

**Research Article****THE ROLE OF TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN IMPROVING QUALITY EDUCATION IN SIERRA LEONE*****Tejan Sesay, Abubakarr mans-kanu and Ibrahim Munu**

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Abstract

This paper titled the role of tertiary institutions in improving quality education in the country came at a time when the country has had experiences of many challenges in the quality of education across the board, from kindergarten to primary school, from primary to secondary education leading to entering the university. Sierra Leone as a post-war nation is yet battling with inadequate support from successive governments in allocating the much needed resources that would improve the quality of education in Bo and the country as a whole. This article aims at identifying the role of tertiary education institutions in improving the quality education, especially at that level of the academic cadre. The methodology used in this article is the descriptive research methods. The reason for this is to bring to the discussion the key roles tertiary educations have played and still playing to improve the quality education in Sierra Leone. This method brought in pictorial evidences that better illustrated the current state of the academic institutions, to present the readiness of these institutions to offer improved quality education in the country. A sample of 6 tertiary institutions were selected, 15 staffs of the targeted institutions. However, another 15 respondents from the ministry of higher education formed part of the participants and 15 other respondents to make a randomized selection of crucial persons of interest. Results from the findings indicated that, tertiary institutions have gotten many roles they play in improving the quality in the educational sectors across the board. Firstly, it is these institutions that received the end products from the secondary level of education, and prepare them for the universe/ corporate world. Therefore the findings show that, tertiary institutions play the role of teaching, doing research and community service. With the three traditional roles of tertiary institutions, it does not only improve the standard of education or modify the attitudes of the students, but through research build their capacities to make decisions for and on behalf of the nation. This means through the research, academics discover theories they can translate into practice that best fit in critical matters in the society.

Keywords: Role, tertiary institutions, education, Sierra Leone.

INTRODUCTION

Sierra Leone since pre-colonial periods to the colonial era have had one thing it's benefitted from the colonial masters was education. Building the educational infrastructure was the best that ever happened to the country. The country had its first tertiary education institution, the Fourahbay College in the African sub-Saharan nations in 1827. The first boys and girls school in 1845 and 1849 respectively. This put the country in the limelight where countries like Nigeria, Ghana, and the Gambia came to acquire quality education. This gives the country its name, "the Athens of west Africa" Joe A.D Alie (2017) a glory we have lost as a result of the war in the 90s. When the country was declared independence, the numbers of children who are capable to access schools at the time were about 15% of the country's population (Wikipedia) after independence when the country was under the rule of its own children, there was pressure on them to strengthen and broaden the educational systems. The country operates the British type educational system, until today when we have the 6334 type of education where pupils/students spent 6 years of primary basic education, 3 years of junior secondary education, 3 years of senior secondary education, and finally climaxed it with four years of university education later into the corporate world. The system above is a show of evidence that, higher educational institutions play crucial role to improve quality education, but without the foundational efforts of the basic categories that prepare them from infancy. To be able to meet global standards in education, every country needs the tertiary

institutions to play a critical role in building the human resource base, with the quality it deserves. This in turn bolsters the economy through its able bodied men and women. This ensures a competitive market for increase in output and service delivery. Education since the war in Sierra Leone has become the most powerful tool that helps the youths after the war (Semela, 2001). Many ex-combatants engaged in skills that changed their mindsets. Some went into agriculture, garment-dyeing, driving and the list goes on. These skilled training helped put many into self-employment which prevents them from going back into the bush to cause instability in the country. An institution such as the higher learning institutions if effective and efficient are pivotal for sustainable development in the African sub regions like Sierra Leone, a state still battling with post war recoveries. To have a viable human resource base and the future employees requires an enabling environment where the higher educational institutions perform unflinching support to the society that prepares eloquent academics who compete in the global standards on publications, research and the climate change issues affecting the world. Although to have a sound education system that offers to play the role present day society requires the concerted effort both the private and public sectors, backed up with huge support from the central government. For instance, there should be a common understanding to balance the equation between the government support and support from the private sectors in ensuring a timely implementation of educational policies, expansion of the higher education institutions to reach the least person at "Kandu Legbiama". This goes in the form of providing the enabling environment for teachers, supply of educational materials, rehabilitation of laboratories for all sectors in the educational institutions, and

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the improvement of conditions of services for the stakeholders in higher education institutions To maintain the right balance is crucial if the higher educational institutions are to effectively play a crucial role in the sustainable development of the country, especially when education form a key part of the government of sierra Leone's big five agenda (government of Sierra Leone 2025)

Universities in Sierra Leone, since their establishment, offer courses that cater not only for the employment of the students, but solving the problems of the country. an example is the public health sectors, social work and sociology that provide the human resource of the ministry of social welfare and the ministry of gender and children's affair. In recent times, when the governing party the sierra Leone people's party took over in 2018, they established the national Youth services where university graduates are trained in different capacities, sometimes according to the nature of the job market. These graduates from the youth service training are into different facet of society helping the country to tackle it numerous problems. Problems like; climate change, drug abuse, youths unemployment etc. these skills they get from the university are transformed into reality which addressed many societal problems. Therefore, development in any shape and form cannot go on without the efforts of the prime movers of the educational sectors, the higher education learning institutions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The role of tertiary institutions in improving the quality education is pivotal in the government's big five agenda. This is the reason the government came with the free quality education program that cushion the effects of poverty on those parents who cannot provide the basics their children need to access quality education. Therefore, education in its broadest term can be looked at using the functionalist perspective to help create a sociological knowledge and view point of how tertiary educational institutions contribute to improve the quality education at that level of receiving end products.

Education as a functionalist perspective

Two questions came up from this view of the functions of western education in primitive societies that one would be tempted to view Sierra Leone. The first question was what is/are the functions of education according to the needs of the society. This means what role the educational sectors play in accordance with what the country actually wants. It means the kinds of graduates, the courses offered in these institutions, and the output that comes out in the end.

The second question asks about the relationship between the educational sector and other key players in the society, like the economy, governance, religion and politics. One would come to terms that, the institutions above are intertwined and interwoven, they complement each other. This is the crux of the functionalist view point that, society comprises of different component parts, each parts work for the interest of the whole. For instance, all the other sectors need the products from the tertiary institutions to help them to run. The functionalist view helps to look at how the educational sector helps to shape things in the social system. Emile Durkheim observes education as a transmission of societal norms and values. This view of him underscores the important part of the tertiary institutions in improving the quality education by correcting

the wrongs. For him, societies, governments only survives where the tertiary institutions track children from cradle, teaching them the dos and don'ts of that society, thereby building a crime free from society. Education helps to maintain social order. Haralambos, M. (1990)

In its broadest term, education is a pivotal aspect in the socialization of the child. This fact is an indication of the different roles in levels of education in Sierra Leone. The tertiary institutions inasmuch they play a complementary role, a supporting role to the basic education sector, they complete the socialization of the children as soon as they darken the doors of education. They provide not only academic excellence, but the tertiary institutions gives assurance to the society that, a set of graduates are fit morally and academically to be given responsibilities of the state. Thus the constitution spells out the categories of persons who are to contest for various positions in the country. (1991 constitution of Sierra Leone)

For higher educational institutions to meet the demands of the 21st centuries, premium needs to be laid on quality assurance and performance contract of stakeholders in that sector. This is instrumental to improve quality education amidst political and cultural challenges. In sierra Leone, some places and ethnic groups are of the view that, educating especially a girl child is over powering her to stand above her male counterparts, which does not resonate to the dictate of certain religious sects like Islam. As an established component, the higher educational institutions have had its governance system that spell out basic roles it play in building the human resource base. In order to cater for the middle man level, government brings in certificates, and diploma programs across all sectors, to enable those who cannot meet the five credits in the west African secondary school education to also access basic education that make them fit to serve the nation in different capacities (Forest & Kinser 2002) posited that, the governance in the educational sectors are the structures of decision making process which spell out the roles universities play in improving the quality education society needs. This decision is crucial for the people in education to the extent it confirms and gives assurance to the society to believe that, the higher educational institutions are places of integrity and accountability (Howell, C., et al. 2020)

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

Looking at the sensitivity of this research, the methodologies worthy to use in this study are the mixed research methods, quantitative and the qualitative methods. The researcher also utilized the descriptive research approach to present a vivid scenario of the role tertiary institutions play in improving quality education in Sierra Leone. Through the above methods, the sources of data are both primary and secondary sources. The reason for this is to present a descriptive picture of how instrumental tertiary institutions are in improving quality education in just 2, 3 and 4 years of study as opposed to 14 years or more in basic education. The sample sized used in this study was drawn from a purposive simple random technique where participants were drawn from few of the tertiary institutions we have in the country, beneficiaries of these institutions, ataya bases etc. this categorizations gives us a total of 36 number of respondents who actively took part, using the instruments, questionnaire, focus group discussion and key cultural consultant. This sample size includes 6

tertiary institutions that did virtual interviews to respond to some of the critical questions raised by the researcher regarding the key roles of tertiary institutions in improving quality education in Bo, Sierra Leone as a whole

Table 1. Showing the sample size of this work

No	Participants	Number
1	Njala University	2
2	University of sierra leone (IPAM, FBC	3
3	Eastern Technical University	1
4	Staffs	15
5	Graduates	10
6	Ataya bases	5
7	Total	36

Field sample survey 2025

The data can be analyzed using statistical figures and tables to showcase the empiricism of the data collected

Findings and discussion of result

Universities the world over are instrumental in making sure the standard of education is promoted and maintained in diverse ways, therefore, the findings from the data collected can be discussed on the key roles through which tertiary institutions contribute to improve the quality of education in sierra Leone.

Teaching

From the data collected on the role of tertiary education institutions in improving quality education, especially as related to the government's big five agenda, it showed a 100% willingness of the respondents to give their time to the researcher. Out of the 36 respondents, 30 of them in the tertiary institutions presented clearly the role of every tertiary institutions. According to them, the tertiary institutions are a part of the development of every country, they instill quality education on the individual thereby preparing him for the universe. According to them, they do so through teaching. The universities Teaches its students to be able to make quality decisions of national interest, instill the confidence of maturity in young graduates who want to join the corporate world. These graduates in turn contribute to nation building through the services they render in their small communities. This they do in different fields they studied, like social work, sociology, economics and health. Through teaching, the university brings theories students are expected to use as a framework in to savage critical situations in the society through practices. An instance brought up by one of the participants cited examples on those in community development. They translate those theories into practice in critical conditions through the teachings of the courses in tertiary institutions. According to the respondents, it is during teachings tutors interact with the students and during the course of that, they identify potentials in those students and proffer recommendations to those students where necessary.

Research

Another prominent and vital role played by the tertiary institutions is conducting research. This again brought in 100% from the respondents, according to them; research is the hub of the university. Government when they think they cannot give answers to problems in the society like drug, violence, and outbreak, they contact the universities to device ways they can

tackle them. According to the respondents, they brought in instances of politics, governance and health. In politics, there are professors in politics whose role is to map out political strategies that help governing parties or oppositions to gain grounds. For instance, before the 2018 elections, the ruling SLPP brought in a university scholar whose name withheld for obvious reasons to use his skills that gave victory to the party, these roles are only from professionals in that regard. Furthermore, the respondents brought in the issue of the then government, when there was massive failure in public exams; they sought the services of professor Gbamanja, a lecturer at Fourahbay College at the time. He instituted a commission of inquiry into the reasons/factors contributing to massive failure in public exams. The outcome of that was to change the system of education from the 6334 now, to the 6344. These systems mean that, the pupils/students spend 6yrs of primary education, 3 years of junior secondary school education, and 3 years of senior secondary school education. His commission recommended to the government for another year to be added to the senior secondary school sector, making it 4yrs of secondary learning. The reason according to him was insufficient time to complete the syllabus at the time. Another reference point was on agriculture. This government has made Njala University one of the hub for the "feed salone" program, another big five agenda of the government. This program is currently championed by one of the university's professors and Dean. These role exemplify the instrumental role played by tertiary institutions to what they described as providing the answers society needs.

Community services

On the roles of tertiary institutions in improving the standards of education, again this brings a 100% response from the participants. According to the data obtained, communities the world over host higher education institution, according to the report gathered, Njala university as an example is hosted on two three campuses, the Njala Campus (mokonde), Bo campus and the Bonthe Campuses respectively. Out of which Bo Campus has two locations, the Torwama and the Korwama Locations. These communities hosting the various campuses have faced massive infrastructural development where rapid expansion and growth took place over the years. The same goes for mount Aureole that hosts the Fourahbay College. It is part of the cooperate social responsibility of the tertiary institutions to provide community services through education. For instance, during the days of the Bo Teachers College, sons and daughters of indigenes of these campuses receive tuition waiver through their parents who were workers of the university. The university sends in T.P, teachers in teaching practices to these communities. It is believed that, these Teachers take quality knowledge to these communities thereby bringing quality to the existing one by their teachers. The Experimental and University secondary school in Njala and Bo respectively offer a great example in this regard.

According to the respondents, as earlier stated, when there was massive failure in public examination in the country, the then government contacted a university professor who did an inquiry into what were the factors of massive failure in public exams. That research brought in the recommendation to add a year into the existing system of education, which is the 6334 to the 6344 system. Above all the tertiary institutions are models to the secondary cadre of education; therefore play a supportive role to the basic educations.

Quality Assurance

Results from the respondents indicated that, from the side of the tertiary institutions staffs, they all agreed that indeed by the mandates of the university to provide knowledge and conduct, publications research reports are an assurance to the public of the quality of education tertiary institutions provide. Students write projects that are supervised by research and academic scholars for the purpose of quality assurance. Most of the outcomes of their work are published on journals which contribute to the knowledge base of the university. To support their responses, all universities in the country are planning to host a three day long retreat on the topic under review, by so doing playing a crucial role to not only improving the quality in education, but on the government's big five agenda

Moreover, academics in higher education institutions published books utilized by secondary schools and are even part of the curriculum. Notably, Prof. Joe A.D Alie, Prof. Foday Yamba Thulla, and host of others. This makes their contributions unnoticed.

Transmission of values and norms

Finally, the data obtained ascertained that, part of the role played by higher education institutions; they receive the end products of students from the secondary school and make them fit members of the society. The result indicated that graduates from the university supposedly are fit to partake in all forms of developmental issues because, they are not only academically inclined, they are morally fit to be complete members of the society. This overemphasized the fact that, HEIs provide formal, semi-formal and non-formal type of education.

Fight examination malpractice at all levels

The findings from this work on how the fight against examination malpractice in higher education institutions improve the standards of is one with much debate. The responses from a virtual network maintained that, examination malpractice at all levels has hindered the standards of education. According staffs of various tertiary institutions, one of them puts it; *"this is the disease that has over the years ravaged our effort in the tertiary institutions making it difficult for our roles to be felt in the development trajectory of the country, therefore needs robustness if the roles of HEIs are to be seen in this regard"* examination malpractice takes different forms, ranging from the students/pupils, the staffs themselves. During admission, most candidates are qualified by the result they presented but cannot defend them but are admitted based on their result and the outcome could be abysmal.

Screened and scrutinized admission process

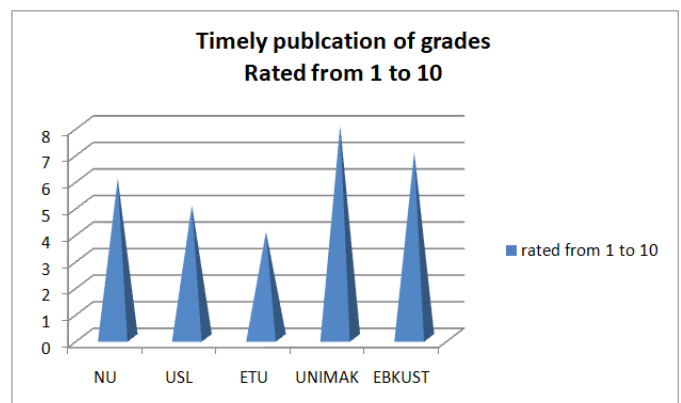
Most of the respondents from the data obtained ascertained that, over the years, the admission processes into entry in the tertiary institutions lacked proper scrutiny. According to them, HEIs are obliged to scrutinize the type of students admitted to various programs, the reasons for this are; the ages of these students, failure to appropriately defend their results, inadequate knowledge on what they apply for, and the preparedness to study for these programs. In the end, they end product is rotten. Therefore, respondents during the virtual discussion maintained that, indeed the tertiary institutions as they receive these pupils from their secondary schools conduct

a proper screening process. They referenced the entry tests conducted by notable universities in the country like Njaa University, university of Sierra Leone through its constituent colleges. Tertiary institutions do so to clean up the type of students for various programs in these institutions. A staff from one of the private tertiary institutions said this; *"the screening exercise when done, reports of these processes are to be sent with recommendations to the ministry of basic education and education regulatory bodies to act upon for stringent measures. Higher education institutions and basic education are two sides of the coin if the educational sector should improve in its standards"*

Timely publication of grades

According to the data obtained, publication is one key factor that improves the standard of education. When grades are published earlier, it gives the students a clear picture of his or her performance, if they are making progress or retrogression. According to the result, parents, past and present students formed part of the respondents all of the categories of parents and students past and present selected randomly gave a 100% response that, this affect students' performance where grades are not published on time and therefore, the efforts of tertiary education in improving the quality education require them to be efficient in the services they render to their clients. Below is a figure showing higher learning institutions effectiveness to publish grades on time. From the data, it is clear that, a private institution is rated above the government owned institutions. However, this could possibly be as a result of the nature of crowd admitted into these government owned institutions to meet international best practice.

Below is a figure indicating tertiary institutions' efficiency to timely publication of grades



Source field survey 2025

Conclusion

It is concluded that, higher learning institutions play pivotal role in improving the standards of education. The fact that in the system of education, HEIs contribute greatly towards building the human capital development of the nation more importantly, HEIs are critical in improving the quality education considering the role in preparing the work force both the private and public sectors.

Recommendation

It is worthy to note that the relationship between HEIs and quality education are two sides of the coin. The same way

tertiary institutions are crucial towards the development trajectory of every government. Therefore, it is important that government's support to tertiary institutions intensifies. Authorities from basic education categories should collaborate with the HEIs to organize workshops, training of teachers on the methodologies of their teachings, teacher pupil relation and interactions. Also, different methods of preparing notes is but vital to strengthen the long time roles Tertiary institutions have been playing to improve quality education in the country

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