

## **NIGERIA'S HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY AND A CHANGING SOCIETY: NEED FOR NEW PEDAGOGIES AND NEW SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHERS**

**Njoku Chimezie (PhD)**

Department of Curriculum Studies and Educational Technology

Faculty of Education

University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State, **NIGERIA**

chimezie.njoku@uniport.edu.ng

### **ABSTRACT**

This literature-based paper looked at Nigeria's Higher Education Institutions in this century that the society is changing rapidly. The paper through its introduction discussed the type of Higher Education Institutions we have now by looking at the features that are influencing them. The author went ahead to look at what some authors agreed to be the roles of Higher Education Institutions before looking at the roles of Higher Education Institutions in Nigeria according to the Nigeria's National Policy on Education document. The author then looked at the characteristics of the 21<sup>st</sup> century Higher Education Institutions and the need for new teachers and new pedagogies, focusing on Social Studies teachers. She also highlighted some of their challenges, proffered some solutions in form of recommendations, then concluded the paper by reminding the readers that her aim is to open up a discussion where important questions will be raised and also create in the readers a need to seek for answers.

**Keywords:** Higher Education Institutions, 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills, Changing Society, Social Studies Teachers.

### **INTRODUCTION**

It is a known fact that change is not possible without learning just like there will be no learning without change. Our ever-changing world is moving steadily towards uncertain future plots, education must try to re-focus towards sustainability, this means towards a new way of doing things that does not damage the environment but rather improves it and also achieve social equality, economic stability and justice.

The disparate and complex society of the new millennium is illustrated and demonstrated by series of internal crises in the countries of the world. These, with the effect of technology developments push for the need for new education. The present needs therefore imply that all, including government and institutions should start viewing the world and education in a new way.

UNESCO's 2009 World Conference on Higher Education report showed that tertiary education is influenced by five main factors; the impact of globalisation, the phenomenon of massification, increasing inequalities in access, increasing student mobility and information and communication technologies. According to that report, integrated world economy, innovations in ICT and the emergence of an international knowledge network are shaping tertiary education as it has never been before.

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This means that students in these higher education institutions are expected to gain mastery of these new skills for them to be able to cope with these changes and the various challenges it came with. On the other hand, educationist need to incorporate these skills in their students by making use of these advanced and effective teaching strategies.

Technology has become the most creative and innovative skill of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the central theme in different innovations and visions of education and Social Studies inclusive. Martorella (1997) wrote about the significance of technology in Social Studies that aroused the interest of many writer with his beautiful metaphor, “Technology and the Social Studies – or Which Way to the Sleeping Giant?”

In this article, I will be discussing the need for a new form of higher education institutions and new teachers especially Social Studies teachers in today’s society. Please note that Higher Education Institutions, Universities and Colleges will be used interchangeably in this article.

### **GOALS OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS**

Watson, Hollister, Stroud, and Babcock (2011) summarized the functions of universities backed up by different theories as the following;

- Universities are communities dedicated to the learning and personal development of their members, especially students (liberal theory)
- They are sources of expertise and vocational identity (professional formation theory)
- They are creators, testers, and sites for the evaluation and application of new knowledge (research engine theory and business and industry services theory)
- Universities are important contributors to society and nations (civic and community engagement theory).

Thomas (2012) the President, 'Universities UK', and Vice-Chancellor, University of Bristol, is of the opinion that the main functions of higher education and universities are predominantly two-fold; as educational establishments and as generators of knowledge and technology. He explained that, as educational establishments, their function is to provide able, self-directed learners that are independent and confident, and will go out into society and give to society through leadership or through civic duties.

As knowledge generators, they are research institutions to provide new knowledge, to change paradigms, to aid society in its development and in meeting new challenges as they come along.

While Arthur (2012) Vice-Chancellor, University of Leeds in his own opinion said that the main function of the university is to make a significant contribution to civil society. He went further to say that the education that is provided to students which is to prepare them for their contribution to society is a key function of the university. He is also of the opinion that universities create new knowledge and that, it is a key and important part of any research-led intensive university. According to him, those are the two key functions of any university.

The role of higher education institutions in the world today is huge, complicated and critical. A wide range of objectives and prospects are emerging, with many political, economic and social connotations. It can be said that the most evident are the threats associated with changing views of knowledge itself, which are strongly altering the functions and the affairs of higher Education Institutions in society. Let me briefly go into the goals of higher education Institutions in Nigeria and how they intend to pursue the goals as stipulated in their National Policy on Education document.

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## **THE GOALS OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN NIGERIA ACCORDING TO NIGERIA'S NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY (2013)**

- Higher education institutions in Nigeria are to contribute to national development through high level manpower training;
- They are to provide accessible and affordable quality learning opportunities in formal and informal education in response to the needs and interests of all Nigerians;
- To provide high quality career counselling and lifelong learning programmes that prepare students with the knowledge and skills for self-reliance and the world of work;
- To reduce skill shortages through the production of skilled manpower relevant to the needs of the labour market;
- They are to promote and encourage scholarship, entrepreneurship and community service;
- They are also to forge and cement national unity; and
- Also promote national and international understanding and interaction.

## **TERTIARY EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS ACCORDING TO THE DOCUMENT SHALL PURSUE THESE GOALS ACCORDING TO THE POLICY THROUGH:**

- quality student intake;
- quality teaching and learning;
- research and development;
- high standards in the quality of facilities, services and resources;
- staff welfare and development programmes;
- providing more practical based curriculum relevant to the needs of the labour market
- generating and disseminating knowledge, skills and competencies that contribute to national and local economic goals that will enable students to succeed in a knowledge-based economy;
- Provision of a variety of flexible learning modes including full-time, part-time, block release, day-release, and sandwich programmes;

All teachers in tertiary Institutions shall be required to undergo training in the methods and techniques of teaching.

## **21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY STUDENTS / HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS**

The characteristics of 21<sup>st</sup> century Higher Education Institution is greatly influenced by the characteristics of 21<sup>st</sup> century students. Some of these characteristics are discussed below.

21<sup>st</sup> century students are described by Dimock (2019) as Generation Z, those born 1995 and 2009, and Generation Alpha, those born since 2010. Most Generation Z students according to him cannot function without the internet and have had technology like smart phones, iPads, smartboards and other devices available throughout most of their schooling. For Alpha Generation students, he said they are younger and are going to be the 1<sup>st</sup> generation to be seen in large numbers in the 22<sup>nd</sup> century.

These generation of students that grew up with this level of technology have large amount of information at their peck and call. They are able to search for any topic and learn whatever they need to learn from anywhere and anytime. These two generation of students are what Prensky (2001) described as digital natives, they have grown up with advanced technology surrounding them in their homes and their classrooms

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Generations Z and Alpha are also the most internationally connected in history according to Dimock (2019) They are the generation that encounter people online from all over the world, and can easily make friends on the other side of the planet before they have even left their home state.

The students in our Higher Institutions today are very smart, independent and extremely talented. They are proficient with technology and happy with global and intercultural communication. It is expected and looks obvious that the future generations will even have more knowledge in these areas.

From the above characteristics of 21<sup>st</sup> century students you can agree with me that, 21st century education should be mainly about helping these students with the confidence to make use of the skills they require to succeed in this new world. The Partnership for 21st Century Learning (P21) is of the opinion that with so much information readily available to these students, 21st century skills should focus more on making sense of the information, sharing the information and using them in smart ways.

They identified four skills as very important skills for today's generation of students, they called it the 4Cs;

- Creativity
- Critical thinking
- Communication
- Collaboration

They are of the opinion that these four themes are not to be understood as units or as subjects, but as themes that should be superimposed across all curriculum arrangement and strategic planning. They stressed that it should be part of every lesson in the same way as literacy and numeracy.

They described the four themes in the following ways; that creativity is about thinking through information in new ways, forming new networks and coming up with ingenious solutions to problems. Creativity skill empowers people to see concepts and ideas in different lights that leads to innovative thinking and problem solving. They described critical thinking as about scrutinizing information and analyzing claims, Critical thinking implies accessing information logically in order to make informed decisions. While communication is described as understanding things well enough to share them in a very clear manner with other people. It is about being able to convey ideas by using different methods. Collaboration to them is about teamwork and the collective genius of a group that is more than the sum of its parts. It involves different people working together as a team to achieve a goal.

These skills are very important skills that 21<sup>st</sup> century students need for them to be able to function in this century and beyond. There are other skills that are also important which fall within these four areas; leadership skills, social skills, entrepreneurship, emotional intelligence etc. The most important role of education is to empower students with transferable skills that they require in this rapidly changing world.

### **THE NEW HIGHER EDUCATION SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHER**

Social Studies Education is one of the most important features of the Nigerian school curriculum. Social Studies curriculum is value oriented in content and as an integrated discipline, it teaches the skills of effective living in the society. Its most important characteristic

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is that it is a corrective discipline that examines the present situation in the society with a view to correcting the ills that prevent national unity, cooperation among people and development. Information technology in all its educational aspects is an effective medium that contributes towards education in general but Social Studies in particular. It is a beautiful medium for training young people in learning about and appreciating the cultural heritage in its diversity, one of the important goals of Social Studies. The exposure of students to the heritage of other countries encourages them to appreciate the culture of these countries and flares up a greater interest in their own heritage thus boosting their own identity.

With its power of interactivity, multimedia and communication, the computer proves an excellent tool for Social Studies Education. Because of this, Social Studies teachers must develop their pedagogical use of ICTs to support learning, teaching, and curriculum development, including assessment of learners and the evaluation of teaching. In other words, they should demonstrate understanding of the opportunities and implications of the uses of ICTs for teaching and learning.

Obviously teaching in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is like a rare occurrence; we have never seen before teaching and learning happening the way it is happening now. Being a 21<sup>st</sup> century Social Studies teacher requires among other things the following;

They should be able to learn new technologies to be able to offer their students choices. Because technology keeps evolving one cannot learn a tool and relax but a good thing about technologies are, they are usually new to both experienced and new teachers so everyone can learn at any time.

Social Studies teachers should be able to go global. Technology makes it possible to learn about other countries and their culture firsthand. I know we have text books that can give us such information but it cannot be compared to learning cultures, communication skills etc. by interacting with people from other parts of the world. They should be able to teach their students how to use the tools in their hands to visit any part of this world they wish, to know people and events among other things, this will probably make them more knowledgeable and sympathetic. When students are encouraged to view their devices as valuable tools that support knowledge and not a distraction, they will start using them as such, the teacher will immediately start seeing positive changes.

21<sup>st</sup> century Social Studies teacher should be able to collaborate. Technology makes it a lot easier, it allows collaboration between teachers and students, students and student, teachers and teachers. They can create digital resources, presentations, and projects together with other educators and students which makes classroom activities resemble the real world. Collaboration globally is a characteristic of a 21<sup>st</sup> century teacher.

They are innovators. These present teachers should be able to expand their teaching pedagogy and be able to try new ways that they have not tried before, it could be teaching with social media, making use of web resources instead of text books etc. Learning is every day, as new tools and new technology keep emerging, learning and adapting is important. Social Studies teachers as well as other teachers will continue to learn, unlearn and relearn for them to be able to teach the present generation of students.



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## **CHALLENGES OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN NIGERIA IN THIS 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY**

Higher education institutions all over the world including Nigeria are striving to live up to their roles and be able to compete. It is obvious that no good thing comes easy in life, hence, every higher education Institution even those that have made their own glorious place in the education domain, still face sets of challenges on a regular basis. Below is a discussion of some of the challenges higher education Institutions in Nigeria are facing today.

### **STUDENTS/PARENTS EXPECTATIONS**

It is known and also observable that the world today is getting very competitive every day and this includes the job market, so students' expectations are higher now compared to in the past. This competitiveness combined with the increasing expenses when it comes to quality higher education is a challenge to Nigerian universities in providing a suitable plan for the students.

### **THE CHALLENGE OF CHANGES IN THE EDUCATIONAL MODEL**

The emphasis now is teaching and learning approaches that enable the development of critical and creative thinking and they are being integrated in higher education institutions. This emphasis is on the 4Cs which is referred to as 21<sup>st</sup> century skills. In a knowledge society, according to Granados (2018) higher education should transform us from disoriented projectiles into guided missiles; rockets capable of changing direction in flight, adapting to different circumstances, and continually course-correcting. These skills are supposed to equip the learners to learn quickly, with the capacity to challenge concepts, work collaboratively and able to communicate their ideas fluently. Teaching and learning must be more active, connected to real life, and designed with 21<sup>st</sup> century students and their unique qualities in mind. As an educator you must have the skills of a 21<sup>st</sup> century teacher for you to be able to effectively teach 21<sup>st</sup> century students.

### **THE CHALLENGE OF COPING WITH DIGITAL INNOVATIONS AND TECHNOLOGY ADVANCEMENTS**

Teaching infrastructures and models are gradually and steadily shifting to digital platforms in order to provide a more innovative teaching and learning experience. Higher education Institutions need to invest in cutting edge software, tools and analytical principles in order to be able to make data-driven decisions. There must be changes in Nigerian higher education institutions to be able to tap from the abundant potentials of information and communication technologies in the creation and dissemination of knowledge. According to Beaudin (2001) the goal of such changes is to create what Prensky (2009) calls digital wisdom.

### **THE CHALLENGE OF COST AND FUNDING**

As there are high expectations and high competition in higher education Institutions today so is a compelling increase in the cost of running educational institutions. They are confronted with the pressure of offering the best of services these 21<sup>st</sup> century students need, while also making the cost of education affordable. The Nigerian economy is not in good shape, so budget allocation to education is usually not enough, coupled with the menace of corruption that has eaten deep into the fabrics of the country in every sector of which education is inclusive. When the Institutions do not have fund, it is very difficult to give to the students the type of education required in this century.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION**

As we have observed, the structure and functions of educational Institutions including higher educational Institutions in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is changing very fast. This change is subsequently

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increasing the competition among the existing universities. This is the period when universities and other higher education institutions should brace up and work harder than before to secure its place.

The work required for implementing the innovative methodologies, competencies and curricula in the Nigerian's higher education institutions that suites the 21<sup>st</sup> century students is enormous. The urgency for a change in education in general in Nigeria is critical as the country cannot afford to wait any longer because the longer they take to reform the system the more the Institutions will fall behind the technological revolution that is happening now.

Because today's students think and learn differently, past or old methods make little or sometimes no sense at all to today's students who learn and think differently, and they also make little sense in relation to the workplaces that have also changed, where making use of information is now more valuable than simple knowledge.

For Nigeria's Higher Institutions to fit into the 21st century requirements they need to take the lead instead of the slow movement being experienced now. They need to be actively involved in new ways of doing things and be in touch with the world in general. I know that change on a broad scale requires leadership in the classroom and across the school community, but every teacher can take steps immediately to help their students succeed. I also know that there are challenges and a lot of obstacles but I believe they are not insurmountable if we put our efforts towards overcoming some of the challenges.

The aim of this paper is to direct the minds of the readers to important issues and create in them a need to solve them.

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