

ALOY EJIUGU & SHEIDU SULE

SIXTY-FIVE YEARS OF UNIVERSITY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: SOME KEY CROSS CUTTING ISSUES

Abstract

This paper traces briefly the history and development of university education in Nigeria from one university in 1948 to a total of 118 universities as at the time of writing the paper. Besides the chronicle, the paper examines some cross-cutting issues that tend to scuttle the otherwise good intentions and robust programme initiatives of the universities to excel and match the best practices evident in world acclaimed universities. Such issues include: the ad-hoc manner in which most of the universities were/are being established; inadequate funding; crisis of access; brain-drain; instability of academic calendar due to strikes; liberalization of university ownership and graduate unemployment. The paper concludes by calling on both the government and all stakeholders to seriously tackle the issue of funding as it is a veritable catalyst for excellence in any university system.

Introduction

Although Nigeria as a nation came into being in 1914, it was not until 1934 that the first form of higher education institution, Yaba Higher College, was established in the country. Its establishment was sequel to a realization by Mr E.R.J. Hussey who was the country's colonial Director of Education that:

the number of Europeans in posts in Nigeria, not only of senior but also of junior ranks, was very large and that situation could not continue indefinitely. Indeed British personnel were performing duties which already in other countries in Africa were being performed by Africans.

It was obviously necessary to start an institution which in the first instance would be a "Higher College" and develop in due course into a University. (Hussey, 1959:91)

Hussey was also of the opinion that although no limit would be set to the scope of the institution, it may take a long time before it reaches the standard, which must be its ultimate aim, that of a British University (Hussey, 1930:29-31).

A University College is Born

In 1943 the British colonial government set up an *Asquith Commission* to consider the principles which should guide the promotion of higher education, learning and research and the development of universities in the country. An outcome of the Commission's report was a recommendation for "the creation of a university college in an area of approximately five square miles on the outskirts of Ibadan" (Ejiogu, 1986:51). Consequently, in May 1947, Dr Kenneth Mellanby of Cambridge University, England was appointed Principal of the University College Ibadan (UCI). In July 1947 Mellanby arrived Ibadan but saw "no college, no building, no student body, no staff, no governing body" (Mellanby, 1952:2). The

only physically identifiable aspects of the university college was Dr Mellanby himself. By January 1948, staff and students of Yaba Higher College numbering 13 and 104 respectively were absorbed into the university college as a college of the University of London. That meant that graduates of the college would receive degrees of the University of London; for as Mellanby (1952:4) recalled:

A brand new college cannot enjoy the status of an established university until it has time to show its merit. If degrees were from the outset granted at Ibadan, neither in Nigeria nor in the world at large would their holders be recognized as the equate of men and women holding degrees of established universities.

By this special relationship agreement, the University of London determined the college's syllabus, examination schemes, setting and grading of question papers, and the ultimate award of degrees to UCI students. This arrangement persisted till 1963 when U.C.I. attained a full university status as the University of Ibadan (UI).

The University College Ibadan was criticized by some Nigerian nationalists for its overt colonial orientation in staffing and course offerings. Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe, a foremost nationalist, speaking in the Nigerian House of Representatives, nicknamed it "a million dollar baby" because of what he termed the college's "financial irresponsibility", arguing that whereas between 1948 and 1953 the average cost per student each year at U.C.I. was between 1,800 and 2,830 US dollars, the average cost per student in U.S.A. were approximately, 835 US dollars (Ejiogu, 1986). The Action Group party also frowned at the idea of tying the college to the dictates of London University, arguing that:

Our political independence would be a sham and at best incomplete if the control of much of our intellectual life remained in foreign hands and the policy of our premier university college is decisively influenced by bodies established outside the country (Taiwo, 1980: 97).

The Emergence, Growth and Development of Indigenous Universities

The University of Nigeria, Nsukka

In spite of the apparent success of U.C.I. (Ejiogu, 1986), the Nigerian elite clamoured for a full-fledged "African" university. The opportunity came in 1954 when, Azikiwe as the Premier of the Eastern Region led an economic mission to Europe to, among other things, "make arrangements for facilitating vocational higher education in Eastern Nigeria". The Mission recommended the establishment of a university in the region. According to Azikiwe and Ojukwu (1954:32-33):

In order that the foundation of Nigeria leadership shall be securely laid, to the end that this country shall cease to imitate the excrescences of a civilization which is not rooted in African life, we recommend that a full-fledged university should be established in this Region.... Such a higher institution of learning should not only be cultural according to the classical concept of universities, but should also be *vocational in its objective and Nigerian in its content.*

It was also recommended that the University should take off with six Faculties (Arts, Science, Law, Theology, Engineering and Medicine) and 22 Institutes: for hitherto unfamiliar disciplines (Ejiogu, 1986). Modelled after the land-grant colleges of U.S.A., it was hoped that these institutes would help in the transformation of the lives of the people of the Region. Besides, the university should be so structured as to make it possible for those wishing to combine studies with their regular work to do so.

Thus emerged on October 5, 1960, the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN), **deliberately designed** with a somewhat different perspective from that which had hitherto characterized the idea of a university in West Africa. From its very beginning,

the University enunciated its first commitment to a philosophy that provides for the broadening of higher education whereby it can be fully equipped to offer courses in such branches of learning as are related to agriculture, business and industry without excluding the classics, the arts and scientific studies. (UNN, 1965:11)

Ashby Commission Universities

In anticipation of indigenous manpower needs of a soon-to-be independent Nigeria, a Commission was set up in April 1959 under the chairmanship of Sir Eric Ashby of Cambridge University, U.K. to conduct an investigation into Nigeria's needs in the field of post-school certificate education over the next twenty years. Among the Commissions recommendations were that: a university should be established in Lagos, the capital city, with emphasis on evening and correspondence programmes; a university should be established in each of the three regions (North, East and West); each university should be autonomous and independent in the conduct of its affairs.

The Ashby Commissions recommendation led to the establishment in 1962 of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria (North); the University of Lagos (Capital); and the University of Ife (West). The East was already had its own University of Nigeria Nsukka, established in 1960. These, together with U.C.I. which attained fully fledged status in 1963 as the University of Ibadan (U.I.) and the University of Benin established in 1970 for the newly created Mid-west region, are known today as the first generation universities.

In the Third National Development Plan (1975-1980), the Federal Military Government of Nigeria established by fiat seven universities, namely: Universities of Calabar, Ilorin, Jos, Sokoto, Maiduguri, Port Harcourt and Ado Bayero University, Kano. These are the second generation universities.

The third generation universities were those established between 1980 and early 1990. They are: the Federal Universities of Technology situated respectively in Owerri, Makurdi, Yola, Akure and Bauchi. Also established during the period were state (regional) universities of Imo, Ondo, Lagos, Akwa-Ibom, and Cross River States. Nearly all of these started operations from make-shift/temporary campuses.

The fourth generation universities are those established between 1991 and the present date, most of them without adequate planning, nor feasibility studies. Today, Nigeria has 118 Universities (36 Federal government-owned; 37 state/regional controlled; and 45 private owned).

Key Cross Cutting Issues

Challenges of Access and Carrying Capacity

A total of 118 universities might seem too many for Nigeria. Considering however the country's large population of over 160 million people, the number of universities may not be too much after all. However numerous studies (Nwadiani, 1991; Oyebade, 2005; Oyebade & Keshinro, 2005, Moti, 2010) confirm the inability of the universities to meet the ever growing demand for higher education by Nigerian students. Over the years, less than 20% of qualified candidates gain admission into the universities. Between 1999 and 2008, for example, admission rate as percentage of total qualified candidates fluctuated between 18.8%; and 5.2%; (Moto, 2010; Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN), 2009). This obvious irony of having so many universities and still too few students enrolment is attributed to the universities' low carrying capacities.

By carrying capacity is meant that the number of students to be admitted must be determined by on available adequate teaching-learning facilities; infrastructure, and standard teacher-student ratio. Since 1999/2000, the universities have respectively exceeded their respective carrying capacity/admission quota by over ten percent. In spite of such apparent excess, over 80% of qualified candidates cannot find a place of study. In acquiescing to the mounting political pressures of social demand for access, the system has been compelled to expand in number, such that between 1980 and 1992 eleven universities were established by the federal/central government, most of them seemingly on an ad hoc basis (Saint, Hartnett and Strassner, 2003).

Inadequate Funding

As Coombs once observed, "national educational systems have always seemed tied to a life of crisis. Each has periodically known a shortage of funds, teachers, classrooms, teaching materials – a shortage of everything except students" (Coombs, 1968:1). This scenario is still very true of Nigerian universities. There is still a growing financial squeeze on the entire national educational system. In a study, Ejiogu (1997:125-132) reveals an abysmally poor funding of universities in 1975-1990, during which universities received less than 45% of their respective budget estimates each year, in spite of the urgent need to cope with growth in student enrolment. Even the Federal Ministry of Education, (FME) lamented on this situation, saying:

Evidently funds allocation to the Federal Ministry of Education has dwindled over the years. Funds release for capital projects was as low as 0.01% of approved allocation in 2002. Release of recurrent allocation was 85% of approved allocation. (FME, 2007:283)

Federal government of Nigeria's allocation to education as a percentage of its total annual budget since 1999 has never exceeded 13% which was the highest recorded in 2008 (Olawale, 2010:1).

Ironically the paltry sum allocated to the ministry for funding education is never released in full. Coombs (1985:137) was right when he states:

What seemed true in 1968 is no less valid today. Organized educational systems do not run on slogans and good intentions.

They run on money. Not that all the problems of education can be solved by throwing money at them. But without the money to secure the essential physical resources of education (buildings, equipment, materials, supplies) and the human resources (teachers, administrators, custodians), organized educational systems would collapse onto an empty center. With money, the nonfinancial problems of education become more tractable.

Such is the plight of the Nigerian university system in which the federal and state governments go on opening up new universities with unmitigated recklessness; inadequate funding to sustain the existing ones, and establishing new ones without any infrastructure in place nor funds to provide for same. The private universities may seem to be doing better in terms of funding and infrastructure, but the very high fees which they charge students make their accessibility herculean. On the contrary the Federal governments, for partisan political reason, abolished payment of tuition fees in its universities-while asking them to source for funds to augment whatever "handouts" they receive from the government.

Brain Drain

A fall out of inadequate funding of Nigerian universities is the "brain drain" phenomenon. It refers to migration of academics, skilled professionals and high technical manpower away from the Nigerian university system in pursuit of self-actualization, whether in universities or in other employments outside Nigeria. Even young academics refuse to return to the country after their studies abroad; brilliant young graduates opting for careers in more financially rewarding sectors of the economy, rather than pursue higher degrees in preparation for employment as lecturers.

"A large proportion of university staff still in the employment of Nigerian universities do not devote their full time to their jobs because of their efforts to "make ends meet" (FME, 2007:185). This phenomenon is generally attributable to such "push factors" as pitiable and eroding salaries and allowances, derogatorily called "starvation wages; unsatisfactory working conditions; inadequacy of support staff; lack of up-to-date teaching and research facilities; social unrest; and discriminatory appointment and promotion practices. It was so bad that between 1997 and 2009 the number of academic staff declined by 12%. In fact the unabated spate of brain drain has left the universities with less than 48% of its estimated staffing needs achieved. Worst affected in short fall are Engineering 73%; Medicine 65%; and the Sciences 53% (Olufemi, 2000).

Instability of Academic Calendar

Before 1980 Nigerian universities operated a relatively stable academic calendar. With time a downward pressure on staff salaries and debilitating working conditions constrained both staff and students to embark on incessant strikes. In 1972 the University of Ibadan closed down for over three months due to students' riot over alleged poor feeding; the University of Lagos students rioted over the introduction of a national youth service scheme (NYSC) and the school was shut for four months. In 1978 university students all over the country rioted over government increase of cost for a student's meal from 50 kobo to 1.50 naira. The Academic Staff

Union of Universities (ASUU) went on strike in 1981, 1986, 1994, 1995 respectively, each time agitating for improved conditions of service. Their non-teaching counterparts embarked on a 3-month strike in 1996 demanding for parity in salary with those of the teaching staff. In 2001, 2002 and 2003, ASUU went on strike (each for 3 months) against inadequate funding of the universities by government; disparity in salary, lack of autonomy, non-payment of allowances, and early retirement age (Okwa & Campbell, 2011). Even as this paper is being prepared, the over eighty public / government universities are shut due to ASUU strike over the same issues that have been lingering since 2001. Amazing, between 1993 and 2012, public (government owned) universities were closed for a cumulative total of 177 weeks due to ASSU strikes (Bamiro, 2012:58). These incessant strikes continue to paralyse academic activities, prolong duration of courses and consequently disorientate students and lecturers alike.

Not only do these frequent strikes in public universities exacerbate the brain drain phenomenon, Okwa and Campbell (2011:303) reveal that 80% of the respondents in their study “choose private institutions because of frequent strikes in public institutions”.

Liberalization of University Ownership and the Aftermath

For more than five decades provision of university education in Nigeria was the preserve of the government, (either federal (central) or state). By 1999 it dawned on the government that it alone could not provide equal access to higher education for its youth. It therefore decided to divest its stranglehold on university education. In 1990, Nigeria’s first two private universities emerged, namely: Igbinedon University Okada and Madonna University, Okija. Today, there are 45 of such private universities in Nigeria.

One would expect a less stressed and more productive university education system as a result of the liberalization. The essence of liberalization, argues Worika (2002), is competition and hence expectation of high yields dividends or profits from investment. It would also imply the sale of knowledge to the highest bidder. With such a “sale of knowledge” education would no longer be a public good. It would result in lowering of standards, and arbitrary award of high marks as a means of attracting enough students. Regretably, the emergence of private universities has not made the desired impact on access to higher education. As Okebukola (2002) observes, there is already a wide disparity in placement of candidates between public and private universities, attributable not to the size of the universities but mainly to high fees payable in those private universities. Access to such private universities would be skewed in favour of children from richer homes. As Osagie, cited in Bamiro (2012:50), says, this situation “represents some form of class problem as high fees result in denial of access for children of the working class and the lower middle class”.

Conclusion

Available records and literature (Federal Ministry of Education, 2007) report that the training which present-day graduates receive is inadequate and that their performance on the job is equally less than acceptable. And yet, ironically, Nigerian universities are endowed with intellectuals who can rank among the best in the

world. Genuinely “racing as it were to overtake one another in their bid for excellence and international recognition” (Ejiogu, 2010:432) these universities suffer serious set-backs due to a lack of political will by government to fund the system commensurably. It is such underfunding that accounts for most of the hiccups which we have identified in the universities. Rather than engage in the rascality of opening more universities to assuage some political agitators, government should embark on a policy of expansion and consolidation of existing institutions through proper funding. To do otherwise would amount to committing national education suicide.

The untoward consequences of these systemic hiccups are worrisome. The quality of degrees awarded has become generally suspect. Children of rich parents leave in droves for neighbouring countries whose universities are adjudged stable. The cost of such emigration on the national economy is disturbing. The private universities are not bringing about the expected succor as most of them do not even have enough qualified staff, the best of whom are aged retired professors from the public universities; there, crass commercialization is the name of the game. State universities are worse off as their governance lacks reason, with neither rhyme nor rhythm. Their proprietors (state governors) act as “emperors” or at best “lords of the manor” over their fiefdom, supposedly universities.

Wracked and strafed by crises of all sorts, the Nigerian university system is in dire need of a drastic reorganization whereby: meritocracy is the guiding principle in all activities; students pay tuition fees; bursary and scholarship awards are given to deserving students; adequate teaching and research facilities are provided; lecturers are equitably rewarded; and opening of new universities is put on hold until the existing ones are cleaned up to remove all wastages.

References

- Azikiwe, N. & Ojukwu, L. P. (1954). *Economic Rehabilitation of Eastern Nigeria: Report of the Economic Mission to Europe and North America*. Enugu: Government Printer.
- Bamiro, O. A. (2012). Nigerian university system and the challenge of relevance. *University of Lagos 2011 Convocation Lecture*. Lagos: Medilag Press.
- Coombs, P. H. (1968). *The World Education Crisis: A Systems Analysis*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Coombs, P. H. (1985). *The World Crisis in Education: The View from the Eighties*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ejiogu, A. (1997). The changing fortunes of higher education in Nigeria. In Ejiogu, A. & K. Ajayi (Eds). *Emergent Issues in Nigeria Education*. Vol. 3 (pp 117-132). Lagos: Unilag Consult.
- Ejiogu, A. (1986). *Landmarks in Educational Development in Nigeria*. Lagos: Joja Educational Research and Publishers Limited.
- Ejiogu, A. (2010). Higher education in Nigeria and the pursuit of excellence and relevance. In: Popov, N. et al. (Eds). *Comparative Education, Teacher Training, Education Policy, School leadership and Social Inclusion*. Vol. 8. Sofia: BCES.
- Fafunwa, A. B. (1970). *A History of Nigerian Higher Education*. Lagos: Macmillan.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria, FRN (2009). *Social Statistics in Nigeria*. Abuja: National Bureau of Statistics.

- FME (2007). *Nigeria education sector diagnosis: A platform for re-engineering the education sector*. Abuja: Nigeria Education Sector Analysis Unit (ESA), Federal Ministry of Education.
- Hussey, E. R. J. (1959). *Tropical Africa 1908-1944*. London: St Catherine Press.
- Hussey, E. R. J. (1930). Speech by E. R. J. Hussey. *Legislative Council Debates*, 8th Session. Lagos: The Government Printer.
- Mellanby, J. K. (1952). *Our University*. Lagos: Public Relations Department.
- Moti, U. G. (2010). The challenges of access to university education in Nigeria. *DSM Business Review*, 2(2): 27-56.
- National University Commission (1997). *Statistical Information on Nigeria Universities*. Abuja, Nigeria: National Universities Commission.
- Okebukola, P. (2002). *The State of Education in Nigeria*. Abuja: National University Commission.
- Okwa, O. B. & Campbell, O. A. (2011). The influence of strike on the choice of higher education demand in Oyo state, Nigeria. *Journal of Emerging Trends in Economics and Management Sciences*, 2(4), 275-280.
- Olawale, O. (2010). Challenges currently facing the educational sector in Nigeria. *The Fronteira Post*, (April 08).
- Olufemi, S. O. (2000). *Globalization, Migration and Brain Drain: The Experience of Olabisi Onabanjo University, Nigeria*. (unpublished Monograph, Dept. of Sociology, Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ogun State Nigeria).
- Omoike, D. & Aluede, O. (2007). Appraisal of production function of Nigerian Universities: Admission disparity in a deregulated context. *Anthropologist*, 9(2), 133-137.
- Oni, B. (2000). Capacity building efforts and brain drain in Nigerian universities In: Sibry Tapsoba, et al, (Eds.), *Brain Drain and Capacity Building in Africa* (pp. 208-227). Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. UNECA.
- Oyebade, S. A. (2005). *Privatization of University Education in Nigeria: Implications for Educational Management*. Jos: NAEP.
- Oyebade, S. A. & Keshiro, O. A. (2007). The gap between the demand for and supply of university education in Nigeria. *Kampala International University Research Digest*, I (1): 60-67.
- Saint, W., Hartnett, T. A. & Strassner, E. (2003). Higher education in Nigeria: A status report. *Higher Education Policy*, 16, 259-281.
- Taiwo, C. O. (1980). *The Nigerian Education System: Past, Present and Future*. Lagos: Thomas Nelson Nigeria Ltd.
- U.N.N. (1965). *Academic Calendar, 1965/1966*. Nsukka: University Press.
- Worika, I. I. (2002). *In Support of Deregulation: Stirring the Hornet's Nest*. (www.nigerdelta.com).

Prof. Dr. Aloy Ejiogu
Dept of Educational Management
University of Lagos
Nigeria
aloy916@yahoo.com

Dr. Sheidu Sule
Dept of Educational Management
University of Lagos
Nigeria