



Improving university education through international collaboration for quality manpower development for the new world economy in south east, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study focused on improving university education through international collaboration for quality manpower development for the new world economy in South East, Nigeria. Three hypotheses guided the study. The descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. The population of the study comprised 11,107 Academic Staff (Federal = 6,039; State = 5,068) in the ten (10) public universities in South East, Nigeria. The sample size was 400 Academic Staff (Federal = 218; State = 182) representing 3.6% of the population drawn using proportionate stratified random sampling technique. An instrument titled “Improving University Education through International Collaboration for Quality Manpower Development Questionnaire (IUEICQMDQ)” structured by the researchers and validated by experts with reliability co-efficient of 0.81 determined with Cronbach Alpha was used for data collection. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while z-test statistics was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 alpha level. The study revealed among others that the ways universities could enable international collaboration for their improvement include: universities need to have clear policies centered on collaboration; put procedures in place to recognize qualifications, programmes and institutions across border; devise mechanisms for linguistic tutoring, licensure and registration and so on. It was recommended among others that universities and their representatives should proactively work with the Government to create an enabling environment and policies that ensure international collaboration.

Keywords: improving, university education, international collaboration, quality manpower development, new world economy

Introduction

The global economy in the 21st century is characterized as innovation-driven economy which is powered by knowledge, creativity, and technology. The triple factors engineer the global value of countries in the new world economy. The trio play a predominant role in wealth creation, particularly when compared with traditional factors of production such as land, labor, and capital. This is partly due to the rise of knowledge-intensive business services - such as computer-related services, research and development (R&D) services, and business services - which provide critical intermediate inputs into other economic activity. The developed countries as a group dominate knowledge, creativity and technology-intensive flows, while developing countries' share is growing at a low pace. Thus, if the less developed countries are going to be relevant in the new world economy, quality manpower development is critical. Manpower development is the process of equipping the human capital with the requisite knowledge, skills and competences through the instrumentality of education to fit into productive economic sectors and occupations. Ibitayo (n.d.) surmised that manpower development is the building and enhancement of the human resources through formal education and training. The essence of manpower development is that of driving innovation and economic growth. Adeyeye (2015) ^[2] in line with this view averred that development of human capital is recognized as an essential pre-condition for a country's economic, political and socio-cultural transformation. The manpower is also developed to continuously adapt to the new challenges of its total environment. This is because the economy is a dynamic entity, which is constantly changing in response to various stimuli such as introduction and discoveries of new products or techniques of production. A vital global trend to ensure appropriate (quality) manpower development that meets the challenges of the new world economy is international collaboration in education. International collaboration in education is a global strategy that calls for helping as many countries as possible raise the game of their entire education system, all the way up to secondary and university education, to meet the demands of the new world economy. Over the past five years and in light of the new UN agenda for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, this new approach has received positive attention. According to Njuguma and Itegi (2013) ^[10], international collaboration in education can be conceptualized as opening the education system in such a way that its inputs and outputs are not restricted to national boundaries. This is to say that university education can no longer be discussed on strictly national context but borders on collaborative effort globally. For Murugesan

(2012) ^[9], international collaboration serves as a means to discuss common challenges and new approaches to deal with them, and to share examples of good practices with the global education community. The collaboration of universities in the less developed countries with foreign institutions is seen as an important element for the improvement of university education system. Improvement of university education especially in Nigeria is a sine qua non to the global changes. Improvement of university education entails raising the embodiment of the whole operation of university education to a standard that ensures global relevance. Thus, Townsend (2014) ^[14] stated that improving the quality and relevance of education relates to improving educational management, facilities, equipment, teacher/tutor competencies and professional development, curricular and resource development, and strengthening capacity in learner-centred and adult learning methodologies. Improvement of these factors guarantees standard of product in terms of its employability and productiveness in the knowledge-driven society and economy (Giami & Solomon-Alufohai, 2020) ^[5]. Improving quality and efficiency of university education would enable the beneficiaries to satisfactorily achieve academic goals, become relevant in today's knowledge-driven society and economy, and enhance the standing of educational institutions in the global ranking. The new world economy, with its knowledge intensity, requires a leap forward in each country's education system - from primary to university education. An international collaboration on this remain sacrosanct. Collaboration is vital in solving education issues in developing countries. Collaboration will help to trigger improvement in university education system. Recently many universities in the developing countries have trodden this path towards improving the standard of their university education. The high ranking universities are located mostly in the developed countries and therefore, this attitude of looking for collaborations with developed countries by universities in the developing countries cannot be overemphasized. Against this background, the study focused on improving university education through international collaboration for quality manpower development for the new world economy in South East Nigeria

Statement of the Problem

Currently international collaboration among universities is growing. An increasing number of universities in the developing countries have followed their counterparts in the developed countries by adopting the international strategy that seeks to help their education system catch up to the global frontier and best practice in education for manpower development. Such countries have realized that university education can be improved and human capacity developed through association and collaboration with other institutions at the international level. The researchers observed that universities in Nigeria are under-represented on the platform of the international collaboration which is a major obstacle in the way of quality manpower development in university education institutions in the 21st century.

The attention seems to have been on relying on domestic institutions. The trend undervalues Nigerian universities' position in global ranking and represents a missed opportunity, for example, in building alliances and relationships with emerging economies and developed countries. This could end up harming the economic development by deterring future innovative activity and limiting the manpower the ability to access best-of-breed skills, competence and creativity that are vital to boosting domestic productivity in the new world economy. These situations are what bothered the researchers.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The study aimed at improving university education through international collaboration for quality manpower development for the new world economy in South East, Nigeria. Specifically the objectives were to:

1. find out the ways universities could enable international collaboration for their improvement for quality manpower development for the new world economy in South East, Nigeria
2. identify the international collaboration strategies that could aid the improvement of universities for quality manpower development for the new world economy in South East, Nigeria
3. investigate the challenges that could impede universities' success in international collaboration for their improvement for quality manpower development for the new world economy in South East, Nigeria

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 alpha level

1. There is no significant difference between the mean values of the Staff of Federal and State universities on the ways universities could enable international collaboration for their improvement for quality manpower development for the new world economy in South East, Nigeria.
2. There is no significant difference between the mean scores of the Staff of Federal and State universities on the international collaboration strategies that could aid the improvement of universities for quality manpower development for the new world economy in South East, Nigeria.
3. There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of the Staff of Federal and State universities on the challenges that could impede universities' success in international collaboration for their improvement for quality manpower development for the new world economy in South East, Nigeria.

Literature Review

International collaboration is an important mechanism that enables universities in developing countries to improve and key in to global relevance. Universities cannot achieve this on a platter of gold. There are enabling

conditions necessary to put in place to ensure collaboration with foreign institutions. In their research into the self-improving school-led system (SISS), Greany and Higham (2018) ^[6] identified such conditions which include: history of local relationships, the context of schools and the agency of local leaders. Robert-Okah (2015) ^[14] highlighted some of the continuous effort directed at keeping the institution open for internationalization to include: enlarged responsibility, decentralized power and authority, and clearly stipulated policy formation. Reporting on a case study research with groups of schools working together in both formal and informal collaborations, Chapman *et al.* (2010) ^[3] found approaches to leadership that are open to collaboration and self-governance underpinned by trust and shared values as key characteristics of the most effective collaborations in their study. Adamu (2019) ^[1] asserted that Nigerian universities must now, more than ever, take deliberate measures to key into available opportunities for linkages and cooperation with their foreign counterparts, if they were to remain globally competitive. Improving universities in the developing countries requires suitable and operational strategies. The strategies are applied to describe the activities done by foreign institutions to integrate a global aspect into research, teaching, service functions, management policies and systems of universities. The strategies suggest paths to take to leap frog the university education system to a standard that meets global relevance.

University of Birmingham (n.d.) identified some of the strategies that are obtainable from the institution to include: supporting universities in the development of their staff and providing international experiences for students and staff, student exchange and teaching partnerships to joint research on global issues, arranging funding for joint research projects with funding bodies and to work with centres of research expertise across the world. Robert-Okah (2015) ^[14] quipped that improving university education through collaboration occurs through exchange programmes for learners, having collaborated study scheme, foreign research supervision, and collaborated research conduct by scholars, exchange of course teachers such as visiting professorship as well as sharing of administrative models, personnel and facilities. Hyderabad (2016) ^[7] affirmed that these initiatives are part of the Andhra Pradesh Government efforts to improve standards in its State varsities by forging closer ties with higher education institutions in United Kingdom, Europe and Australia. The notion of improvement of university education in the developing countries through international collaboration is a powerful and seductive one with which few would argue in principle. Yet for all of the possibilities this approach presents, there are pitfalls and barriers that often hinder or prevent meaningful collaborative activity. The study of Sana (2015) ^[15] showed that the major sources of challenges to the university's international collaboration efforts are difficulties in making contacts with international institutions, language barriers, faculty resistance to international partnerships, cross-cultural issues, and establishing partnership agreements. Dinansha *et al.* (2016) ^[4] found that collaboration between institutes was affected by the organisational structure of the partner institutes, political influences, the collaboration design and limited funding resulted in restricted engagement by some partners. Robert-Okah (2015) ^[14] identified paucity of funds allocated to the education sector in the national budget, lack of periodic review of institutional structure, academic programmes, and facilities in line with the current global sophistication, the activities of strikes and incessant closure of schools as barriers that have affected Nigerian universities seeking cross border education. Owens (2018) ^[12] submitted that international collaboration has its share of challenges. Some are minor inconveniences that are easy to adjust to, while others can turn the project into a difficult grind. Nwamanah (2021) ^[11] averred that the challenges confronting the higher education system in Nigeria are alarming and these challenges have over time watered down the quality of higher education.

Methodology

The descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. The population of the study comprised 11,107 Academic Staff (Federal = 6,039; State = 5,068) in the ten (10) public universities in South East, Nigeria. The sample size was 400 Academic Staff (Federal = 218; State = 182) representing 3.6% of the population. Proportionate stratified random sampling technique was used to draw the sample. An instrument titled "Improving University Education through International Collaboration for Quality Manpower Development Questionnaire (IUEICQMDQ)" structured by the researchers and validated by experts with reliability coefficient of 0.81 determined with Cronbach Alpha was used for data generation. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while z-test statistics was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 alpha level.

An item with a calculated mean value equal or greater than 2.50 was accepted while an item with the calculated mean value less than or equal to 2.49 was rejected.

Results

Table 1: The Mean and Standard Deviation Responses of the Ways Universities could enable International Collaboration for their Improvement for Quality Manpower Development for the New World Economy in South East, Nigeria.

S No.	The Ways Universities could enable International Collaboration	X	SD	Remarks
1	Universities need to have clear policies centered on collaboration.	3.08	0.59	Agreed
2	Put procedures in place to recognize qualifications, programmes and institutions across border.	3.06	0.62	Agreed

3	Devise mechanisms for linguistic tutoring, licensure and registration.	2.98	0.78	Agreed
4	Set up forum for mandatory university partnerships.	3.02	0.71	Agreed
5	Build an institutional culture that supports international collaboration.	3.04	0.69	Agreed
6	Develop strong leadership that is open to collaboration.	3.09	0.56	Agreed

Table 1 indicates that the mean values of all the items are 3.08, 3.06, 2.98, 3.02, 3.04 and 3.09. All the mean values are above the criterion mean of 2.50. With the mean values above the criterion mean of 2.50, the data revealed that the ways universities could enable international collaboration for their improvement for quality manpower development for the new world economy are universities need to have clear policies centered on collaboration; put procedures in place to recognize qualifications, programmes and institutions across border; devise mechanisms for linguistic tutoring, licensure and registration, Set up forum for mandatory university partnerships; build an institutional culture that supports international collaboration and develop strong leadership that is open to collaboration.

Table 2: The Mean and Standard Deviation Responses of the International Collaboration Strategies that could aid the Improvement of Universities for Quality Manpower Development for the New World Economy in South East, Nigeria.

S No.	Strategies Variables	X	SD	Remarks
7	Cross-border accreditation of institutional structure, academic programmes and facilities.	3.01	0.69	Agreed
8	Regular academic staff capacity building through international seminars, workshops and conferences.	3.05	0.61	Agreed
9	Cross-border research collaboration.	3.10	0.45	Agreed
10	Cross-border affiliation.	3.03	0.67	Agreed
11	Granting visa for staff/student mobility.	2.43	1.09	Disagreed
12	Exchange of course teachers such as visiting professorship.	2.93	0.76	Agreed
13	Sharing of administrative models, personnel and facilities.	3.07	0.58	Agreed

Table 2 shows that except item 11 with the mean rating of 2.43 below the criterion mean of 2.50, all the other items 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, and 13 have mean ratings above the criterion mean of 2.50. The data therefore revealed that cross-border accreditation of institutional structure, academic programmes and facilities; regular academic staff capacity building through international seminars, workshops and conferences; cross-border research collaboration; cross-border affiliation; exchange of course teachers such as visiting professorship and sharing of administrative models, personnel and facilities are the international collaboration strategies that could aid the improvement of universities for quality manpower development for the new world economy.

Table 3: The Mean and Standard Deviation Responses of the Challenges that could impede Universities' Success in International Collaboration for their Improvement for Quality Manpower Development for the New World Economy in South East, Nigeria.

S No.	Challenges Variables	X	SD	Remarks
14	Risks of political turbulence.	3.08	0.54	Agreed
15	The declining Nation support for public higher education.	3.05	0.59	Agreed
16	The activity of strike and incessant closure of universities.	3.09	0.52	Agreed
17	Paucity of funds allocated to the education sector in the national budget.	3.11	0.43	Agreed
18	Lack of policy provisions on collaboration.	3.04	0.61	Agreed
19	Regulatory environment.	3.02	0.65	Agreed

Table 3 reveals that all the items have mean scores of 3.08, 3.05, 3.09, 3.11, 3.04, 3.02 and all the mean scores are above the criterion mean of 2.50.

Having the mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50, the data indicated that the challenges that could impede universities' success in international collaboration for their improvement for quality manpower development for the new world economy include: risks of political turbulence; the declining Nation support for public higher education; the activity of strike and incessant closure of universities; paucity of funds allocated to the education sector in the national budget; lack of policy provisions on collaboration and regulatory environment.

Hypotheses

H₀₁: There is no significant difference between the mean values of the Staff of Federal and State universities on the ways universities could enable international collaboration for their improvement for quality manpower development for the new world economy in South East, Nigeria.

Table 4: z-test of Difference on the Responses of the Staff of Federal and State Universities on the Ways Universities could enable International Collaboration for their Improvement for Quality Manpower Development for the New World Economy in South East, Nigeria.

Staff	N	\bar{X}	SD	df	Z-cal	Z-crit	Decision
Federal Universities	218	3.09	0.61	398	1.10	1.96	Accepted
State Universities	182	3.00	0.70				

Table 4 shows that the calculated z-value is 1.10 at 398 degrees of freedom and 0.05 alpha level. Since the calculated z-value of 1.10 is less than the table value of 1.96, the study therefore failed to reject the null hypothesis.

Ho₂: There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of the Staff of Federal and State universities on the international collaboration strategies that could aid the improvement of universities for quality manpower development for the new world economy in South East, Nigeria.

Table 5: z-test of Difference on the Responses of the Staff of Federal and State Universities on the International Collaboration Strategies that could aid the Improvement of Universities for Quality Manpower Development for the New World Economy in South East, Nigeria.

Staff	N	\bar{X}	SD	df	Z-cal	Z-crit	Decision
Federal Universities	218	2.97	0.65	398	0.60	1.96	
State Universities	182	2.92	0.74				

Table 5 reveals that the calculated z-value is 0.60 at 398 degrees of freedom and at 0.05 alpha level. Since the calculated z-value of 0.60 is less than the table value of 1.96, the null hypothesis is therefore upheld.

Ho₃: There is no significant difference between the mean scores of the Staff of Federal and State universities on the challenges that could impede universities' success in international collaboration for their improvement for quality manpower development for the new world economy in South East, Nigeria.

Table 6: z-test of Difference on the Responses of the Staff of Federal and State Universities on the Challenges that could impede Universities' Success in International Collaboration for their Improvement for Quality Manpower Development for the New World Economy in South East, Nigeria.

Staff	N	\bar{X}	SD	DF	Z-cal	Z-crit	decision
Federal Universities	218	3.08	0.52	398	0.40	1.96	Accepted
State Universities	182	3.05	0.59				

Table 6 indicates that the calculated z-value is 0.40 at 398 degrees of freedom and 0.05 alpha level. Since the calculated z-value of 0.40 is less than the table value of 1.96, the null hypothesis is therefore retained.

Discussion of Findings

The study revealed that the ways universities could enable international collaboration for their improvement for quality manpower development for the new world economy are: universities need to have clear policies centered on collaboration; put procedures in place to recognize qualifications, programmes and institutions across border; devise mechanisms for linguistic tutoring, licensure and registration; set up forum for mandatory university partnerships; build an institutional culture that supports international collaboration and develop strong leadership that is open to collaboration. The findings complement the conditions identified by Robert-Okah (2015) ^[14] and Greany and Higham (2018) ^[6]. The findings are in tandem with the findings of Chapman *et al.* (2010) ^[3]. The results corroborate the assertion of Adamu (2019) ^[1] that Nigerian universities must now, more than ever, take deliberate measures to key into available opportunities for linkages and cooperation with their foreign counterparts, if they were to remain globally competitive.

The study equally revealed that cross-border accreditation of institutional structure, academic programmes and facilities; regular academic staff capacity building through international seminars, workshops and conferences; cross-border research collaboration; cross-border affiliation; exchange of course teachers such as visiting professorship and sharing of administrative models, personnel and facilities are the international collaboration strategies that could aid the improvement of universities for quality manpower development for the new world economy. The findings are in line with the strategies identified by University of Birmingham (n.d) that are obtainable from their institution. The findings are consistent with the strategies identified by Robert-Okah (2015) ^[14]. Hyderabad (2016) ^[7] affirmed that these initiatives are part of the Andhra Pradesh Government efforts to improve standards in its State varsities by forging closer ties with higher education institutions in United Kingdom, Europe and Australia.

The study further revealed that the challenges that could impede universities' success in international collaboration for their improvement for quality manpower development for the new world economy include: risks of political turbulence; the declining Nation support for public higher education; the activity of strike and incessant closure of universities; paucity of funds allocated to the education sector in the national budget; lack of policy provisions on collaboration and regulatory environment. The findings are in consonance with the findings of Sana (2015) ^[15]. The findings complement the findings of Dinansha *et al.* (2016) ^[4]. Some of the findings correlate with the challenges identified by Robert-Okah (2015) ^[14]. The findings affirm the submission of Owens (2018) ^[12] that international collaboration has its share of challenges. Some are minor inconveniences that are easy to adjust to, while others can turn the project into a difficult grind. The findings support Nwamanah (2021) ^[11] who averred that the challenges confronting the higher education system in Nigeria are alarming and these challenges have over time watered down the quality of higher education.

Conclusion

The findings of the study shed light on the ways that universities could enable international collaboration, provide insights on the ground strategies from the perspectives of international collaboration that could aid improvement of university education and highlights a number of barriers to the success of collaboration among South East, Nigerian universities and foreign institutions.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommended the following:

- Universities and their representatives should proactively work with the Government to create an enabling environment and policies that ensure international collaboration.
- The Government and the relevant agencies should steer up international collaboration in order to adopt these strategies that are geared towards improving university education for quality manpower development.
- There should be incremental improvements in these problem areas through Government's macro-steering and the strategic management of the universities in order to key in to international collaboration.

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