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Chapter

Perspective Chapter: Sustaining University Education for and National Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

This chapter presents a retrospective and prospective reflections on university education in Nigeria in relation to national development. Retrospectively, the Nigerian university system was among the best in Africa and beyond, especially in the 1970s. The universities were top notch and attracted other Africans who flooded into Nigeria to study. Then the Nigerian university system possessed the four crucial elements of a universal and functional university system-quality teachers, quality students, an enabling environment for learning and international competitiveness. However, over the past three decades, the Nigerian university system has suffered benign neglect and lost its hallmark of quality, and thereby raising concerns about its role and relevance in contemporary national development. Nevertheless, this chapter expresses strong believe and conviction that the university system is still relevant for the socio-economic and political development of the country but there is the need to take necessary actions/steps to strengthen the system towards making it have the desired and comparative international quality and functionality required to meet the requirements of contemporary challenges and the future. Suggestions were offered accordingly.

Keywords: university education, national development, university ranking and Nigerian university system

1. Introduction

Attention and interest in the role of the university in national development is evergreen. This is because universities have long been and remain vital and powerful drivers of socio-economic, cultural and political development, and global innovation. Like other countries, universities have continued to multiply in Nigeria and are expected to contribute to her socio-economic, cultural and political development. However, given the historical evolution of university education in Nigeria, past glory and performances, vis-à-vis recent inclinations and experiences, there have been serious reservations about the role and relevance of Nigerian universities and other tertiary education institutions to the national development. Accordingly, the discussions in this paper convey some retrospective and prospective reflections on University Education in Nigeria in relation to National Development.

The chapter will be structured into 6 sections. The first is the introduction followed by Section 2 that highlights the role of universities in national development. Section 3 discusses the evolution of university education in Nigeria and its contributions to national development. The current state of the quality of university education in Nigeria is presented in Section 4. Section 5 briefly discusses the expected role(s) of university education in Nigeria going forward. Section 6 appraises the factors that undermine the quality of Nigerian universities while Section 7 concludes the chapter.

2. The role of the university in development

Historically, the first medieval university was at Salerno, Italy, in the 9th century, followed by the University of Paris in the second half of the 12th century and subsequently Oxford and Cambridge in the European continent. At the very beginning, universities exist as associations or guilds for learning particular crafts, and later became institutions for the creation and dispersion of knowledge. And as knowledge comes to replace other resources as the main driver of economic growth, and education increasingly become the foundation for individual prosperity and social mobility; the role of the universities became more pronounced and fundamental. Thus, universities became widely recognized and linked with research, information transfer, and technology development.

As universities pursue their missions of generation, dissemination, advancement and application of knowledge, they have become of significant importance in the service of the society at the local, regional and international levels. Universities are been looked up to for proper and adequate human capital development, the structural transformation of an economy, technological innovation, forging of democratic citizenship, social cohesion, nation building, and preserving the earth. Indeed, there is growing evidence that university education, through its roles in empowering domestic constituencies, building institutions, and nurturing favorable regulatory frameworks and governance structures, is vital to a country's efforts to increase social capital and to promote social mobility and cohesion, are proving to be an important determinant of economic growth and development.

From the forgoing and summarily, the main functions of universities in the development process at whatever level include to: (i) serve as repositories and generators of knowledge; (ii) prepare and equip graduates so that they can obtain viable employment; (iii) offer rational and timely criticisms in areas of public policy and social and economic life; (iv) serve as large and influential bodies in civil society and the state; and (v) produce graduates to foster cohesive and tolerant communities.

Specifically, Otonko (2012) [1], identified the benefits derivable from a good and functional university education system to include: (i) the rapid industrialization of the economy, by providing manpower with adequate professional, technical and managerial skills, (ii) boost the transformation of societies into knowledge societies, by providing not just educated workers, but knowledge workers who will contribute immensely to the growth of the economy, (iii) instill good attitudes and engenders attitudinal changes that are necessary for the socialization of the individuals, thereby, leading to the modernization and overall transformation of the society, (iv) help through teaching and concise research, in the creation, absorption, dissemination and application of knowledge, and (v) the formation of a strong nation- state and at the same time aids globalization, and (vi) allow people to enjoy an enhanced life of mind', offering the wider society both cultural and political benefit.

At the empirical level, Egorov, et al. (2017) [2] study demonstrated that universities are fully-fledged economic agents which make positive contributions to gross regional product (GRP) growth in Russia. They, therefore, concluded that the development of regional higher education systems would lead to a positive effect on regional economic development. Goldstein et al. (1995) [3] enumerated eight sources of the impact of HEI on GRP, namely, knowledge creation, human capital creation, the transfer of know-how, technological innovation, capital investment, regional leadership, influence on environment, and knowledge infrastructure production.

3. University education and national development in Nigeria

The advent of university education in Nigeria is traced to the Elliot Commission of 1943, which culminated in the establishment of the University College Ibadan (UCI) in 1948. The UCI was an affiliate of the University of London. By the late 1950s, it became apparent that Nigeria would need more universities to cater to the many secondary school graduates. In April 1959, the Ashby Commission (The Commission on Post-School Certificate and Higher Education) completed a comprehensive research on the state of education in Nigeria. Several recommendations were provided by the Ashby Commission including the establishment of more universities. The University of Nigeria, Nsukka was later established in October 1960, a few days after Nigeria gained its independence, making it the first autonomous and full-fledged university in Nigeria.

Several universities followed suit. Ahmadu Bello University was established in 1962. In the same year, two more universities were established in Nigeria – the University of Ife, Ife-Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University) and the University of Lagos, Lagos. These five universities are collectively referred to as the first-generation universities. Following recommendations from Nigeria's Third Development Plan, seven more universities were founded in 1975. These are the universities of Port Harcourt; Ilorin; Kano; Calabar; Jos; Maiduguri and Sokoto.

From 1979, State governments started establishing State Universities. In 1999, the law prohibiting non-federal and state entities from establishing universities was abolished, paving way for the creation of private owned universities. The first private universities to receive licenses are Babcock, Madonna and Igbinedion Universities in 1999. Currently, there are 170 universities in Nigeria (See **Table 1**) comprising 49 Federal Universities, 59 State Universities and 111 private Universities.

Universities in Nigeria were expected to be key contributors to the human resource needs of the countries. Initially, there was a particular focus on the development of human resources for the civil service and the public professions. This was to address the acute shortages in these areas that were the result of the gross underdevelopment of universities under colonialism, and the departure of colonial administrators and professionals following independence. The major purpose for establishing universities in these countries was, and still is, for the institutions to play a pioneering role in addressing problems of poverty, social disorganization, low production, unemployment, hunger, illiteracy, diseases, that is, the problems of underdevelopment, which appeared to be common on the African continent.

Otonko (2012) [1] provided a good summary and specifics of how university education in Nigeria has contributed to national development. According to him, they have and still providing not only the high-level skills necessary for every labor market but also the training essential for teachers, doctors, nurses, civil servants, engineers, humanists, entrepreneurs, scientists, social scientists, and a myriad of

Years	Federal	Region/ State	Private	Total (Per Row)	Remarks
1948–1960	1	1*	—	2	
1961–1974	1	3*	—	4*	
1975–1998	23	10	—	34	Four existing Regional/State Universities by 1974 were taken over by the Federal Government in 1975.
1999–2009	2	22	40	64	The first three (3) private universities were licensed in 1999 and fifteen were licensed in 2005; one in 2006; ten in 2007, and seven in 2009.
2010–2019	17	15	39	70	
2020–2022	2	12	32	46	
TOTAL	(45) 49	(63) 59	111	(220) 219	

Four Regional/State Universities in existence by 1974 which the Federal Government took over in 1975 should be subtracted from the vertical Region/State and Total columns. Source: Author (based on information available on the website of National Universities Commission). The list is the current and valid one for the year 2022 (updated with NUC on 30/10/2022).

Table 1.

Distribution of the 170 Nigerian universities by ownership as at October 2022.

other personnel. These trained individuals are engaged in developing the capacity and analytical skills that drive local economies, support civil society, teach children, lead effective governments, and make important decisions which affect the entire country. In addition, and notably too, the university education in Nigeria has led to the development of many Nigerians into sound and effective citizens through higher self-awareness and self-realization of individuals at various tasks, enhanced better human relationships, national consciousness and effective citizenship. The universities in Nigeria have also by and large enhanced social, cultural, economic, political, scientific and technological progress in Nigeria. The country is more blessed now with specialists at various fields of endeavor: medicine, law, engineering, philosophy, education, etc. and thereby making the nation become more and more dynamic and self-reliant as the days go by. University education has also been on the vanguard of creating opportunities for the teeming Nigerian population towards building the desired united and egalitarian country that encourages every Nigerian to contribute to the development or upliftment of the country. The university education has continually churned out scholars who have contributed meaningfully to the world's reservoir of knowledge.

However, it has been observed that university education in Nigeria has performed very poorly in terms of focus on innovative works and entrepreneurship as well as the commercialization of research findings. This is because they have continued to focus only on their traditional role of training scholars and leaders, but remained weak in the practical application of knowledge and are unable to respond to the demands of the job market. In addition, there is the growing worry on the fallen and falling standards of university education in Nigeria.

4. Current state of the quality of university education in Nigeria

Universally, the quality of university education is often assessed via a set of four (4) connected indicators. These are “*quality teachers*”, “*quality students*”, “*an enabling environment for learning*”; and “*international competitiveness*”. Good quality university education features world class teachers and researchers who invest in one another through stimulating lectures, seminars, workshops, conferences, and other academic activities. Historical recollections indicated that Nigerian premier universities started out this way¹, but today though with exceptions here and there, most Nigerian universities (including the old ones) suffer from poor quality teaching at the instance of low quality of lecturers and substandard research outputs. Indeed, Nigerian universities are noted to relatively under perform on research in the continent. Nigeria’s universities produce only 44% of the scholarly output of South Africa and 32% of Egypt. This is despite that Nigeria has nearly four times more universities than Egypt and over six times more than South Africa. On the whole, universities in Nigeria lag well behind equivalent global economies like South Africa, Egypt, Thailand, Turkey and Brazil. They also lag behind traditional world leaders. This, therefore, makes the general national outlook very discouraging and disheartening.

While efforts at improving on the quality of the students that are fed into the university at the instance the declining quality in elementary and secondary schools are recognized, however, there are still significant lapses. Many universities, particularly, privately owned ones admit students on very low scores (120 out of 400 marks, 30 per cent pass mark) in the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) qualifying examination. This constitute a significant problem. Moreover, Nigerian universities loses local talents and fails to replace them. According to data of UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS), Nigeria is the number one country of origin for international students from Africa, as she sends the most students overseas of any country on the African continent, and outbound mobility numbers are growing at a rapid pace. **Figure 1** shows that the number of Nigeria students abroad increased by 164 per cent in the decade between 2005 and 2015 alone from 26, 997 to 71,351. **Figure 2** shows the trend for the three (3) major choice destinations from 2014/15–2020/21. Both figures show significant number of outbound students’

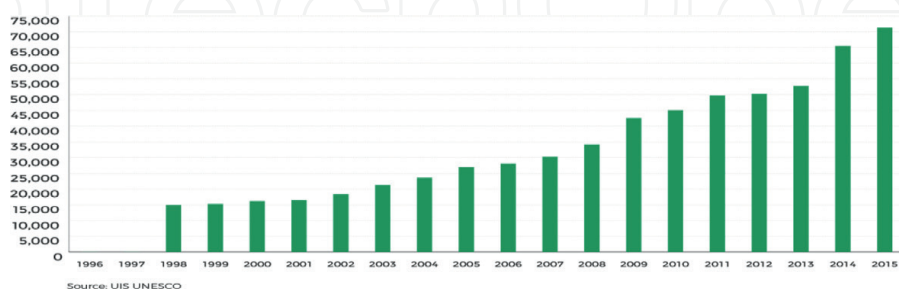


Figure 1.
Number of outbound Nigerian students between 2005 and 2015. Sources: IRCC (CA), IIE/open doors (US), HESA (UK).

¹ It is documented in Ojudu (2012) [4] that by 1980 University of Ibadan and Ahmadu Bello University earned global recognition for research in tropical health and agriculture, respectively.

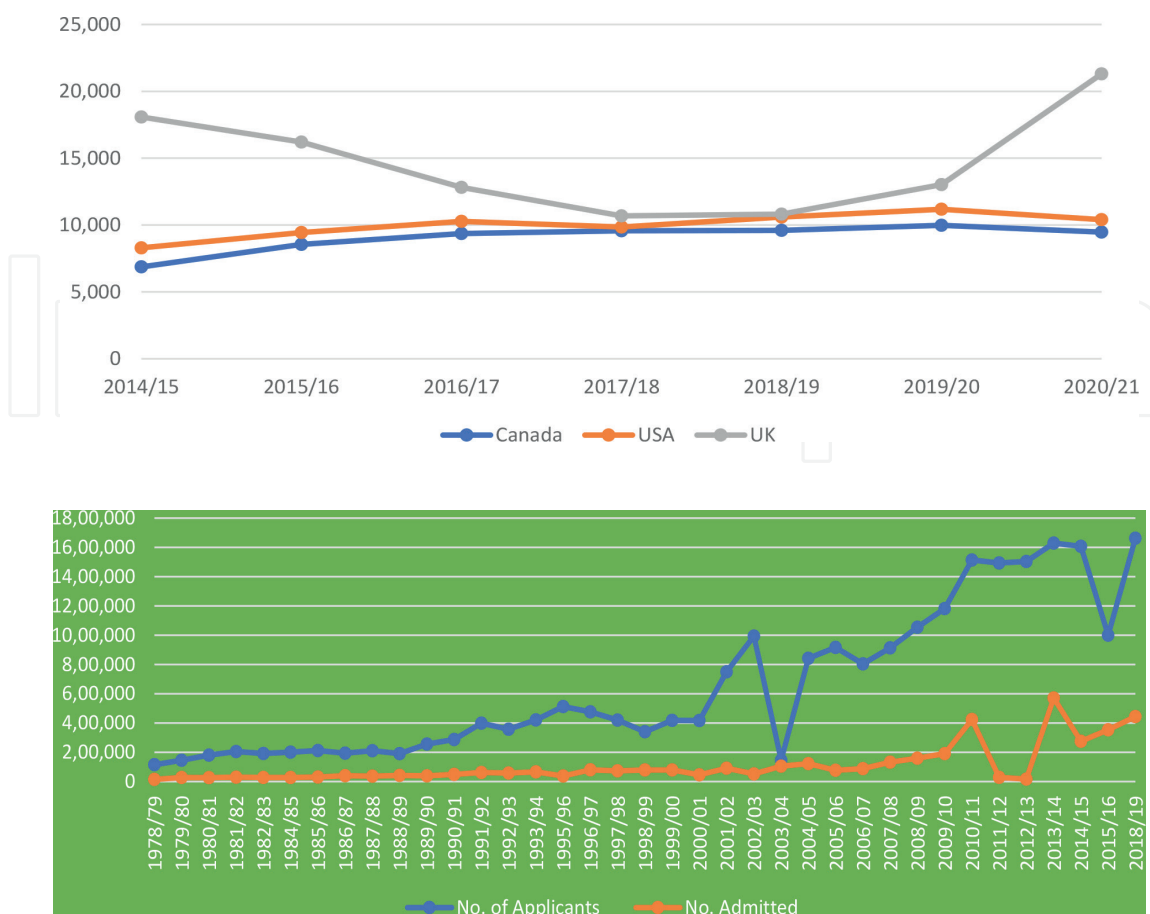


Figure 2. Applications and admissions into Nigerian universities, 1978–2019. Source: National Bureau of statistics (NBS) and the joint admissions and matriculation board (JAMB).

overtime. In contrast, the system fails to attract the equivalent in foreign students as foreign students are few in Nigerian Universities. So, there has been “brain drain” rather than “brain exchange”.

The environment for learning is becoming more and more un-enabling. Even though universities are mushrooming all over the place, but most of them are lame right from birth, while older ones are wallowing in crumbled and still crumbling basic infrastructure and facilities. Indeed, most universities are ill-equipped. A survey by the National Universities Commission (NUC) records that only about 30 per cent of Nigeria student population have adequate access to classrooms, lecturer theaters, laboratories, workshops and libraries. According to the University Systems Chronicler, over 70 per cent of the laboratory equipment and library books in today’s Nigeria universities were bought and placed between 1960 and 1980. Other necessary amenities such as electricity, water, good hostel accommodation and medical care are also inadequate.

In international competitiveness, Nigerian universities rank very low in world university ranking (see **Table 2**). Only one Nigerian university, the University of Ibadan (UI), was listed among the first 1000 universities in the world by the Center for World University Ranking in 2018/ 2019. Even at this, the position UI occupies in the ranking says a lot about the discouraging state of university education in Nigeria. More instructively, of the 14 African Universities that featured in the in the top 1000 of the Center for World University Ranking of 2018/2019, Nigeria performed poorly relative to South Africa and Egypt. Indeed, the first five leading universities in Africa

S/No.	World rank	University	Location	NR	QE	AE	QF	RO	QP	INF	CIT	Score
1	223	University of Cape Town	South Africa	1	216	294	187	293	299	190	254	77.9
2	230	University of the Witwatersrand	South Africa	2	133	80	216	367	377	187	304	77.7
3	402	University of KwaZulu-Natal	South Africa	3	509	277	—	400	526	347	327	74.9
4	438	University of Pretoria	South Africa	4	—	686	246	416	555	600	460	74.5
5	448	Stellenbosch University	South Africa	5	555	139	—	428	500	409	541	74.3
6	452	Cairo University	Egypt	1	569	> 1000	228	378	629	602	541	74.3
7	715	Ain Shams University	Egypt	2	—	> 1000	—	606	870	779	541	71.8
8	771	Makerere University	Uganda	1	448	> 1000	—	981	779	456	673	71.3
9	790	University of Johannesburg	South Africa	6	—	> 1000	—	785	896	781	541	71.2
10	884	Mansoura University	Egypt	3	—	> 1000	—	731	942	971	898	70.5
11	903	Alexandria University	Egypt	4	500	> 1000	—	768	923	> 1000	898	70.4
12	908	Tunis El Manar University	Tunisia	1	-	1000	—	641	946	> 1000	> 1000	70.4
13	964	North-West University	South Africa	7	591	> 1000	—	823	> 1000	681	> 1000	70
14	991	University of Ibadan	Nigeria	1	540	> 1000	265	> 1000	> 1000	774	898	69.8

Source: cwur.org/2018-19.php

Breakdown: South African Universities = 7, Egyptian Universities = 4, Ugandan University = 1, Tunisian University = 1, Nigerian University = 1, Total = 14.

Key: NR = National Rank, QE = Quality of Education, AE = Alumni Employment, QF = Quality of Faculty, RO = Research Output, QP = Quality of Publications, INF = Influence, CIT = Citations.

Table 2.

The 14 African countries listed in top 1000 of the 2018/19 university ranking by Center for World University Ranking.

are in South Africa, followed by two others from Egypt. Summarily, of the 14 universities, South Africa had 7, Egypt 4, while Uganda, Tunisia and Nigeria had 1 university each. Retrospectively, Nigerian universities in the 70s were said to be among the best in Africa and the world. So beautiful and attractive were the institutions then that other Africans came to study in Nigeria. In those glorious days, Nigerian universities were proud producers of great graduates (**Table 2**).

5. Expected roles of university education in Nigeria

Undoubtedly, Nigeria given the vast potentials she possesses and the myriads of challenges faced (high and widespread poverty, high unemployment rate, significant infrastructural deficits, low technological development/slow technological adoption, poor governance and leadership across all strata of government layers, increasing internal conflicts, etc.) need university education system towards the achievement of development goals and the transformation to become an industrialized sufficiently high-income country providing high quality life for all its citizens.

To start with, the universities still have an essential role in conducting meaningful, particularly cutting-edge researches and trainings of highly qualified personnel. The Universities remain the active promoters of the innovation culture at the regional and international level. Higher education can enhance economic development through technological catch-up, by helping economies gain ground on more technologically advanced societies. Investing in tertiary in Nigeria will accelerate technological diffusion, which would decrease knowledge gaps and help reduce poverty in the country. The development of infrastructure is a vital component in steering the country's development agenda. Universities have a primary role in empowering Nigerians with expert knowledge to work on infrastructure in their own country.

More importantly, the universities remain critical and immense significance of serving as the intellectual citadel where political discourse occurs and ideologies pertinent to policy formulation are generated. It is necessary that dysfunctional systems of the past are replaced with new value systems that will repair the emaciated social fabric. Universities can assist in this by developing individuals committed to democratic values and human rights.

Hence, the imperative and continued need for sustaining university education for national development in the country.

6. Factors undermining the quality of Nigerian universities

The factors undermining quality in Nigeria universities are serious and disquieting. The declining quality and standard of university education in Nigeria is palpable. Nigerian universities have failed to deliver the expected and contemporary quality education due to a number of factors. The major factors include:

6.1 Inadequate funding

Generally, education is poorly funded in Nigeria. **Figure 3** shows the budgetary allocation to education as percentage of government total budget spanning about three decades from 1992 to 2019. It could be seen that the United Nations Educational,

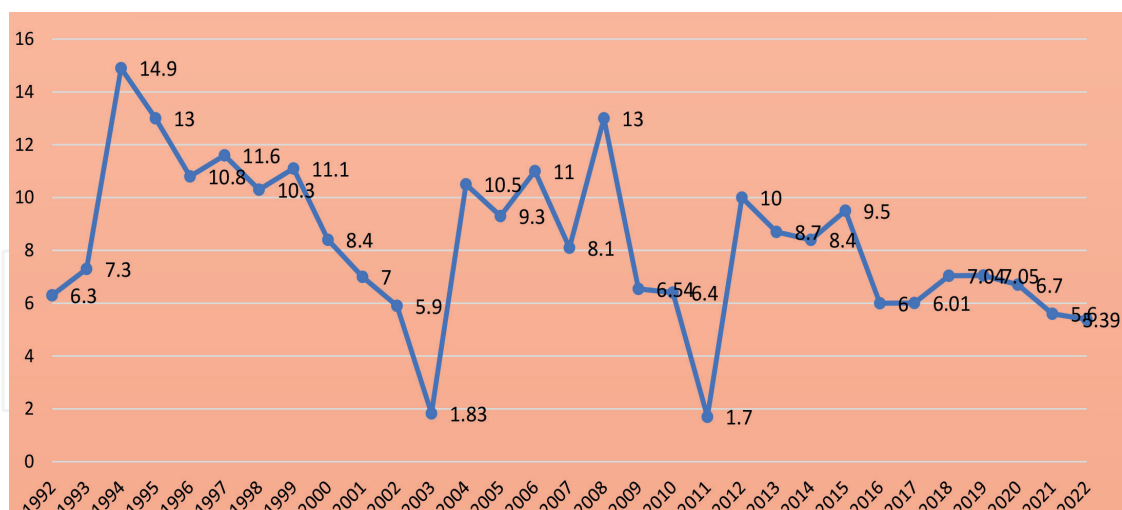


Figure 3.
 Budgetary allocation to education as % of Total budget in Nigeria, 1992–2022. Source: CBN statistical bulletin, various issues.

Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) recommendation that between 15 and 20% of a nation’s budget be allocated to the educational sector was seldom met.

The poor funding of education directly translates to poor funding of universities especially with the increase in their numbers over time. For instance, it is noted that the Federal Government of Nigeria’s budget for 50 Federal Universities and UBE (Universal Basic Education) was N495, 456,130, 065 which translated to 40.88% of the budget allocation of California State University, USA for that year.

Thus, a major constraint to quality and attainment of academic excellence in Nigerian universities is financial constraints resulting in many academics and non-academics working under difficult circumstances. Indeed, many universities are unable to build lecture halls, students’ hostels, provide decent and functional offices for teaching staff, equip laboratories and workshops and pay entitlements, allowances, and medical bills and provide research grants.

6.2 Inadequate and poor-quality teaching staff

Most universities in Nigeria are short of lecturers to adequately handle teaching and learning activities, due to inadequate funding to employ adequate number of lecturers. The student-lecturer ratio in the Nigerian university system is very high in contradiction to global practice of quality education. In most of the top 200 universities in the world, the staff-student ratios are amazingly low and good. Indeed, for the top universities in the world, the staff-student ratios are as follows: California Institute of Technology and University of Chicago, both in the USA have 6:9; University of Oxford has 11:6, while Harvard has 8:9 student-lecturer ratio. In contrast, many universities in Nigeria have student-lecturer ratios of 300:1 or more. Given this scenario, it is evident that the few available lecturers are seriously over worked. Owing to the shortage of lecturers, academic programmes in many universities are not accredited by the National Universities Commission. Bamiro (2012) [5] linked the observed and increasing problem of de-intellectualization of the academia to low quality of staff in some institutions of higher learning in Nigeria. He asserted that where there is inadequate teaching staff and poor quality of lecturers, the attainment of good quality in higher education will be difficult.

Most universities in Nigeria lack staff development programme for training and re-training of staff. However, in this era of knowledge explosion and emergent knowledge-based economy, staff development is of paramount importance. Vibrant staff development programmes on a continuous basis will help academics and non-academics to clarify and modify their behavior, attitude, value, skills and competencies (Asiyai and Oghuvbu, 2009) [6].

6.3 Frequent labour disputes and closures of universities

A big challenge to quality university education in Nigeria is the incessant staff union disputes and subsequent closures of the institutions. Financial crises between the various staff unions and the government, students' excesses like riot, and other issues that lead to strike and temporary shut-down of universities. **Table 3** shows that labour disputes and closures of universities have characterized the system since 1980s. These closures have overtime resulted in disruption of academic activities, loss of time and academic sessions, unstable academic calendar, delayed implementation of development policies, drop in productivity, uncertainty on the terminal point of programmes, poor quality of graduates and brain-drain with the system (both of students and faculty).

6.4 Brain drain

Brain drain is a common problem in Nigerian universities dating back to the military era. It is estimated that Nigeria lost a total number of 10, 000 professionals from different higher institutions between 1986 and 1990 (Chigozie, 2014) [7]. This is occurring much more frequently lately as universities lose talents in academia to other fields for economic or political reasons. Brilliant lecturers leave the frustrations of universities for more rewarding sectors or seek better opportunities outside the country.

Brain drain has distorted the organizational structures of some Nigerian universities. In most cases, brain drain has placed the academic departments of the Nigerian universities in a state of chaos and no direction. Many departments of Nigerian universities have lost the top-middle cadre of their lecturers to brain drain, while most of the junior lecturers were left behind. More instructively, many Nigerian scholars who traveled for their doctorate degree abroad were employed by their host universities, and chances that they will come back to fill the vacuum left in Nigeria is very minimal (Adebayo 2010:2-4) [8].

6.5 Poor governance and leadership

Despite the centrality of good governance to the success of universities, most Nigeria universities are facing a governance crisis that often manifests itself in terms of conflict between management and students and staff that flares up from time to time over issues such as living allowances, pay, terms and conditions of service, limited representation in university governing bodies and perception of university authority as defender of state interests as opposed to the interests of the university (Mwiria, 1992) [9]. Existing evidence shows that the principles of good governance are routinely flouted with great frequency in many African countries and particularly, Nigeria (Kauffeldt, 2009 [10]; Obondo, 2000 [11]; Task Force on Higher Education and Society 2000 [12]), resulting in poor governance. In particular, regular political

Year	ASUU	SSANU	Total	ASUU strike duration
1988	1	1	2	
1989	1	1	2	
1991	1	—	1	
1992	1	—	1	
1993	1	1	2	
1994	1	1	2	
1995	1	—	1	
1996	1	1	2	
1997	—	1	1	
1998	1	—	1	
1999	1	1	1	5 months
2000	—	1	1	
2001	2	1	3	1 week; 3 months
2002	1	—	1	2 weeks
2003/2004	2	—	1	1 week; 6 months
2005	1	—	1	3 days
2006	1	—	1	3 days
2007	1	—	1	3 months
2008	1	—	1	1 week
2009	1	—	1	4 months
2010	1	—	1	Over 5 months
2011/12	1	—	1	3 months
2013	1	—	1	Over 5 months
2015	1	—	1	Over 3 months
2017	1	1	2	Over 5 months
2018	1	1	2	3 months
2020	1	—	1	over 9 months (275 days)
2022	1	1	2	8 months (242 days)

Source: Authors Compilation.

Table 3
Chronicle of Strikes ASUU and SSANU in Nigerian universities 1988–2018.

interference, especially in public universities, makes adherence to the principles of good governance a near impossibility (Kauffeldt 2009 [10]).

An ancillary challenge closely associated with the declining quality in the university system is the syndrome of “*sexual molestation*” and/or “*grades for gratification*” that has become very rampant. A recent British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) investigative expositions and other news reportage confirmed this. Imperatively, this syndrome must be checkmated before it festers further. The ongoing efforts by the National Assembly to pass a Bill to officially criminalize these acts and make offenders serve deserving punishment is recognized and commendable.

6.6 Wrong advice and leadership weaknesses

In the two turbulent decades between the 1980s and 1990s, higher education in Nigeria faced a period of dramatic structural change and financial and governance crises. At the same time, the sector experienced uncoordinated expansion amid dilapidated infrastructure, deteriorating working conditions, low staff morale, worsening academic quality standards, staggering budget deficits, all compounded with phenomenal enrolment increases and the continuing ravaging impacts of the historic brain drain phenomenon.

The systematic neglect and rot of Nigerian universities intensified and acquired the status of official policy during 1980s and 1990s and up till date based entirely on the flawed presumption and external advice that university education in sub-Saharan Africa yielded no clear impacts on social equity, economic growth, or poverty reduction. Unfortunately, the leadership of these countries, particularly Nigeria took to this non-evidence based and ill-informed advice and drastically cut the budgetary allocation to university education. However, international institutions, and other major development organizations and industrialized countries have now recognized that higher education and knowledge production are critical for rapid economic development in every country.

6.7 Supply and demand imbalance

A major challenge is the demand imbalance principally as a result of the burgeoning population of the country which is now put at 201million going by the latest estimates of the World Bank, with over 60% under the age of 25 years. Given these dynamics, there has been increasing demand for university education which has not been met. **Figure 2** shows the trend in applications for admission into universities and the number admitted from 1978/79 session to 2018/19 session, with wider gaps in more recent years. Indeed, there is an everincreasing demand for placements but universities are constrained by institutional carrying capacity for placements of applicants. **Figure 4** shows the percentage of applicants that gets admitted yearly. Going by the figure, not up to 40% of the applicants get admitted in any 1 year except for the 2003/2004 academic session.

There is also the problem of access in addition to that of quality in the nation's university system. While the Open University and the Distance Learning initiatives

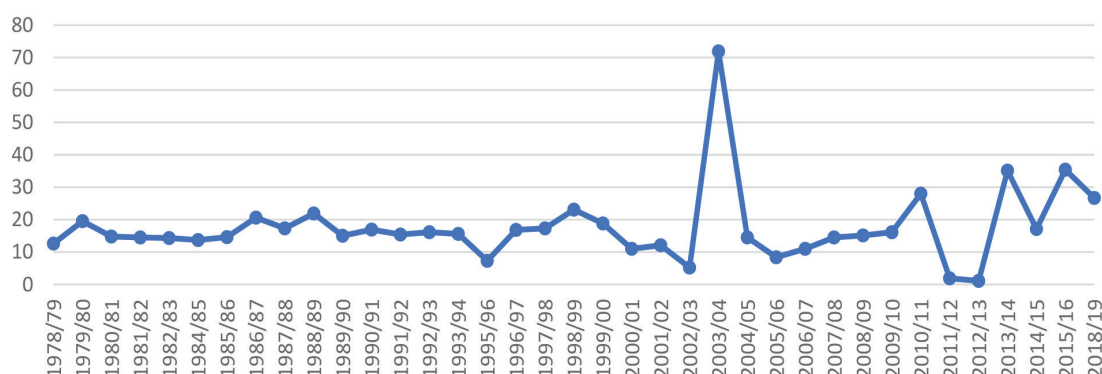


Figure 4. Percentage of applicants that gets admitted into Nigerian universities, 1978–2019. National Bureau of statistics (NBS) and the joint admissions and matriculation board (JAMB).

are recognized and commendable, however, their quality are doubtful given that their operations and programmes delivery depend largely on the faculty members of full-time universities. There is, therefore, the need for more creativity with the university system on more effective ways to particularly increase access for the teeming prospective applicants for placement in the university.

7. Summary and conclusions

Retrospectively, Nigerian universities (in the 1970s) were said to be among the best in Africa and the world. So beautiful and attractive were these institutions then that other Africans came to study in Nigeria in those glorious days. They practiced the idea of universality of universities characterized by the embodiment of “*quality teachers*”, “*quality students*”, “*an enabling environment for learning*”; and ‘*international competitiveness*’. All four factors combined to ensure that Nigeria had world-class universities then. However, over the past three decades, beginning in the 1980s, with fewer resources, inadequate capacity and a history of neglect among other challenges, quality was knocked off the system consequently raising serious questions about the contributions and relevance of Nigerian universities and other tertiary education institutions to national development. One of the main issues facing the university system is its research and innovation capacity and the ability to use these for the country’s transformation.

Several of the factors undermining quality in Nigeria universities and some other subsisting challenges were identified and explained. The conclusion from the reflections contained in this paper is that the universities were once glorious and contributed to the development of the country, and are still relevant and needed for the socio-economic and political development of the country. In view of that, the paper posits that there is the need to strength them to have the desired and comparative international quality and functionality necessary to meeting the requirements and challenges of Nigeria’s development agenda or the future. To remain strong, relevant and have maximum impact, universities must reorient their mandate and usefulness in the twenty-first century society.

To recreate quality and functional university system in Nigeria, we recommend the following:

The Government should:

- *Ensure adequate funding*: Government should place high premium on education, and particularly university education by providing adequate funding all year round to revitalize the university system and subsequently support adequate engagement of staff in the required mix, improve conditions of service for staff, provision of basic infrastructures (i.e. up-to-date teaching and research facilities), virtual libraries and information communication technologies and internet connectivity.
- *Checkmate the frequent labour disputes and closures of universities*: Government needs to checkmate incessant strikes by honoring all agreements entered into with the various unions as well as properly motivate staff (financially and improve the working conditions and policies) to make them more dedicated and effective in their jobs.
- *Halt Brain Drain of both students and Faculty*: Most students that go out of the country to study are ultimately lost to those countries where they go to study, as they seldom return back to the country after their studies. This trend therefore

needs to be halted to appropriate and maximize the future potentials of these students to the advantage of the country's development. In particular, there is need to put in place measures that will reduce brain drain of faculties in the university system to help reduce the exit of skilled manpower out of the country. This will involve adequate compensation of skills. It is wasteful to use public funds to train high-level manpower and for such manpower to then be "drained" by attractive external bodies and countries.

- *Expand access to university education for the teeming Youth:* There is the need for creative initiatives to expand access to a higher proportion of applicants on a sustainable basis henceforth. The carrying capacity of the existing universities should be increased through massive injection of funds for infrastructural expansions and establishing more universities why not compromising quality. Another alternative is to encourage and license more private universities but with subventions or grants extended to them to facilitate absorbing more students at subsidized costs.
- *Hold university administrators accountable:* Several Nigerian universities are certainly poorly governed and the internal systems in these universities including their governing councils are incapable of holding the administrators accountable. The government, therefore, need to enforce adherence to every element of proper accountability and good governance among the ranks of university administrators. There is also the need to revisit and overhaul the criteria and processes for selection of heads of universities especially federally-owned universities which have become local ethnic institutions where only indigenes and/or the dominant local ethnic groups can aspire to the position of the Vice-chancellor. Historical facts showed that during the glorious years in the annals of Nigerian universities across the country, only accomplished scholars and of diverse tribal/ethnic inclinations were appointed heads at one time or the other. The university system, therefore, needs to be re-configured along this model.
- *Forge links between Universities and Private sector:* Governments must create an incentivized environment for strengthening university-private sector linkages through science and technology strategies, legislation on intellectual property rights and funding for R&D, among other items.

The University System should:

- *Prioritize funding:* Universities must prioritize other funding sources in view of declining receipts from Government. The world's best universities have huge endowments and support from the private sector. Harvard University had an endowment fund of \$38.3 billion in 2018 and endowment per student of \$1.736 million in 2015, followed by Yale University at \$29 billion (\$2.073 million per student in 2015) and Stanford University at \$26.4 billion (\$1.323 million per student in 2015). While comparable statistics are not available for Nigerian universities, evidence indicates that endowment funds are quite low in these universities and they need to step up efforts at attractiSng private funding.
- *Ensure vibrant staff development programmes:* Staff of universities, especially the teaching staff need to be up to date on the frontier of knowledge in both teaching and research engagements. To make this possible requires that the lecturers be properly

and adequately exposed through seminars, workshops, attendance at conferences (both at local and international arena), collaborative researches and mentorship. Hence, the need for a comprehensive and all-inclusive staff development programmes covering every staff in the university for free and on a regular basis.

- *Initiate more innovative ways to expand access for admission:* There is the need for more innovativeness and creativity with the university system on more effective ways to particularly increase access for the teeming prospective applicants for placement in the university.
- *Stem the tide of sexual molestation” and/or “grades for gratification”:* The pockets of efforts being made in some universities on this issue/problem are recognized. However, there is the need for the university system as a whole to work on a holistic approach to the problem.
- *Foster stronger university-industry linkages:* The university system needs to more closely work with the industry to forge stronger linkages. In doing this, there is the need to commence a study series of manpower needs and skills set requirements of the industrial sector on a 5 years period basis. In addition, every university should henceforth engage in tracer studies of their alumni in industries periodically. In these ways, the gap resulting from the current miss-match in skills set supply by the universities and demand by industry can be closed. These initiatives would also constitute a basis for proper manpower planning and training programme in the country.
- *Shore up relevance:* Universities need to become increasingly relevant by providing evidence-based inputs into policy formulations and implementations and spearhead the technological revolution to spur relevant innovations and development in the country. A renewed agenda must focus on skilled human resources for economic growth, especially in science and technology, to be prepared for the unfolding fourth industrial revolution and the global shift towards robotics, cloud computing and artificial intelligence. Many Nigerian universities produce only half-baked graduates that are not fit for the world of work because of the way they are taught and the absence of curricular reviews that should respond to the calls of the nation and industry’s contemporary needs. In this regard, universities must break free of outmoded paradigms, some dating to the colonial era, if they hope to contribute to meaningful progress.
- *Promote and sustain diversity and internationalization programme:* Diversity in the mix of students and faculty members that transcends diverse nationalities is the hallmark of high standard, high quality and the international universities. Diversity of students and staff is currently non-existent in most Nigerian universities. Among the few, particularly the first-generation universities, it is equally very low. There is, therefore, the need for the university system to promote and sustain diversity and internationalization programme in every university.

The Industry should

- *Forge collaboration with Universities:* The private sector must also reach out to universities to strengthen links between universities and businesses. A strong

productive private sector requires robust input from universities and other institutions of higher education for knowledge generation and skill development of the workforce. Industry must collaborate with the university system by sponsoring and financing researches that are potentially beneficial to their operations, profitability and growth.

- *Create opportunities for internship for staff and students:* Industry should also assist the university system with opportunities for staff and student visiting programme/industrial attachment; and development and resources for staff development, and infrastructural as well as programme development.

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