

## **NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY AND ITS MANDATE IN A CHANGING WORLD**

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### **ABSTRACT**

In the context of an evolving competitive and private sector-driven economy, the Nigerian university is expected to advance itself in academic programmes, research and innovation towards academic excellence and world-class status. However, the Nigerian university system does not appear to have attained this status. What is responsible for this state of affairs? This paper, therefore, attempt to assess the system via its mandate to be world-class in a rapidly changing world. The study employed secondary data source. The ultimate objective of any university is to strive to attain academic excellence by ensuring quality teaching, research and public service. This can only be achieved when the university uses innovative curriculum and pedagogical methods under conducive circumstances. This study however, revealed that the exponential increase in the number of universities and student enrollment without necessary funds has brought about dearth of other resources and facilities such as run-down infrastructure, inadequate laboratories, and ill-equipped libraries, all contributing to the decline in the university system. The aspiration of the Nigerian university to attain world-class status is yet to be realized. For the country's university system to attain this status, it needs to be systematically planned with a profound change in the curriculum.

*Keywords: University, Development-oriented, Entrepreneurial, Competitiveness, Paradigm.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The history of higher education (in its modern form) in Nigeria dates back to the setting up of Eliot Commission by the British Colonial Administration in 1943. On the basis of the Commission's recommendation the University College, Ibadan was established in 1948 as a college of the University of London. In like manner, the University of London was in a mentoring arrangement with the other 1948 generation of English speaking African university colleges in Makerere in Uganda, Legon in Ghana, and Salisbury (now Harare) in Rhodesia(now Zimbabwe) . Great Britain like other colonial powers in Africa, installed a replica of its higher education in Nigeria (Obanya, 2004). For this historical reason, the pattern of university governance (with Pro-chancellor, Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, Rector, Provost, Dean, etc. titles originating from the hierarchy of the Church of England and handed down to Oxford and Cambridge) has remained largely an enduring one in the country's higher institutions over the years . This is also applicable to the prevailing patterns of academic organization; the disciplines taught, their

grouping into departments and faculties and, to a large extent, the content of specific disciplines, although American influence has been on the increase over the years.

This was in keeping with the recommendation of Elliot Commission to the effect that all colonial territories able to support the ( colleges) should have universities of their own...these should aspire from the outset to academic standards equal to those of universities and university colleges in Britain (Mellamby, 1958:25). Consequently, the universities in Nigeria, especially, the older ones, have the vision of attaining world-class status. For example, the University of Ibadan has its vision as “To be world-class institution for academic excellence geared towards meeting societal needs” (Obanya, 2010); the vision statement of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka is “To create a functional, globally competitive and research-focused university which is not just an Ivory Tower, but responsive to the needs of the society, why delivering world-class education and knowledge” (Ugwu, 2013:67); and the vision of the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria states that it “shall be a world-class university comparable to any other, engaged in imparting contemporary knowledge, using high quality facilities and multi-disciplinary approaches, to men and women of all races, as well as generating new ideas and intellectual practices relevant to the needs of its immediate community, Nigeria and the world at large”(Anyebe, 1995). Expectedly, the Committee of Vice-Chancellors of Nigerian Universities in 2011 charged Nigerian universities to be world-class universities that are engaged in the highest standards of excellence in all aspect of teaching, research, and public service (Ugwu, 2013:8).

However, according to the ranking web of universities (2012), universities in Nigeria appeared on unfavourable positions. Reacting to the positions of Nigerian universities on 2012 World University Ranking, President Goodluck Jonathan affirmed that:

The poor African and International Ranking of Nigerian universities, especially, the older ones must endeavour to change the situation. He went further to state that the recent rating which indicated that no Nigerian university is among the top 10 providers of tertiary institutions in Africa, not to mention globally, is unacceptable. He declared that Nigeria cannot be a great nation on the back of poorly trained youths. It is for this reason that the transformation of the nation must start in the classroom. The President charged the universities to lead in fresh thinking that would align their curricula with modern reality to produce graduates with an entrepreneurial mind-set (Ugwu, 2013:8).

This paper, therefore, attempts to assess Nigerian university system vis-a-vis its mandate to be world-class in a rapidly changing world.

## **MATERIALS AND METHOD**

Some basic historical documents were relied upon for purposes of data collection for this study – The 1962-68, the 1970-74, the 1975-80, and 1981-85 national development planning documents; 1984 Bulletin of National Universities Commission (NUC) on Merger of Universities of Technology, 1988 NUC Bulletin on 25 Years of Centralised University Education in Nigeria, 2002 and 2009 Bulletins of Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB), and Ashby Commission Report of 1960

## **MANDATE OF NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY**

In the post-independence era, the development of university education closely followed the evolution of the country from the debris of colonialism, its crisis of underdevelopment and its current transition into corporate, globalised capitalism with its attendant rupture of the general principles of the welfare state. This schema entails a disorderly oscillation between the developmentalist and the entrepreneurial path in the evolution and growth of universities (Abubakar, 2004). In the first place, universities were created to advance themselves in academic programmes, research and innovations towards academic excellence and world-class university status (WCU). The trend today is towards emphasizing reputation and recognition as key performance indicators including ranking of universities as more people struggle for education in this technology-driven orientation (Ugwu, 2013:7).

In direct proportion to this notion of public good, all levels of government – local, state and centre–built and funded educational institutions to actualize the objectives of university education. In 1959, the Nigerian government set up a commission (Ashby Commission) to examine the country's needs for higher level manpower in the following two decades. Consequently, in 1960, the Ashby Commission recommended the establishment of the first generation universities and by 1962, Nigeria had five universities as follows:

- The University of Nigeria, Nsukka was established in 1960 by the then Eastern Regional Government as the first Nigerian initiated university (this was done while the Commission was still at work);
- The University of Ife, Ile-Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University) though not recommended by Ashby Commission, was founded in 1961 by the then government of Western Region;
- The Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria was founded in 1962 by the then Northern Regional Government;
- The University of Ibadan, Ibadan (was a university college from 1948 until the bill making it an autonomous institution was passed in December 1962); and
- University of Lagos, Lagos (1962) (Ayo, 1988:87).

According to Anyebe (2012:125), another relevant recommendation contained in the Ashby Commission Report was that 7,500 students should be enrolled in Nigerian universities by 1970. Actually, the total enrollment in the universities in 1970/71 session was 15,272 distributed as follows: Ahmadu Bello University, 2,689; University of Nigeria 2,929; University of Ife 2,423; University of Ibadan 3,655; and University of Lagos 2,536 (Anyebe, 2012:125). This is far more than the Ashby Commission target. Since then there has been the proliferation of universities in the country leading to a tremendous increase in student enrollment.

## **NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY, 1970-80**

In 1963 when the defunct Mid-Western Region was carved out of the then Western Region, she demanded for a university of her own. However, the Region had to wait till the end of the national crisis in 1970 before getting a university. A new university, the University of Benin, Benin, the sixth in the country, was finally founded in 1972 as an offshoot of the then Mid-West Institute of Technology (Anyebe, 2012:125).

The Third National Development Plan 1975-1980, made provision for the establishment of seven more universities to be located in states where there were none at the time. This gave birth to the second-generation universities in 1975. This was the period in which the multiplication of universities took an amazing turn.

Between 1971 and 1975, all the universities were taken over by the federal government or were voluntarily handed over to it by their respective states purely for reasons of financial incapacity. That was the case for the University of Nigeria, Nsukka and University of Benin, which were handed over to the federal government in 1971 and 1975 respectively. Also, the federal government took over the former regional universities in Ife and Zaria.

The short-lived civilian administration between 1979 and 1983 pursued a policy of fair geographical spread of universities and in the process established seven federal universities of technology in the country. It was projected in the 1981-85 plan that about 108,720 students would be enrolled in the university system by 1985 (Anyebe, 1995:118). It was, therefore, stipulated in the plan document that:

*In order to meet the increased level of demand for university places the existing universities will be expanded, seven new universities of technology and one unconventional university with emphasis on postgraduate studies will be established to cater for the needs of those who are unable to go to conventional universities (Anyebe, 1995:119).*

All the above universities were expected to be established to cater for the projected enrolment of about 108,720 students (Anyebe, 1995). National policy on education also in consonance with the projection in the plan wanted the new universities established to ensure a fair geographical distribution as a means of ensuring national unity. Thus, the universities of technology were sited at Bauchi (in Bauchi State), Makurdi (in Benue State), Yola (in the then Gongola State), Akure (in Ondo State), Owerri (in Imo State), Abeokuta (in Ogun State), and Minna (in Niger State). The National Open University whose bill was passed by the House of Representatives on July 16, 1981, Senate on April 20, 1983 and finally signed into law on July 22, 1983 was sited at Abuja (Anyebe, 1995:127).

Thus, as a result of unplanned development and competition for limited funds from government source the universities' financial capacity withered severely. This development led to an erosion of the staff strength of the older universities as they lost a number of experienced academics and administrators to the new universities. This phase of the evolution of Nigerian university system, unfortunately, marked the steady fall in its world standard rating (Obanya, 2010).

During this period, a strange phenomenon also began to appear and that was the private sector participating in the establishment of universities. The most famous of these was Imo Technical University founded by one Dr. Ukaegbu. When the legality of starting a private university was challenged in the courts, the Supreme Court finally ruled in 1983 that it was perfectly legal for individuals or private concerns to establish private universities or at least that there was nothing in the Constitution and the laws of the country preventing the establishment of private universities. Within six months of this ruling of the Supreme Court, 26 private universities were either established or proposed in the country. This immediately, led to the mushrooming of private universities, established without strict regulatory guidelines.

Faced with what could best be described as an avalanche of universities, the Federal Military Government in June 1984 abolished all private universities and prohibited the

establishment of new ones in the foreseeable future by Decree No. 19 of 1984. The government also merged four of the seven federal universities of technology with some conventional universities while the National Open University was stopped in order to restore some sanity to the system (Anyebe, 1995:127)

The developmentalist project initially designed for Nigerian universities to produce an elite core with the requisite competence and commitment to spear-head the national development plans and thus plays its hegemonic role in ushering the country into modernity was partially successful at least in the production of an elite core especially, between 1960 and 1980 (Abubakar, 2005). Furthermore, the internal situation in the universities was stable because the resources were fairly adequate and the employment climate was dynamic. The series of disruptions, closures, violence, and deaths that characterized students' unionism in the first twenty years of university education mainly emanated from involvement of students in national and international politics. Inspired by ideology of de-colonisation; welfarism; and independence; students' vanguardism sought to protect the privileges of students over funding, welfare, academic freedom while simultaneously opposing neo-colonialism in all its ramifications (Abubakar, 2005).

Also, clashes between universities and the military government began in 1971/72, a year after the end of the civil war. This action bordered on interference with university autonomy which allowed direct appointment of university Vice-Chancellors by the government. Usually, names of three eligible candidates were sent by a joint committee of Senate and Council to the head of state (also called Visitor to the institution), who exercised the right to appoint anyone of the three. The choice has not often been based on purely academic stature and managerial competence, and the process was quietly resisted by academics (Obanya, 2010).

The second clash between the academics and the authorities occurred in 1972/73, when university teachers went on strike and were ordered by government to 'pack and go' from the campuses. While Ibadan academics, like all others in the country, did not quit their jobs, the event brought in discontent and loss of morale to the campus, and this was the beginning of a gradual loss of social prestige for the academic profession in Nigeria.

A third episode was the mass firing of public servant by the military in the late 1975. The military government had earlier assaulted university autonomy by bringing higher institutions within the ambit of the public service. The then Vice Chancellor of Ibadan, an internationally acclaimed surgeon who had earlier pioneered the establishment of the Medical faculty of the University of Lagos, was unceremoniously retired, for reasons that had nothing to do with his academic rating nor his management competence.

A fourth incident that further demoralized academics was the sacking of marxist-oriented lecturers from Nigerian higher institutions in 1978. These lecturers had contributed to raising the level of intellectual discourse on campuses and had always contributed to a rising climate of critical appraisal of the military regime by the wider Nigerian society. Government saw this group as instigators of an academic staff strike that rocked the nation in 1977/78 and ordered their dismissal. Radical scholarship in the country began a steady decline from this period, while the university began to lose its ground as the incubator of ideas (Obanya, 2010).

**NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES, 1980-2014**

From 1980 the number of universities and student enrollment has increased exponentially without a regard to the resource capability of the country. Today, according to NUC sources there are 127 universities including one national open university in Nigeria. The following admission statistics in Table 1 demonstrate the exponential increase in student enrolment from 15,272 in 1970 to 122,492 in 2004/2005 academic session.

**Table1 Admission Statistics in Nigerian Universities (2002– 2008)**

Academic Session	Admission Statistics
2008/2009	NA
2007/2008	107,370
2006/2007	88,524
2005/2006	76,984
2004/2005	122,492
2003/2004	105,157
2002/2003	51,845

Source: [http://www.jambng.com/app\\_ume.php](http://www.jambng.com/app_ume.php)

Table 1 reveals the exponential increase in admission into Nigerian universities (both public and private). From 1999, public policy became favourable towards the establishment of private universities, unlike in the previous decades when it was hostile to their establishment. Even in spite of this expansion, according to UNDP’s Human Development Report, which provides a ranking of 162 nations of the world in terms of human development index, Nigeria, unfavourably features among the 28 ‘low human development’ category (Obanya, 2004). What is responsible for this state of affairs?

The unplanned expansion in the university system maybe an answer to the social demand for university education but we seem to have taken an action which may, in fact, compound the problem that we are supposed to solve. As we move towards mass university education, can we truly say that there is any marriage between our educational system and the industries? The national policy on education is specific in identifying universities as contributors to national development by intensifying and diversifying their programmes for the development of high level manpower within the context of the needs of the nation. The policy also avers that the content of the professional courses in universities should reflect national requirements (Baikie, 2002).

However, Nigerian university system does not appear to be integrated with the economic system of the country, rather the system has developed on its own producing more of the same from the number of universities that there are. We do not seem to have the knowledge or the

strategy to harness the knowledge acquired by the products of the system to promote societal needs. This is not too surprising. The needs of the society were not taken into account when fashioning the curriculum contents of the educational programmes at the university level.

The choice of courses study by students in Nigerian universities provides interesting reading for their diversity. In Ahmadu Bello University, the sample of subjects of choice by direct entry students in 2007/2008 session shows the following profile:

Table 2 Choice of course in Ahmadu Bello University, 2007/2008

Course	No. of Students
Administration	182
Agriculture	29
Arts	241
Education	544
Engineering	60
Environmental Design	30
Law	48
Medicine (MBBS)	27
Pharmaceutical Sciences	20
Science	99
Social Sciences	117
Veterinary Medicine	1

Source: Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria: 2007/2008 Matriculation List

Education (544) tops the list of most preferred course with Arts far second (241). Are the major choices reflective of the needs of the society and or national development? The sciences are way down the ladder and that does not augur well for the scientific development of Nigeria. Courses like pharmaceutical sciences and veterinary medicine had only twenty candidates and one candidate respectively, admitted. The example of this university is not an isolated case; a detail study and analysis of the choice pattern of the Nigerian students for their university education will reveal a great deal about the trend of the thinking of the youths of this country(Baikie, 2002).

What is perhaps the most important point here is that the demands of the world of work are rapidly changing as current developments indicate that what the future would need most is the 'knowledge worker, with flexible and adaptable skills'. Besides, universities should serve as power houses and think tanks for the continuous advancement of knowledge, the generation of

innovative ideas, the development of the minds of the young and the old and continuous engagement in issues concerning the survival of humanity. Any person who has passed through a university would certainly acquire skills, knowledge, and techniques that could be related to job requirement in specific fields of socio-economic endeavour. But it is also important that the institution passes through him. That is the only way in which he could graduate with the tangibles (e.g. certificates which could be ephemeral) together with the intangibles (life-long and life-wide learning skills, an analytical and creative mind, intrapersonal and interpersonal skills) that are more enduring (Obanya, 2004).

This means that a university should not simply feed the factories and the employers of labour. It should instead undertake that task as part of the more all-embracing one of serving the advancement of the entire society by applying its critical and creative arsenals to generating ideas, creating innovative mental and physical tools and training the creative minds needed for the continuous regeneration of society (Anyebe, 2009). The role of university education in the development and growth of a nation is, therefore, critical, self-evident and inescapable.

The paradigm shift from the developmentalist to the entrepreneurial function of university education requires a shift in the managerial sphere. Despite these profound changes and challenges, management has remained in a state of flux in Nigerian universities. What thus exists is an unhealthy marriage of the old and anticipated, a new wine in an old, cracked bottle, not just spilling but exploding. The universities are often characterized by outmoded operational processes and management structures.

This unhealthy marriage in the Nigerian university system became noticeable in the ethical and leadership indiscipline displayed by university administrators who have emerged on the landscape of university governance. This must have prompted Baikie (2002) to assert that the situation has led to such acts as examination malpractices, ethnicity, religious bigotry, cultism, sexual harassment, strikes, and corruption on our university campuses. Today, the university system is contending with very many problematic issues which take too much of the little time available at the expense of promoting excellence in the academic programmes of the institutions. These include inadequate teaching and learning facilities; very poor academic preparation of the entrant to the university; dearth of senior academics in the system; ethnicity, leading to in-breeding in terms of composition of staff and students; the effect of unionism on the stability of the system; examination malpractices; sex abuse; decline in staff training programmes; religious bigotry; politicisation of academic leadership in departments and faculties; issues related to the appointment of vice-chancellors; financial squeeze; and cultism and secret societies.

Some of the stark realities being faced in Nigeria today on the expansion in university education are not any different from those faced by other parts of the world. Thus, everywhere in the world, there was rising social demand for higher education. The responses to this challenge came in a variety of forms:

- Great Britain at first expanded the 'red brick' universities and later transformed its polytechnics and colleges of education into universities. The process was followed by increased 'vocationalisation' of higher education.
- The United States of America responded by expanding its two-year community college system, in addition to encouraging private higher education, for which that country is well-known.



- Most of Western Europe, especially France, Italy, Spain and Portugal carried out reforms which ensured that expansion of higher education went along with greater devolution of responsibilities to decentralized educational authorities (like the ‘Academies’ in France).
- The countries of South-East Asia expanded their national systems in phases, with heavy reliance on the practice of ‘corporate partnerships’.
- A country like Cuba was able to take the challenge in its stride by building everything into its communist style ‘command economy’ (Obanya, 2004).

South Africa has aligned the technikons and the colleges of education with universities in an attempt to expand access.

## **FINDINGS**

The major findings of this study include:

- There was a proliferation of universities leading to an exponential increase in student enrollment.
- There was inadequate funding of universities.
- There was instability in the university system.
- Nigerian universities are not yet world-class universities.

## **DISCUSSION**

One inevitable price a nation may pay for unprecedented explosion in student enrollment at the university level, especially if this explosion is not accompanied by a corresponding improvement in facilities, quality of teachers, teaching materials etc., is dilution of quality of graduates. The explosion may adversely affect the quality of the graduates if the university system is not prepared to cope with situation (Anyebe, 2012).

Another area of worry is the phenomenon of heavy in-breeding in terms of composition of staff and students. Take for example, in the University of Ibadan in 1983/84, according to available reports, there were 307 foreign students out of total enrolment of 12,132 (2.5%) in 1983/84. In 1984/85 out of a total of 13,862 students, 2.3% were foreign nationals, with Cameroun, Ghana and India accounting for the bulk. Indigenes of Nigeria’s South-West accounted for 37% of the student body in 1983/84 and 38% in 1984/85. The situation became so unsatisfactory in 2007/2008 that, out of 1,197 of the academic staff, 1,193 were Nigerians. Only four were non-Nigerians. 45 (or 0.02%) of the 18,843 students enrolled in the same session were non-Nigerians. In fact 12,863 of the students (68%) were indigenes of South-West geo-political zone of Nigeria, where the University is located. No wonder, a literary giant, Professor NiyiOgundare, lamented at a valedictory lecture in 2005 that, ‘the universe had been taken out of the University’ (Obanya, 2010). This situation applies to all Nigerian universities in varying degrees.

One reason for limited number of foreign scholars in Nigerian university system, according to the National President of Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), is poor funding (Halidu, 2014). Unfortunately for Nigerian universities, the weight of foreign (or international)

students and researchers is being taunted as a feature of the world's most highly rated universities. Some one-third of the academic staff of three most highly rated universities: Harvard, Cambridge and Oxford is made of internationals, while the international student strength is approximately one-fifth. This must have led Salmi to conclude that unquestionably, the world's best universities enroll and employ large numbers of foreign students and faculty in their search for the best talent (Salmi, 2008).

The expansion of universities in Nigeria without necessary funds has brought about dearth of other resources and facilities. Unavailable and run-down physical infrastructure, inadequate laboratories and ill-equipped libraries are contributory factor to the decline in the university educational system. For example, the rot in the University of Ibadan has been summarized by a former Vice-Chancellor of the University in the following words:

At the onset of my tenure (in 2000), student population was 24,569. This was far in excess of the carrying capacity of the University. It put a lot of strain on the facilities available for teaching and accommodation. The classrooms and halls of residence were seriously congested. The halls were populated by criminals and prostitutes, many of whom were non-students. In fact, the University could not identify its own students, as there were fake students with fake matriculation numbers. There also gross indiscipline among members of staff, both academic and non-teaching. Some lecturers were feeding fat on sale of hand-outs and committed all forms of sharp practices, including sexual harassment, upgrading of marks for financial rewards, late grading of examination scripts, late submission of marks and late resumption of teaching at the beginning of each semester. Both academic and non-academic staff were involved in admission scandals. With regard to the provision municipal services, the picture was no less gruesome (Obanya, 2010).

This is further illustrated by the Report of the Committee on Needs Assessment of Nigerian Public Universities in 2012 which revealed that:

Less than 10% of Nigerian public universities have video conference facility, less than 20% of these universities use interactive boards; more than 50% don't use public address system in overcrowded lecture rooms/theatres. Internet services are non-existent or epileptic and slow in 99% of Nigerian public universities. Library resources are outdated and manually operated and as such no university library is fully automated. 76% of these universities use well as source of water, 45% use pit latrine, 67% of students use bush as toilet, 77% of these universities can be classified as glorified secondary schools (Halidu, 2014).

This discussion simply illustrates that one intractable problem facing Nigerian universities today is the issue of funding. Initially, the funding was fairly adequate mainly because the universities were few with low student enrollments. For example, Onyeonoru (2012) observed that from the beginning in 1962, there was no substantial difference each year between the amount requested by the Ahmadu Bello University authority and the amount received from the Northern Regional Government. In fact, there were years in which the amount received was

slightly more than the amount requested. Ukeje reiterated that the year 1975 marked the beginning of the problem of university funding in Nigeria. After the 1975/76 session, for the first time Ahmadu Bello University recorded a short fall of 20% in the amount requested, and since then the funding has been on the decline (Halidu, 2014). This change was as a result of the increase in the number of staff and students. Take for example, the recurrent allocations for the University of Benin for 1978/79, which was about ₦9 million, and compare it with the 1982/83 allocations, which was about ₦22.3 million, one would be struck by the apparent large increase in the allocation. It should be noted that these allocations fell short of the minimum requirements (Baikie, 2002).

No wonder some university administrators declared that measures to promote higher education and improve the quality of university education to meet the challenges of a constantly changing environment are often constrained by under-funding and inadequate resources (Akinkugbe, 2001, Nwaka, 2000, and Ajani, 1999).

Indeed, the period, 1980-2014 is characterized by phenomenal expansion of university education. This expansion, inevitably has posed serious challenges such as inadequate funding and the overstretching of limited facilities and these in turn have generated a series of crises in the system. For example, from Abuja Metro investigations, the nation's university system has lost close to three years to strike in 14 years. It is a total of about 33 months, and 15 days (Emewu, 2013).

This situation is a contrast to the picture of what Salmi (2008) describes as world –class institution:

The highest ranked universities are the ones that make significant contributions to the advancement of knowledge through research, teach with the most innovative curricula and pedagogical methods under most conducive circumstances, make research an integral component of undergraduate teaching and produce graduates who stand out because of their success in intensely competitive arenas during their education and, more importantly, after graduation. It is these concrete accomplishments and the international reputation associated with these sustained achievements that make these institutions world-class.

All these issues have been allowed to develop into complexities which are really destabilizing the internal tranquility of the university system. Unfortunately, the resolution of this issues is nowhere in sight and they have remained permanent features in the calendar of activity of universities in Nigeria.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

One inescapable conclusion from the findings of this paper is that the aspiration of Nigerian universities to be world-class is yet to be achieved because of many challenges facing the system. This aspiration should have been accompanied by a profound change in the university curriculum.

Thus, any attempt to reposition the Nigerian university system must include systematic and planned development of the sector. This is the real area of attention and would involve a number of specific activities, one of which would be an effective evaluation of the current state of university education, including an assessment of the country's capacity to bear its current university education burden. Overstretching of facilities as a result of rapid explosion in student enrollment is a major crisis in our universities. The situation can be seen from several dimensions:

- Some programmes (mainly in the Humanities) are over-subscribed, while several others (particularly the natural sciences and technology) are under-subscribed.
- The universities are bursting at the seams, while non-university tertiary institutions are not attracting a sufficiently large number of students.

The question then, is whether to retain the existing three-tier system of university education. South Africa has already taken a hard decision of aligning the technikons and the colleges of education with the universities. This development deserves very close monitoring, as the view that non-university tertiary institutions are needed for the 'production of middle-level manpower' no longer seems to have the currency it had in the 1990s. The new experiment in South Africa has however not got to the level at which anyone can confidently say 'go ye and do likewise'.

Nigerian universities need to review their curricula and the following areas are in need of actions:

- Internal management processes and structures that eliminate waste, promote and reward innovations. This will involve instilling an inquiring, innovative and entrepreneurial frame of mind in students and staff.
- Curriculum reforms that promote the inculcation of the generic skills (communication, inter-personal skills, adaptability, IT-fluency, creativity and lifelong learning skills so valued in today's knowledge economy), while de-emphasizing narrow and premature specialization. This will involve regularly evaluating and continuously improving and renewing university programmes, practices, procedures, and systems.
- Aligning teaching, research and service functions with the needs of the immediate society – being practically involved in thematic and problem-oriented societal/human activities and generating/disseminating knowledge from these to enrich the world pool of knowledge.

Nigerian universities would have to acquire the major tools of internationalization – ICT, which must become a 'management, learning, and research tool'. With appropriately developed ICT capacity, our universities would be reducing the time and space that have separated them for too long from the world epicentres of internationalization.

Nigerian university system should be run on a stable path by ensuring that:

- persons appointed to leadership positions in the governance and management of the university system respect fundamental academic nature, goals and aspirations of the system;
- peace is nurtured and advanced in the university system so that we can have a good student graduation rate and in record time; and
- appreciation and understanding for diversity is cultivated actively, differing perspectives arising from diverse backgrounds and cultures enrich academic debate and institutional life, give rise to new questions, deepen scholarly inquiry, and build tolerance.

Finally and very important too, Nigerian university should develop and sustain the financial capacity to support its academic objective by:

- careful financial and general management of the university;
- reorganizing and refocusing the university's existing sources of revenue;
- exploring new sources of revenue e.g. endowment, organized fund raising and virile alumni;
- exploiting the economic value of its assets, including intellectual property;
- using its resources effectively and efficiently; and
- utilizing partnerships and establishing linkages and collaboration, wherever academically appropriate.

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