SUSTAINING QUALITY IN TERTIARY EDUCATION IN ENUGU STATE: NETWORKING AND COLLABORATION AS KEY STRATEGIES

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Abstract
This paper revealed that most tertiary institutions worldwide are having problems of resource insufficiency. It further rationalized networking and collaboration strategies as latest trend for bridging gaps that exist within any educational system and also key for quality sustainable renewal which is capable of unlocking the educational potentials of the numerous tertiary institutions in Enugu State. It finally discussed the possibilities of applying networking and collaboration as key strategies for sustainable, quality, educational renewal within Enugu State tertiary educational system.

Keywords: Quality Education, Tertiary Education, Networking, and Collaboration

Introduction
Paucity of funding and other educational resources are common problems bothering administrators of tertiary education all over the world, especially in Nigeria. There is no single tertiary institution today in Nigeria that can boast of sufficiency in funding or availability/adequacy of resources. According to Commonwealth of Learning (2010), tertiary educational institutions worldwide are experiencing funding cuts even as global need for training in skills and for professional upgrading increases. They conclude that providing course programmes is one of the proven ways institutions meet higher training demands, yet coming up with the funding and resources for both traditional as well as distance education services remain a challenge. In the same vein, Ofoefuna and Eya (1999) posited that, owing to the cost of some instructional resources, funding and resources are not easily available in Nigerian educational institutions. In the same regard, Anidi (2004) pointed out that tertiary institutions, as funded today in Nigeria, may not produce functional and self reliant graduates with the limitations imposed by the present Nigerian economy. As at today, there are numerous tertiary institutions in Enugu State. In fact, Enugu can boast of having the highest cluster and number of tertiary institutions within the south east of Nigeria and most of them are having similar problems of resource insufficiency (Anidi, 2014). In the face of the challenges of poor funding and lack of other resources, tertiary institutions in Enugu State can tap on strategies of networking and collaboration as key to renew and unlock quality educational potentials of the system.

What is Quality in Education?
There are various definitions of quality education as a concept. Quality in education is viewed as a systematic review of educational programmes to ensure that acceptable standards of scholarship and infrastructure are being maintained (UNESCO, 2012). Quality pervades every element of the activities undertaken in the process of educating and the wider array of beneficial resolves of educational activities on both individual learners and the wider society (Obanya, 2002). Quality education could be a product, an attainment or a process of planning and sustaining acceptable
standards to ensure that objectives are always achieved as set. Quality in education is very important for a consistent and sustainable development of tertiary educational system in Enugu State.

**Concept of Tertiary Education**

Tertiary education as a concept is continually evolving; hence different experts and people view it differently. Tertiary education is the teaching and learning or schooling, specifically for undergraduate/graduate students, entered after successful completion of secondary education, which may include vocational post-secondary institution (leading to a certificate) and higher institution or education (leading to a degree), even though the designation is often used synonymously with higher education (Campbell and Rozsnyai, 2002). Campbell and Rozsnyai further posited that tertiary education is formal, non-compulsory, education that follows secondary education. They conclude that tertiary institution (education) is different from education or schooling at the primary and secondary levels. Harvey (2004) viewed tertiary education as normally taken to include undergraduate and postgraduate education, as well as vocational education and training. He opined that colleges, universities, and institutes of technology are the main institutions that provide tertiary education (sometimes known collectively as tertiary institutions). He further gave a few examples of institutions that provide post-secondary education to include vocational schools, community colleges, independent colleges (e.g. institutes of technology), and universities, including institutes of technical and further education. Tewarie (1998) defined tertiary education as the teaching and learning process that occurs following completion of secondary education and provides credits and certificates, diplomas and degrees, from universities, university college, polytechnics, community colleges and similar institutions. He stressed that it may also include technical and vocational education. Tertiary education is the animator and the driver of national goals and objectives especially, when quality education is sustained. Quality can be sustained in tertiary educational system in Enugu State by applying strategies of networking and collaboration as key for renewal and to unlock the potentials of the State.

**What is Networking?**

Networking is the art of connection or communication between two or more persons or groups, through the instrumentation of digital Information Communication Technology (ICT) or analogue technology. Wikibooks (2011) viewed ICT technologies, such as the internet – tele-collaboration (email, listservs, message boards, real-time chat and web-based conferencing), broadcasting technology (radio and television), teleconferencing (audio conferencing, audio-graphics conference, video conferencing; and web-based conferencing) and telephony, as a set of technological tools and resources used to communicate, and to create, disseminate, store, manage information and network. Gutterman, Rahman, Supelano, Thies and Yang (2009) considered ICT as powerful tool to promote social, economic development, and education network. Every day, new ICT and networking tools emerge. According to McLoughlin and Lee (2007), the two-way Web has arrived, accompanied by a raft of affordances that expand how we teach, communicate, learn and create knowledge. They revealed that “Web 2.0” services such as blogs, wikis and social bookmarking applications, as well as social networking sites like ‘MySace’, ‘Friendster’ and ‘Facebook’ are seen as more social and personal, and based on “micro content”, images and interpretations. They stressed that all these are of great use to tertiary teachers and learners and also offer greater learner choices and self-direction.

The concept of networking has been perceived differently or in fact mixed-up by many in recent times. To some, it could also be a social behavior, of association, communicating or working
Meaning of Collaboration
Different experts view the concept of collaboration differently. Collaboration is working together to achieve a goal. Wikipedia (2011) viewed collaboration as a recursive process where two or more people or organizations work together to realize shared goals. They opined that an example is an intriguing endeavor that is creative in nature, by sharing knowledge, learning and building consensus. The use of the word collaboration may, at times, lead to confusion. Friend and Cook’s (1992) definition of collaboration is internationally accepted as interpersonal collaboration and a style of direct interaction between at least two co-equal parties voluntarily engaged in shared decision making as they work towards a common goal. They clarified this definition by detailing several defining characteristics of collaboration as follows: (i) it is voluntary, (ii) it is based on parity, (iii) it requires shared goal, (iv) it includes shared responsibility for key decisions, (v) it includes shared accountability for outcomes, (vi) it is based on shared resources, and (vi) it has emergent properties.

Collaboration is about working together or sharing a resource, for same purpose. Commonwealth of Learning (2010) viewed institutional collaboration as sharing resources of any type, with two or more partners or institutions. They posited that collaboration may be between institutions in same neighborhood, state, within the same country or region, and anywhere in the world. Collaboration is a social behavior, not necessarily powered by any external technology. It has intrinsic value and like any other scientific principle or theory can be applied as solution to the challenges of life. In educational technology, collaboration is regarded as a process technology in its own right. Collaboration and networking benefits are indeed by-products of system theory and design. Collaboration as a modern concept and as practiced today is a key strategy for the renewal of the tertiary education system in Enugu State; it is capable of bringing about change and sustenance of quality within the system.

Rational for applying Networking and Collaboration Strategies as Key for the Renewal and Sustenance of Quality within Tertiary Institutions in Enugu State
In response to the challenge of funding and lack of resources, many educational institutions are beginning to tap on networking and collaboration strategies – by sharing their financial, administrative and infrastructural burden with others on a local, national, regional and global level (Commonwealth of Learning, 2010). Tertiary institutions, that are collaborating or networking, share information and other resources. This implies the need for establishing a strong driving link (network) between the university research and teaching strategies and the NREN (National Research and Education Network) strategy, building the capacities of members in optimizing network resources for sharing learning resources (UbuntuNet, 2010). In research, teaching, learning, management and support, ICT (network) provides opportunities for schools to communicate with one another through e-mailing, mailing lists, chat rooms, and so on (Yusuf, 2005). There are indeed many strategies tertiary institutions in Enugu State can apply in educational networking and
Many small undergraduate colleges aspire to similar curricular goals, yet lack opportunities to share resources in ways that could help them meet these common goals (Scott, 2003). Scott argued that these campuses go it alone by choice or lack of information about possible optional solutions to their common challenges. He further revealed that Consortia have made progress in sharing administrative services in the following areas: (i) Availability of specialized courses that otherwise could not be offered by a single campus, (ii) Opportunity to share the development of curricular materials with colleagues on another campus, (iii) Access to faculty expertise for independent research projects as guest lecturers, or as sabbatical or leave replacements even for single courses, (iv) Pooled enrollment for courses that might otherwise be cancelled, (v) Greater awareness of neighboring campuses in terms of faculty expertise and interests, student culture, curricular requirements, (vi) New and renewed connections with faculty colleagues that lead to a host of enhancements for students.

There are various benefits tertiary institutions in Enugu State can derive from networking and collaboration. Commonwealth of Learning (2010) posited that institutions collaborate primarily to share financial burden of developing, providing and maintaining educational resources. They stressed that institutions that benefit most from networking and collaboration are from small developing nations that lack the individual expertise or fund to design course material or to maintain a wide range of services. Some of the benefits they enumerated include: (i) **Resource sharing and flexibility:** Institutions can develop and offer a wide range of quality human, academic or technology resources through collaboration at a relatively low cost. For example, some institutions cannot afford a programme or course if its enrollment number is low (as it is the case with some programmes or courses, presently at the Enugu State College of Education (Technical), Enugu). However, a low-enrollment programme may still be made available through an arrangement with another institution where the programme is in high demand. (ii) **Growth of Institutional Culture:** Collaboration and networking help institutions implement new and often progressive ideas. Inter-institutional collaboration often means working with people of different culture, value system or religion. Institutions benefit intellectually from an infusion of global culture. (iii) **Raising quality of Programme:** Institutions in collaboration benefit from sharing “quality-building” processes and techniques such as admissions, course design and learning support. For example, UNESCO-initiated “World Declaration of Education for All” International Convention, Jomtien, Thailand in 1990 and in Dakar Senegal in 2000 helped nations share and develop tools for assessing their educational activities.

In pursuance of the need and urgency for educational institutions to begin to adopt the strategies of networking and collaboration, UNESCO (1998) in Articles 15 and 17 declared as follows:

(i) The principle of solidarity and true partnership amongst higher education institutions worldwide is crucial for education and training in all fields that encourage an understanding of global issues….

(ii) The principles of international co-operation based on solidarity, recognition and mutual support, true partnership that equitably serves interests of the partners and the value of sharing knowledge and know-how across borders should govern relationships among higher education institutions in both developed and developing nations and should benefit the least developed countries in particular.
(iii) Regional and international normative instruments for recognition of studies should be ratified and implemented including certification of skills, competences and ability of graduates, making it easier for students to change courses in order to facilitate mobility within and between systems.

(iv) Partnership and alliances amongst stake holders – natural and institutional policy makers, teaching and related staff, researchers and students, and administrative and technical personnel in institutions of higher education, the world of work, community group – is a powerful force in managing change…. Henceforth, partnership based on common interest, mutual respect and credibility, should be a prim matrix for renewal in education.

May be, in response to the UNESCO declaration, Julia (2002) reported that, from a researcher-collaboration perspective, African researchers should have opportunities to learn from the international community and themselves. In addition, she asserted that closer collaborations amongst institutions/ universities etc. could assist in enhancing the existing professional working relationship. She insisted that there is an urgency to begin and strengthen linkages between African Institutions and IASSIST-linked institutions abroad. In addition, she asserted that closer collaborations amongst institutions/ universities, etc., could assist in enhancing the existing professional working relationship. Tertiary institutions in Enugu State can benefit in various ways by applying strategies of networking and collaboration. Sharing educational resources and programs within, between and across institutions is becoming more common in recent times (Mason, 1994). UNESCO (1998) reported that, through collaboration, knowledge can be shared faster, while change and progress can be induced in society.

There are many tertiary institutions in Enugu State. These institutions may be having similar problems of poor funding and lack of resources as their counterparts elsewhere in the world but these tertiary institutions may not be tapping on the potentials of networking and collaboration. Anidi and Eya (2011) asserted that education particularly at the tertiary level seems to be the primary and dominant industry of Enugu State. The State has a cluster of tertiary institutions which include The University of Nigeria, Nsukka and Enugu campuses; Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Agbani-Enugu; Institute of Management and Technology, Enugu; Caritas University, Amorji-Nike, Enugu; Renaissance University, Agbani; Godfrey Okoye Memorial University, Enugu; Bigard Memorial Seminary, Enugu; Spiritan Institute of Theology, Atakwu; St. Paul’s International Institute of Theology, Emene-Enugu; Institute of Journalism and Continuing Education, Enugu; Institute of Ecumenical Education, Thinker’s Corner, Enugu; African Thinker’s College of Education, Independence Layout, Enugu; Enugu State College of Agriculture, Oghe; Enugu State College of Education (Technical), Enugu; Our Savior’s Institute of Science, Agriculture and Technology, Enugu; Federal College of Education, Eha-Amufu; School of Health Technology, Oji River; National Open University Study Centers, Enugu and Ogwu; Nigeria Law School, Agbani; and many more.

Most of these institutions are likely to be poorly funded and may be lacking some resources, and so should take advantage of their cluster/proximity by networking and collaborating. Each may have something to offer and share in common amongst themselves. Each of these tertiary institutions may be independently hosting an internet portal, for example. Each may still be bearing the entire cost and burdens of installing and maintenance of each of their internet platforms. This is not in keeping with trends of networking and collaboration worldwide. Each, can save a lot of her lean resources, by networking and collaborating-by sharing classrooms, staff, information and other resources amongst themselves, or even with other private and commercial sectors. Each stands to
benefit from sharing information, knowledge, culture and experience. Tertiary educational system in Enugu State can indeed benefit enormously by applying networking and collaboration strategies by design and as key for renewal to sustain quality within the system. The time is now for a sustainable quality renewal of our failing tertiary educational system.

Possibilities of applying Networking and Collaboration as Key Strategies for the Renewal and Sustenance of Quality within Tertiary Institutions in Enugu State

There are various possibilities of applying networking and collaboration strategies so as to renew and ensure sustained quality in tertiary education in Enugu State. Today many tertiary institutions worldwide are embarking on networking and collaborative ventures by design to fill the gaps that exist in their systems. Kim and Barry (2011) asserted that tertiary institutions can collaborate through the following strategies: (i) Internship programme, (ii) Faculty exchange, (iii) Sharing syllabi; (iv) Intensive programme, (v) Graduate Student collaboration, and (vi) Internet (network).

In same vein, Osazuwa (2011) also revealed that regional university associations, especially the Association of African Universities AAU, Southern African Regional Universities Association, the Inter-University Council for East Africa and the Conseil Africain et Malgache pour l’Enseignement Supérieur (CAMES) are playing an increasingly important role in efforts to harmonize African higher education and to promote university collaboration and quality sustenance among other things. He stressed that a strengthened and enhanced cooperation on ICT (network) and research within institutions, nations and continents is required for international, cutting edge research to solve the challenges facing organizations. He maintained that the ultimate goal of a National Research and Education Network (NREN) is to establish a robust academic research and education network that facilitates the sharing of content among its members.

Osazuwa further listed some collaborative and networking strategies as follows: (i) The Medical School in Dakar, Senegal, is collaborating with medical experts in Toulouse, Strasbourg and ULG Bruxelles to strengthen the quality of teaching, learning and research by using Distance Learning and Tele-mentoring in Surgery programmes to upgrade critical surgery skills. (ii) The University of Ibadan has been able to reduce the withdrawal rate of undergraduate students from 14 percent to 2.6 percent as a result of introducing ICT-based admission and Post-UME test. The Distance learning Institute has increased enrolment of students from 1,000 in 2005 to 17,000 in 2011, through the deployment of ICT-driven open distance learning ODL mode of delivery at significantly reduced cost when compared to traditional classroom model. (iii) The University of South Africa UNISA operates an ODL mode of delivery and has students’ enrolment of close to 250,000. This is more than ten times the enrolment at the University of Ibadan. UNISA operates with physical assets that are less than 20% of the assets being deployed at the University of Ibadan. (iv) SANRN (South African National Research Network) is a new National Research and Education Network in South Africa. Unlike other NRENs, SANREN provides its clients with connectivity to the world’s research networks as well as commodity internet access (Wikipedia, 2011). (v) The Ghanaian Academic and Research, GARNET, is assisting to fulfill a very crucial need for research and education within Ghana by providing services aimed at fostering collaboration among research and educational institutions in the region as well as between and peer institutions worldwide (Dakubu, 2010). (vi) The Belgian Research and Education Network (BELNET) supplies internet access with very high bandwidth to Belgian educational institutions, research centers and government services; and (vii) Eko-Connect- Lagos Higher Education Connectivity Project (LHECP) has helped to foster collaborative research in network technology, development and sharing of content applications and
other resources, as well as stimulating capacity building among institutions. It has achieved some level of inter-connectivity between some research organizations and higher educational institutes (HEI) in the country, as well as easy network that are accessible to students, teachers and researchers at a faster speed (Uawadia, 2011).

According to McLoughlin and Lee (2007), several examples focus on innovative uses of modern ICT tools to support what they termed “student performance content”, engaging students as content creators in peer-to-peer learning environments, and demonstrating the application of the metaphor of learning as both participation and knowledge creator.

Institutional collaboration can also be formed through a consortium. According to Common Wealth of Learning (2010), an educational consortium is an association of several institutions on a joint education venture that is funded, governed and staffed by partner members and the stakeholders. They insist that, for a consortium to work, it must have the following: (i) clear mission statement that reflects the interest of all partners, (ii) a shared, on-going governance structure with clearly defined roles of each member, (iii) the firm support of all partners, (iv) a funding policy agreed upon by all partners, (v) short term as well as long term benefits to all partners (Common Wealth of Learning, 2010). Collaborative strategies can come in many forms. But they must be well designed, executed and managed. A memorandum of understanding is usually prepared and signed by both parties assigning areas of collaboration. Fatusi and Popoola (2010) stressed that this instrument is prepared to ensure that at whatever level of collaboration, consideration should be given to areas of strength of the organizations that want to collaborate and forge partnership so that at the end of implementation of an activity, service or programme, when stock is taken and evaluated, both parties will have beneficial effects of the outcome of the venture.

Some tertiary institutions, both at global and local levels, are beginning to tap from the potentials of networking and collaboration. In line with this, Institutional Network of the Universities from the Capitals of Europe (UNICA) (2009) reported that the Institutional Network of Universities from the Capitals of Europe is a network of forty two (42) universities, gathering main higher education institutions in European capital cities, whose activities cover the following areas: internalisation and mobility – staff and faculty members’ education – laboratory, best practices, joint programmes, admissions, recognition and free movement; Research and Development – Ph.D, M.Ed, Seminars and Research; Policy and Strategy; and Mission and Link with Society. UNICA revealed that the collaboration was founded in 1990 on the initiative of Universite Libre de Bruxelles. In addition, the network has a combined strength of over 120,000 staff and 1,500,000 students, with a clear mission of promoting academic excellence, integration and co-operation among its member universities throughout Europe. In conclusion, they confirmed that the collaboration is today a driving force in the development and integration of universities from Central and Eastern Europe into the European Higher Education Areas.

Video conferencing courses are becoming common among tertiary institutions in the United States of America, Europe and Asia (Mason, 1994). Adigwe (1978) reported that the Institute of Management and Technology, IMT, Enugu, in 1976, collaborated with the then Anambra Broadcasting Service (ASBS) to establish the present IMT/ESBS Poly-Air programme. In same regards, Anidi (2004) confirmed that the IMT/ESBS Poly-Air programme set aside four hours for education broadcast a day, while providing set books for learners with supplement of face-to-face on Saturdays. Telephone and posted services were also used for the programme. Anidi (2014) also researched on extent to which collaboration strategies can be utilized in tertiary institutions in Enugu State and he reported that collaboration strategies could be used to a great extent in sourcing
instructional media, human resource, fund, student support services, infrastructural deficiencies and solving management related problems among government owned tertiary institutions in Enugu State. He further reported that academic staff and the senior administrative staff of government-owned tertiary institutions in Enugu State do not differ significantly in respect of the extent to which collaboration strategies could be used in sourcing instructional media, human resource, fund, student support services, infrastructural deficiencies and solving management related problems.

International agencies such as United Nation Development Programme (UNDP) and World Bank, among others, can collaborate with tertiary institutions to establish a global digital platform-framework that can deal with emerging educational issues. Collaboration and networking are cost-effective, help to maximize resource, expand communication, knowledge and make for sustenance of resource. It can bring about the much-needed functionality and self-reliance of the system and graduates of our tertiary institutions can become powerful tools that may usher in the much needed change/renewal, quality assurance and development of our society. The importance of good quality education was resolutely reaffirmed as a priority for UNESCO at a Ministerial Round Table on Quality of Education, held in Paris in 2003 (UNESCO, 2005). They argue that access to good-quality education should be promoted as a human right – they support a rights-based approach to all educational activities. They further opined that within this approach, learning is perceived to be affected at two levels. At the level of the learner, education needs to seek out and acknowledge learners’ prior knowledge, to recognize formal and informal modes, to practice non-discrimination and to provide a safe and supportive learning environment. Finally, they stressed that, at the level of the learning system, a support structure is needed to implement policies, enact legislation, and distribute resources and measure learning outcomes, so as to have the best possible impact on learning and value for all. All these efforts are in pursuance of sustained quality in education.

In same regards, it is stated in Article 149 of the European Commission Treaty that ‘the Community shall contribute to the development of quality education by encouraging cooperation between Member States (European Commission, 2000). Acceptable quality can indeed be sustained in Enugu State tertiary education by tapping on the strategies of networking and collaboration. This is the key to a sustained quality renewal of the system.

Conclusion
Strategies of networking and collaboration are trending tools used as key for renewal of failing educational systems worldwide. Tertiary institutions in Enugu State can adapt networking and collaboration strategies as key by design to revive their system and sustain quality, so as to unlock the great potentials of the State.

Recommendations
The following recommendations are made:

(1) Students (learners) and teachers of tertiary institutions in Enugu State should be encouraged to develop skills and strategies needed for effective collaboration. They should take advantage of these strategies especially in peer group learning and teaching.

(2) Tertiary institutions in Enugu State should establish consortia or partnerships to enable them to tap into the benefits of collaboration strategies. When establishing a consortium, equity should be ensured in every aspect of the project, in the organization, in the mission, in the administrative, in the programme development and in the expected deliveries.
(3) Government should revisit the existing weak Information Communication Technology (ICT) policy so as to restructure it, in keeping with the realities of adapting networking and collaboration strategies.

(4) Donor and funding institutions should begin to partner with tertiary institutions in Enugu State.

(5) ICT companies in Enugu State should take practical action towards packaging and administration of digital education and services to tertiary institutions in Enugu State.
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