

EDUCATION MANAGEMENT AND ITS CHALLENGES IN THE UNIVERSITY OF SIERRA LEONE

**OLUDOLAPO O. AKINYOSOYE-GBONDA (Ph.D.), ERNEST UDEH (Ph.D.),
WILLIAM CONTEH, ALIMAMY BANGURA & MOHAMED P. BAH**

Institute of Public Administration and Management – University of Sierra Leone

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ABSTRACT

In accelerating the future growth and development of Sierra Leone, education is considered a key factor. Sierra Leone had faced multitude of challenges in education in the past, from civil unrest to health-related outbreaks. However, the current government's education agenda is outlined in its Medium-Term National Development Strategy, which has two broad result areas in education: Ensuring free quality basic and senior secondary education and strengthening tertiary and higher education. The objective of this paper is to assess the challenges faced by the University of Sierra Leone (USL) in terms of managing tertiary education and strategic learning. Data was collected through online questionnaire with a sample size of 78 respondents while the qualitative questionnaire targeted key administrators of the USL using a convenience sampling method. Findings from the study revealed that the demands of the labour market and the competitive external environment have led to continuous call for improvements. Therefore, a university management system based on a well-designed development strategy will effectively deliver on its key missions i.e. student-centred learning, research, and collaboration with stakeholders that will enable development and improvement. The USL is faced with challenges of underfunding, inadequate ICT infrastructure, lack of capacity building for academic staff and strategic education management. The paper recommends the Government must support tertiary educational institutions in the acquisition and maintenance of modern technologies due to their high cost; and the USL should create room for collaboration and partnerships with other local or international educational institutions, industries and government agencies so as to build network and relationships, which in turn leads to sharing resources and expertise and the adoption of best practices and the adoption of best practices.

Keywords: University of Sierra Leone, Tertiary Education Management, Administrators, Lecturers, and ICT Infrastructure.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Sierra Leone considers education as a crucial factor in driving its future growth and development. Significant efforts have been made by both the current and immediate past political administrations to extend access to education across the country, and ensuring its reach to all minority groups including girls and women and disabled people. However, the nation grapples with multifaceted challenges in the sector stemming from natural disasters,

national and global health crises, and bad educational management. Hence, Sierra Leone, once acclaimed for its education standards, has witnessed a decline over the past two decades due to neglect, mismanagement, resource scarcity, and corruption amongst other things.

Despite challenges, the nation recently seeks to build on its historical educational prominence. For example, recent legislative and policy initiatives, including the National Policy on Radical Inclusion in Schools, School Health Policy, Free Quality School Education (FQSE) programme, and National School Feeding Policy all guided by the nation's 2004 Education Act, the Polytechnics Act of 2001, and the Tertiary Education Commission Act of 2001 underscore the commitment to enhancing education access and quality. The introduction of the Free Quality School Education policy over the last five years reflects the government's broader agenda, outlined in the Medium-Term National Development Strategy, emphasizing free quality basic and senior secondary education and the strengthening of tertiary and higher education. The flagship Free Quality School Education Programme (FQSE) was instituted to operationalize this vision. Yet, the effectiveness of the implementation of the FQSE warrants an investigation. In fact, the entire educational management system of Sierra Leone needs a comprehensive evaluation.

This study examines education management and its challenges in the University of Sierra Leone. The University of Sierra Leone (USL) is a public national university owned by the government of Sierra Leone; it was established in 2005 as a result of the Universities Act of 2005. It's composed of three constituent colleges - Fourah Bay College (FBC), the Institute of Public Administration and Management (IPAM) and the College of Medicine and Allied Health Sciences (CoMAHS). FBC, the oldest, was founded in 1827 and is the first Western-style university in sub-Saharan Africa. IPAM, established in 1980, focuses on public administration and management (renowned as Sierra Leone Business School). CoMAHS, established in 1988, is Sierra Leone's first medical school. The university offers programs in arts, humanities, social sciences, law, basic and applied sciences, engineering, architecture, public administration, business administration and entrepreneur, finance and accounting and medicine.

2.0 MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 Background of Sierra Leone Education System

In accelerating the future growth and development of Sierra Leone, education is considered as a key factor. Sierra Leone faces multiple challenges in education, many of which result from successfully expanding access to schooling across the country against a backdrop of recovery from civil conflict, natural disasters, Ebola, and COVID-19. Among the greatest of these is how to ensure and manage a high-quality education workforce in all tertiary educational institutions in the country. Prior to the 2018 elections, Sierra Leone identified education as one of the key strategic national priorities under the leadership of President Maada Bio. Among other actions, the government introduced the Free Quality School Education policy in 2018. The current government's education agenda is outlined in its Medium-Term National Development Strategy, which has two broad result areas in education: Ensuring free quality basic and senior secondary education and strengthening tertiary and higher education.

The government launched its flagship Free Quality School Education Programme (FQSE) as a vehicle for operationalizing its vision for education. Two major health emergencies have negatively impacted the education service delivery. The first was the Ebola virus epidemic (2014 - 2016), which led to nearly 4,000 deaths and prolonged school closures. Before the country had fully recovered from the aftermath of the Ebola virus epidemic, COVID-19 struck, resulting in further school closures and severe economic downturn. (Sierra Leone Education Sector Plan 2022 - 2026). The quality of education in Sierra Leone before and after independence, to some extent, was one of the best around the world. The Fourah Bay College was established in 1827, and because of the base it provided within the sub-region, it gained the epithet "Athens of West Africa." It is said to indicate that, due to the negligence, mismanagement, and corruption, the educational system in Sierra Leone fell considerably over sometime. Education quality is no more than that state before and years after independence in 1961, Kamara A.B (2021). Despite these challenges, Sierra Leone continues to leverage its proud history of education in sub-Saharan Africa. Fourah Bay College was the only institution of higher learning in West Africa from 1827 to 1948, and played a pivotal role in training the first set of doctors, administrators, and teachers in Anglophone West Africa.

Tertiary education, including teacher education and courses offered by universities, polytechnics and professional colleges, generally taking between two to four years. The higher and tertiary education (HTE) sector was a small but thriving sector that has been undergoing a process of restoration. Starting from 2001 to date, the following structures has been put in place; The Polytechnics Act of 2001 established polytechnic institutions by combining education colleges and technical vocational institution and outlined their governance and institutional arrangement. The polytechnics were initially set up to grant post-secondary diploma and certificates awards. They included: Eastern Polytechnic (EP), Milton Margai College of Education and Technology (MMCET), and Northern Polytechnic (NP). The National Council of Technical, Vocational and other Academic Awards (NCTVA) Act of 2001 established the NCTVA as a body to certify graduates at the diploma and certificate level and to accredit such programs in tertiary institutions. The Tertiary Education Commission Act of 2001 (TEC 2001) established the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) as the agency responsible for quality assurance of higher and tertiary education institutions.

2.1.1 The Necessity of Financial Resources in the Operation of Tertiary Education

According to the University Act of 2021, the operations and governance of the tertiary institutions were outlined. This Act was made from the amended Act of 2005, which clearly indicate the public universities and that of the private ones and their patterns of formation. There are seven public universities in Sierra Leone of which the University of Sierra Leone is one of them.

The public university system operates through committees and sub-committees to assure that its complex operations are appropriately coordinated and aligned to common policy goals. For universities, the Court is "the highest administrative authority" to which the Vice-Chancellor and Principal reports; while the Senate is the highest authority on all academic matters, (Tertiary Education Commission, 2021). The provision of effective and efficient financial resources at optimal levels is a key factor when it comes to the functioning, continue

growth, competitiveness, and quality of teaching and learning, and research in tertiary institutions. Financial resources play a key role in producing quality education services. In reality, the education sector requires much more if the system is to be expanded and national and international goals met (Kamara A.B 2019). Education is a long-term investment that requires predictable financing. It is not a short-term, one-off, or quick win. The major returns to investment in education accrue over 10 or more years (when a child completes their education and contributes to their society). This is a major challenge in Sierra Leone that overwhelmingly makes shorts and medium-term investment decisions, driven by Medium Term Expenditure Plans (supported by the IMF) and the political demands of electoral cycles (Education for All Sierra Leone, Global Campaign for Education, and ANCEFAS 2017).

According to Tertiary Education Commission 2021, study reveal that higher education systems in Sierra Leone, like the world over, face financial austerity that continues to impact access to and expansion of these institutions. Sustained and efficient financing of higher education is the cornerstone of a well-functioning higher education sector, and it is one mechanism by which governments can ensure that the higher education system is delivering outcomes that are relevant for the social and economic advancement of the society (Guerrero and Urbano, 2014). Finance underlies much of the three overarching themes of contemporary higher education policy:

- Quality, and the relationship between funding and quality in any of its several dimensions;
- Access, or the search for social equity in who benefits from, and who pays for, higher education; and
- Efficiency, or the search for a cost-effective relationship between revenues, particularly those that come from students, parents, and taxpayers, and outputs; whether measured in enrolments, graduates, student learning, or the scholarly activity of the faculty (Casement, 2013).

The University being a public entity is required by law to generate its own resources through research, consultancies and tuition fees but considering the aforementioned the universities in Sierra Leone especially the public ones are constrained in meeting students' and staff expectations. This is due to the fact that government subsidies to tertiary institutions is not only paid late but most importantly is never enough to address higher educational costs. Hence it is a challenge not only to the government to finance higher education but also the tertiary institutions especially the University of Sierra Leone that currently accounts for almost least twenty thousand students, majority of whom are beneficiaries of the government. It is however a plausible idea for the government to finance higher education owing to the fact that students as well as parents/guardians would hardly pay the required fees approved by the university's committee because of low income earned and the high rate of unemployment (Duramany-Lakkoh E. K, 2015). Sierra Leone is faced with tremendous challenges, and to name a few, weak macroeconomic outlook in terms of constrained revenue signify that very little is invested in education to enable improvements to be recognized as evidenced in a 3.5% spending of the country's GDP on education in comparison to 3.9% average for all 'Least Industrialized Nations [LICs]' (Government of Sierra Leone Ministry of Education & Technology, 2013).

Population projections suggest that the world's population will continue to increase from the present figure of around 5.5 billion to 11-14 billion by the end of the next century. UNESCO's projections for student enrolments show a worldwide increase in enrolment from 65 million in 1991 to 79 million in the year 2000, 97 million in 2015 and 100 million in 2025. Tertiary institutions need to incorporate population education concepts and principles into curricula, for many graduates will become managers, planners and policy/decision makers who will need to understand the dynamic inter-relationships among population, the environment, natural resources and national socio-economic development (PROSPECTS Vol IXXX, 1998). Infrastructure places considerable constraints on Sierra Leone's tertiary education environment. Strong growth in student numbers in recent years has not been matched by an expansion of capacity. Students report overcrowding in lecture rooms, while faculty staff lack office space. Only few tertiary institutions are constructing new facilities, but improved management may enable tertiary institutions to make better use of existing facilities. Many tertiary institutions lack standardised teaching timetables, preventing efficient allocation of classroom space. Other key elements in Sierra Leone's tertiary institutions are energy supply and ICT infrastructures. With less than 10% of the country's population having regular access to power. Availability of information and communications technology (ICT) resources among tertiary institutions in Sierra Leone is limited.

As a weak state, Sierra Leone's economy is highly dependent on the changing aspects of the international socio-economic and political environment. The price of its important export commodity, iron ore, is determined by the international market. This significantly depends on the consumption forms and dynamics of consuming economies like China, and other countries. Being aid dependent suggests that the country has to be aware of the financial and political realities clarifying in major industrialized countries that offer aid (Education Sector plan). As Sierra Leone Government had projected a rescue in gross domestic product (GDP) growth for the period 2017-2021, the latest World Economic Outlook Update, released by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), proposes that global economic action is in a period of restrained development following a number of shocks. It cautions that the UK decision to leave the EU has created considerable economic, political and institutional uncertainty that could pose severe downside risks. This is particularly notable in a world economy that is already categorized by weak business and consumer attitudes and frequent financial market instability, parting global GDP estimated growth slower than predicted for 2017 at 3.4 percent (Education Sector plan 2018 - 2020).

2.1.2 Impact of Human Resource on Education Management

The term 'human resource management' (HRM) has been subjected to considerable debate. It is a concept that is highly controversial as it lacks precise formulation and agreement as to its significance. Nonetheless, HRM is that part of the management process that specializes in the management of people in work organizations. HRM emphasizes that employees are critical to achieving sustainable competitive advantage, that human resources practices need to be integrated with the corporate strategy, and that human resource specialists help organizational controllers to meet both efficiency and equity objectives. Human resource refers to people in work organizations, endowed with a range of abilities, talents and attitudes, influence productivity, quality and profitability. People set overall strategies and goals, design work systems, produce goods and services, monitor quality, allocate financial resources, and

market the products and services. Individuals, therefore, become ‘human resources’ by virtue of the roles they assume in the work organization. Employment roles are defined and described in a manner designed to maximize particular employees’ contributions to achieving organizational objectives.

Human resource in the area of education management is one key element that helps in the acceleration of education growth and rapid development. Educational sector, when compared to other sectors of the Sierra Leone’s economy, it is said to be the least when it comes to workforce; i.e. governance and administrative functions in the past decades. The government has been committed so much in the contribution to revitalize and rapid recovery of Sierra Leone’s educational system. The warp and woof of all educational reform has always been, on the one hand, the rational use of resources and, on the other, cost control. However, in the absence of sound governance and of the updating of the civil service, past efforts have borne little fruit. Education is increasingly becoming the major determinant of wealth creation, social growth and economic emancipation.

Education is the greatest tool for enhancing the development and sustainability of nations. Education can enhance sustainable development of nations if it is functional. Functional education lays more emphasis on recipient’s ability to put into practice what is learnt. The functionality of education is dependent on the extent to which the recipients can effectively use their hearts, heads, and hand to contribute to socio-economic, technological, scientific, and political development of a nation. For education to be functional and enhance national development, it must be of good quality and high standards Asiyai. R. I & Okoro. P 2019. Functional education is the education that emphasizes the learners’ interests and needs. Such education is conducted in a lively school environment that triggers the learner to act enthusiastically. The curriculum of functional education must be learner-centered. Functional education is the education that empowers the learners with relevant knowledge, values, skills and competences required for productive task performance (Asaju and Adagba, 2014).

The demands of the labour market and the competitive external environment have led to continuous call for improvements in the management of education especially the tertiary level. The government through the Ministries of Education and other bodies are pioneers to the effectiveness of human resource in relation to education management in Sierra Leone. The Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE) supervises primary and secondary education delivery, and it is closely supported by the Teaching Service Commission, a semi-autonomous body under its purview responsible for organising teachers and enhancing the quality of their services. The Ministry of Technical and Higher Education (MTHE) oversees higher education institutions in the country.

The Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) is a body corporate established by an Act of Parliament in 2001, among other things, to advice Government on tertiary education matters, provide institutional liaison with Government and other stakeholder organizations assisting in the sector, and to ensure parity of the products from tertiary education institutions. As a body responsible for quality assurance, it behoves the TEC to assess the statuses of accredited tertiary education institutions in fulfillment of its statutory mandates, (Tertiary Education Commission 2021). According to the Sierra Leone TVET Sector Situation Analysis, the Education Act of 2004 mandated the creation of the National Council for Technical and

Vocational Education (NCTVE) to regulate TVET programs across Sierra Leone. Unfortunately, this body is yet to be created leading to the perpetuation of TVET institutes that are fragmented and unregulated in terms of quality of facilities, teaching, and programs (Islamic Development Bank 2015, 31).

The regulation of teachers' colleges is split between the regulatory frameworks for universities and polytechnic institutes. Some teacher colleges are part of universities and therefore fall under the Universities Act of 2005, while others have been converted into polytechnic institutes and are covered under the regulation of the Polytechnic Act of 2001. A small number of teacher colleges are stand-alone, and it is unclear how they are regulated. As far as quality assurance is concerned, the National Council for Technical, Vocational and Other Awards (NCTVA) awards teacher certificates (for teaching junior secondary and lower levels) and for institutions at the polytechnic level (Lamin, Massaley, and Yamba 2012, 18). NCTVA is tasked with the responsibility to monitor and regulate non-university institutions. TEC and NCTVA are the two buffer bodies operating in Sierra Leone. The legal framework stipulates that both TEC and NCTVA are monitored by the Parliament of Sierra Leone, and are required to submit an annual report to it as well, (SERBA country Report 2017). According to Claudius Bart-William et al 2020, their study revealed that, the Teaching Service Commission's mandate includes all matters pertaining to teachers in the government and government assisted sub-sector elaborated as; Broad advice to the Minister on the topic of education workers, including issues such as pre-service training, delivered by Teacher Training Colleges, the approach to managing unqualified and untrained teachers; and ways of sanctioning breaches of standards of professional practice; registration and licensing, and the maintenance and publication of a register of education workers; recruitment, deployment, transfers, and dismissal of education workers, including verifying qualifications and disciplinary procedures, development and maintenance of standards and codes of professional ethics; defining rights and obligations of education workers to the institutions where they work, and vice versa; the appearance of new university models, changes in social attitudes, economic crises, and competition in the higher education market (Witczak, Mitreęa 2015, pp. 417-418) force the introduction of system changes in management, financing (Kwiek 2015, pp. 23-35; Leja 2013, pp. 53-64), as well as the personnel function at universities. Skilful management of staff competencies will decide in the future on the attractiveness of the institution, both in terms of the place of work and the place to study" (Modele zarządzania 2011, p. 90). It is the people with their qualifications, skills and commitment, aspirations and work that make up the success of a tertiary institution. For all the attributes embodied in those people to produce the expected results, the appropriate conditions should be created by implementing the Human Resource Management (HRM) concept. It refers to strategic thinking in the sphere of human resources (Saczyńska-Sokół 2012, p. 141). It consists in developing HRM strategies and instruments resulting from the organization's development strategy and supporting its implementation while ensuring the care of employees (Szaban 2011, p. 15; Wolska, Kizielewicz 2015, p. 145). A tertiary institution where the mission, vision, strategic goals and an effective plan for their implementation will be defined (Beck-Krala, Klimkiewicz 2011, p. 240, Jajszczyk, Pacholski 2010, p. 2). A university management system based on a well-designed development strategy will effectively deliver on the key missions of the university, i.e. student education, research, and collaboration with stakeholders (Leja 2013, pp. 60, 159) and will enable its development and improvement (Wawak 2013, p. 48)

The Teacher Management Policy focuses on the needs of the state in recruiting and deploying workers. At the same time, the system faces chronic difficulties in filling posts in remote regions. In the Recruitment and Matching paper, there is a matching model that would allow the TSC to balance teacher preferences with system needs, resulting in more successful deployments and less absenteeism (Claudius Bart-William et al 2020).

2.1.3 Wide Population Trends of Enrolment in Tertiary Institutions

Enrolments in the higher education sector have increased significantly over the last decade, and demand for higher education continues to be high. This high demand for higher education has led to a boom in the private higher education sector as well – in 2011, there were 24 private institutions registered with the TEC where there was none in 2004. Higher education institutions are also changing their pattern of admission to respond in a more flexible way to growing student demand.

Data from the 2020 NTHEC shows that enrolment in tertiary education increased from 89,592 to 129,196 between 2017 and 2019, a 44% jump. Of the 129,196 enrolled in tertiary education, 104,447 (80%) are enrolled in general programmes and only 20% in TVET programmes. Sierra Leone has a high access rate to tertiary education compared to other West African countries at 1,337 per 100,000 inhabitants compared to the average of 963 per 100,000, (Sierra Leone Education Sector Plan 2022 - 2026).

In Sierra Leone in 2011 enrolment is estimated at about 600 compared to 1180 in Ghana and 700 in Rwanda (World Bank, 2013). Continuous reforms and investments would be required to raise the quality of education, including learning outcomes. The targets for education delivery across specific key performance indicators are yet to be met and require consistent investments and reforms. The pace and scale at which these investments and reforms can be implemented depend mainly on the availability of resources and the efficiency with which these resources are utilized, (Ministry of Finance 2023).

Ikoya (2016) study revealed that global best practice in admission of students into universities led to improvement in quality assurance in the system. When global best practice is followed in the admission process, only the best and qualified students will be admitted. Politicians would not interfere in the admission process by using admission of low performing candidates as political gifts for their own interest. In this way, examination fraud and malpractice would reduce and the functionality of tertiary education could become better. According to Okoye (2016), study point out that enrolment into higher education in Nigeria have continued to increase without commensurate increase in infrastructure, workshops, libraries and other physical facilities for meaningful teaching, learning and research which is not different from what is actually happening in Sierra Leone and other sub-regions. In 2019, women made up 48% of enrolment in tertiary education, up from 43% in 2017. However, most women are enrolled in short-cycle tertiary education programmes (certificate and diplomas), and the share of enrolment goes down at higher levels. For example, women make up 52% of enrolment in short cycle programmes, but only 38% of enrolment in master's programmes and 21% of doctoral programmes. Even though women enrolled in science, technology, engineering, agriculture and mathematics (STEAM) programmes are granted

automatic scholarships, only 22% of women are enrolled in STEAM, compared to 31% of men, (Sierra Leone Education Sector Plan 2022-2026).

2.1.4 Challenges of Tertiary Education Management in Sierra Leone

Tertiary education management in Sierra Leone faces numerous challenges, including inadequate funding, outdated curricula, and limited research capacity. Furthermore, a lack of quality management systems and misalignment of university course content with job market needs are significant issues. Establishing standard learning outcomes and ensuring relevance to the job market are also areas needing attention.

Funding - Tertiary education institutions in Sierra Leone struggle with low overall funding, making it difficult to maintain and improve infrastructure, invest in quality teaching, and attract and retain qualified staff, according to the World Bank. **Curriculum Relevance** - University course content often does not align with the needs of students and the job market, potentially leading to graduates with skills that are not in demand. **Quality Management** - The lack of robust quality management systems in higher education institutions hinders the development of standardized learning outcomes and the assurance of quality in teaching and research. **Standardization** - The absence of standardized learning outcomes across similar programs in different institutions limits student mobility and makes it difficult to compare the quality of different institutions. **Research Capacity** - Limited research capacity hinders the development of innovative solutions to national problems and the production of new knowledge. **Infrastructure** - Many tertiary institutions lack adequate infrastructure, including libraries, laboratories, and well-equipped classrooms. **Brain Drain** - The outflow of skilled professionals and researchers from the country due to limited opportunities and poor working conditions further weakens the education system. **Quality Assurance** - The Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) and the National Council for Technical Vocational and Other Academic Awards (NCTVA) have relatively weak capacities to carry out their external quality assurance functions. **Stakeholder Engagement** - Inadequate engagement with external stakeholders, such as employers and civil society, in the quality assurance process limits the relevance of education to the needs of the country. **Relevance to Job Market** - Academic programs are often not aligned with the demands of the job market, leading to unemployment or underemployment among graduates.

2.1.5 Empirical Review

Emmanuel. E (2015), the challenges of tertiary management education and strategic learning panacea in Nigeria. This study identified the problems perverting management education in Nigeria as rooted in the many inadequacies, particularly in educational policies, curricula, facilities, balance between education levels, states, ethnicity, gender, arts and sciences, quantity and quality of education, occupations, and professions. A cross-sectional research design consisting of descriptive field survey, multiple linear regressions, 'F' Test research designs were used in this study. In a similar vein, data were collected from about 132 management graduates through questionnaires structured oral interviews and observations. The findings of the study revealed that an all-encompassing system - Innovative Management Education Model premised in self-employment, self-reliance, entrepreneurial, technical, vocational and problem-based learning skills is the ultimate. The study recommended that an

“Organisation Chart of a Management Faculty with Entrepreneurship Focus” must be a lee way for extended and functional management education in Nigeria.

Duramany-Lakkoh, E. K, 2015, Financing Higher Education in Sierra Leone: The challenges and Implications on the Supply Side. The study was carried out to evaluate financial performance and institutional sustainability and risk of selected educational institutions in providing services to students. The study uses a case of three (3) institutions within the University of Sierra Leone (USL). The quantitative approach was used for this study, both primary and secondary data was collected from the selected sample. Findings of the study revealed that USL is underfunded and the financial challenge is increasing as the gap between government subsidies and budgeted revenue widens. USL relies heavily on government subsidies as fees income only accounts for about 32% of expenditure requirement on the average. An economic fee of Le13.7 m should be charged to enable USL meet its investment target. USL fees are undercharged by 51%. The study recommended that faculties may decide to allocate budgets on a different basis from the central allocation to their departments based in their unique teaching, research and community service contributions to achieving the strategic priorities of the University. The financing of major capital projects will be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

Jackson, E. A. 2015, Competitiveness in Higher Education Practices in Sierra Leone: A model for Sustainable Growth. This study is centred around the scope for exploring avenues to open up critical discourse(s) for improving competitiveness amongst Higher Education (HE) institutions in Sierra Leone, more so in enabling the output of graduates to be measured at a competitive level through the marketization of qualifications on a global scale. The study looked at three universities such as; University of Sierra Leone, Njala University and University of Makeni. The study made use of secondary quantitative data from Google Scholar Analytics (WEBOMETRICS), and supported by a critical discourse analysis of the state of Higher Technical Educational Institutions (HETIs) situation in the present day in comparison to the African / Global league table outlook. Findings of the study revealed that, the process of promoting sustainable development / growth, particularly for HETIs in Sierra Leone, spearheaded by TEC (watch-dog) is not an easy process, especially when it involves effecting ‘CHANGE’; for HETIs in Sierra Leone to improve their profile at both global and regional league tables, change is certainly an inevitable component the vision for sustainable growth. The study recommended that, the development of a strategic plan to encourage a robust and timely quality assessment review of all HETIs in the country (this should take the form of arrangement for all faculties / schools to be assessed on the basis of quality in teaching, learning and research capability (a role for TEC).

Asiyai, R. I. & Okoro. P. 2019, Management Strategies for Improving the Functionality of Tertiary Education in Nigeria. This study investigates management strategies for improving the functionality of tertiary education in Nigeria. The sample of the study comprised 900 respondents selected through the simple random sampling technique from six tertiary institutions in Delta and Edo States of Nigeria. The questionnaire was the instrument for collection of data from the respondents. Descriptive statistics in the forms of mean and standard deviation were used to answer the only research question. The three hypotheses were tested using one way analysis of variance. The findings of the study showed that improved funding, monitoring and adoption of best practice in service delivery would help to

improve the functionality of tertiary education in Delta and Edo States. The study recommended that governments of Delta and Edo States should give adequate priority to tertiary education by ensuring that enough fund is allocated and disbursed to the institutions for proper management of affairs and improved functionality.

Bingilar, P. F. & Etale, L. M 2014, The Impact of Human Resource Development on Performance of Academic Staff in Nigerian Universities: A Study of Selected Universities in Bayelsa State of Nigeria. The study examined the impact of human resources development on performance of academic staff in Nigerian Universities in Nigeria. The study involved a survey of two Universities in Bayelsa State. Data were obtained from the annual reports of the Federal University, Otuoke and Niger Delta University, Wilberforce Island both in Bayelsa State selected for the period 2010-2014. The research methodology of this study is survey design. Findings of the study revealed that Human Resource Effectiveness (HUREE) and Human Resource Certification (HUREC) have positive and significant relationship with Performance of Academic Staff (PAS) in Nigerian Universities. The researchers recommended that training and human resource development relevant to organizational goals should be provided to employees and recipients provided with an enabling environment to perform tasks that will lead to excellent staff performance.

2.2 Research Methodology

This study was conducted over a 2-week period in Freetown in January 2025. Rationale for this is that the administrative arm of the University of Sierra Leone (USL) is situated in Freetown as well as its constituents. Two questionnaires were developed based on previous work done on the subject area – individual and in-depth questionnaires. The individual questionnaire targeted academics and consists of open and close-ended questions. The questionnaire was administered electronically through google form; it contained 27 item questions divided into four sections - A, B, C and D. The section A had 8 questions bothering on personal details of the respondents; followed by section B which had 8 questions relating to educational policies, facilities and infrastructure; Section C had questions on impact of human resource development on academic staff performance and Section D had questions on strategies for improving competitiveness of higher education institutions. The in-depth questionnaire targeted selected top administrators from the University Secretariat and registries of each constituent college as respondents. This sampling method was done by approaching selected administrators who are very knowledgeable with the challenges in managing the university. The respondents were those who completely filled the electronic questionnaire. After the collected data were coded, edited, compiled and computerised, it was analysed using SPSS version 25. The results were used to obtain frequencies and percentages for the close-ended responses and the open-ended responses were analyzed in a qualitative manner. The qualitative data formed part of the analysis with the aim of achieving the research objectives and questions.

3.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1 Demographic Characteristics

Data were obtained from 78 respondents were filled electronically through form; representing 100% response rate of the total log in. The demographic factors revealed that the majority of the responsive respondents were male (87.2%) while the rest were female (12.8%). This indicates that there are more male academics than female in the University of Sierra Leone. The analysis revealed that 10% of the respondents were between 31– 40 years, 30% were between 41 – 50 years, while 38% were 51 years and above. A greater proportion of respondents are therefore above middle age group. Of these respondents, 4% were from the College of Medicine and Allied Health Sciences (CoMAHS), 22% were from the Fourah Bay College (FBC), 50% were from the Institute of Public Administration and Management (IPAM) while only 2% were from the University Secretariat. (64.1%) of the academic respondents are full time employees, (25.6%) are associates and (10.3%) are part time employees, this shows that majority of the academic employees across USL are full time. (41.0%) of the respondents are not in either of the administrations, whereas the administrative respondents belong to the College Management and Committee with (35.9%), only (12.8%) of the respondents are in the registry, while (5.1%) of respondents each are in the Finance and IT Department administration respectively. (25.6%) of the academic respondents lecture both undergraduate and postgraduate levels, (33.33%) of the respondents lecture all levels. At least (15.4%) of the respondents lecture the diploma, and undergraduate, which means the demand for trained and qualified employees in the various constituents is high. As revealed, (2.6%) and (10.3%) of the academic respondents lecture only diploma or undergraduate respectively. (17.9%) of the respondents are specialists in Business Administration whereas, (10.3%) of the respondents are specialized in social sciences. Only (7.7%) of the respondents are specialists in Art, Business Administration and procurement respectively, this shows that, more people are shifting their focus on Business Administration as specialists in the tertiary institutions of Sierra Leone. However, at least (2.6%) each of the respondents are specialized in Information Systems and Technology, Education, Medicine, Finance and Accounting, Leadership and Governance respectively.

On the respondents' work experience, (25.6%) have served in the teaching profession for over 7 - 10 years; another (25.6%) have been in the teaching profession for over 11 - 15 years; (20.5%) have been in the profession between 16 - 20 years while only (5.1%) have been in the teaching profession for over 20 years. Cumulatively, majority of the respondents are seasoned and well conversant with the operations of their constituent college and academic field.

3.2 Data Analysis Techniques of the Key Variables

3.2.1 Educational Policies, Facilities and Infrastructure

In Sierra Leone, tertiary education policies aim to promote access to quality education and skill development, with institutions including universities, polytechnics, and TVET institutes. While the regulatory framework for universities and polytechnics is more developed, the focus is on improving infrastructure, quality, and relevance of tertiary education to meet the country's needs. This aspect will answer the research question relating to the educational policies, facilities and infrastructure.

(59.0%) of the respondents are somewhat satisfied, which means they feel content or pleased to a certain degree, but not fully or completely satisfied. Also, implying a level of satisfaction that is not as strong as it could be. (23.1%) of the respondents are neutral, which means they are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the existing educational policies, governing tertiary education in Sierra Leone. (12.8%) of the respondents are dissatisfied with the existing educational policies governing tertiary education. Only (5.1%) of the respondents are very much satisfied with the existing educational policies governing tertiary education.

Rating the adequacy of Facilities (classrooms, laboratories, libraries, etc.) available for teaching and learning - (33.3%) of the respondents indicated that, the rate of adequate facilities available for teaching and learning is poor while (48.7%) of the respondents indicated fair rate of adequacy of facilities, while only (7.7%) of the respondents indicated that, the rate of adequate facilities available for teaching and learning is very poor. However, (10.3%) of the respondents admit that the rate of adequate facilities available for teaching is good.

On the challenges related to infrastructure that hinder effective teaching and learning - majority (97.4%) of the respondents admitted that, there are lot of challenges related to infrastructure that hinder effective teaching and learning. Only (2.6%) of the respondents could not admit to the existence of challenges related to effective teaching and learning. The main challenges faced regarding facilities and infrastructure include majority indicated inadequate computer laboratories is one key challenge faced regarding facilities and infrastructure, another key challenge indicated by the respondents is the inadequate IT related tools at (7.7%) such as poor internet connectivity; frequent power outage; inadequate classrooms; inadequate library materials. Frequent power outage at (5.1%) is another key challenge faced regarding facilities and infrastructure.

Suggested improvement to enhance policies, facilities and infrastructure - Majority of the respondents suggested, provision of all required IT related tools and infrastructure; Investment in solar power; Establishment of more computer laboratories for research practical is one way to enhance policies, facilities and infrastructure. Another key improvement (10.3%) suggested by the respondents that will enhance policies, facilities and infrastructure is the provision of all required IT related tools and infrastructure; Acquisition of standby generator; Investment in solar power; Establishment of more computer laboratories for research practical; Establishment of more medical laboratories for research practical; More teaching and tutorial classrooms. From the analysis, only (5.1%) of the respondents suggested that Investment in solar power; more teaching and tutorial classrooms will enhance policies, facilities and infrastructure of the institution.

3.2.2 Impact of Human Resource Development on Academic Staff Performance

Human resource in the area of education management is one key element that helps in the acceleration of education growth and rapid development. This aspect answers the research question relating to the impact of human resource development on academic staff performance.

Satisfaction with the current Human Resource Development Programs Offered by the University of Sierra Leone – the result revealed that (46.2%) of the respondents are somehow satisfied with the current human resource development programs offered by the university of Sierra Leone, whereas (23.1%) of them indicated dissatisfaction with the human resource development offered by the university of Sierra Leone. Other respondents with (23.1%) cannot tell the satisfaction nor dissatisfaction of the HR development program, instead they were neutral. Only (2.6%) of the respondents were very much dissatisfied with the human resource development program.

Participation of the human resource development activities provided by the university in the past year – the analysis revealed that majority (66.7%) of the respondents participated in the human resource development activities provided by the University of Sierra Leone in the past year. Only (33.3%) of the respondents were unable to participate in the human resource activities provided by the University of Sierra Leone.

Effectiveness of the human resource development programs in enhancing your professional skills and knowledge - majority (46.2%) of the respondents indicated that, the effectiveness of the human resource development was fair, (20.5%) were poor. Only (2.6%) of the respondents indicated that, the human resource development activities were very poor in terms of effectiveness. However, (2.6%) of the respondents shows that, the human resource development activities were excellent and large amount (28.2%) of the respondents admit that, the human resource development activities were good in terms of effectiveness.

To what extent do you believe that participation in human resource developments activities has positively impacted your teaching performance - (33.3%) of the respondents moderately believed that participation in human resource developments activities has positively impacted their teaching performance. (28.2%) of the respondents significantly believed that participation in human resource developments activities has positively impacted their teaching performance. Only (12.8%) of the respondents do not believe that participation in human resource developments activities has positively impacted their teaching performance. However, (2.6%) of the respondents extremely believed that participation in human resource developments activities has positively impacted their teaching performance.

Perception of the influence of human resource development initiatives on your research productivity and output - (30.8%) of the respondents strongly perceived that there are some influences of human resource development initiatives on their research productivity and output. However, (20.5%) of the respondents stated that, human resource development initiatives have minimal influence on their research productivity and output, on the contrary, (20.5%) of the respondents admitted that, human resource development initiatives have significant influence on their research productivity and output while only (10.3%) of the respondents stated that, human resource development initiatives have no influence on their research productivity and output.

Specific areas for additional support or resources are needed to further enhance performance as academic staff member - (56.2%) of the respondents highlighted that, teaching resources/materials; research funding; professional development opportunities; facilities and infrastructure; and administrative support is one key area where they feel additional support

or resources are needed to further enhance their performance as academic staff members. Also, (17.8%) of the respondents stated that, teaching resources/materials; research funding; professional development opportunities; facilities and infrastructure is another key area where they feel additional support or resources are needed to further enhance their performance as academic staff members. From all indication, teaching resources/materials and research fundings are key to their performance as academic staff members.

3.2.3 Strategies for Improving Competitiveness of Higher Education Institution

Education is the greatest tool for enhancing the development and sustainability of nations. Education can enhance sustainable development of nations if it is functional. Tertiary education, including teacher education and courses offered by universities, polytechnics and professional colleges, generally taking two to four years.

Main factors contributing to the competitiveness of higher education institutions in Sierra Leone - (28.2%) of the respondents indicated that quality of academic programs; faculty expertise and qualifications; research output and innovation; facilities and infrastructure; funding and financial resources; industry partnerships and collaborations; global recognition and accreditation is one key factor contributing to the competitiveness of higher education institutions in Sierra Leone in an ascending order.

Rating management strategies currently employed by your institution in fostering competitiveness and growth - majority of the respondents (59.0%) admitted that, management strategies employed by the institutions in fostering competitiveness and growth are fair enough. (23.1%) of the respondents indicated that management strategies employed by the institutions in fostering competitiveness and growth were good. Only (12.8%) of the respondent stated that, management strategies employed by the institutions in fostering competitiveness and growth are poor. However, (5.1%) of the respondents admitted that, management strategies employed by the institutions in fostering competitiveness and growth are very good.

3.2.4 Challenges faced by the University of Sierra Leone in Terms of Management Education and Strategic Learning

Result from the studies indicated that tertiary institutions in Sierra Leone faced several challenges in terms of management education and strategic learning one of which is delay in implementing sound management policies and practices. The findings also revealed that, the delay in implementation of policies and practice is caused by various factors such as low capacity of administrative staff; poor infrastructure and outdated systems; inadequate funding and revenue constraints; inadequate learning facilities; academic malpractices and ethical issues; weak institutional autonomy and political interference; and corruption and mismanagement.

Findings revealed that, the University of Sierra Leone operates in a hierarchy of authorities where decision are first taken by management thereafter, filtered down to subordinates for implementation. However, management can enhance quality and accessibility of education in Sierra Leone if key management strategies such as; establishment of internal quality assurance and training units; expansion of Open Distance Learning (ODL); integration of

digital learning platforms/e-learning management/LMS; curriculum enhancement and employer engagement; strengthening of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) are to be implemented by higher institutions in Sierra Leone.

Findings from the results also indicated that, governance structure are less effective and the efficacy of them are influenced by prevalence of corruption; internal quality assurance; governance and financial stewardship; and anti-corruption initiatives.

3.2.5 Funding Mechanisms and its Challenges

The provision of effective and efficient financial resources at optimal levels is a key factor when it comes to the functioning, continue growth, competitiveness, and quality of teaching and learning, and research in tertiary institutions. Financial resources play a key role in producing quality education services. Findings from the interviews revealed:

- Government funding; tuition and student fees; donor and international aid; research grants and collaborations; private sector partnerships; endowments and philanthropy; and income-generating activities are some of the key primary sources of funding however, they are considered limited;
- Also, limited alumni contributions; limited human capital; lack of private sector investment; infrastructural and maintenance cost; high dependency on tuition fees; limited access to research grants and external funding; inadequate government funding; corruption and mismanagement are some of the institutional challenges faced in securing adequate funding to support the operations and initiatives of public universities;
- However, the mechanisms and partnerships which includes, crowdfunding and social investment; international collaboration and grants; student work and cooperative education programs; Alumni giving and endowment funds; that can be successfully used in addressing funding challenges for institutional sustainability; and
- Finally, fees generation from self-paying students are never forth coming due to the high cost of living and majority of about 70% of these students acquire government grant-in-aid and these fees are always owed by the government sometimes in arrears of 4 to 5 years.

3.2.5.1 Other Challenges and Monitoring Mechanisms

Challenges in terms of funding availability and allocation within the university - (25.6%) in an ascending order of the respondents stated that, insufficient funding, inequitable distribution of funds; lack of transparency in budgeting; limited access to external funding sources are key challenges of funding availability and allocation within the institutions. Whereas another (17.9%) of the respondents indicated challenges in budget prioritization is another key challenge of funding availability and allocation within the institutions. Only (2.6%) of the respondents highlighted limited access to external funding sources is one big the challenge of funding availability and allocation within the institutions.

How important is the Global marketization of qualifications for the competitiveness of Sierra Leonean higher education institution – (12.8%) of the respondents revealed that, the global

marketization of qualifications for the competitiveness of Sierra Leonean higher education institution is extremely important; (66.7%) of the respondents stated that, the global marketization of qualifications for the competitiveness of Sierra Leonean higher education institution is very important, while only (7.7%) of the respondents indicated that, the global marketization of qualifications for the competitiveness of Sierra Leonean higher education institution is not important at all.

Observation of any best practices being implemented by other institutions locally or internationally that could be adopted to enhance competitiveness – majority (82.1%) of the respondents stated that, they have observed best practices being implemented by other institutions locally or internationally that could be adopted to enhance competitiveness while only (17.9%) of the respondents stated that they have not observed best practices being implemented by other institutions locally or internationally that could be adopted to enhance competitiveness.

Measures necessary to ensure sustainable growth and development of higher education institutions in Sierra Leone - (87.4%) of the respondents believe strengthening research and innovation capabilities; enhancing faculty development retention; Improving infrastructure and facilities; increasing access to funding and resources; strengthening industry partnerships; implementing effective governance and management practices as measures are necessary to ensure sustainable growth and development of higher education institutions in Sierra Leone. Also, (10.0%) of the respondents believed that enhancing faculty development retention; improving infrastructure and facilities; implementing effective governance and management practices that strengthening research and innovation capabilities are the only requirements necessary to ensure sustainable growth and development of higher education institutions in Sierra Leone, while only (2.6%) of the respondents believed that improving infrastructure and facilities are the only measure necessary to ensure sustainable growth and development of higher education institutions in Sierra Leone.

Monitoring Mechanisms - Effectiveness of the current monitoring mechanisms in ensuring quality and accountability within higher education institutions in Sierra Leone - (35.9%) of the respondents stated the current monitoring mechanisms ensuring quality and accountability within higher education institutions in Sierra Leone is moderately effective. Only (7.7%) of the respondents indicated that, the current monitoring mechanisms ensuring quality and accountability within higher education institutions in Sierra Leone is very effective. However, (28.2%) of the respondents stated that the current monitoring mechanisms ensuring quality and accountability within higher education institutions in Sierra Leone is not effective at all and another (28.2%) believe the monitoring mechanism is somewhat effective.

The role regulatory bodies and policymakers play in supporting the competitiveness and functionality of tertiary institutions in Sierra Leone - (28.2%) of the respondents in an ascending order stated that, by establishing clear quality standards and regulations; allocating sufficient funding for higher education; providing incentives for excellence and innovation; Facilitating industry-academic partnerships; ensuring transparent and accountable governance are key roles regulatory bodies and policymakers play in supporting the competitiveness and functionality of tertiary institutions in Sierra Leone. Also, (10.3%) of the respondents revealed that, establishing clear quality standards and regulations alone is one key role

regulatory bodies and policymakers play in supporting the competitiveness and functionality of tertiary institutions in Sierra Leone. However, (2.6%) of the respondents indicated that, allocating sufficient funding for higher education; Facilitating industry-academic partnerships is another role regulatory bodies and policymakers play in supporting the competitiveness and functionality of tertiary institutions in Sierra Leone.

4.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Conclusion

The higher and tertiary education (HTE) sector was a small but thriving sector that has been undergoing a process of restoration. The demands of the labour market and the competitive external environment have led to continuous call for improvements in the management of education especially the tertiary level. Therefore, a university management system based on a well-designed development strategy will effectively deliver on the key missions of the university i.e. student education; research, and collaboration with stakeholders that will enable development and improvement. Tertiary institutions in Sierra Leone faced several challenges in terms of management education and strategic learning. However, the following recommendations are therefore made to address the issues surrounding education management in tertiary institutions.

Tertiary institutions through the state government should adopt strategies and initiatives such as institutional digitalization and governance reforms; research collaboration and grant funding; entrepreneurship and innovation hubs; strengthening quality assurance and accreditation system; adoption of digital learning and learning management system; university partnerships and work integrated learning from international best practice so as to improve competitiveness among higher education institutions and improve the functionality of those institutions in the state.

In overcoming the barriers to the adoption and implementation of global best practice in higher education, tertiary institutions in Sierra Leone must address challenges related to funding, capacity, governance, and technology through strategies such as digital transformation and technology adoption; improve faculty training and capacity building; enhanced industry collaboration and curriculum modernization; strengthen research culture and international collaborations; strengthening institutional leadership and governance; improve monitoring, evaluation and quality assurance.

In other to attain sustainable growth and market competitiveness higher education institutions must introduce interdisciplinary programs, STEM education, and entrepreneurship courses to align with industry needs and also, enhancing practical learning through internships, apprenticeships, and co-op programs.

4.2 Recommendations

Tertiary institutions should consider key human resource development activities such as teaching resources/materials; research funding; professional development opportunities; facilities and infrastructure; administrative support so as to effectively improved the performance of academic staff in Sierra Leonean universities.

Government of Sierra Leone should ensure its own obligations towards tertiary institutions are met and on time such as the payment of subvention and grant-in-aid, provision of adequate IT related tools such as strong internet connectivity; constant power supply; adequate library materials so as to aid tertiary institutions in implementation of sound management practices and good governance.

Tertiary educational institutions should create room for collaboration and partnerships with other local or international educational institutions, industries and government agencies so as to build network and relationships thereby fostering trusts and cooperations which in turn leads to sharing resources and expertise.

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