

Revitalizing Tertiary Education in a Distressed Economy: Strategies for Sustainable Recovery and Adaptation

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Abstract

Education system in Nigeria, especially the public Tertiary level is bedeviled with several challenges that require efforts of all stakeholders to have a rethink about its revitalization in this distressed economy, towards a sustained recovery, for Nigerian national development. Tertiary education system in a distressed economy like Nigeria is bedeviled with several significant challenges and requires strategic approaches for sustained recovery move and adaptation. This paper therefore discusses a range of challenges that encompass funding and adequate infrastructures. It emphasizes the importance of innovative approaches to enhance infrastructure, effective financial management, strategic partnerships, and stakeholder's engagement. The goal is to foster adaptability, and innovation within the tertiary education institutions to navigate the complexities of a distressed economy. The implementation of these strategies requires a collaborative effort involving policymakers, institutional leaders, and stakeholders. Policymakers play a crucial role in creating an enabling environment through supportive policies and funding mechanisms. Institutional leaders must embrace a transformational mindset, fostering a culture of innovation and accountability. Engaging stakeholders, including students, faculty, alumni, and industry partners, is vital for building strong partnerships and aligning education programs with economic needs. The impact of these strategies is multifaceted. Financial sustainability measures enable institutions to diversify revenue streams, optimize resource allocation, and reduce dependence on public funding. By implementing these strategies, tertiary education can position themselves as resilient, dynamic, and indispensable contributors to societal and economic progress.

Keywords: Revitalizing, Tertiary Education, Distressed Economy, Strategies, Sustainable Recovery, Adaptation

Introduction

In today's dynamic educational landscape, the concept of revitalization in tertiary institutions has gained significant attention. With the aim of transforming traditional approaches to education, revitalization seeks to reshape the future of tertiary institutions by embracing innovation, technology, and student-centered learning. By fostering interdisciplinary collaboration, enhancing student support services, and forging strong industry partnerships, revitalization paves the way for a vibrant and holistic educational experience. This paradigm shift holds the promise of empowering students, equipping them with essential skills, and preparing them to thrive in an ever-changing world.

The higher education sector plays a crucial role in shaping the intellectual capital, workforce, and economic development of a nation Bejinaru and Prelipcean, (2017). However, in the face of a distressed economy, tertiary education institutions often encounter significant challenges that hinder their ability to fulfill their mission effectively. Economic downturns, budget constraints, poor infrastructures and obstacles that threaten the sustainability and relevance of tertiary education, therefore require revitalization. Revitalizing tertiary education in a distressed economy requires strategic planning and innovative approaches that address the unique circumstances and demands of the situation Bryson, (2018).

It necessitates a comprehensive examination of the current state of tertiary education, an exploration of successful initiatives and case studies from other countries or regions, and the identification of strategies for sustainable recovery and adaptation.

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An analysis of economic indicators and funding models will provide valuable insights into a sustainable financing mechanism for tertiary education in the distressed economy. This analysis will consider the financial constraints and explore alternative funding approaches that can ensure the long-term viability of tertiary institutions. By synthesizing the quantitative and qualitative findings, a comprehensive framework of strategies for revitalizing tertiary education in the distressed economy will be developed. Moreover, the revitalization of tertiary education in a distressed economy is not only a matter of economic recovery but also a crucial investment in human capital development Song and Zhou, (2020). By equipping individuals with relevant knowledge, skills, and competencies, tertiary education empowers them to navigate economic challenges, contribute to innovation and productivity, and drive overall societal progress.

The significance of this research lies in its potential to provide actionable strategies that could address the specific challenges faced by tertiary institutions in such circumstances may be daunting in this distressed economy. It also presents an opportunity for transformative change and innovation. By identifying a successful initiative and drawing upon lessons learned from similar contexts, this research aims at inspiring a creative solution, tailored to the needs and resources for a vibrant tertiary education system in a distressed economy. Furthermore, the recommendations analysis would from this have implications beyond the individual institutions and the distressed economy itself. A thriving tertiary education sector can contribute to the overall economic recovery and attract foreign investment, as it demonstrates a commitment to human capital development and the nurturing of a skilled workforce Mahapatro, (2022). The revitalized tertiary education can also lead to positive social outcomes, such as increased social mobility, reduced inequality, and improved quality of life for individuals and communities.

It is essential to acknowledge that revitalizing tertiary education in a distressed economy requires collaboration and commitment from various stakeholders, including policymakers, institutional leaders, educators, students, and employers. This position paper presents strategies to facilitate a dialogue among the stakeholders, fostering a shared understanding of the challenges and opportunities and encouraging collective efforts towards sustainable recovery and adaptation, towards Nigeria National development.

The Concept of Revitalization in Tertiary Institution

The concept of revitalization in tertiary institutions revolves around the idea of reinvigorating and transforming the educational landscape to meet the evolving needs of students and society. It encompasses a range of strategies and initiatives aimed at improving the quality, relevance, and effectiveness of higher education. Revitalization involves embracing innovation, technology, and student-centered approaches to teaching and learning Kohnke and Foug, (2023). It emphasizes interdisciplinary collaboration, industry partnerships, and comprehensive student support services. By adopting a holistic and forward-thinking approach, revitalization seeks to shape the future of tertiary institutions, empowering students to thrive in an increasingly complex and interconnected world. It refocuses on a commitment to continuous improvement, adaptation, and the pursuit of educational excellence.

Revitalization in tertiary institutions acknowledges that the traditional models of education may no longer be sufficient in preparing students for the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century. It recognizes the need to adapt to rapid advancements in technology, changes in the job market, and the diverse needs of learners. The concept of revitalization encourages institutions to reassess their curricula, teaching methods, and institutional structures to create a more dynamic and relevant educational experiences. Olivares, (2023) observed that one of the key aspects of revitalization is the integration of technology and digital transformation. Tertiary institutions are leveraging digital tools, online platforms, and virtual learning environments to enhance accessibility, flexibility, and engagement in education. From interactive multimedia materials to virtual simulations and remote collaboration, technology enables students to access information, interact with peers and instructors, and participate in immersive and connective learning experiences beyond the confines of a traditional teaching and learning classrooms.

Furthermore, revitalization emphasizes the importance of student-centered learning approaches. It promotes active learning, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills through methods such as project-based learning, flipped classrooms, and experiential learning opportunities. By shifting the focus from passive absorption of knowledge to active engagement, students become co-creators of their knowledge, developing skills that are essential for success in the modern workforce. Revitalization also recognizes the value of interdisciplinary education. Breaking down disciplinary boundaries and promoting cross-disciplinary collaboration enables students to develop a broader perspective to knowledge, think critically across different domains, and tackle complex real-world challenges. That is why Taylor et'al (2021) maintained that interdisciplinary programs and courses encourage students to integrate knowledge from various fields, fostering creativity, innovation, and a holistic understanding of the interconnected nature of global issues.

In addition, revitalization places a strong emphasis on comprehensive student support services. Recognizing the fact that students' success goes beyond academic achievements, institutions provide robust counseling, mentoring, and career development services to support their holistic growth. Mental health support, guidance in academic and career choices, extracurricular activities contribute to the overall well-being as well as personal development of students. Revitalization also involves cultivating strong partnerships with industries and communities. By collaborating with business organizations, nonprofits organizations as well as government organizations, tertiary institutions can provide students with practical experiences, internships, and opportunities to work on real-world projects. These partnerships not only enhance the employability of graduates but also foster innovation, entrepreneurship, and social impact.

While the specific decays that necessitate revitalization may vary across different tertiary institutions, there are some common challenges that often drive the need for revitalization efforts. Rapid advancements in technology, changes in industries, and evolving societal needs often render traditional curricula outdated. Revitalization aims to update and align the curricula with current trends, ensuring that students receive relevant knowledge and skills. Traditional teaching methods that prioritize rote memorization and passive learning can stifle creativity and critical thinking. Revitalization encourages innovative approaches to teaching and learning, fostering an environment that nurtures curiosity, problem-solving, and experimentation.

Passive learning environments, large class sizes, and limited student involvement can hinder engagement and active participation. Revitalization strives to create interactive and participatory learning experiences, promoting student engagement and collaboration Rogers and Gronseth, (2021). Many tertiary institutions struggle with integrating technology into their educational practices. Revitalization aims to leverage technology to enhance teaching, learning, research, and administrative processes, enabling institutions to keep pace with the digital age. Graduates often face a disconnect between the skills they possess and those required by employers. Revitalization tries to bridge this gap by aligning curricula with industry needs, providing practical experiences, and cultivating transferable skills essential for employment.

Inadequate support services for students, such as counseling, mentoring, and career guidance, can hinder their overall success and well-being. Revitalization focuses on strengthening student support systems to ensure holistic development and positive outcomes. Disciplinary silos can inhibit cross-pollination of ideas and interdisciplinary collaboration. Revitalization encourages breaking down these barriers to foster collaboration, innovation, and holistic approaches to problem-solving. Traditional assessment methods often focus on regurgitating information rather than assessing critical thinking and practical application of knowledge. Revitalization promotes the development and implementation of effective and diverse assessment strategies that align with desired learning outcomes. These are some of the areas that revitalization efforts typically address. However, it is important to note that the specific challenges and priorities may vary among institutions. Revitalization seeks to address the unique needs and context of each tertiary institution, driving positive change and enhancing the overall educational experience for students and stakeholders.

Revitalization in tertiary institutions therefore presents a shift towards creating a dynamic, inclusive and future-oriented educational environment. It embraces technology, student-centered learning, interdisciplinary collaboration, comprehensive support system and strong partnership to prepare students for the challenges and opportunities of the modern world. By embracing revitalization, tertiary institutions can ensure that they remain at the forefront of educational excellence, equipping students with the knowledge, skills and the mindset to thrive and make meaningful contributions to society.

CURRENT STATE OF TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN NIGERIA

There are a lot of challenges facing the nation's public tertiary institutions, these challenges include inadequate funding, unstable academic calendar, brain-drain, cultism, examination malpractice, corruption, poor infrastructure, overcrowding among others. A lot of these challenges identified in the academic world are most times linked to poor management, in the sense that putting in place the right commitment and political-will to changing things in tertiary institutions has been a challenge.

Gross underfunding, monitoring and maladministration of the tertiary institutions by appropriate authorities who admit student beyond the carrying capacity of their institution, non-enforcement of standard and regulations, generation of young people in the tertiary institution, commercialization, and lack of basic infrastructures such as accommodation as well as power remains the major challenges observed in the tertiary institutions.

Most campuses of tertiary institutions are laced with decayed infrastructures such as poor and inadequate lecture halls, hostel accommodation, office spaces, health centers, road etc. These and many more remain the issues that have

continued to account for protest in tertiary institutions, which calls for revitalization as this was not the case in times past when the Government and our leaders paid more attention to the welfare of both the students and teachers. What is seen in recent times is that leaders care less for the educational sector. Addressing these decays in Nigeria public tertiary institutions for sustainability will involve a concerted efforts from the government, educational leaders and academic communities, because when these decays are successfully handled, it will have a significant and positive impact on the quality of education generally.

STRATEGIES FOR REVITALIZATION OF TERTIARY INSTITUTION IN NIGERIA

The need for revitalization of tertiary institutions in a distressed economy for sustainable recovery and adaptation cannot be overstated. Revitalizing a tertiary institution is a complex and multifaceted process that requires a comprehensive strategy. The strategies needed for the sustainable recovery and adaptation needed for tertiary institution among others are explained below:

1. **Revitalizing Inadequate Funding for Better Outcome in the Educational Sector:** Funding is a major component of any revitalization strategy in education, with insufficient funding, it is difficult to improve infrastructure, attract or retain high quality teachers in the educational sector. Hence, funding of education needs to come from various sources such as Government Grant, Philanthropic support from individuals, companies or Non-Governmental Organization (NGO's), Public-Private Partnership, External Aid such as World Bank (WHO), United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) etc. When such funds are not available, it affects the overall management / administration of the school system, most especially the tertiary institutions. Financial challenges within tertiary education institutions can have a direct impact on educational outcomes Tang, (2023). In a distressed economy, tertiary institutions face significant financial challenges that threaten their sustainability and ability to provide quality education. Economic downturns, budget constraints, inflation, and reduced public funding pose formidable obstacles to the financial health and operational capacity of these institutions Chan (2016). Olivares (2023) opines that without adequate financial resources, standards of education at any level is tantamount to a mirage that is, building castle in the air. Financing education therefore is important because it is used to provide all physical, material and human resources needed to maintain and keep the school system running smoothly.

Nwadiani (2012) identified underfunding, shortage of all other resources except learners and politicking and lack of political will as antecedent element to the decay of education in Nigeria. You will agree that good political policies are being formulated in Nigeria, but such policies are not adequately followed at the implementation stage, hence, these policies collapse due to inadequate budgetary allocation to this crucial sector as the Federal Government of Nigeria is so unstable and dwindling when it comes to the allocation of finance to education, they keep falling below the required 26% recommended by UNESCO. The average budgetary allocation to education has been hinged around 8% over the last decade, this affirms that the Government Allocation to Education is not sufficient to provide the type of education that would take the nation to its next level considering the development and demand by the sector, particularly, the tertiary institution UNESCO (2022).

2. **Revitalizing Inadequate Infrastructural Facilities for Better Outcome in Educational Sector:** infrastructural facilities in the educational sector is an important factor in determining the quality of teaching/learning and graduates being sent into the society. Hence, most tertiary institution lacks adequate infrastructural facilities such as Laboratories, Libraries, ICT facilities, Hostel Accommodation, power and other quality teaching/learning environment have remained a major challenge facing almost all public tertiary institutions across the country while existing infrastructure in most institutions are in deplorable state, others have below acceptable standard and in few cases nonexistence. In this regard, Tang (2023) lamented that this can be very challenging as tertiary institutions should have a comfortable and enabling environment to ensure sustainability in the educational sector. Other cases where there is no sufficient accommodation for the newly intake, it leaves them with the option of squatting in places they wouldn't have love to originally and, in most cases, they are exposed to peer pressure that influences them negatively as a result they are unable to face the essence or reason why they are in school. Also in most cases, they end up in the homes of relative and are saddled with much home chores with less time to face academic's work.

Another aspect of infrastructure is inadequate classroom, where there is insufficient classroom space, it can lead to clash of lecture time in the same space and in situations where the lecturers are not understanding or stressed out for the day, they leave the students and make them feel like they are unserious and in the end, they have high expectations from the students which in most cases could lead to poor performance in their academics. The Government could liaise with bodies like TETFund, Host Communities, NGO and Philanthropic individuals to help in building classrooms, hostel

Accommodations, Laboratories, ICT facilities and office spaces as is seen in most tertiary institutions of learning. This will help to curb the menace in the educational sector.

THE WAY FORWARD

It is important to note that there is no single solution to inadequate funding and infrastructural challenges facing public tertiary institutions in Nigeria. A combination of approaches will be needed to ensure that all students have high-quality and conducive learning environment for quality output.

- **Increased Government Funding:** if the standard of education must be improved, the government needs to increase the funding of education, mostly the public tertiary institutions by allocating up full 26% allocation recommended by UNESCO to education, to allow for improvement in infrastructures, provision of a more conducive environment for both lecturers and students to help in conducting more research that can be of help in the future.
- **The need to address Corruption:** Corruption is a major problem in Nigeria, and it has a negative impact on the funding of public tertiary institutions. The government needs to take serious steps to combat corruption in the educational sector, such as strengthening the enforcement of anti-corruption laws and creating a culture of transparency and accountability.
- **Fundraising and Philanthropic Support Strategy:** Fundraising and philanthropic support have been effective in generating additional funds for institutions Kumar and Chakrabarti, (2023). Successful campaigns and alumni engagement can provide financial resources for scholarships, research grants, infrastructure development, and program enhancements. However, the effectiveness depends on the institution's ability to engage donors, build strong relationships, and demonstrate a compelling case for support.
- **Public-Private Partnerships Strategy:** Public-private partnerships have the potential to provide significant financial support and resources to institutions. These partnerships can lead to industry-relevant curriculum development, research collaborations, and increased funding for specialized programs. The government can work with private Companies to develop public private partnership in infrastructural development.
- **Financial Management and Budget Planning Strategy:** Effective financial management practices help institutions optimize their resources, monitor expenses, and make informed decisions. Transparent budgeting and internal controls promote accountability and ensure that funds are allocated appropriately Adikari & Shrestha (2023). Strategic financial planning enables institutions to anticipate and address financial challenges proactively.
- **Planning:** To have or improve on infrastructural development, each administration should have a clear plan for infrastructural development based on allocating a certain percentage (%) of her Internally Generated Revenue (IGR) to development of her infrastructural.
- **Implementation Measures:** The Administrators of the Tertiary Institutions must see the need for implementing workable measures towards ensuring that resources allocated are efficiently and effectively put to use in infrastructural development.
- **Sustainability:** it is important as well to ensure that infrastructural development is sustainable, they should be designed to stand the test of time and be maintained in a way that minimizes the environmental impact.
- **Community Based Initiatives:** The government and the Administrators of Public Tertiary Institutions should support community-based initiatives as this will then engage in infrastructural development.

Conclusion

In conclusion, revitalizing tertiary education in a distressed economy is a long-term endeavor that requires commitment, dedication, strategic planning, adaptability and active involvement of all stakeholders. By implementing the strategies discussed, institutions can navigate the challenges posed by economic hardships and create a foundation for long-term success. Diversifying revenue streams, optimizing resource allocation, and forging strong industry partnerships can enhance financial sustainability and infrastructural development. Prioritizing academic quality, curriculum relevance, research and innovation fosters educational excellence and societal impact. Investing in comprehensive student support services and community engagement initiatives promotes student success and contributes to local development. Ultimately, by embracing these strategies for sustainable recovery and adaptation, Public tertiary institutions can play a pivotal role in working with ease in the distressed economy, empowering students, and preparing them for future challenges and opportunities.

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