

# Achieving Sustainability in Nigerian Higher Education Institutions: Responsive Role of the Leaders

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## ABSTRACT

It is undoubted that we are now living in turbulent era where teaching-learning and administration of higher education institutions (HEI) are facing many difficulties. This is because everything is growing at a fast pace and the future is uncertain. Revisiting the mission of higher education and achieving sustainability in HEI are lacking attention. These have been the top topic discussion addressing in various conferences and literatures. If leaders make sustainability a communicable concept and be their responsive roles in HEI, a priority towards sustaining the future of HEI would be achieved. This paper focuses on leadership roles and explores the literatures pertaining to sustainability in HEI. As a new area in the literatures, this study brings connections between leadership roles and sustainability process as a responsive way in facing the various challenges confronting HEIs. The study discusses the possibility towards the sustainability in HEI allied with a relevant model for future achievement.

**Keywords:** Leadership, Sustainability, Nigerian Higher Education

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### Aims Research Journal Reference Format:

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## INTRODUCTION

Higher educational leaders were uncovered that sustaining the future of the institution was really matter especially when initiating changes in administration activities. With this frequent on sustainability experience, it has becomes a prospect for many HEI today mostly up graded institutions and in administration achievement of HEI as this was revealed in iSteam Nexus Conference 2015 in Nigeria. Based on the recommendation of the researchers, it has become a desire and responsive roles of leaders which begin the process of change and as a sustaining tool for HEI achievement (Lasisi and Hairuddin, 2015). However, making changes happen for HEI in Nigeria, sustainability concept should be a communicable aspect of administration, potential model for developing a renewed image needed and full commitment among the educational leaders for achieving true sustainability requires.

According to Whitehead, *et. al.*, (2013) change is not easy, nor will it take place by itself without sacrifices on the part of leadership. Sustaining the future of HEI in Nigeria is a responsive role of leaders as it been the proper way for all other activities improvement. Sustainability model is a critical component leading the institutions and its leadership roles towards changing and achieving the quality service in HEI administrations. The question remains, will NHEI potential leaders be a supportive leaders as this is being the main gap emphasized in the literatures (Lasisi and Ali, 2015; Kurland, 2011; Wright, 2010; Velazquez, *et al.*, 2005). The sustainability researchers have carried out several researches based on sustainability concept in HEI, their findings revealed that leadership support is lacking.

Meanwhile, Kofi Annan argued that the biggest challenge in this century is to transform sustainable development from abstract to real for all the people in the planet (Velazquez, et al., 2005). It is undoubted that sustainable development very slow till date in NHEI than other part of the world. However, other HEIs were imputed the strategies in order to be among sustainable universities as mentioned by Wright (2010). Nevertheless, this paper aims to seek for a workable way through leadership role, implementation of sustainable model for achieving considerable future in NHEI. In so doing, this paper view leadership and its roles, sustainability concept and how sustainability process might be a responsive role by the HEI leaders through the applications of model suggested for sustaining the future of NHEI.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Since academic community and administration complexity were being proofed a critical and armored environment for leaders in realizing the proper way-forward in achieving the mission and strategizing the developed vision of HEI. Blaze and Wals (2004) revealed that in a postmodern world, pathways towards sustainable universities are unlikely to develop without friction, controversy and conflict. Sustainability has also been critically observed in various Talloires Declaration Signatories list institutions in which NHEI were not in the list. The research finding revealed that there is lack of supportive of sustainability by the leaders in HEI generally.

Despites that, Nigerian HEIs were one of the persuasive citadel of learning formerly focused globally in 70s, 80s, the problem till date in Nigerian higher education are inconsistent direction about the leadership roles in supporting the total achievement of sustainable educational institutions and lack in administrative readiness towards quick adjustment by the usage of modern system especially technology advancement in solving administrative needs in HEI which is one of the HEI sustainability issues. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to indicates some leadership roles and reveal the advantages towards achieving sustainability in Nigerian higher education institutions which is relevance to management /or leadership problem facing NHEI today.

### **SUSTAINABILITY GAP IN THE LITERATURES**

Sustainability has been defined as an issue moving around keeping alive, continuing and enduring (Murray and Cotgrave, 2007). On the other hand, sustainability expanded through it further development seen in other parts of learning matter, then define itself as a concept related to human endeavor while is literarily defined as a development which has to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. There are several definitions about sustainability and too much focus on sustainability either in environmental, natural science, economy, but less on social sustainability (Lasisi, et al., 2013). Sustainability provides support for all issues in HEI in order to progress without any delay.

Sustainability is a fundamental and it is important in every aspect of people's lives, including education which it was grouped along with social sustainability in general sustainability domain in the literatures (McFarlane and Ogazon, 2011; Kurland, 2011; Wright, 2010). Since, sustainability required in achieving excellent education and quality services, while strives made by administrators in HEI focus on effectiveness and efficiency on quality management. Then, support particularly to sustainability according to recent researches need proper attention through leadership roles and authoritative potential for sustainability achievement in HEI (Velazquez et al., 2005).

According to Wright (2010) emphasize on "what a sustainable University might look like". This was considered in research carried out based on interviewing the top leaders of HEI of Talloires Declaration Signatories list (ULSF, 2002). The research was concluded that sustainability of HEI required full support from the leaders of HEI (Velazquez, et al., 2005; Wright, 2010). It is significant if the leadership roles be considered in NHEI in order to have a sustainable university. Nevertheless, not to jeopardize the future of HEI, thus leadership roles really required in finding solution to the gap in the literatures (Lasisi, et al., 2013; Sadler, 2003).

Many successful institutions around the world today pay close attention to leadership and management roles towards achieving effective, efficient, and sustainable future of the HEI. Leadership roles are among development concerned, be the top of organizational issues. According to Lasisi and Hairuddin, (2012:49) opines that healthy organization is mostly applicable to educational sectors due to influencing effort made by educational leaders in directing people such as human resource to achieve educational goal despite the fact that human are critical and complex to manage (Drucker, 1998).

Also, imagine a learning community in which all present and future needs were present, such institution will met its basic needs in order to improve the teaching-learning and administrative activities. If HEI is not meet sustainability achievement, it jeopardized the future scientists, engineers, business and professional lecturers who were readily available to turn NHEI into world class institution. However, few HEI leaders were likely to fully comprehend the sustainability important and to recognize an important issue. Nevertheless, leadership relevant and vivid definition about who is leader need to be recall for fully achievement of sustainability in NHEI.

### **DEFINITION OF LEADERSHIP FOR TRUE SUSTAINABILITY ACHIEVEMENT**

Based on researchers' definition on leadership, Hersey and Blanchard (1988) emphasized that leadership is process of leading group of people to achieve the missions and vision of an organization. Arriving at a simple definition about leadership is difficult because of the complexity brought on by multiple dimensions and views of researchers. Some definitions based on role, personality, behavior, influence and guidance. Bass (1990) supported that the leadership context consists of the leader and follower. This is considered that leaders were also known to be a follower in some situation. Leaders influence followers, followers influence leaders, and all parties are influenced each other's by the context in which exchange takes place. As a result, leader-follower exchange can influence future interactions and can result in producing a change which leads to sustainable future of HEI.

Furthermore, Leadership can be viewed through the myriad of definitions around 13 different ways. Pierce and Newstrom (2008) define leadership as the role in which the leadership researchers' definition moves around Bass (1990) focus on roles as leadership delineation. Overview on the concept of leadership that leadership roles were looking at as "focus of group processes, as a personality attribute, as the art of inducing compliance, as an exercise of influence, as an instrument in the attainment of goals, as an effective of interaction, as a differentiated role, and as the initiation of structure" (Bass, 1990:20). The dynamic nature of the contemporary administrative community urges the leaders with administrative potential to increases the effectiveness in many ways which leads to define leadership as leading, guiding, organizer, and potential influencer of others in HEI (Lasisi and Hairuddin, 2012).

Nonetheless, leadership is a social influence relationship, interactive between two or more people dependent upon one another for the attainment of certain mutual goals, bound together within a group situation. In short, leadership is dynamic and working relationship, built overtime, involving an exchange between leader and follower thus leadership is a resource embedded in the situation, providing direction for goal attainment and achievement of sustainability (Murphy, 1941; Hollander and Julian, 1969; Smircich and Morgan, 1982; Pierce and Newstorm, 2008). In this regard, leaders in HEI should have potential of motivating the leading group. Motivation is one of the leadership roles that can assist towards achievement of sustainability planed in NHEI.

### **Leadership Roles On Sustainability Of HEI**

Leaders are the primary saddled with the responsibility of maintaining quality in services, enforcing vision and mission of achieving sustainability, and ensuring the safety of HEI future activities within the facet of quality achievement for the benefit of the society. Leaders in HEI are the specialists who strive to become generalists and in mediating position to the subordinate staffs in HEI.

As an organization in which quality services is their mission, mediating leaders are not going to see some trusted work forces of the institution turned into swine by ineffective situation confronting the institutions in Nigeria today. However, one of decline situation that makes leaders in HEI becoming mediator is inevitable ways of coping with administrative demands and academic complexity. By changing the environment of traditional ways of doing things to modern ways by educational leaders with administrative potential thus, they are occupying the non-potential spaces as mediator for sustainable achievement. Leadership roles are vital to educational communities. The leadership process (figure1) emphasized on roles of leaders in mediating the teaching-learning activities and administrative perspectives. This diagram shown that interactions seem to have crucial power and as something to do with way the leadership in HEI possesses the vision and missions for sustainability of institution.

At the same time, it could be argued that it is also related to how moderate influence between academicians relates with administration and management staff in which leadership expected to be a mediator through consistency, effectiveness and efficiency in leading roles. On the other hand, if leadership roles is lacking and are not be an institutional focus it leads to loss of institutional potentials, professional, efficient staff and developed vision. Ogawa and Bossert (1997) maintain that leadership is the quality of organization rather than individual. This is sees as leadership in content of group function. It is important to consider the scholar who emphasized that “the organizational perspective has gradually disappeared from the discussion of leadership, except instances” (Crawford, 2012:614). Similarly, Glatter, (2006:73) further opines that ‘we are in danger of continuing to be trapped within the ideology of the “can-do” culture whereby agency is always considered capable of overcoming structure (Crawford, 2012). However, NHEI are leading citadel among the educational provider globally, it is important to see the how sustainable university will be through leadership roles.

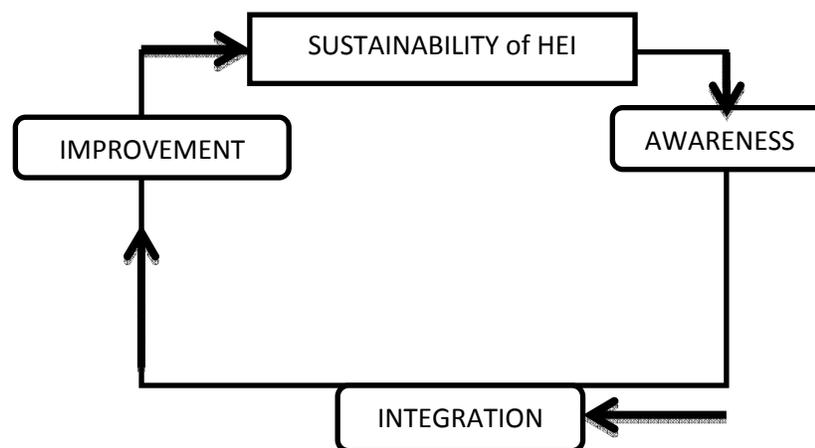
Motivation in this regard plays important function which encourages the credibility of faculty members and increases the sources of its intellectual capital in HEI. Patricia and Sherry, (2012) further explain that, focusing on leadership role through motivation will enhance in administration and how administrative motivates faculty. Motivation performance will also influence how the faculty practice and share their expertise with students, colleagues and as active members within the institution. Moreover, Communication on effective performance is another fundamental role of leaders for sustainability of NHEI. Effective communication promotes inevitable reflection in the history of institution. Rich-communication by the leader either from bottom-top or top-bottom communication helps the institutions with mission of achieving sustainable future. Consistence on quality performance through communication also supports the goal of being a mediator in sustainable university.

Apart from organizing, planning, selecting and budgeting which are the major and principle of management in HEI, Motivational messages through communication improves the department to settle the conflict normally arises between institutions’ administrators and academicians at times. Thus, motivation communicated importance in educational community to achieve great performance, have different potential influences on effort of leaders and improve quality of faculty and administrative work in HEI.

## **PROCESSING MODEL FOR SUSTAINABILITY IN HEI**

The vision on awareness, integration and improvement is much important for leaders in order to see the professionally qualified contribution into sustaining the future of HEI in Nigeria. Sustainable development issue should be equipped with the attributes of “how and what” which will bring the value of sustaining the future of NHEI to the society rather than decline from former position of NHEI globally as perceive in 80s. The leaders need to equip other staff of the institutions with skills, knowledge and the value of sustainability should be apparently shown through leading subject in administration.

Modeling process of sustainability as lead this present study engaged in finding of (Lasisi, A.A, 2015) research in HEI sustainability which revealed that sustainability of HEI have to be processed through the consideration of concept of Awareness, Integration and Improvement. It was claimed that if leaders failed to meet the required set for sustaining the future of HEI by revisiting the awareness, how integration level look like then, improve the status for achieving sustainability in HEI. Thus, Figure1 of this study expatiates on 'how and what' –awareness, integration and improvement is all about, it relevancy in sharing and motivating the administrative for achievement of true sustainability in NHEI.



**Fig. 1:** How and What' – Awareness, Integration and Improvement in NHEI  
**Source:** Sustainability of HEI Model (Lasisi, A. A. 2015:213)

### Sustainability Awareness

Briefly, Sustainability Awareness is a major role of leaders in HEI. Awareness is organization's must in pursuing developed mission and vision for excellent achievement. It is a set of believe needed in HEI that allows sharing the value of developed vision to the reality in each department. Awareness about sustainability should not be varying as vision of organization remains the same for accomplishment of a goal. By communicating the vision and mission of sustainability among other staff in HEI, it enhances achievement of Excellency and leading the institutions towards sustained future. Consistent awareness can change others reluctance and resistant to change in HEI. HEI Leaders should influence the subordinates and change the behavior, historically as known in 70s; 80s as great commitment educational institutions. According to Moore (2005) possible directions for future sustainability at the university level requires consistent awareness through guide of change agents. Thus, the change agents here were the leaders when universities leaders took sustainability as their obligation they prevent global image on teaching-learning from collapse.

### Sustainability Integration

Given that administrators who are leading the successful goal of HEI have knowledge of integrating changes in any situation of the institution. They were expected of putting the great ideas of creativity in them to promote the vision of achieved awareness among subordinates to produce substantial new output through integration concept. Integration however has been researching in different ways in HEI (Moore, 2005; Wright, 2010; Kurlad, 2011). At the part of HEI leaders, sustainability integration has to take higher dimension through planning, decision making and evaluation, frequent communications and orientation for achievement of vision for future sustainability of HEI. Universities often create opportunities

for the renounced scholars, gifted administrators and well-equipped student in different field of specialization. Thus, failed to integrate sustainability in HEI leads to loose of future opportunities even, not mention of high income for HEI. Nevertheless, if leaders visibly perceived loosing of different opportunities such as internationalization, brain drain and scholars migrating to well-equipped institutions then sustainability improvement request.

### **Sustainability Improvement**

Sustainability improvements do bring collaborative ideas to improve institution through consulting the external agents and qualified quality assurance units for improvement of HEI. It is unfortunate today that majority of institution failed to establishes a quality assurance unit that can oversee what future of HEI going to be and collaborated with strategic planning units in order to return the glory lost and brought prestige require in HEI. Processes of improvement for sustainability may quiet challenging because it involves budget that majority of HEI lack. Financing challenge makes sustainability improvement lack of rich research, space for quality pedagogical transformation and infuses sustainability in all their decisions (Moore, 2005). Improvement needs to be revisited the vision of the HEI should base on sustainability. Following the processing step makes their mission a set of priority with evaluations of their policy, then assist the HEI plan for other opportunities. Sustainability is not achieved in a day or in one step but rather become a circle needs to pursuing in rotational form till vision and mission reach certain level. The above model is very important to follow that given opportunity to acquire certain step needed by HEI to be ahead of other in competitive advantage even for private universities uses.

### **Advantages of sustaining the future of HEI in Nigeria**

By paying close attention to leadership roles in sustaining the future of HEI, specific advantage could be generated which be sources of advanced in managerial aspect of institution. It also may be a significant advantage to improve the efforts of sustainable leaders and faculty. Utilizing the sustainability model among HEI leaders is advantage to achieve standard for future generation. This may improve the interest of youth to involve in educational environment. It is an overall advantage for effectiveness of managerial training and professionally development of potential administrator that possess the technical-how in directing HEI towards sustainable achievement in Nigeria.

### **CONCLUSION**

The study shed light on leadership roles and sustainability of HEI. The previous researches have been emphasized that sustainable university required leadership support and mediating the sustainability achievement in global HEI (Lasisi and Ali, 2015). However, in the context of NHEI it is advantage to recall strategy to achieve sustainable future for HEI. This is because NHEI is one of the potential providers of quality education and sustainable syllabus inculcated. Leaders at all levels of HEI have a crucial effect on institutional outcomes and performance. This reality has been illustrated in the figurative aspect of this study. Therefore, this paper emphasized on leading role, effective among administrative staff, academicians and looking for way forward to be in its leading position among the best in proving sustainable future for HEI. Level of internal administrative capability in NHEI should increase, communicating on budget and improve physical facility which involve digital way of life. Thus, this paper claims that leadership role and potential are important and fundamental for sustainability in NHEI.

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