

## CHALLENGES OF MANAGING HIGHER EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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### Abstract

*The mandate of higher institutions is to develop human being educationally, mentally and morally, and to confer certificates of academic excellence to those of them who are found worthy in character and learning in order to enable them assume leadership roles in their immediate and extended society. This paper recognizes the fact that in spite of this mandate, tertiary institutions in Nigeria find it difficult to create the enabling environment for the actualization of their mission due to the myriads of problems militating against the effective management of the Nigerian tertiary institutions. These include inadequate public finance, poor academic infrastructure, brain drain syndrome, government regulation and control, inadequate staff/student accommodation, volatile and militant students' unionism, secret cults, examination malpractices and sexual harassment. Therefore, it is recommended that government should address the issue of funding of higher institutions, review upward the pay-package of academics, grant the university autonomy and make plan and projections for the nation's manpower needs in a bid to integrate this into the programmes of higher institutions.*

### Introduction

The role and contributions of education to the development of an individual and the society cannot be over-emphasized. Many countries, including Nigeria, take education as an instrument for the promotion of national development and desirable social change (FRN, 2004). This perhaps, might be responsible for the continuous growing concern of all stakeholders in the educational sector on the need for changes that are likely to affect it as well as the implications such changes will have on the management and administration of education. There is, therefore, the urgent need to really look into the future of our nation's education vis-à-vis the challenges ahead with a view to achieving effectiveness, quality and relevance in the entire system.

The purposes of higher education in Nigeria are numerous, some of which include knowledge acquisition, development and inculcation of the proper value orientation for the survival of the individual and society, the development of the intellectual capacities of individuals to understand and appreciate their environment, the acquisition of both physical and intellectual skills, which will enable the individual to develop into useful members of the community, and the acquisition of an objective view of the local and external environments.

Thus, the goal of higher education has long been identified as the process that helps develop the whole man physically, mentally, morally and technologically, to enable him/her function effectively in any environment in which they find themselves so that they may become more productive, self-fulfilling and attain self-actualization (Tawari, 1986 in Aluede & Ufah, 2004). Hence, the importance of higher education is to provide quality education for her products so that they can assume leadership positions in their immediate and external communities. However, the Nigerian education system has been facing crises, making it difficult to meet the yearning and aspirations of Nigerians (Adeyemi, 2001).

The main objective of this paper is to examine the challenges of managing tertiary education in Nigeria. Another objective is the examination of factors that could engender sound and productive educational management in Nigeria.

### **Historical Overview of Educational Administration in Nigeria**

Management implies a process of which administration is an aspect of such process. Resser in Babarinde (2001) opines that management is the utilization of physical and human resources through cooperative efforts, and it is accomplished by performing the function of planning, organizing, staffing, directing, controlling, reporting and budgeting.

Management as well as administration of education in Nigeria dates back to the commencement of Western education in the country. It has close link with the periods of the nation's political history. Various periods concerning educational management and administration have been identified by scholars like Odebiyi, Aina and Soetan (1997) as the missionary period, the pre-independence period and post-independence period. Gang, Udoh and Akpa, citing Nwankwo (1983:1) assert that the administration and management of education in Nigeria reflects the earlier impact of the various agencies such as the missionaries, British colonial government and Nigeria herself. Each of these agencies left foot prints that have guided educational administration, management and supervision in Nigeria.

At the inception of western education in Nigeria, particularly around the 1840s, educational management was solely in the hands of the missionaries. This spanned between 1840 and 1887. Although, the colonial government made an educational ordinance in 1882, it was not interested in the management of education; it only made grants-in-aids available to schools.

The first colonial government intervention in national education management and control took place in 1887 with promulgation of the first purely Nigerian educational ordinance between 1887 and 1960. The colonial government and the nationalists played significant roles in national educational management and administration. There were many educational codes, policies, ordinance and commissions aimed at proper management and control of education. The Nigerian nationalists, having recognized the roles of education as an instrument of colonial liberation, played an active part in the management of the country's educational system.

At independence in 1960, the management and administration of education in Nigeria rested on Nigerians themselves. This period witnessed active participation by non-governmental agencies, communities and individuals as well as government intervention (FRN, 2004).

It should be noted, however, that although the Nigerian government got involved in the management of education as from the time of the Richards Constitution of 1946 with the creation of regional governments, total management of education by Nigerians started after independence. The most important step ever taken in the management of the nation's education took place in 1969 with convention of the national curriculum conference which led to the provision of the educational document christened national policy on education in 1977. This served as a guide to the direction of our educational practice. The administration of Nigerian education, however, changed between the civilians and the military from 1960 to 1999 when the record of education industry in the country witnessed unstable educational policies.

Management as well as control of education in the 21st century has actively experienced a laudable and historic landmark as Nigerians took complete control of their destiny in education. Indeed, there are numerous positive landmarks in education in Nigeria presently. In other words, Nigeria has accomplished more in education recently than during the British colonial administrative rule in the country. This was a period of what we may call home-grown education. Nigeria's educational administration management was greeted with several heights such as issues bordering on national education policies, primary education, secondary education, the Universal Basic Education (UBE), tertiary education as well as the institutional frameworks for regulating education. Successive governments at both state and federal levels have continued to allocate over 30% of their budget to education.

#### **Management of University Education in Nigeria**

Management of university education can be looked at from two dimensions: external and internal. 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 tertiary education in 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 and 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 awarding degrees.

Besides, at the apex of the management structure within each university is the Governing Council, headed by the Chairman (Pro-Chancellor), 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 with 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), 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.

#### **Objectives of Higher Education in Nigeria**

The objectives of higher education in Nigeria are established with the aim of providing sound and quality education, to be able to function effectively in any environment in which any student may find him/herself; so as to become more productive, self reliant and attain self actualization (Federal Government of Nigeria 2004; Aluede, *et al.*2005). In realization of all these important goals and objectives, the National Policy on Education (NPE), formulated in 1977 and reviewed between 1999 and 2007, has as its policy as the following:

- (a) The acquisition, development and inculcation of the proper value-orientation for the survival of the individual and society;
- (b) The development of the intellectual capacities of individuals to understand and appreciate their environment;
- (c) The acquisition of both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to develop into useful members of the community; and
- (d) The acquisition of an objective view of the local and external environments (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2004).

These goals are expected to be pursued through:

- (i) Teaching: imparting knowledge and skills
- (ii) Research: discovery of knowledge
- (iii) Dissemination: spreading of existing and new information;
- (iv) Service: fostering community service and professional training for the development of intermediate and high level manpower (Wokocha, 2003; FRN, 2004:31).

The goals and objectives of tertiary education, as enunciated above, are crucial for national development. However, research by scholars such as Emaikwu and Eba (2001), Nwagwu (2005), and Okebukola (2006) has shown that many of the Nigerian tertiary educational institutions are finding it increasingly difficult to achieve the highlighted goals and objectives because of the problems confronting them.

### **Challenges of Managing Higher Institutions 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 to being central to national development and to be able 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:

#### **Inadequate Financing:**

Funding is central to unhindered access to higher education in Nigeria. The greatest problem in the education sector has been inadequate funding which is not in line with the rising population and inflationary trend. This issue of inadequate funding is supported by Oshuntokun (2006) who put forward in clear terms that underfunding remains the major hindrance to the successful management and administration of the nation's education system and by extension national development. Thus, poor funding is a major factor that militates against effective management and administration of education.

It has been observed that virtually most, if not all, of the problems of higher institutions in Nigeria are attributed to inadequate funding (Ajayi and Adeniji 2009). As Okebukola (2005) rightly observed, the depressed quality of education in Nigeria has been explained in part by inadequate funding of the system. As all stakeholders in the education sector have listed funding inadequacy as a problem. Furthermore, Oyeneye (2006) and Adegbite (2007) testify that the major challenge facing the management of higher institutions in Nigeria is inadequate funding. So also Ibukun (1997) lamented that there is growing shortage of funds and learning resources in Nigeria's higher institutions. Mainoma (2004) posited that funding shall continue to be the problem until all stake holders participate in the funding of higher education. It should not be left for Government alone.

Despite the recommendation of UNESCO that 26% of national expenditure be devoted to education, a close look at Nigeria's expenditure on education reveals that Nigerian government expend between 4% and 16% annually on education. Besides, Ajayi and Ekundayo (2006) remarked that the Nigerian government over the years has not been meeting the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) recommendation that 26% of the total annual budget be allocated to the education sector.

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.

Nigeria's higher education system is currently experiencing a deep crisis. In spite of the huge budgetary allocation to education by the government, higher education in Nigeria seems to be inadequately financed; these are revealed with the following indicators, according to Oke (2010).

- i) The poor teachers' remuneration coupled with the delay and irregularities in payment of salaries and allowances
- ii) Declining library and social facilities in Nigerian tertiary institutions.
- iii) The old and dilapidated buildings.
- iv) Ill-equipped laboratories.
- v) Overcrowded classrooms which brought about high teacher-students ratio.
- vi) Inadequate infrastructural/instructional materials.
- vii) Curriculum failed to promote the development of vocational and technological education as planned.
- viii) Low quality graduate in all disciplines.

Consequently, the above stated indicators manifested in low morale of teachers and this has effects on the other sectors of the economy such as health care, population management, rural development, poverty alleviation and infrastructure and technological development. This, in no small way, makes the governance of the tertiary institutions a herculean task.

#### **Poor Educational Facilities:**

Academic infrastructure has become one of the most challenging institutional issues. It is worrisome to note that Nigerian universities are fast decaying. This infrastructure includes: lecture halls, laboratories, students' hostels, library space, office spaces, books and journals and academic information systems all of which are seriously inadequate (Ochuba, 2001). Thus, about 15-30% of the infrastructure, equipment and books are non functional, obsolete or dilapidated (Federal Ministry of Education, 2009).

Similarly, 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 higher institutions were in a 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. The good news is that technologically based

infrastructure is becoming cheaper, but the bad news is that there is increasing demand for it. Many higher institutions in Nigeria still grapple with insufficient library resources. But innovations, including CD-ROM based journals, digital books and Internet updates now are more widely available. However, the institutions do not have the resources to acquire them.

**Inadequate Staff/Student Accommodation:**

Nigeria's higher educational institutions faced and continue to face acute accommodation problems for both staff and students. Less than 40% of our students are accommodated in the institutions hostels and the rest find accommodation in private hostels in the communities around the various institutions. The situation is the same for the staff and this militates against the attraction and retention of qualified staff.

**Brain-drain Syndrome:**

Brain-drain refers to the widespread migration of academic staff from the higher institutions in the country to overseas or equivalent institutions where their services are better rewarded. According to Akinture (2004), institutional deterioration and salary erosion during the past decade have prompted substantial "brain-drain" of academic staff and impeded new staff recruitment. 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.

**Government Regulations and Control:**

Another challenge facing Nigerian tertiary institutions is the issue of regulation and control, which in turn affects the autonomy of the system. Ojedele and Ilusanya (2006) and Babalola et al (2007) described university autonomy as protection of the higher institutions from interference by government officials in the day-to-day running of the institution, especially on the issues related to the admission of students, the appointment and dismissal 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 (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 always been vociferous in this demand.

**Leadership Failure:**

The leadership expectations of Nigerians are no less than those of other nationalities. Some of the past leaders were not committed to the development of the educational system, partly because of lack of defined mandate and duration, especially during the military rule. This type of operational environment makes the management of higher institutions in Nigeria vulnerable to crises. Nwagu (1997) posited that it is the failure of leadership that affects the management of higher institutions in Nigeria.

**Inadequate Staffing:**

Another challenge facing Nigerian tertiary institutions is the issue of staffing, inadequate qualified and professional staffing presented problems for teaching, learning and research. According to UNESCO (2007) cited in Okebukola (2008), there is a plethora of evidence suggesting that teacher quantity, quality and motivation exert noteworthy effects on a host of school variables.

According to the Federal Ministry of Education (2009), the total number of academic staff in the Nigerian university system as at 2006 was 27394, but about 50,000 teaching staff are required for effective course delivery across the disciplines. The implications of this obvious short fall in the number of academic staff can further lead to low productivity and decline in the quality of teaching in the Nigerian university system.

**Militant Student Unionism and Secret Cults:**

Some of the banes of effective higher institutional management in Nigeria in recent times are the unbridled student violent reaction to national issues and internal problems. According to Ibukun (1997) and Akintudire (2004), the result of student militancy and violent unionism has been the constant closure of institutions, removal of Vice-Chancellors, Rectors or Provosts among others.

Another challenge 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 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 institution may run the risk of being constantly closed or disrupted. The results of these cult activities as submitted by Smah (2007) have been the feeling of fear on campuses, killings and deaths and campus disturbances.

**Problem of Curriculum and Curriculum Delivery:**

Another challenge facing tertiary institutions in Nigeria is the problem of curriculum and curriculum delivery. The curriculum of Nigerian higher institutions is presently defective (Ajayi and Adeniji, 2009). This may have arisen because of lack of relevance of academic programmes, loss of programme by some specialized higher institutions to match graduate output to national manpower requirements. (Federal Ministry of Education, 2009). Because of the obvious deficiencies in the curriculum at all levels of education in Nigeria, National Universities Commission, National Commission for Colleges of Education and the National Board for Technical Education are now taking steps to revise higher education curricula.



### **Political Interference:**

It has been observed that higher institutions these days are not totally free from the hand of politics. Government of the day, most especially in state-owned institutions, interfere a lot in terms of selection and choice of the chief executives, deans, departmental heads, directors of programmes and above all the selection of Vice-Chancellors, Provosts and or Rectors.

A situation whereby members of the institutions are not totally free to choose their heads without government intervention would not augur well for the system. Similarly, Adegbite (2007) opined that another area of political interference is the constitution of Visitation Panels by the Visitor at will, instead of the minimum five years intervals; the main aim of which is to witch-hunt or crucify the Vice-Chancellor, Rector and or the Provost of the institution.

### **The Way-out**

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

1. There should be provision of adequate funding that meets UNESCO's recommendation of 26% of the total budget of a nation to be devoted to education. Governments should therefore allocate more funds to the universities so that they can be more effective in their day-to-day operations. The Nigerian higher institutions should also seek alternative sources of revenue generation to argument what the government allocates to them.
2. There is the need to improve and provide adequate infrastructural and instructional facilities, research, scholarly publications and staff training and development. Governments should intensify efforts in providing more physical facilities in the higher institutions. Besides, corporate bodies, philanthropists and alumni associations should also assist in the provision of these facilities. There is need for a serious expansion of physical facilities and equipment to meet the increasing student population.
3. In order to attract best brains to the system, the personal emoluments of the higher institution's staff must be revisited. 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.
4. Curtailing secret cult activities: Government and educational management must address the menace of cultism in Nigerian universities a joint effort that includes 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 effectively.
5. Removal of political interferences: The granting of autonomy to universities would help reduce the extent of political interference in the affairs of these universities, most especially in the appointment/selection of key principal officials in the university. The

academics should be free to choose their head without the influence of the visitor. The issues of tribalism, political interference, etc should be disregarded in the appointment of such heads.

6. There should be new orientation in order to have strong consciousness and commitment toward our nations' educational development, management and administration. All stakeholders must be willing to contribute to the funding of education, including parents.
7. There should be continuous training and retraining of all educational managers, administrators, policy-makers and implementers in form of workshops, conferences and seminars. These should be vigorously pursued and made compulsory.
8. The entire management and administration of the nation's education should be in the hands of the professionals and experts in the field. In order words, political favouritism should be avoided, if standard and quality is to be put in place.
9. Leadership should not be on popularity contest but must involve leaders with managerial skills, ability to make tough decisions to rise above the present standard of education.

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