

RE-INVENTING THE NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES DREAM AND THE CHALLENGE OF LEADERSHIP

Ebuara, V. O. Ph.D
Obulevictor61@yahoo.com

Udida, L. A. Ph.D
luluudida@yahoo.com

Ekpiken, W. Ph.D

Bassey, U. U. Ph.D
idohusang59@yahoo.com

Department of Educational Administration & Planning
University of Calabar
Calabar-Nigeria

Abstract

The paper examined the issues of re-inventing the Nigerian Universities dream of contributing to the development of the nation through offering services in the areas of teaching, research, capacity building and community service. It is very disheartening to observe that Nigerian Universities over the years have lacked behind in the performance of this formidable task due to the nature and dynamics of leadership as well as the political and economic environment of these institutions. To properly prefer solutions to this problem, there is need to articulate the relationship between the mission of the Universities, its leadership question as well as the specific needs of university's political, social, economic and cultural environment, and the characteristics of a rapidly changing world of works.

**Being a paper presented at the 11th International Conference of
Educational Management Association of South Africa (EMASA) 7th – 9th
August 2009**

Introduction

University education in Nigeria is a complex organization of interactions among independent bodies, groups and individuals, with the aim of achieving the National educational goals. These bodies, groups and individuals who are seen as stakeholders are the government, the public, parents, teachers, teachers' union, religious bodies and voluntary organizations, Nigeria Universities are therefore seen as dynamic organic whole, having a set of dream, to fulfill. This dream is seen through the objectives, mission, vision and inputs in a form of human and material resources. The vision or dream was mainly to nurture men and women of character and good judgment, who will lay the foundation of good leadership for our great country and set her upon the path of greatness through a University education that will sustain development and salutary values in our society.

The fulfillment of this dream also is best captured in the mission of the universities in Nigeria, which when put succinctly are; to propound, preserve, promote and propagate knowledge through teaching, research, provision of extension and community services. To also expand the frontiers of knowledge in the right ambience, contribute to society, nature individuals of sound character and judgment that would creatively and innovatively transform the system and sustain its integrity by being a dynamic custodian of knowledge and salutary values.

Literature Review

According to Brubacher (FME, 2003), the fundamental dream of universities is to promote the life of the mind through intellectual inquiry as well as generate, store and transmit specialized knowledge and sophisticated expertise, higher forms of culture and ethical basis of conduct.

In agreement with Brubacher, Ivowi (2006:21) equally believe that Universities exist to generate, disseminate and apply knowledge through

teaching, research and extension services. To sustain its institutional arrangement, since its inception in 1948 Nigerian Universities system has continued to prepare high level manpower for the survival of the society and the individuals and have expanded frontiers of knowledge and show case research results for sustainable development of the society.

Fafunwa (1995) maintains that, "Nigeria Education must of necessity relate to the needs and aspirations of the child, the community and the nation and indeed be tailored towards the re-inventing and the re-discovery of our cultural heritage". In essence, we need to restore our cultural values, ethics, quality and high educational standard. This could be achieved through the proper implementation of our higher educational policy, monitory supervision of educational activities, the use of adequate technology, good leadership, adequate funding and prompt numeration of staff, discipline dedication and determination to improving the falling standard of education as to re-inventing the Nigeria Universities dream and the challenge of leadership.

In the process of executing the fundamental task of re-inventing the Nigeria University dream, the principal challenges that has made the attainment of this dream almost impossible: according to some scholars, this has been leadership and corruption which bedevils the Nigerian society. One question therefore that agitate the minds of the public is; what is fundamentally wrong with the ways by which Nigerian University system has been managed and/or is being managed by our leaders in terms of planning, organizing, staffing leadership, control and coordination and what way forward in this knowledged based economy? In the light of the above background, this paper analyses the past, present and perspective management approaches in the Nigeria University system with the aim of re-inventing, re-positioning the weak managerial assumptions by the actors that may further hinder Nigerian Universities from capturing the emerging

opportunities created by the knowledge based economy. Precisely, the paper addresses the following questions.

Research Questions

1. What are the management approaches currently adopted by Nigerian University leadership/system in delivering its general mandates of maintaining the quality and standard of education.
2. What are the new challenges and opportunities created by the changing economic situations for Nigerian University system in delivering its mandates?
3. Are there some weak managerial assumptions by Universities leaders that could hinder Nigerian University system from fackling these challenges in an effective and efficient manner?
4. If so, what leadership strategies could be adopted to re-invent or re-position the University system to cope with the challenges of and size the opportunities created by the changing economic situation management style and the structure of Nigerian Universities.

Discussion

Management style and the structure of Nigeria Universities: An area of close examination is the management style and the structure of our Universities. There are allegations of politically motivated decision making, mutual back scratching, patronage and partisanship that have permeated African Universities. Babalola (2005). Commenting on this issue as reported in Guardian Newspaper, December 5, 2005 noted that the world ranking of Universities published by institute of higher education of Shangha, Jiao Tony University had exposed the its associated with the management of the Universities in the country. Some of those related problems according to World Bank (2000) report, are leadership and governance resulting in

ineffectiveness and in-competencies at all levels of Universities, non-realization of national cohesiveness, incessant crime rates and insecurity, inadequate funding, access and poor quality of products turned over amongst others. Added to this are issues of politicization and proliferation of academic programmes that could not be sustained.

In the 1960s till late 70s, each Nigerian, University and their leaders were known for their expert in academic programmes. There were very dedicated and concencious university administrator that were devoid of political pressures. Today, it is a different senario, as many Nigerian University emerged on the platform of politics, each want to run all programmes from University Teaching Hospital to having a non-functional nuclear department.

To this, is the massive influx of unprepared students whom the universities admit without increase resources to address their special needs. At this time too, attempt in university reforms are guided by political debates surrounding global waves of educational ideas that are propounded and published in our national dailies. The terrible state of Nigerian universities according to the Nigerian Tribune report of June 17, 2007, can be traced to the ignorance of university leaders who misappropriate the revenue allocations meant for the sustainable development of higher institutions in Nigeria. Nigerian university administrators, in delivering the general mandates of sustaining the quality and standard of the university system have by certain actions and inactions frustrated the realization of this dream and have contributed to relegating the universities to bottom of the accredited universities in the world. The Nigerian tribune report of June 17, 2007 affirmed this assertion that no Nigerian university is even rated among the best 1,000 university ranked among the top 50 universities in Africa of the 44th position Nigerian university leaders neglected Nigerian universities, sent their children to the best colleges and universities in America and the UK, and then misappropriate revenues to establish private universities. But none of

these private universities made the list of the best universities in the world in the global rankings latest. This is because of the rot in the system headling are today, confronted with several challenges. The challenges facing Nigerian universities are complex and is a combination of limited access, increasing cost, leadership failure, decreasing quality inadequate research, brain drain, inflexibility in course selection and existing gap between theory and practice, between what we claim to be doing and what we are actually doing. Perhaps the most formidable task confronting Nigerian universities governance is to articulate the triple relationship between the mission of the universities and the specific needs of university's political, social, economic and cultural environment. These challenges are capable of either enslaving Nigeria university education as lord of knowledge and power (if properly addressed). These educational challenges largely account for the reasons why the nations effort to provide for her citizens good university education as a social service has made little impact; it may be said that the system has remained in the throes of failure (Mgbodile, 2003). This is due largely to some philosophical, ideological and policy inefficiencies which consequently affect the degree of commitment of university leaders in the process of policy implementation.

Challenges In Re-Inventing The Nigeria Universities Dream

Access to University Education

Access to university education should be for all on the basis of merit. The UNESCO expects universities to base their policies on this principle of merit based provision. Therefore, nobody can be and should not be discriminated against because they lack financial resources.

Increasing Cost

Funding has remained a major challenge and problem to Nigerian university education system; yet no conscious effort has been made to

address it. The traditional source of funding-federal support has simply not kept pace with the growing demand.

This imbalance between demand and available resources is aggravated by the running cost, driven as they are by the number of students seeking admissions to the universities our educational policy makers do not take time to do proper costing of our educational programmes before embarking on expansion; they rather overestimate government capacity to fund such programmes and this has always resulted in setbacks or managing what is available at the risk of inefficiency, ineffectiveness and poor quality education (Uwazuruike, 1991) Nigeria university education today, needs a total overhauling and restructuring to improve its performance.

Leadership failure

The leadership expectations of Nigerians are no less than those of other nationalities Nigerians expect their university leaders to be individuals who would promote new directions where necessary, who are able to direct the affairs of university system effectively by getting things done properly and be able to make good strategies decisions or recognize and improve on good strategies excepts when made by their contemporaries.

These tasks for over 48 years of independence, Nigerian leaders in the university system have failed to deliver on these tasks due mainly to ineptitude and corruption Leaders in our educational system should be people who are transformational in their disposition, they should be able to make those they lead believe in themselves and their collective aspiration (Nwaguwu, 2006:55).

Quality of Education and Students Attitude

In the last two decades, there has been mounting concern about the quality of education in Nigeria. This concern has been raised particularly about the decline in the quality of university education offered in Nigeria. This is evident by the quality of graduates produced. According to Obayan (1999),

the quality of education offered by higher education institutions at the recent time has deteriorated substantially. The poor quality of many Nigerian universities has accelerated. In other words the standard of education has fallen. This poor standard of education is in part cause by the inability of university managers to effectively run the universities by sustaining standards of academic programmes. Students attitude to studies has dwindled in most universities hence some students do not value the culture of hardwork and commitment to studies. Nowadays, some students prefer to purchase their grades either in cash or kind. Hence such products may not be highly equipped with skills and knowledge as to face the current technological challenges for the re-inventing of the Nigeria universities dreams and the challenges of leadership. This poor state of university education in Nigeria made Ekaette (2006) to challenge the operators of the nation's university system to work harder and be more creative in their bid to produce quality human resources for the development of the country.

Inadequate Research

Research is about advancing knowledge and improving quality and status of universities. The Nigerian university system places more emphases on the importance of research in enhancing the status of an institution. The national universities commission in carrying out an evaluation of the research achievements of Nigerian universities came out with the result on Nigerian universities, as being currently extremely low in world ranking both on research and overall, and are low even in the rankings of the African universities (Makoujuolia, 2008).

It has generally been observed that research in Nigerian universities systematically declined and collapsed from the Late 1980s up to date. Summarizing the factors that contributed to this decline from the late 1988 to 1996, and subsequent collapse from 1997 to date, the Nigerian universaities commission listed the following as inhibiting factors

1. Difficulty in research funding
2. Lack of research skills in the modern methods
3. Constraint of equipment for carrying out state-of-the-art research
4. Overloaded teaching and administrative schedules which give little time for research.
5. Diminishing scope of mentoring researchers due to brain drain (Okebukola, 2002:4)

Considering these observed inadequacies in research, there are a number of challenges facing universities in Nigeria today, the first of which is to tackle declining standards and the research sub-sector that is grossly neglected.

Brain drain syndrome

The recurrent challenging problems invading Nigerian university education system have also led to a number of lecturers and researchers leaving the shores of the country for greener pastures abroad are brain drain. According to Olugbile (2006) a gale of brain drain is now blowing away whatever remains of scientists and researchers in national research institutes and universities and this ill will portend dangers for national development because research institutes are the pivot upon which any meaningful growth can be achieved in any nation. Nigeria universities are losing their value at a fast rate and it is high time that something is done to correct the situation. The issue of poor funding, brain drain among others, all of which have led to poor quality graduates should be properly addressed by both government and university administration so as to provide a challenging environment for the staff and students.

In 1992, the total number of lecturers in the Nigeria universities was 12, 977. This total number declined to 12, 064 in 1995. In other words, a total of 883 lecturers left the universities between 1992 and 1995 with an

average separation rate of 294% per annum, the problem is very significant (Oni, 2005:15).

Managerial Assumptions of University Leaders.

Nigerian universities leaders run the universities with the assumption that the system cannot be sustained without continues government assistance. Some have seen the universities education system as their private estate. This has caused disharmony in the system. To this groups university is a means to their individual ends with devastating results on our economy. It is amazing how our system creates leaders whose vision of greatness is limited to their pecuniary interests. With this state of affairs they are unable to regulate their academic activities to enhance service delivery.

Furthermore, some weak managerial assumptions by university leaders that has hindered progress of our institutions arises from the feelings of the absence of democratic control of university administration. Some of our leaders have become much too sensitive to criticism and thus arbitrariness and high handedness on their part have blurred their vision of tackling challenges in education system in an effective and efficient manner. Thus they have remained visionless towards successful university managerial and administration.

Leadership Strategies for Re-Positioning University System.

In repositioning university leaders ideology and approaches in the management of university education, there is need to reconsider absolute assumptions of relying on the government for the survival of the system. It is time for them to make proper preparation to cost and provide the resources required internally to maintain the programme and provide values for the money paid by students. Considering the rate of information explosion in today's world, universities should find a way of dealing with bureaucracy and adopt an enterprise model to review academic programmes regularly in response to rate at which new knowledge is being created.

Furthermore, there is need for Nigerian universities to change from being conventional sources of graduate, to becoming engines of community development and social renewal. Fundamental reforms is needed in the curriculum design, teaching, research and management of Nigerian universities. For better knowledge delivery, Kerr (1993) urged Nigerian university managers to assist in solving the economic social and environmental challenges that the authorities in their location are facing in order to bring research, training and outreach activities to the service of the beneficiaries.

In doing this, it will however require deliberate collaborative efforts by government, academic, business and civil society to re-invent the dreams of Nigerian universities and put them to the service of the people. This will require a qualitative change in the goals, functions and structure of Nigerian universities to be able to sustain the system.

There is need for universities to develop entrepreneurial leadership to go along with institutional autonomy. It is in this regard that Ejiogu (1987) argued that such development should transient the hand, and more importantly, it should involve the mind, the heart and the head.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the paper observes that leadership in the university system like other organizations cannot be ignored. They are important stakeholders in the education system. To this end some have good intentions for the university system while others are visionless leaders who have contributed to ruining Nigerian education system in their management style of administration.

The expectation of leadership in this write-up is to influence government interest and activities, directly or indirectly towards sustainable development of university education. In view of the foregoing, leaders should be people who are indeed transformational in their disposition; they should be able to make those they lead believe in themselves and their collective aspirations.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusion, the following recommendations are made.

- (1) It is imperative for university leaders to be re-oriented in consonance with acceptable democratic and international standards in the management of the system. In this regard, there must be a total overhauling of the system such that universities in Nigeria would be run properly.
- (2) The Nigerian government must ensure that only credible people (leaders) are appointed as university administrators and not politicians who do not understand the norms of the university system.
- (3) Appointment of university administration (Vice Chancellor) must follow laid-down procedures not based on friendship, political affiliation or compensating politician.

- (4) Nigerian government at all levels must show serious commitment to educational institutions by re-ordering their priorities in the area of funding educational sector and given it the highest priority in the budget.
- (5) Appointment of institutional leaders should not be based on ethnic considerations or political favoritism, but strictly on merit and contributions to knowledge.
- (6) Staff and students and the general public should have a rethink towards the re-invention of the Nigeria university education as to overcome the falling standard of education through commitment and dedication in the achievement of the national educational goals and objectives.

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