

*Full Length Research Paper*

# Problems militating against effective management of the Nigeria university education system

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Higher education plays a crucial role in the supply of high level manpower for the socio-political and economic development of a nation. To this end, the effective management of this educational sector becomes necessary. This paper examines the myriads of problems militating against the effective management of the Nigeria university education system. These include: financial crisis, poor infrastructure, brain-drain, erosion of university autonomy, graduate unemployment, volatile and militant students' unionism, secret cults, examination malpractices and sexual harassment. Therefore, it is recommended that government should re-address the issue of funding of university, review upward the pay- package of academics, grant the university autonomy and make plans and projections on the nation's manpower needs in a bid to integrate this into the university programmes.

**Key words:** University education, management.

## INTRODUCTION

Education is widely accepted as a major instrument for promoting socio- economic, political and cultural development in Nigeria. Universities educate future leaders and develop the high- level technical capacities that underpin economic growth and development (Odekunle, 2001). Besides, Ibukun (1997) 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. Higher education is regarded as an instrument of social change and economic development.

According to the National Policy on Education (2004), higher 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.

e. Promote and encourage scholarship and community service.

f. Forge and cement national unity.

g. promote national and international understanding and interaction. Ojedele and Ilusanya (2006) also posited that the National Policy on Education specified how higher educational institutions in Nigeria should pursue these goals. Considering the importance of university education, Ajayi and Ekundayo (2006) submitted that the funds allocated to higher education should not merely be considered as an expense but a long-term investment, of benefit to society as a whole. These benefits are reflected on a societal level in terms of lower unemployment rates, better health, lower crime rates, more involvement in societal activities, higher tax returns and other trickle-down effects.

Odia and Omofonmwan (2007) argued that successful development entails more than investing in physical capital, or closing the gap in capital. It also entails acquir-

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ing and using knowledge as well as closing the gaps in knowledge. Thus, to successfully confront the challenges of development, a developing country must undertake three major tasks:

1. Acquire and adapt global knowledge and create knowledge locally.
2. Invest in human capital to increase the ability to absorb and use knowledge.
3. Invest in technologies to facilitate both acquisition and the absorption of knowledge.

Despite the immense benefits of university education to nation building, the potentials of higher education and indeed the university system in developing countries to fulfill its responsibility is frequently thwarted by long-standing problems bedevilling the system. According to Ajayi and Ayodele (2002), higher 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 crossroad.

### **Historical development of university education in Nigeria**

The history of university education in Nigeria started with the establishment of University College Ibadan (UCI) in 1948. UCI was an affiliate of the University of London (Ike, 1976). According to Ibukun (1997), the UCI was saddled with a number of problems at inception ranging from rigid constitutional provisions, poor staffing and low enrolment to high dropout rate.

In April 1959, the Federal Government set up the Ashby Commission to advise it on the higher education needs of the country for its first-two decades. Before the submission of the report, the Eastern region government established its own university at Nsukka (University of Nigeria, Nsukka in 1960). The implementation of the Ashby Report led to the establishment of University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University) in 1962 by the Western region, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria in 1962 by the Northern region and University of Lagos (1962) by the Federal Government. Babalola et al. (2007) posited that the University College Ibadan became a full-fledged university in 1962. This made UCI Ibadan and University of Lagos became the first two federal universities in Nigeria while the other three universities were regional. In 1970, the newly created Mid-Western region opted for a university known as University of Benin. The 6 universities established during this period 1960—1970 are still referred to as first-generation universities. Babalola et al. (2007) again remarked that during this period, universities in Nigeria were closely under the surveillance of the government. Appointments of lay members of council and

that of the Vice-Chancellor were political.

In the third national development plan (1975 - 1980), the government established 7 universities in 1975. They were Universities of Calabar, Ilorin, Jos, Sokoto, Maiduguri, Port Harcourt and Bayero University Kano. These universities are referred to as second generation universities.

The third generation universities were established between 1980s and early 1990s. They are Federal Universities of Technology in Owerri, Makurdi, Yola, Akure and Bauchi. Other state universities were established in Imo, Ondo, Lagos, Akwa Ibom, Oyo and Cross River states (Anyamele, 2004).

The fourth generation universities are those ones established between 1991 to date. They include more state universities, Nigerian open universities and private universities. According to Okojie (2007), there are 26 federal, 30 state and 24 private universities.

### **Management of university education in Nigeria**

Management of university education can be looked at from two dimensions; the external and the internal levels. At the external level, this is the control by the federal government through the National Universities Commission (NUC), a body charged with the coordination of university management in the country. According to Ibukun (1997), the main objectives of the NUC are to ensure the orderly development of university education in Nigeria, to maintain its high standard and to ensure its adequate funding. Okojie (2007) posited that the NUC activities in improving quality of university education in the country include:

- i. Accreditation of courses.
- ii. Approval of courses and programmes.
- iii. Maintenance of minimum academic standards.
- iv. Monitoring of universities.
- v. Giving guidelines for setting up of universities.
- vi. Monitoring of private universities.
- vii. Prevention of the establishment of illegal campus.
- viii. Implementing appropriate sanctions.

On the other hand, the internal management of each university is represented by a simple organogram. The first is the Visitor who is usually the Head of State or the Head of Government that established it (The President in case of federal universities and the Governors in case of state universities). He usually comes to grace the convocation ceremonies where he uses the occasion to address the academic communities on matters of the moment (Adegbite, 2007). The second is the Chancellor, who is the titular head of the university, who by law, in relation to the university, takes precedence before all other members of the university and when he is present, presides at all meetings of the convocation held for con-

ferring degrees.

Besides, at the apex of the management structure within each university is the Governing Council, headed by the Chairman (Pro-Chancellor) which is charged with the administrative functions in the areas of goal setting, policy formulation, staff development, general discipline, budget approval and liaison activities with the government. In addition to this, there is the Senate, headed by the Vice-Chancellor and the Registrar as the Secretary. The Senate regulates the academic activities of the university following the general guidelines provided by the NUC.

According to Mgbekem (2004), the universities in Nigeria are run through committee systems which are either responsible to the Council or the Senate, among these committees are:

- i. Finance and General Purpose committee.
- ii. Development committee.
- iii. Appointments and Promotion committee.
- iv. Admissions committee.
- v. Academic Planning committee.
- vi. Committee of Deans.
- vii. Research Grants committee.
- viii. Ceremonies committee, among others.

### Problems of university management in Nigeria

The story of university education in Nigeria today has largely been a story of mixed fortune. These institutions initially laid claims in making respectable impact on the socio-political and economic advancement of Nigeria. Today, there are doubts whether Nigerian universities under the present conditions will be able to continue to lay claims on being central to national capacity to connect with the new international knowledge system and adopt, adapt and further develop the new technologies needed in the wider society (Verspoor, 1994). Ibukun (1997) observed that university governance in Nigeria today is nothing but crises management.

Some of the crises noticeable in Nigerian universities include:

1. Financial crisis: Ibukun (1997) lamented that there is growing shortage of funds and learning resources in the university system. According to Oyeneye (2006) and Adegbite (2007), the major challenge facing the management of university system in Nigeria is inadequate funding meanwhile, Ajayi and Ayodele (2002) 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 phenomenal increase in student enrolment and increasing cost, which has been aggravated by inflation.

Besides, Ajayi and Ekundayo (2006) remarked that the Nigerian government over the years has not been meet-

ing the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) recommendation of 26% of the total budget allocation to education sector. Aina (2007) 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.

The apparent shortage of fund available to the university system has been responsible for declining library, social and laboratory facilities in Nigerian universities in recent years. This in no small way makes the governance of the university system a herculean task.

2. 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 and office spaces are all seriously inadequate (Ochuba, 2001). According to World Bank (1994), 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 carryout the basic functions of academics. Moreover, according to the NUC (2004), the Presidential Visitation Panels which looked into the operations of all federal universities between 1999 and 2003 reported that physical facilities in the universities were in deplorable condition. Meanwhile, this condition of resource inadequacy is what Ajayi and Ayodele (2002) described as an offshoot of the endemic financial crises in the sector.

3. Brain-drain syndrome: Brain-drain refers to widespread migration of academic staff from the universities in the country to overseas universities or equivalent institutions here their services are better rewarded. According to Akindutire (2004), institutional deterioration and salary erosion during the past decade have prompted substantial "brain-drain" of academic staff and impeded new staff recruitment. Bangura (1994) found out that between 1988 and 1990, over 1000 lecturers left the federal university system in Nigeria. According to Saint, Harnett and Strassner (2003), 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 emphasised 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.

4. Erosion of university autonomy: Ojedele and Ilusanya (2006) and Babalola et al., (2007) described 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 admission of student, the appointment and dismissal of academic staff including the vice-chancellors, the deter-

mination 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 (2002), 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. According to Babalola et al. (2007), university autonomy and academic freedom has over the years been a recurring issue in the ASUU's demand from the federal government.

5. Graduate unemployment: Akindutire (2004) lamented that the problem of graduate unemployment is a reality in Nigeria where graduates had to wait for upwards of five years to get a job in the public service. According to Ajayi and Ayodele (2002), 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 herculean task for fresh inexperienced graduates to pick a 'first' employment in the formal sector.

6. 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 (1997) and Akindutire (2004), the result of student militancy and violent unionism has been the constant closure of universities, removal of vice-chancellors among others.

7. Secret cults: One of the challenges 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 so great or escalated as fast and horrible as now (Ogunbameru, 2004). In the same vein, Adegbite (2007) 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 (2007) 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. The results of these cult activities as submitted by Smah (2007) have been feeling of fear on campus, killings and deaths and campus disturbances.

8. 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 becomes their head without

government intervention would not augur well for the university system. According to Adegbite (2007), 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 erosion of the statutory functions of the vice- chancellors by the chancellors and pro-chancellors (who are titular heads 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.

Some other problems in the management of the university system in Nigeria include rising private cost of university education (Ajayi and Ayodele, 2002), the unmanageable social demand for admission (Sanit et al., 2003; NUC, 2004; Mgbekem, 2007), sexual harassment (Ibukun, 1997), examination malpractices (Odia and Omofonmwan, 2007; Mgbekem, 2007).

### **Possible solutions to the management problems of Universities**

It has become obvious that the broad aims of producing high-level manpower for national development for which the university education is meant are not being achieved as a result of the multi-faceted problem bedeviling the governance of the university system. It therefore becomes necessary to suggest ways of making the system more effective and efficient in relation to contemporary Nigerian society.

1. Adequate funding: The gross under-funding of the educational system in the country has been rendering the university system incapacitated. Adepoju (2002) remarked that money is an absolutely input of any education system. It provides the essential purchasing power with which education acquires its human and physical inputs. According to Saint et al. (2003), the university system has not had the financial resources necessary to maintain educational quality in the midst of significant enrolment explosion.

Also, according to Odia and Omofonmwan (2007), UNESCO recommended 26% of the total budget of a nation to be allocated to education but the Longe Commission of 1991 observed that the percentage of budgetary allocation to education has never exceeded 10%. Governments should therefore allocate more funds to the universities so that they can be more effective in their day-to-day operations. The universities should also seek alternative sources of revenue generation to argument what the government allocates to them.

Apart from the release of fund, there is the dire need for



an effective monitoring of the management of fund presently being allocated to the sector, as efforts should be intensified to improve on what is currently being allocated to the system. As a means of ensuring effective management of fund, Mgbekem (2007) suggested that reliable accounting system should be established in each Nigerian university to guarantee accountability, honesty and transparency.

2. Need to improve the infrastructure base: If quality is to be enhanced in our nation's universities these days, the infrastructure base of the system needs to be improved upon. As Ochuba (2001) has rightly put it, the present situation calls for an urgent need for the government to make available enough funds for the rehabilitation of existing facilities. Governments should intensify efforts in providing more physical facilities in the universities. Besides, corporate bodies, philanthropists and alumni associations should also assist in the provision of these facilities to aid effective teaching-learning activities in order to achieve the academic goals of university education for national development. There is need for a serious expansion of physical facilities and equipment to meet the increasing student population.

Moreover, there is the need to take serious look at the maintenance culture, which is lacking in an average Nigerian, as this will go a long way to reduce the rate of decay of the existing facilities.

3. Upward review of pay-package for academics: In order to attract best brains to the university system, the personal emoluments of university staff may have to be revisited. According to Ibukun (1997), the situation where a young graduate who is fortunate to take up job outside the unified public service immediately starts to earn salaries sometimes twice a professor's annual income does not augur well for staff motivation and stability of tenure in the Nigerian university system. If education is well-funded, pay-package of academics reviewed upward and the conditions of service improved, academics would not have to go abroad looking for greener pasture. Smah (2007) reports Professor Joseph Stilglitz, 2001 Nobel Prize winner in Economics, who, while delivering a lecture at the first Dr. Pius Okadigbo memorial lecture series in Enugu said that there is a particular university in the U.S. that has over 25 Nigerian professors. He submitted that the above pointer is instructive for any serious-minded government that wants to address the issue of brain-drain.

4. Granting of autonomy to varsities: The issue of autonomy to varsities is a matter of necessity if quality output is expected, uninterrupted academic calendar is to be guaranteed, an enabling teaching-learning environment is to be assured and the incessant face-off between the ASUU and the government to be put to rest. The struggle for university autonomy has been a long-standing in the university system in Nigeria. Varma (1967) in Babalola et al. (2007) argued that for a university to be truly autonomous, the state control must be minimum, limited

to requirements of proper utilization of funds and conformity to the broad objectives of national policy. Babalola et al. (2007) argued that there can not be absolute autonomy, but a critical mass of qualified autonomy is needed for a university to operate as a functioning university. However, these areas of autonomy should be jointly agreed upon by both the government and the stakeholders of the university system (ASUU inclusive).

5. Re-appraisal of the role of university education and the world of work: University education in Nigeria today needs a total overhauling and restructuring, this reform is required to improve the performance of the system. Ajayi and Ayodele (2002) posited that a reform in university programme is highly necessary and long-overdue. Better training for university students should be vigorously pursued. The curriculum needs to be reformed in content and in methodology to give room for the spirit of inquiry, discovery and experimentation. Nwadiani in Ochuba (2001) observed that the 60:40 Science: Humanities placement policy has not been implemented resulting in overproduction of humanities graduates while some areas of critical importance have been neglected. It has therefore become necessary to redesign the university education to become purely practical oriented for skill acquisition. Ibukun (1997) suggested that there is the need to make plans projections on the nation's manpower needs in a bid to integrate this into university programmes. The NUC and the Nigerian Manpower Board are in the position to alert universities on the future manpower requirements of the country.

6. Volatile and militant students' unionism: To reduce the extent of volatile and militant students' unionism in campus, it is advisable that the students are involved in decision-making particularly on issues that borders on their welfare. Mgbekem (2007) suggested the following as means of curbing students' crises:

(a) University administrator should avoid being high-handed with students.

(b) Vice-chancellors should make themselves accessible to students.

(c) University administrator should establish frequent forums for negotiation, dialoguing and exchanging of ideas between students and university administrators.

7. Combating secret cults: Eradicating cultism in Nigerian universities is a joint effort of all the stakeholders (government, university authority, religious leaders, students and parents). They should come together and decide on how cases of cultism should be dealt with as research evidences have shown that most cult members are children of the highly-placed in the society.

8. Depoliticisation of the university system: The autonomy to universities would help reduce the extent of political interference in the affairs of these varsities, most especially in the appointment/selection of key principal officials in the university. The academics should be free to choose who becomes their head without the influence of the

visitor. Where this situation is not free, then the governance of the system will still depend on external influence. According to Jaiyeoba (2006), the place of school head in the administration of school cannot be over-emphasised, therefore, there is need to follow the conditions for the appointment to the letter. The issues of tribalism, political interference, etc should be disregarded in the appointment of heads. The idea of using visitation panels to witch-hunt the vice-chancellors and university authorities should be discarded. The Visitation Panels should be made to follow the due process.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

The need for university education stems from the fact the system is responsible for the development and production of high-level manpower within the context of the needs of the nation. It has been seen that the university system, which is the bedrock of development in the country is bisected with myriads of problems. These include: financial crisis, deteriorated infrastructure, brain-drain, erosion of university autonomy, graduate unemployment, volatile and militant students' unionism, secret cults, examination malpractices, sexual harassment, drug addiction and so on.

However, for meaningful development to take place in the university system, the government must be ready to address the issue of funding the system adequately. Adequate finance will help solve the problem of infrastructure. The government should as a matter of national importance review upward the pay-package for academics; give consent to the university autonomy being clamouring for by the academics. It is also recommended that there is the need to make plans projections on the nation's manpower needs in a bid to integrate this into university programmes. The NUC and the Nigerian Manpower Board are in the position to alert universities on the future manpower requirements of the country.

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