Sub goal 4.7 states: “By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development” (Wolff & Ehrström, 2020) Educational Managers have a vital role to play in fostering social sustainability in tertiary institution. It is the responsibility of every educational manager to ensure that school is achieving and meeting its objective in an effective and efficient manner. It is therefore, good for every educational manager to search for ways and means of ensuring social sustainability in school.

Social Sustainability

The central elements of social sustainability are human wellbeing, equity, democratic governments and democratic civil society. In addition to these are elements like cultural diversity, gender issues, individual capabilities, and quality of life. (Wolff & Ehrström, 2020) Social sustainability is the ability to achieve sustainable development through social practices. The social practice has to do with what people consider decent and practice every day and how they are typically and habitually performed in the society. Social practices such as going to work, doing business, acquisition of knowledge and skills, cooking, eating, showering, playing, and all that are meaningful to people as part of their everyday life activities. Social sustainability refers to how society develops and maintains social practices that promote well-being, economy, equity and a high quality of life for its members over a long period of time. Social sustainability is recognizing the needs of the people by ensuring that all members of the society have access to essential services such as education, health care, housing, clean water, security and empowerment which will enable them to make choices and take actions that affect their lives in order to have a decent standard of living. The UK Sustainable Communities document approved in 2003, in Eizenberg, & Jabareen (2017) defines sustainable communities as “places where people want to live and work, now and in the future. He further said “They meet the diverse needs of existing and future residents, and contribute to a high quality of life, they are safe and inclusive, well planned,

built and run, and offer equality of opportunity and good services for all”. According to Ricckmann, in Wolff & Ehrström. (2020). a task for education for sustainable development is to support individuals so they start to reflect on their own roles as actively promoting global social and environmental sustainability now and in the future.

Sustainable Development Goals

In 2015, the United Nations member states adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (called Agenda 2030) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to steer the promotion of sustainable development from 2016 to 2030. The aim of the goals and targets is to foster peaceful and inclusive societies: by underscoring human rights, dignity and equality; by an intention to end poverty and hunger; and by underscoring the empowerment of women and girls and the most vulnerable people in the world. A core promise is ‘to leave no one behind,’ and, specifically, goal 10 focuses on reducing inequality within and between countries. (Wolff & Ehrström, 2020)

Sustainable development can be seen as an ethical practice that engage and support every citizen to participate in the pursuit of knowledge, skills, attitudes, politics, economy and environmental peace and security for sustainable improvement in the quality of life of the people in their society. according to Mahuta (2010) in Amadi and Achigaonye, (2021) assert that sustainable development requires that all programmes that should be for the well-being of the society to have considerable plans, with positive effects in order to maintain balance in the pursuit of development and improve quality of life of the people in the society. Sustainable development is a manipulation of resources with the aim of improving the quality of life of people both in present as well as in the future.

Omaye, (2022) assert that sustainable development is conceived as a situation where by everybody has basic life sustaining needs which include food, shelter, health, and protection. She further sees sustainable development as the maintenance of stand against foreign domination, or protest against been dependent and subject to the control of foreign power. This implies the sustainable development is the ability of citizens to obtain their needs and remained independent without been control by any foreign power. This can only be done if people acquire what they need and intent to acquire without being treated insignificant or irrelevant in the school or society. Therefore, every citizen needs to be encouraged and supported to acquire knowledge, skills, attitude, values and competencies so that such person will fit in to society for sustainable peaceful coexistence.

Nigerian Tertiary Education System

Tertiary education in Nigeria can be defined as all post-secondary education which include universities, colleges of education, polytechnics. The National policy on education defined tertiary education as higher education which include universities, colleges of education and Polytechnics (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2013) tertiary education system in Nigeria is divided in to university and non-university sector. The university sector is also divided in to public and private universities. Public universities are owned by federal or state government, while private universities owned by private individuals or organizations all are charged with responsibilities of producing higher degrees. They offer programmes at

undergraduate and post graduate levels. At undergraduate level, they award Bachelor Degrees while at postgraduate level, and they award Masters and Doctorate degrees. The management of each university be it private or public is headed by Vice Chancellor. All programmes of the universities are supervised and accredited by National Universities Commission (NUC).

The non-university sector comprises of polytechnics, monotechs. The non-university sector institutions are also divided in to two, public and private. The public ones are owed by federal or state government and private ones are owned by individuals or organizations. The polytechnics were established to train technical manpower. They offer two levels of programmes. National Diploma (ND) and Higher National Diploma (HND). The management of each polytechnic be it private or public is headed by Rector. The regulatory body for polytechnics is National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) The monotechs such as Colleges of education were established initially to produce professional teachers at basic education level, but now are granted dual mode of operation. They offer two levels programmes. Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) and Bachelor of education (B.Ed). The head of the colleges is called a Provost. The colleges of education have dual regulatory bodies. National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) and National Universities Commission (NUC). Ogundeji, Kazeem, and Olanriwaju (2022) assert that tertiary institutions benefit not just the individual, but society as a whole. They further said “graduates of tertiary education are more environmentally conscious, have healthier habits, and have a higher level of civil participation, also have increase revenue from higher earnings, and build stronger nations”. Tertiary institutions need to play a noticeable and leading role in preparing people to become active members of their society.

Contemporary Challenges of Social Sustainability in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions

Social sustainability in Nigerian tertiary institutions faces a variety of contemporary challenges. This includes issues like corruption, educational inequality, Lack of relevance, insecurity, Strike Actions among others. These hinder the institutions' ability to produce effective human resources and contribute to national social sustainable development. The challenges are as follows:

1. **Corruption:** there are lack transparency and accountability in Nigerian tertiary institutions which undermine trust in educational institutions. Corruption within tertiary institutions undermines public trust and diverts resources away from essential academic activities. This can hinder the advancement and sustainability of educational institutions.
2. **Educational inequality:** There are significant disparities in access to tertiary education based on socio- economic status, gender or geographical location. Individuals from low-income families, some women, and people with disabilities have been marginalized. They often face barrier to enrollment and success in education. A study conducted by Oluwatosin, and Endurance (2016) on gender inequality in Nigerian tertiary institutions, the case of University of Benin. The study revealed that men are still being continually appointed to important positions where important policies and decisions that affect the life of everybody in the tertiary institutions are

- taken. The few qualified women who could be considered for appointment to certain vital positions are often side-lined and the opportunity is given to the next male in the chain of command.
3. **Lack of Relevance:** There are courses in our tertiary institutions that are outdated. Many of our tertiary institutions suffer from curricula that do not meet the current market need. Some argue that the curriculum in Nigerian tertiary institutions may not be adequately aligned with the needs of the job market and the demands of a rapidly changing world, leading to graduates who are not well-prepared for the workforce.
 4. **Insecurity:** Insecurity, including cultism, armed robbery, kidnapping, and attacks on students and staff, poses a serious threat to the safety and well-being of the tertiary institutions' communities. Umar, (2022) asserts that learning environment must be provided with full security for effective teaching and learning. Insecurity is a situation whereby people are not safe and free from any crime or violence. This can create a climate of fear and anxiety in students, disrupting their academic activities and discouraging them from attending classes.
 5. **Strike Actions:** There are frequent and prolonged strikes by academic and non-academic staff unions in our tertiary institutions especially university unions ASSU to be precise. They often go on strike over salaries, earned academic allowance, and conditions of service. The most recent one in 2022 lasting for eight months. The 2022 strike began in February and ended in October. The strikes delay students' graduation, increase social vices like corruption, cultism, violence, stealing and increase financial burdens for student and parent due to extended stay in school.

Role of Educational Managers in ensuring Social Sustainability

Educational managers have to play their role fairly by integrating social sustainability in to educational practice and institutional policies through the following:

- i. **Community Engagement:** Educational managers need to develop initiatives that will link institution with community where it located. This can help address local socio-economic challenges, such as poverty, health care, and education. Involve member of the community in decision making process that affect them so that their voices should be heard and valued. Always encourage students to engage in community services, this cultivates a sense of responsibility and social awareness. Engage every member of the society regardless of wealth or status. Avoid paternalistic attitudes that undermine their autonomy as a member of a society. Cornwall in Okeke and Nweke (2023) asserts that, it goes beyond passive involvement and seek to empower community members by giving them a voice, enabling them to actively contribute their knowledge, skills and experiences in shaping the development initiatives that affect them.
- ii. **Inclusion:** Educational managers promote equal opportunities. They should ensure that educational opportunities are accessible not only to a people from well to do family but also to marginalized group in society. They should create inclusive environment that respects diversity, prevent discrimination, and promote social harmony within the institution and the wider community.

- iii. **Curriculum Development:** Educational managers ensure that the school curriculum integrates concept of social sustainability. They should emphasize on programmes that cut across different disciplines that can provide students with a holistic understanding of social issues, fostering critical thinking and innovation. In developing curriculum for tertiary institution, educational managers should organize it in such a way that it will enable the individual to advocate for themselves and their communities. Every student has to be given an opportunity to maximize his intellectual capacities through the provision of facilities so that they can participate in both curricula and extra-curricular activities in school.
- iv. **Students' Motivation:** Motivation is concerned with the cause of behaviours; why staff or students act or think in a particular way. Students' motivation is the act of creating drive or energy that propels them to specific positive actions that leads to their advancement and progress within and outside the institution (Nwankwo, 2014). Students need motivation without motivation, they easily get discouraged or frustrated.
- v. **Security and Health Services:** It is believed that, if there is fear in students, they cannot acquire what need to be acquired with full concentration. Tertiary institutions need to be free from all sort of insecurity. Health is also a very fundamental aspect of human life. The health services in educational institutions cannot be over emphasized. Educational managers should provide adequate and equipped health centres in their institutions. Nwankwo, (2014) states that " Each educational institution must have a Health medical Centre staffed with qualified staff and perhaps a medical Doctors in schools with large student population.

Conclusion:

Admittedly, social sustainability is one of the pillars of sustainable development. In addition, ensuring social sustainability in tertiary institution in Nigeria is one of the key roles of educational managers. Therefore, tertiary institutions in Nigeria should ensure that all programmes are for well-being of society. The recognition of social sustainability in tertiary institution is very crucial aspect of educational manager's daily activities by involving members of the community in decision making process, giving equal opportunities, promote motivation, integrate school curriculum with the concept of social sustainability. Certainly, there are contemporary challenges of ensuring social sustainability in Nigerian tertiary institutions and addressing these challenges requires a collaborative effort from government, educational managers, and communities by enhancing equal access, improving quality education and fostering a more inclusive and equitable educational environment so that social sustainability can be achieved in Nigerian tertiary institutions.

Suggestions

Based on the observed challenges of social sustainability in Nigerian tertiary institutions, the following suggestions are made:

- i. Government should ensure accountability and transparency in allocation of resources. This reduces the corruption and mismanagement of resources in Nigerian tertiary institutions.
- ii. Educational managers should enhance equal access to education and create educational environment that will accommodate social equity, community engagement as well as wellbeing of people in society
- iii. Government should ensure full funding and implementation of relevant educational programmes so as to match between skills acquired and marked needs.
- iv. Educational managers should collaborate with security agencies and create school and community security forum so as to have easy identification and apprehension of criminals.
- v. Government should improve working condition of tertiary institution personnel so that no union will embark on strike again.

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