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International Organizations and Universities Development in Nigeria

Ogbu Wilfred
Wilfredogbu212@gmail.com
Department of Educational Management, University of Abuja.

Abstract: University education serves as a cornerstone for human resource development and societal advancement, characterized by its emphasis on teaching, research, and community engagement. With governance and funding primarily orchestrated by various stakeholders, including governmental bodies and international entities, universities play a pivotal role in shaping the intellectual and socio-economic landscape of nations. This paper explores the substantial contributions of international organizations to the evolution of Nigerian universities. Through a comprehensive analysis of funding initiatives, infrastructure development projects, and research collaborations, the study underscores the significant role played by international actors in enhancing the educational landscape in Nigeria. Drawing upon empirical evidence, the paper concludes that international organizations have made substantial strides in bolstering educational resources, infrastructure, and research endeavors within Nigerian universities. In light of these findings, the paper advocates for proactive measures by the government to foster deeper collaboration and engagement with international institutions, thereby leveraging their expertise and resources to further enhance the quality and accessibility of education in Nigeria.

Keywords: International organizations, university development, universities

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INTRODUCTION

University education stands as the pinnacle of academic pursuit, succeeding secondary education and serving as a catalyst for societal evolution. It represents a crucial platform for the cultivation of skilled professionals, essential for driving social, economic, and technological progress within communities, states, and nations (Ogunode, Olowonefa & Idowu, 2024). Through its structured programs, universities groom individuals across diverse fields, culminating in the conferment of academic credentials upon graduation (Ogunode et al., 2024). Furthermore, universities are hubs of knowledge dissemination, research exploration, and community engagement, shaping not only individual careers but also societal development trajectories (Ogunode & Ayeni, 2023).

Building upon the foundational understanding on the role of universities for global development, Ogunode, Audu, and Olatunde-Aiyedun (2022) sheds light on the crucial aspect of beginning from the community, wherein universities serve as agents of positive change beyond academic pursuits. By examining the problems plaguing community service initiatives, such as inadequate resources and institutional constraints, the study offers valuable insights into the enhancement of university-community interactions. Moreover, it presents a pathway for universities to effectively address societal needs and contribute meaningfully to national development agendas. This exploration underscores the transformative potential of universities as catalysts for social progress and underscores the importance of robust community engagement strategies in advancing societal development trajectories. Therefore, within the Nigerian context, universities stand as pivotal institutions aligned with national development imperatives (Oyebade & Dike, n.d). Their role transcends mere academic instruction, extending into the realms of research, innovation, and community service. As centers of knowledge production and dissemination, they play a vital role in nurturing high-caliber professionals equipped to tackle evolving societal challenges. This alignment with national development goals underscores the critical importance of harnessing international partnerships and collaborations to bolster university capacity and efficacy in addressing the diverse needs of Nigerian society.

University education operates within a framework managed and funded by various stakeholders invested in its advancement. Among these stakeholders are government bodies, private institutions, religious organizations, alumni associations, parents, students, and notably, international organizations. The involvement of international institutions in

steering the trajectory of university development holds particular significance. It is against this backdrop that this paper seeks to scrutinize the distinctive and pivotal contributions of international organizations in fostering the growth and enhancement of universities in Nigeria.

This paper aims to explore the role of international organizations in enhancing the development of universities in Nigeria, recognizing university education as a vital engine for societal transformation and progress, deeply rooted in teaching, research, and community service.

Concept of International Organization

The term "international organization (IO)" commonly refers to entities comprised of sovereign states or universal memberships, established through treaties conferring legal status. These organizations are subjects of international law and have the capacity to engage in agreements with both member states and among themselves. Dety (2013) and Giorgio (2011) emphasize that international organizations, such as the United Nations, the World Health Organization, the International Union for Conservation of Nature, and NATO, are founded by treaties or governed by international laws, possessing their legal identity. International organizations encompass primarily member states but may also involve other entities like additional international organizations, corporations, and non-governmental organizations, with some entities holding observer status (International Organizations - Research Guide International Law, 2019).

International organizations can be grouped into many forms such as non-governmental organizations, international development agencies and foundations. They are all formed to provide special human services (Mohammed and Ogunode 2024). They are established to help improve the development of the society. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are defined by the National Open University of Nigeria (2013) as entities, usually international and non-profit making organizations, which work independently and play complementary roles with the government for the benefit of society. The approach of NGOs ranges from lobbying and advocacy to operations and project-oriented organization. Since becoming a player in the international economic development world in the early 1980s, NGOs have proliferated in both developed and developing countries. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) according to Mohammed et al (2024) are institutions that are locally or internationally owned, and established to provide services that are not profit-making inclined. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are organizations designed to carry out critical or specific functions in society to improve the social, economic, political and technological development of a country with the permission of the country where they are operating.

On the other hand, Mohammed et al (2024) viewed foundation as those institutions established to provide services to better society and sponsored by an individual or institution. Foundations are organizations established purposely for empowerment and social development and owned mostly by wealthy individuals or well-known institutions. Examples of NGOs operating in Nigeria include; the Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere (CARE), Education International (EI), Save the Children International, Carnegie Corporation of New York, Ford Foundation, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation Foundations are institutions through which private wealth is contributed and distributed for public purposes. They are institutions financed by charitable contributions or endowments and can either be for-profit or non-profit entities, depending on how their money is invested and managed. Foundations generally grant funds to certain causes in keeping with their mandate and mission. In the case of education, Foundations often supplement the public provision of finance for education, specifically channeling funds to needy or privileged few in a population. The board of a given Foundation establishes the grant-making policies from which the programming agenda is then derived. Foundations provide grant money to a variety of organizations, including non-profit making NGOs, universities and schools. The programming agenda is periodically revised to keep abreast of changes in society (National Open University of Nigeria 2013).

Mohammed et al (2024) defined International Development Agencies as those foreign institutions established in some specific countries to carry out developmental projects based on mutual understanding. International Development Agencies are instruments used for developmental purposes by owners in another country. Examples of international development agencies include the US Agency for International Development, the Canadian International Development Agency, The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, the Department for International Development (DFID), the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) the German Organization for Technical Cooperation and the United Nations. International Development Agencies according to the National Open University of Nigeria (2013) are governmental organizations established between or among different nations to fulfil certain obligations based on mutual understanding. Such organizations can either be that of a particular country or agencies of the United Nations. For example, the United States Government or the Swedish Government could establish development agencies in Nigeria based on bilateral agreements between either of these two countries. These agencies may not be established in any other country besides Nigeria, as long as that country does not enter into any bilateral relationship with either the United States of America or Sweden. On the contrary, other development agencies of the United Nations are replicated in other countries, as long as that particular country is a member of the United Nations. Thus, International Development Agencies are agencies of government or an association of comity of nations, whereas Foundations and NGOs are not philanthropic organizations established by

individuals or societies and are independent with their own Board and ability to decide on their mode of operations (National Open University of Nigeria 2013).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this paper draws upon the General System Theory, pioneered by David Easton in 1953 and rooted in the natural sciences, particularly biology, as exemplified in the works of Ludwig Von Bertallanty. This theory, originating in the natural sciences and later adapted to social sciences such as anthropology and sociology, offers a comprehensive lens through which to understand complex systems, including university education.

The General System Theory conceptualizes university education as a dynamic system comprising various interconnected subsystems within institutions. It scrutinizes the intricate relationships and interactions among these subsystems, recognizing that the performance of each unit influences the overall effectiveness of the university as a whole. Through this systemic approach, specific challenges within the university environment can be identified and addressed, fostering optimal functioning and organizational development (adapted from Ogunode & Ukozor, 2024).

In essence, university education operates as a multifaceted system akin to the General System Theory, wherein diverse components collaborate synergistically to maintain stability and achieve optimal performance. Within this framework, key elements such as administration, financial resources, facilities, supervision, and stakeholders (including government entities, international organizations, parents, students, and private institutions) each play distinct roles crucial to the effective functioning of the university system. Any lapse in the performance of these components can disrupt the overall operation of the university. Therefore, the involvement of international organizations becomes paramount, particularly in providing essential financial support, including funding, infrastructure, and research development grants, to bolster the university system and facilitate its advancement.

Contributions of International Organizations in education development in Nigeria

There are many contributions of international institutions in Nigeria. Some of these contributions includes; funding of education, development of infrastructure facilities and provision of capacity building programme

Funding of Education

Funding is critically to the development of tertiary institutions. No tertiary institutions can succeed without adequate funding. Funding of tertiary institutions is decentralized to allow private institutions to participate in the funding. International institutions in Nigeria are actively involved in the funding of tertiary institutions. For example, Ochigbo (2024) reported that no fewer than six Nigerian Universities have been selected to benefit from the 15 Intra-Africa Mobility Scheme Projects funded by the European Union (EU) with €27 million under the flagship Youth Mobility for Africa. The Permanent Secretary, of the Federal Ministry of Education, Mrs. Didi Walson-Jack, who signed the agreement at the Global Gateway High-Level Event on Education in Brussels, noted that Nigeria would also benefit from the regional Team Europe Initiative on Opportunity-driven Skills, Vocational Education and Training in Africa. Under the initiative, the European Union would spend €27 million, allocating €1. 8 million to each of the Projects in the education and healthcare sectors in Africa. These Projects, which are to be facilitated by various Universities, aim to enhance learning mobility opportunities for Students, Trainees, and Staff across the Continent, focusing on developing high-level green and digital skills. The participating Universities include the University of Lagos, the University of Port-Harcourt, Ebonyi State University, the Federal University of Technology, and the University of Nigeria. Also, World Bank (2019), reported that 10 Nigerian universities are to get 70 million dollars in financial support, from the International Development Association funding. This is part of money approved by the board of directors of the World Bank to build and nurture specialized world-class higher education institutions on the continent. According to the bank, the centers, which were competitively selected, would receive funding for advanced specialized studies in science and technology, engineering, and mathematics related disciplines as well as agriculture and health. According to the bank, the beneficiaries are the Federal University of Agriculture, Bayero University, Kano, Benue State University, and Redeemers University, Mowe. Others include Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria; University of Jos; University of Benin; African University of Science and Technology, Abuja; University of Port Harcourt and Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife. World Bank Vice-President for Africa, Makhtar Diop, said: "I am excited to support these pioneering centres of excellence because they will be another step in building and nurturing specialized world-class higher education institutions on the continent.

Aiyedun, Olatunde-Aiyedun, and Ogunode (2021) further stated that the intricate web of factors hindering the progress of Nigerian universities in global rankings. This scholarly investigation serves as a crucial foundation for understanding the complex challenges faced by these institutions on the international stage. By identifying and analyzing these impediments, such as infrastructural deficiencies, academic standards, and research output, the study offers valuable insights into the systemic barriers that limit the global competitiveness of Nigerian universities. Moreover, it underscores the urgent need for strategic interventions aimed at addressing these obstacles and fostering a conducive environment for academic excellence and institutional advancement. As such, this research sets the stage for a comprehensive examination of the role played by international organizations in mitigating these challenges and catalyzing the development of Nigerian universities.

Development of infrastructure facilities

Ogunode, Olatunde-Aiyedun, and Mcbrown (2022) adds another layer of understanding to the discourse on university development. It underscores the significance of addressing institutional shortcomings identified by academic staff, which may impact the attractiveness of Nigerian universities to international students. Moving beyond academic considerations, the development of infrastructure facilities emerges as a critical factor influencing the overall appeal and effectiveness of higher education institutions. Ogunode (2022) defines infrastructure facilities as essential components facilitating the delivery of academic and non-academic services within educational settings. These facilities encompass a wide range of resources, including libraries, laboratories, administrative blocks, hostels, and technological infrastructure like internet connectivity and electricity. Adequate provision of such facilities is essential for the efficient administration of educational institutions, as noted by Odey (2018) and Abdulkareem (2000). Notably, international organizations have played a pivotal role in supporting infrastructure development in Nigerian universities. For instance, the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) collaborated to donate a state-of-the-art genomic and sequencing laboratory to the Virology Department at the University of Ibadan, while FHDP, a US-based foundation, contributed high-end medical laboratory equipment to Ahmadu Bello University. Similarly, the University of Lagos received a digital fabrication laboratory, known as Fab Lab, from the Embassy of France, marking a significant milestone in research and innovation initiatives. These initiatives underscore the collaborative efforts between international organizations and Nigerian universities to enhance infrastructure capabilities, thereby bolstering the institutions' global competitiveness and attractiveness to students and researchers alike.

Research Development

Research can be sum to be involves identification of problems, gathering new data, finding solution to a problem through carefully designed procedures and logical analysis. Research therefore is an intensive and extensive search for solutions to problems in a society ( ). Okeke (2004) viewed research as an activity that involves observation and description of the characteristic properties of objects or events to discover relationships between variables and developing generalization that may predict future occurrences. Osualla, (2001) defined research as arriving at dependable solutions to problems through the planned and systematic collection, analysis and interpretation of data. Research is oriented towards the discovering of the relationships that exist among the phenomena of the world in which we live. Due to the important of research in the tertiary institutions, many international institutions are contributing to the development by providing laboratory facilities and funding aids such as grant to higher institutions in Nigeria. For instance, World Bank (2019) reported that the Board approved a total amount of $131 million in International Development Association (IDA) credits and grants to scale up its support to Benin, The Gambia, Niger, Nigeria and Togo to deliver high-quality education, training and applied research in the key priority fields including science, technology, engineering, mathematics (STEM), health and agriculture. The Second Africa Higher Education Centers of Excellence for Development Impact Project (Second ACE Impact) will help establish 14 new ACEs and strengthen the activities of 9 well-performing existing ones to further improve postgraduate education (PhD, master and professional short courses) and applied collaborative research that is essential to provide Africa with the skills needed to address regional development challenges. The specific sectors supported include sustainable power and energy, sustainable cities in Africa, neglected tropical diseases, maternal health, transport, mining and environment, applied informatics and communication, crop science, dry-land agriculture, and water and sanitation. Premium Time (2019) reports that Lagos Business School, supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, has launched a research project to address the regulatory gaps and market structures disabling financial inclusion for poor unbanked Nigerians. The research project is titled “Sustainable Business Models for Delivering Digital Financial Services to Lower Income Income-Unbanked Citizens of Nigeria”. University of Bristol (2021) reports that the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation grant was awarded to a Nigerian named Associate Professor Christine Valentine in Economics, in the tone of US$1.9 Million for research. Wikipedia (2011); United Nations Committee of Experts on Public Administration (2006) reported that international organizations are developing research programme of tertiary institutions through provision of facilities and trainings.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, university education stands as a pivotal system for the cultivation of skilled manpower and the facilitation of societal transformation. Anchored on the pillars of teaching, research, and community service, it relies heavily on the support and contributions of various stakeholders, including governments and international organizations. Within the Nigerian context, the presence and involvement of numerous international organizations have been instrumental in driving the development of universities, particularly through funding initiatives, infrastructure enhancement, and research advancement.

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that the government take proactive measures to encourage and facilitate the active participation of international institutions in the ongoing development of education in Nigeria. This can be achieved through the establishment of conducive policies, incentives, and partnerships aimed at fostering collaboration and mutual support between domestic and international stakeholders. By leveraging the expertise and resources of international organizations, Nigeria can further enhance the quality and accessibility of its educational infrastructure, ultimately advancing its socio-economic development agenda and positioning itself as a global leader in higher education.

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