



Challenges, Development and Prospect of University Education in Nigeria

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Abstract

Education in Nigeria is the shared responsibility of everyone, government, stakeholders, parents, teachers and the society at large. But it is rather unfortunate that, when the issue of the Nigerian education system is raised, the thoughts that come to mind are: decline in standard, deterioration of facilities, and examination malpractice, and the likes. In view of this, the paper investigated the challenges, development and prospect of University Education in Nigeria. University Education was viewed as a community of teachers and scholars who commit themselves to the dissemination of knowledge through teaching and its acquisition through learning, research and scientific enquiry. Consequently, the paper discussed the challenges facing University Education in Nigeria as; financial crises, deteriorated infrastructure, brain-drain syndrome, erosion of university autonomy, graduate unemployment, volatile and militant students' unionism, secret cults and political interference. Also, the development recorded by the University Education in Nigeria were also discussed; to mention but a few is training of high level human capital through various courses and programs, which include; Medicine, Engineering, Law, Education, Pharmacy, Psychology, Accountancy, Banking and Finance, Mass Communication, and Journalism etc. Also, discussed are the prospects of University Education in Nigeria, which includes; new discovery and inventions through research, eradication of poverty, hunger, ignorance, and illiteracy, and good governance and genuine democracy. Conclusively, the paper recommended among others that the government, through the Ministry of Education should allocate the necessary funds required for the educational sector to eliminate strike and other industrial actions.

Keywords: Challenges, Education, Development, Prospect, University.

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INTRODUCTION

Educational pursuit in Nigeria has become something of a necessity if one must get or advance in certain choice jobs. This puts pressure on the University education system hence this post takes a look at problems of Nigeria universities and possible solutions. Given the importance of education and the role it plays in a country, this high demand of education in Nigeria should be met with the attention it deserves, to put Nigeria universities at par with those around the globe. Education is widely accepted as a major instrument for promoting socioeconomic, political and cultural development in Nigeria. Universities educate future leaders and develop the high-level technical capacities that underpin economic growth and development (Odekunle, 2011).

University education, which is the focal point in this study, is an important form of investment in human capital. It can be viewed as a high level or a specialized form of human capital, contribution of which is very significant to economic growth in any society (Schultz, 2016). This is why Castel rightly refers to it as - the engine of development in the new world economy (Castells, 2014). Nevertheless, it is by adequate university education that people get to know their basic rights and seek to get them enforced. This is because part of the reasons for the smooth ride of the unscrupulous ruling elite - lies in the fact that they have constantly worked on the emotions of an ignorant population (Kukah, 2007). Lack of adequate education limits the horizons of the masses and therefore restricts the capacity of the oppressed to extract their rights from state. Besides, Ibukun (2017) also posited that the main purpose and relevance of university education in Nigeria is the provision of much needed manpower to accelerate the socio-economic development of the nation. Such specialized education at the University level is regarded as an instrument of social change and economic development.

However, in spite of the pertinence of university education to any nation, Nigeria has been bedeviled by many woes in her university education sector, such that anyone who has the good of the country at heart would agree that the sector need a divine touch. This write-up will therefore have as its kernel, to consider the situation of the Nigerian university education – the problems, growth and prospect as well as areas that need to be touched and how this should be done in order to salvage the university education in Nigeria. According to the National Policy on Education (2013), University education is expected to:

- Contribute to national development through high level relevant manpower training;
- Develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of the individual and society;
- Develop the intellectual capability of individuals to understand and appreciate their local and external environments;
- Acquire both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to be self-reliant and useful members of the society;
- Promote and encourage scholarship and community service;
- Strengthen national unity; and promote national and international understanding and interaction.

According to Ajayi and Ayodele (2012), University education in Nigeria is in travail, the system is riddled with crises of various dimensions and magnitude. A number of multi-faceted problems have inhibited goal attainment and are raising questions, doubts and fears, all of which combine to suggest that the system is at a cross road. However, this paper discusses the most critical of

these problems that have been rendering the system incapacitated as well as, its growth and prospect.

The Concept of University

The name university by which such centres gradually became known, probably originated about the middle of the eleventh century, from the Latin word, *universitas*, which at the time, was not used only for institutions of higher learning. Over the centuries, however, the name evolved into that of its present usage – an institution incorporating the scholars, the teachers, the generality of subjects taught and the physical location of the organisation¹. Thus, according to Briggs (2013), university is a community of teachers and scholars who commit themselves to the dissemination of knowledge through teaching and its acquisition through learning, research and scientific enquiry. The honest and relentless pursuit of truth for a better understanding of the world is the supreme remit of all universities. They achieve this by engaging in scholarly activities that expand the frontiers of knowledge and lead to innovations, inventions and discoveries. Furthermore, they inclusively educate and transmit knowledge to deserving students and scholars and participate in those activities in the local and international arena that enhance the common good and well-being of all mankind.

CHALLENGES, DEVELOPMENT AND PROSPECT OF UNIVERSITY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

Challenges of University Education in Nigeria

Nigeria's university challenges, some of which have been identified by the World Bank (2004), and the traces are noticeable as (1) decline public expenditure; (2) deteriorated infrastructure/facilities/equipment for teaching, research and learning – these are either lacking or very inadequate and in a bad shape to permit the universities the freedom to carry out the basic functions of academics; (3) the erosion of university autonomy and academic freedom; (4) the increasing rate of graduate unemployment; (5) brain-drain; and student unrest and constant strikes by both students and academic staff. However, this paper critically takes a comprehensive look at the following problems of University Education in Nigeria:

Financial Crisis

Ibukun (2017) lamented that there is growing shortage of funds and learning resources in the university system. According to Oyeneye (2016), and Adegbite (2017), the major challenge facing university system in Nigeria is inadequate funding. Meanwhile Ajayi and Ayodele (2012) argued that there was an increase in the proportion of total expenditure devoted to education, but this has been considered to be rather grossly inadequate considering the phenomenon increase in student enrolment and increasing cost, which has been aggravated by inflation. Besides, Ajayi and Ekundayo (2016) remarked that the Nigerian government over the years has not been meeting the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) recommendation of 26% of the total budget allocation to education sector. Aina (2017) posited that government priority to education is still very low. These revelations expose the extent to

which the government itself is a contributing factor to the financial imbroglio of the university system.

Deteriorated Infrastructure

It is worrisome to note that Nigerian universities are fast decaying. All the resources required for education production process are in short supply. Lecture halls, laboratories, students' hostels, library space, books and journals, office spaces are all seriously inadequate (Ochuba, 2011). According to World Bank (2004), the equipment for teaching, research and learning are either lacking or very inadequate and in a bad shape to permit the universities the freedom to carry out the basic functions of academics. Still, according to the NUC (2014), the Presidential Visitation Panels which looked into the operations of all federal universities between 1999 and 2013 reported that physical facilities at the universities were in deplorable condition.

Brain-drain syndrome

Brain-drain refers to widespread migration of academic staff from the universities in the country to overseas universities or equivalent institutions where their services are better rewarded. Institutional deterioration and salary erosion during the past decade have prompted substantial "brain-drain" of academic staff and impeded new staff recruitment (Akindutire, 2014). According to Bangura (2014), between 1988 and 2013, over 30, 000 lecturers left the federal university system in Nigeria. According to Saint, Hartnett and Strassner (2013), various factors have combined to cause these staffing difficulties. One has been the relatively low level of academic salaries during the past decade and the declining financial attractions of university employment in comparison to other opportunities. Another has been the rising workloads associated with deteriorating staff/student ratios. It must be emphasized that while the best brains are leaving the university system, the broad aim of producing high level manpower from the system for national development cannot be achieved.

Erosion of university autonomy

Babalola, Jaiyeoba and Okediran (2007) describe university autonomy as protection of the universities from interference by government officials in the day to day running of the institution especially on the issues related to the selection of student, the appointment and removal of academic staff including the vice-chancellors, the determination of content of university education and the control of the degree standard and the determination of size and the rate of growth.

According to Ajayi and Ayodele (2012), government involvement in university governance has been a point of strife between the government and the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) over some time now. University autonomy is essential to the advancement, transmission and application of knowledge and this is the more reason the ASUU has been more vociferous in this demand.

Graduate unemployment

Akindutire (2014) lamented that the problem of graduate unemployment is a reality in Nigeria where graduates had to wait for upwards of five years to get job in the public service. According to Ajayi and Ayodele (2012), it is even common in recent times for university graduates to be subjected to series of competitive examination for appointments. They lamented that it is becoming a titanic task for fresh inexperienced graduates to pick a 'first' employment in the formal sector.

Volatile and Militant Student Unionism

One of the banes of effective university management in Nigeria in recent times is the unbridled student violent reaction to national issues and internal problems. According to Ibukun (2017), the result of student militancy and violent unionism has been the constant closure of universities, removal of vice-chancellors among others.

Secret Cults

Perhaps the most important problem facing tertiary institutions in Nigeria today is how to handle the menace and aggressiveness of cult members. Never before has the potential for the destruction of lives and property on campuses been as great or escalated so fast and horrible as now (Ogunbameru, 2014). In the same vain, Adegbite (2017) remarked that the issue of cultism among the students has opened a new and very dangerous dimension to the situation of things in our educational institutions. Smah (2017) posited that where cults exist, there is no guarantee that academic programmes and activities would run normally. Hence the university may run the risk of being constantly closed or disrupted as a result of these cult activities which has led to feeling of fear on campus, killings and deaths, and campus disturbances.

Political Interference

It has been observed that universities these days are not totally free from the hand of politics outside the university system. Government of the day, most especially in the state-owned varsities, interfere a lot in terms of selection and choice of the chief executive, Deans, Departmental heads, Directors of programmes and above all the selection of vice-chancellors. A situation whereby the members of the university are not totally free to choose who their head without government intervention becomes would not augur well for the university system. According to Adegbite (2017), another area of political interference is constitution of Visitation Panels by the Visitor at wills instead of the minimum five years intervals, the main aim of which is to witch-hunt or crucifies the vice-chancellors and the university authorities. Besides, there is the erosion of the statutory functions of the vice-chancellors by the chancellors and Pro-chancellors (who are titular head of the University) as some of them now decide to stay permanently in their offices on Campus seeing to the day-to-day administration of some universities, and some union officials prefer to see them on issues relating to the internal governance of the university rather than the Vice-chancellor or designated officials.

DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA UNIVERSITY EDUCATION

Even though the university system in Nigeria has not had a very smooth sail from inception, it has witnessed many successes and developments. Prior to when University of Ibadan was established in 1948, the production of Nigerian high level human resources development for the economy was minimally available. High level human resources were employed from Britain and other European countries and USA to take care of Nigerian economy because there were no universities. Nte (2005) observes that some early graduate obtained their degrees from Fourah Bay University College in Sierra Leone or from Achimota University College, Ghana.

Today, Nigeria has over 140 universities that contribute to the training of high level human capital through various courses and programs, which include among others, Medicine, Engineering, Law, Education, Pharmacy, Psychology, Accountancy, Banking and Finance, Mass Communication, and Journalism. The graduates from these disciplines are turned out to be Medical Doctors, Engineers, Lawyers, Educationists, Pharmacists, Psychologists, Accountants, Bankers, Journalists, etc. (Wali, & Ololube, 2015).

Nigerian university education also provides qualified and dedicated personnel for community service. This is done by appointing graduates from university as Commissioners, Ministers, Heads of Parastatals or Board Members or Commission for enquiry. Universities organize extra-moral and extension services in their various departments, agricultural extension services and rural health services. These institutions help to foster and promote national unity, through teaching courses and programs that promote unity, inter-state visits, music, arts and culture, and encouragement of students to participate in the one year national youths corps. In the same vein, promote international understanding and cooperation. This is carried out by departments like department of foreign languages, organizes exchange of visits where students not only learn the language but also get to know about other people's cultures, arts and traditions. Nigerian universities provide research data to government, agencies and industries.

Furthermore, the gains that Nigeria has derived from the university education become glaring when one considers the five national goals through which Nigeria's philosophy of education draws its strength, namely, to create a democratic and free society, a just and egalitarian society, a united, strong and self-reliant nation, a great and dynamic economy and a land full of bright opportunities for all citizens (National Teachers Institute, 2010).

In addition, university education has been on the vanguard of creating opportunities for the teeming Nigerian population. To build a united and egalitarian country entails that every Nigerian should contribute to the development or development of the country (Nwangwu, 2013). The opportunity to do this in Nigeria has been largely provided by the university education. Apart from serving their fatherland, the university education has continually churned out scholars who have contributed meaningfully to the world's reservoir of knowledge.

PROSPECT OF UNIVERSITY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

New Discovery and Inventions through Research

Everyone who cherish genuine growth and sustainable development – Government, private and corporate organization, non-governmental organization and individuals should as a matter of due responsibility encourage and finance research programmes, inventions and mass production of invented products as a way of discouraging prospective students from indulging in any form of

academic irregularities, who may not have seen anything good or meaningful on the part of those who have been hardworking and creative, research and invention wise in terms of reward for their effort. Currently research interest by the government at all levels and corporate organization is nothing to write home about.

Eradication of poverty, hunger, ignorance, and illiteracy

The University of Education in Nigeria has the capacity and prospect to train individuals to become literate, self-reliant, self-employed, and employers of labour. The result of ignorance has led to illiteracy; which has led to increased poverty and consequently hunger and diseases among Nigerians. If the standard of University Education in Nigeria is improved and well-funded, then poverty, hunger, ignorance, and illiteracy would become a thing of the past in Nigeria.

Good Governance and Genuine Democracy

It is no longer news that the rule of law guarantees transparency, credibility, and the safety of human rights. Although Nigeria lacks all the above now. However, if education is handled with all seriousness, where each and every citizen knows their right, and know what to do when their right is violated. Then, every citizen can now decide who they want in the position of power by way of exercising their franchise without any form of coercion or persuasion by any political aspirant during elections. By so doing, people will have the opportunity to vote their preferred candidate during elections, and they also have the power to remove him/her if the candidates perform below their expectations, as they reserve the right to vote someone else in the coming election.

CONCLUSION

An educated populace is vital in today's world; this fact becomes more indubitable considering the convergent impacts of globalization, the increasing importance of knowledge as a main driver of growth, and the information and communication revolution. Knowledge accumulation and application have become major factors in economic development and are increasingly at the core of a country's competitive advantage in the global economy. However, the state of higher educational system in Nigeria has been very discouraging and sad. It is very sad because it reflects the frustration that university lecturers, students, some in government, and parents have been feeling for a long time.

Suggestions

Based on the finding of this study, the following recommendations were made:

- The government through the Ministry of Education should allocate the necessary funds required for the educational sector to eliminate strike and other industrial actions;
- Involvement of private and public sectors in financing higher institutions should be encouraged;
- Curricula and use of technology should be tailored to match international standards;

- Provision of conducive environment for active learning to take place;
- Creating a research-friendly environment to encourage innovation;
- Providing adequately equipped libraries, well furnished with ICT tools;
- Increase security and set appropriate measures to curb cult activities;
- Decision making as regards management of universities should not be partisan or politically motivated but based on qualifications;
- Augment the salary structure of lecturers and include deserving benefits to limit brain drain and increase eagerness to impart knowledge in students;
- Lecturers that instigate exam malpractice should be penalized accordingly just as students are too;
- De-politicization of the University System, by granting of autonomy to varsities;
- The federal government needs to establish more universities to meet the growing demand from secondary schools;
- Undoubtedly, the higher education system in Nigeria needs a reformation and the move by NUC to constitute a committee on the revitalization of the Nigeria University System (NUS) is a step in the right direction.

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