

STEPHEN ADEBANJO OYEBADE & CHIKA DIKE

RESTRUCTURING NIGERIAN TERTIARY (UNIVERSITY) EDUCATION FOR BETTER PERFORMANCE

Abstract

This study assesses the goals of university level of education, namely, development of high level manpower, scholarship and community service, and found that universities have not been able to achieve close to average. Problems range from social, political, financial as well as personnel issues. Specifically, they include problems of infrastructure, funding, staffing, record management and external interferences. Results include low quality outputs, poor state of infrastructure, poor international competitiveness, and hence the search for strategies to reconstruct and restructure rebuild the system to respond favourably to novel challenges of development. To redeem the system, the study prescribes that student and staff personnel needs be taken as priorities from henceforth. Also, inter national collaboration for students and staff exchanges, and expansion of access to qualified candidates, among others, be prioritised.

Introduction

Tertiary education is the education given after secondary education in colleges of education, polytechnics, monotechnics, universities and other institutions offering correspondence courses (FRN, 2004). According to the document, the goals of tertiary education encompass the development of relevant high level manpower, development of intellectual capability of individuals and acquisition of physical and intellectual skills. Others are to promote and encourage scholarship as well as community service. Tertiary educational institutions pursue these goals through teaching, research, generation and dissemination of knowledge which they achieve through a variety of programmes such as certificate, diploma, undergraduate and postgraduate courses.

Specifically, university education contributes to the production of high level manpower in diverse professional callings as dictated by national development requirements. The goals of university education also focus on inculcation of community spirit in the students through projects and action research.

The practice of tertiary education in Nigeria so far has not met the expectations of the above goals and objectives due to a number of factors such as limited infrastructure, poor funding, poor staffing, poor record keeping and socio-political interferences. These problems have resulted in low quality outputs, lack of international competitiveness and comparability of outputs. This pitiable and unacceptable condition has necessitated the investigation into how the Nigerian university education system can be restructured in order to meet the expectations of the stakeholders.

The origin of higher education in Nigeria, according to Oni (1997), is traceable to the establishment of Yaba Higher College, YHC (now Yaba College of Technology) in 1932. YHC was heavily criticised for subjecting its candidates to substandard curricula which were meant to produce subordinate officers to the

European expatriates who supervised the programmes and their products. Again, each programme was to last six to seven years, about twice the length of time a person needed to graduate from a first degree university course and, almost twice the length of time used by their European bosses to graduate. Unfortunately, the diploma certificates awarded were not accredited to any university in Britain.

This necessitated the agitation and clamour for a true higher institution of university status and the setting up of the Commissions of Higher Education in West Africa in 1943. There was the Elliot Commission which was to report on the organisation and facilities of the existing centres of higher education in British West Africa and to make recommendations regarding future university development in that area. Then, there came the Asquith Commission which wrote the minority report out of the Elliot Commission Report.

Following political independence in 1960, government noted the non-indigenous status of the existing University College, Ibadan (UCI) and started setting up what can be called indigenous higher educational institutions. This started with the establishment of the University of Nigeria at Nsukka in 1960. In 1962, there came the University of Lagos, Akoka, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria and the University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile – Ife) and others (Amadi, 2011). As at 2011, there were 36 federal, 37 state and 45 private universities in Nigeria making 118 away from the three indigenous universities in 1963.

Problematic Issues in the Management of Nigerian Universities

So many factors converge as bottlenecks hindering effective and efficient performance of Nigerian universities. For a better and broader treatment of these issues, we discuss government factors (including those of regulatory bodies which are agents of government), social factors; technological issues, university internal factors and family issues.

Government and Regulators

Government

- *Inadequate budgetary allocation (underfunding)*: Over the years, government has grossly underfunded education to the extent that their effort falls far below the UNESCO recommended annual budget proportion of 26%. The consequences are grave. The report of the Presidential Task Force Team on Education published in May, 2011 states inter alia: “education budget, as a proportion of total federal spending is some 7.6% (average from 2008-2010). It is roughly 5% of total federal capital budget and 11% of total recurrent budget. There is a decreasing trend over the years” (pp. 36-37).

- *Policy inconsistency or policy somersault*: Generally, we note some discontinuity in national policy between one political dispensation and the other. If one government starts an education programme or project, another incoming government will abandon it and start a new one which it may also not complete. There are, therefore, many abandoned projects. In some other cases lobbying and influences of political heavyweights and influential traditional rulers make government to backpedal on enunciated policies. This has made the federal government to lament policy inconsistency in the following words: ‘*policies have not always been given the chance to prove their effectiveness (or failure to do so), as*

uncoordinated changes tend to be dropped in and out in a haphazard manner, dictated by moods in place of reason. This is a practice that shocks (instead of guiding stakeholders and policy implementers' (FRN, 2011: 17).

- *Political Interference:* Party politics and personality clashes often make funding and implementation of educational policies difficult or impossible. In other cases, government engages in playing politics with the educational system to score political points. Renaming of educational institutions has often led to public resistance and disruption of academic activities. For example, government announcement on Democracy Day of May 29, 2012 renaming the University of Lagos to Moshood Abiola University led to a lot of protests both within and outside the University.

- *Localisation of academics and student admissions:* University education and management are supposed to be a universal (worldwide) phenomenon. This means that there is no rationale in limiting recruitment of staff and management officers to people from the contiguous communities of the university. This is common in Nigeria and this practice has resulted in low quality performance and inefficient operations. The problem also stretches into student admissions. According to Breton (2003), the world is moving towards universalisation of higher education and so he states that "... one of the essential components of the cultural world of university internationalization practitioners is how to improve student and professor mobility and give this its true meaning in today's world".

- *Inadequate infrastructure:* Poor funding, personal interest of management and high level of corruption have led to a state of inadequate infrastructure in most of the higher institutions in Nigeria and this has hindered adequate performance of Nigerian universities.

Regulators

Education regulators in Nigeria include the National Universities Commission (for Universities), the National Board for Technical Education, NBTE (for Polytechnics), the National Commission for Colleges of Education (for Colleges of Education) and the Federal Ministry of Education, as the overall controller of education in Nigeria. There is also the Teachers' Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) for the teaching profession while the NERDC regulates curriculum development and management. Problems emanating from these bodies include:

- *Poor Supervision and Monitoring:* Their accreditation exercises are often stage-managed and no efforts are made to put the made-up issues in place even after the exercise is completed.

- *NUC imposes a carrying capacity rule:* This means that the regulator defines the number of students that a university could admit during each session based on the facilities available. This limits the number of students admissible with a large overflow of un-admitted candidates. The Committee of Vice Chancellors (CVC) has not been very helpful in this matter.

- Inadequate manpower resulting in ineffective regulation of the teaching profession has left many uncertificated teachers teaching in Nigeria's tertiary education system especially in universities.

- Curriculum reform lethargy has left the Nigerian system less dynamic and apparently insensitive to curriculum matters due to the boogey of bureaucracy on the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC).

Examination Bodies

Nigeria's examination bodies for various levels of education include: the West African Examinations Council, WAEC, the National Examinations Council, NECO (for the secondary school level), the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) for entrance examinations into tertiary institutions. As feeder institutions to the university level, failures on the part of these institutions have negatively reflected on the university system. Some of the problems include: examination malpractices (and leakages), inadequate monitoring of administration of examinations, especially in corruption-ridden 'special centers' and in secondary schools whose outputs feed the university system with half-baked or poorly-prepared candidates.

The Society: Negative Impact on Students

University staff and students live in and relate with the society. The life pattern and behavior of the society will surely influence university performance. The problem here starts from before the candidate is admitted. Most secondary school students (who are inputs into the university system) get polluted by the society and the environment as well as by family and peer group factors. Some of these problems include: examination malpractice, lesbianism and gay life, academic laziness, unwillingness to study, bullying and fastidiousness, unbridled desire for money and immorality, cultism and intimidation of others, robbery and stealing, telling lies and escapist mindset. Some others are results/documents falsification, indiscipline, indecent dressing and corrupt music, pornography and cyber crimes.

University Internal Factors

These internal factors manifest in lack of trust and regard for university authorities, pressure from teaching and non-teaching staff, inadequacy of facilities such as libraries, laboratories, textbooks, un-conducive learning environment, over-crowding, dirty hostels, etc. We also have compromises on academic standards, cultism and cult violence, wrong placement of students into unwanted courses, peer pressure and deficient curricula which have negatively impacted on products' employability after school.

Technological Factors

Prominent are dangers of misuse of information communication technologies to commit fraud and other unprofitable foibles common to youths, distractive and negative life styles (habits). Others include: pornography, cyber crime, documents manipulation and forgery.

Family Problems

These cause poverty leading to gullibility, naivety on the part of the younger ones, desperation for admission which leads to crime, over petting and pampering, low quality primary and secondary schools attended, high expectations from

students, poor monitoring and control, nonchalant attitude to curbing adolescents' excesses and forcing students to study some courses they do not like.

Causes of Poor Research, Poor Performance of University Graduates and Non Recognition of Nigeria's Academia Effort

1. **Shallow Teaching:** Lecturers are not deep; they rush through lectures and do not bother whether their students understand what was taught or not.

2. **No Monitoring of Lecturers' Teaching:** Lecturing is a teaching activity. Academic freedom does not imply that a university teacher does what he likes in the class. There is too much freedom to the extent that lecturers' class activities are not checked, assessed or monitored. The consequence stares us in the paper.

3. **Over-crowding / Overpopulated Lecture Rooms:** Lecturing facilities - classrooms, teaching aids, instructional materials as well as class/building fittings-lighting etc, are not adequate. There are not enough lecture theaters. Public address systems are almost non-existent. The lecturer most of the time is frustrated with the excess student number swooping into lecture rooms during lectures. Dearth of facilities may make some students not attend lectures when they could not locate lecture venues especially once there is a shift in venue.

4. **Lack of Practical Demonstration:** At the secondary school level, those who take the General Certificate of Education [GCE] examinations settle for alternative to practical as against the practical tests taken by regular SSCE candidates. This handicap is extended to the Nigerian university system where science and technology students neither us nor touch, not to talk of practicing with, practical equipment. It may therefore not be a surprise that a student who made first class in chemistry may not know well how to titrate. Graduates of agriculture and related areas may not have visited nor practiced in a farm all through tertiary education.

5. **Lack of Housing (living) Facilities:** The reality that some lecturers and students live too far away from their universities and have to shuttle to school every day and back cannot make for a credible academic exercise. Lectures in big cities like Lagos, Abuja, Kano and Port Harcourt suffer untold hardship in their effort and desire to go to work. Some, especially in Lagos leave their places of residence about 5 am everyday to arrive at the university about 9 am, lagged out, tired, wearied, hungry, etc, what will such a person teach? At about 3/4pm he has started rushing home to arrive about 9/10 pm. When will he prepare the lectures, do research and publish? Yet, if you do not publish, you perish in the university system. This same situation applies to students some of who sponsor themselves and could only attend classes once/twice a week.

6. **No Gown-Town Relationship:** Industry operators do not have any formal relationship with the universities. It is therefore almost impossible for the universities to assess the performance of their graduates. There are no labour exchange programmes organized by universities. There is no proper man planning system in the country. It is as nobody cares nor is anybody in charge of anything in Nigeria. Most manpower data appear to be "cooked data".

Unfortunately, one of the accreditation criteria set out by the National University commission for universities is the report from employers. Little is received here and what comes in is unreliable. The employers are not sensitized.

Otisi (2011) in a piece published by the Guardian x-rayed the effort of Petroleum Trust Development Fund at improving teaching and learning in Nigeria's petroleum industry. The programme is a 6 month diploma broken into two 3-month phases, one phase will be done in a selected university in Europe while the other will be in Nigeria. Essentially, the programme targets practical monitored teaching and research as a teaching practice. The teacher's registration council of Nigeria is challenged by Otisi's article to make alive its mandate of regulating and monitoring the teaching profession in Nigeria. It needs to develop feasible practical modalities to be put in place immediately.

Requirements for Sound and Effective Academic Work in the University System

For a university to be so called and respected, certain conditions and facilities have to be in place. Failure to meet these conditions and set in place these facilities will cause problems to arise. In the Nigerian university system, different types of services are expected from the system, including:

Student academic services (or student academic needs)

To enhance the teaching-learning activity and improve student's learning and academic performance, the following things need to be put in place as part of students' academic services: lecture halls, good lecturers, well-furnished and well-equipped libraries, well-equipped laboratories (for sciences), technology workshops, mini-markets or supermarkets, business laboratories, (for economics, business education), agricultural demonstration centres and agricultural farms and practical entrepreneurial apprenticeship experience while in school.

Practical training of students of agriculture can be carried out in demonstration farms for piggery, fishery, snailry, grass-cutter farming, etc. Entrepreneurship centres can be used to teach students to learn carpentry, furniture making, events management, fashion designing, interior decoration, computer appreciation, metal works, sign writing and other crafts.

Staff Academic Services (Needs)

Libraries well stocked with relevant and current materials, laboratories, demonstration schools (for Adult Education Lecturers), agricultural extension stations, effective research facilities, ICT skill-acquisition centres, demonstration centres for journalism and broadcasting, research fairs, university-industry partnerships to market research outputs and patenting research products.

Non-Academic Services: For Students

General students' welfare include – hostels, catering, safety/security, unionism/activism, work-study programme, recreation and sporting facilities, social interactions, social networking, counseling, student outreaches – debating, conferences, facility visits/excursions, religious issues, etc.

Non-academic Staff Services

These are enhancers for greater productivity and they include accommodation (within and around the campus), medicals, transportation, family welfare, recreation

and social networking, consultancy, preparation for retirement and pension, handsome remuneration and welfare packages, home ownership programmes, cooperative facilities, upfront bulk payment of allowances, etc.

General Services (Physical Infrastructure)

We expect focus on infrastructure such as buildings, aesthetics, sanitation, civil works, event centers, roads, electricity, water, healthcare, recreation and sports etc. We also expect supporting facilities like business centers, supermarkets, trading malls, etc, to be set up in areas close to campuses to enable the university community have easy access to them.

Suggestions, Solutions and Policy Options

Having diagnosed and analysed the problems of university education and management in Nigeria, we attempt suggesting ways of improving the situation, especially by generating new ideas that can be put into practice to improve the system.

Education franchising/cross border education

This concept means that entrepreneurs in education or existing educational institutions can enter into franchise agreements with renowned and specialized institutions abroad to hoist their banners in Nigeria, bear their name and operate according to their tenets and principles. For example, the Imperial College London can allow a Nigerian University to use its name and become Imperial College Nigeria. The College is renowned for escapades in engineering and so it will bring that escapade to bear on its franchise in Nigeria. The advantages of this include:

- a. Improvement in quality of education and training especially in the areas of specialization of the franchisor.
- b. The standard of education will be improved and international recognition of Nigerian University graduates will be enhanced. Also, staff quality and standards will be enhanced. The arrangement will, in no small measure, reduce the army of un-admitted but qualified candidates waiting for admission.
- c. It will also create opportunities for collaboration and exchange of staff and students among universities. It will also create job opportunities both within and outside Nigeria especially with countries of franchisors.
- d. E-learning will be enhanced and promoted; universities will be able to meet the objectives of MDGs and will help reduce social tension.

Introduction of access programmes

The problem of backlog of qualified but not admitted candidates in Nigerian university system can be alleviated if universities can introduce and properly manage access programmes such as pre-degree and diploma programmes. Candidates can be surer of formal university admission through this mop up outlets.

Remedial programmes

Universities can also invest in remedial programmes where they properly/adequately prepare candidates for admission. This will solve the problems

created by inadequate and poor teaching learning in secondary schools. It will also save parents and children from patronizing unscrupulous education vendors and hawks in 'special centres' who trade in marks and fake certificates.

Establishing more institutions

University education facilities should be expanded. A situation of admitting less than 20% of over 1 million candidates sitting for JAMB examinations annually is unacceptable. It is a time bomb waiting to explode. Conditions for establishing universities should be made easier. Better recognition should be accorded other levels of tertiary education to create veritable platforms for absorption of teeming population of waiting candidates. In all, however, regulatory authorities should ensure that quality and standards are not compromised.

Re-orientation and counseling

Students need to change their disposition towards education. The present "cash and carry" attitude must be stopped and the spirit of honesty and hard work instilled in them. The principle of KYC (Know Your Customer/Client) must be imbibed by universities. They need to effectively monitor the attitudes, inclinations and behaviours or lifestyles of their students so as to nip in the bud their slips into bad behavior. University managers should make the campus environment busy and active to get students engaged to distract them from negative inclinations.

Regular counseling programmes should be organized to inculcate good habits into students. It is excess freedom and idleness together with the non-challant attitude of university administration that makes some students to stray. The situation is akin to absentee parents who do not have time enough to monitor and guide their children and wards so they gradually go wild and become ultimately uncontrollable.

Work-study programme

Universities should continue to expand the work-study programme whereby some, especially indigent students, are given the opportunity to work in the university while schooling. This will help them generate money to pay their fees and meet other expenses. The student's academic standing must be considered in this programme.

Universities as labour exchange

Universities can act and operate as labour exchange. In this arrangement, universities act as data bank for information on prospective employers and employees. Employers supply information on the number, type/quality and experience of prospective employees they want. Applicants also give their data and their qualifications, types of jobs expected and preferences of job location or industry. Universities match these two groups for a fee and the society is better off.

More efficient education access and utilization of available facilities

The Makerere University Model (in Uganda) operates on a 24-hour system whereby students are taught day and night in shifts. The day shift runs from 8am to 6pm while the night shift runs from 8pm till dawn. In this process, different sets of lecturers teach in the different shifts in the affected programmes with few

exceptions. Teaching and learning assistants take care of the environment during the intervals. The benefits/implications of this model include the following:

- a. Higher (university) education is able to expand access, increase student admission prospects, and reduce the backlog of qualified waiting candidates/applicants.
- b. The model increases efficient utilization of available facilities which ordinarily would have lain idle in periods of non-use.
- c. It reduces the stress and cost of seeking university admission by candidates and their sponsors respectively.
- d. It generates more income for the university system.
- e. It creates more employment opportunities for the country.
- f. It reduces the tendency of falling into the traps of education touts in special centres vending admission and mushroom universities.

The implications of the above model are the need for constant/reliable power supply, assurance of safety and security, expansion and regular maintenance of infrastructure, effective monitoring and quality assurance by the education regulators, like the NUC, and FME. It also emphasises the need for accommodation of staff and students within and around the university environments to enhance quality and efficiency of the system.

Tri-semester admission system

In Kampala International University (KIU) in Kampala, Uganda, student admission is done everyday for qualified candidates in their areas of choices. The admission lists are now streamed into *January to March Intake*, *April to July Intake* and *August to November Intake*. Each of the streams begins its own academic semester and runs concurrently with others until they all conclude their programmes and graduate. All the benefits of the *Makerere Model* are also obtainable in the *KIU model*.

Free mobility of students and academics

Nigerian universities system should be restructured in such a way that if the need arises, a student can transfer his credits from one university to the other within and beyond the country especially those with similar systems of education like those using the British system of education namely Ghana, Tanzania, Canada, Uganda, *etc.* This collaborative arrangement can also include staff mobility and exchange in teaching, research, technical exchange and community service.

Student allocation to hostels

One thing that can create attachment for students is to be allocated halls of residence whether they physically live in them or not. This model, practiced at the University of Ibadan, makes every registered student to become psychologically attached to the system. With identity card, a student can always go to his assigned hall of residence to play games, enjoy recreation, use the Hall Library or Reading Room, use the lobby, enjoy sporting activities and visit or interact with other students who sleep in the halls, *etc.* The belief here is that students can use these facilities during examination periods and perform better academically especially in the case of off- campus students. Nigerian university authorities are advised to adopt

the model as it will reduce incidences of cultism and unnecessary distraction for students.

Conclusion

Universities as *ivory towers* and communities of thinkers reside to advance the cause of the society and of the society of people is in serious dilemma, but not totally irredeemable. No serious person desires to get to the north by travelling south. Nigeria should halt the current trend of counting numbers (124 universities in 2012), which portends growth without development. Enough of flimsy excuses and poor attention given to university development in a third world country like Nigeria which is not redeemed by mere wishful thinking. *If wishes were horses...*

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Dr. Stephen Adebajo Oyebade
Department of Educational Administration
University of Lagos, Akoka Lagos
Nigeria
oyebadestephen@gmail.com

Dr. Chika Dike
Department of Arts & Social Sciences Education
University of Lagos, Akoka Lagos
Nigeria