

## **REFLECTIONS ON THE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF UNIVERSITY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA**

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**Abstract.** The year 1948 marked the start of university education in the University College, Ibadan, Nigeria. High demand for university education and the need to produce the much-needed high-level manpower for the newly independent nation, made the federal and regional governments to found additional four new universities in the 1960's bringing the number to five. The federal and state governments established more universities in the 1970's and subsequent decades in answer to further request for university education. Private universities started to appear since late 1990's. As of now, there are 117 universities owned by the federal government, state governments and private individuals and corporate bodies. In the first four decades (1948 – 1988), the quality of the nation's university education was quite very good. Afterwards, the university education system derailed, so to speak, as a result of myriads of problems prominent ones being inadequate financing and erosion of university autonomy. To get the system back on track once again,

the government must display genuine interest towards it by funding it appropriately and allowing it to enjoy considerable autonomy.

*Keywords:* university education, administration, funding, planning

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## **Introduction**

The first institution of higher learning in Nigeria, ever to be organized with different departments located at one centre, was the Higher College, Yaba. It was established in 1930. Its first group of students, forty-one altogether, was admitted in 1932. The foundation academic staff comprised the principal, eight Europeans and two Africans. The different courses run in the college were: agriculture, commerce, engineering, forestry, medicine, secondary school teacher training, surveying, and veterinary science.

It was the dream of the college's founding fathers of "the time when it will be possible for men and women to obtain at Yaba external degrees of a British University."<sup>1)</sup> This wish, as we shall soon see, never materialized, however.

Two different Commissions—the *Commission on Higher Education in West Africa* and the *Commission on Higher Education in the Colonies*—are of interest to us. They were both set up by the British Government, through the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Colonel the Right Honourable Oliver Stanley, in 1943.

The *Commission on Higher Education in West Africa* was founded in June 1943. Its chairman was the Right Honourable Walter Elliot. Its terms of reference were: "To report on the organization and facilities of the existing centres of higher education in British West Africa, and to make recommendation regarding future university development in that area."<sup>2)</sup> The fourteen-member commission agreed on the need for the extension of higher education and of university development in West Africa but disagreed on the number of

universities to be set up. Consequently, nine of the members—all the three West Africans inclusive—signed and issued a Majority Report whereas the rest five members submitted a Minority Report. The former proposed the founding of three separate university colleges one of which would be for Nigeria. The latter recommended the establishment of only one institution of university rank and should be situated in Ibadan, Nigeria. Interestingly, the two reports, submitted in June 1945, favoured Nigeria.

The *Commission on Higher Education in the Colonies*, was set up in August 1943. Its members were Mr. Justice Cyril Asquith (chairman), and sixteen others. The Commission was set up essentially “To consider the principles which should guide the promotion of higher education, learning and research and the development of universities in the colonies; and to explore means whereby universities and other appropriate bodies in the United Kingdom may be able to co-operate with institutions of higher education in the colonies in order to give effect to these principles.”<sup>3)</sup> Three of its recommendations are: setting up universities, as soon as possible, in areas not served by an existing university; taking the first step of founding university colleges; and the establishment of an *Inter-University Council for Higher Education in the Colonies*.<sup>3)</sup> The commission submitted its report in May 1945.

Some important efforts are worthy of note. First, the implementation of the recommendations of the *Commission on Higher Education in West Africa* and the *Commission on Higher Education in the Colonies*. Second, the huge amount of money, one million, five hundred thousand Pounds, was made available by the Colonial Development and Welfare Fund (Taiwo, 1980; Omolewa, 1975). These marked the process of bringing university education into the country.

*Inter-University Council for Higher Education in the Colonies* recommended that the Yaba Higher College be transferred to Ibadan. The council’s five-man delegation, led by Sir William Hamilton-Fyfe, was in Nigeria in

December 1946. It ensured the successful establishment of the university college.

### **Emergence and growth of universities in Nigeria**

On 8th May, 1947, the Secretary of State for the Colonies appointed Dr. Kenneth Mellanby as the principal-designate of the University College, Ibadan. He arrived in the country on 13th July, 1947. He took over the Higher College, Yaba, and made arrangement for its transfer to Ibadan. The Higher College, Yaba, which started in 1932, thus lasted for just one and a half decades. In December 1947, the Higher College—its furniture items, equipment, fixtures and fittings, one hundred and four students, library of some ten thousand volumes and staff—was moved to Ibadan and became the nucleus of the University College, Ibadan.

Academic activities started at the University College, Ibadan, in January 1948. Thirteen members of staff taught the first set of students numbering, as just pointed out in the last paragraph, one hundred and four, studying intermediate science, surveying, teacher training programme and intermediate arts. In February 1948, the London University began the operation of its special relationship scheme with Ibadan.

In April 1959, the federal government appointed the *Commission on Post-School Certificate and Higher Education in Nigeria*. It was “to conduct an investigation into Nigeria’s needs in the field of post-school certificate and higher education over the next twenty years.”<sup>4)</sup> The nine-member commission comprised: Sir Eric Ashby (chairman), two other British, three Americans and three Nigerians. Prof. Frederick Harbison, a renowned economist, was one of the five experts who rendered invaluable assistance to the commission.

The commission recommended, in part, that university development should be planned in a way that the student population would not be less than 7,500 by 1970 with a noticeable increase beyond that figure during 1970-80

period. It advised the Nigerian government to give full support to the growth of the new University of Nigeria, Nsukka, and take steps toward the creation of a university in the northern region with its headquarters at Zaria, and another one at Lagos. A member of the commission, Dr. Sanya Onabamiro—the Honourable Minister of Education, Western Region—expressed a reservation on the report of the commission. According to him, the western regional government too should have its own university.

On 7th October, 1960, the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, established on 18th May, 1955, formally opened its gates to students. In 1962, other universities joined the list. These were: the University of Northern Nigeria (later known as the Ahmadu Bello University), which officially started academic business on 4th October, 1962; the University of Lagos, that formally opened same 4th October, 1962; and the University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University), which officially started academic business on 27th October, 1962. At the close of 1962, 27th December to be precise, the Federal Parliament passed a bill establishing the University of Ibadan. This enactment made it possible for Ibadan to attain full independence and autonomy and thereby end the fourteen-year special relationship with the London University. Universities of Ibadan and Lagos were established and owned by the federal government. The rest: Universities of Nigeria, Northern Nigeria, and Ife, were founded and owned by Eastern, Northern and Western Regional Governments. The year 1962 equally marked the birth of the National Universities Commission (NUC).

Which of the universities was, indeed, the nation's oldest? Answer to this question depends on which side of the coin one looks at. Some answer with a simple "the University of Nigeria." On the one side of the coin, it may be argued that though the University College, Ibadan, and the University of Ibadan may look alike, they are not exactly same. The graduates of the University College, Ibadan, were awarded the degrees of London University. The

University of Ibadan was actually brought to birth in 1962 much after the establishment of four other full-fledged universities—of which the University of Nigeria was first—that could award their own degrees. This logic would place the University of Ibadan as the fifth. On the other hand, many may answer the question by saying “University of Ibadan.” Such people, looking at the other side of the coin, may argue that University of Ibadan was first as its year of establishment—1948—is recognized at home and abroad. More importantly, no one will dispute the fact that Ibadan—where the University of Ibadan is domiciled—was the cradle of university education in Nigeria.

Standard of education at all the five first-generation universities was, indisputably, very high. The quality of their products was quite good. Within a very short period, the institutions became famous in Nigeria and, indeed, in the entire world. Good as the quality of the graduates was, the quantity produced was still grossly inadequate to satisfy the manpower resource needs of a new nation.

The report of the *Commission on Post-School Certificate and Higher Education in Nigeria* had significant effect on university education in Nigeria during the period of 1960-80. Ten years after independence, i.e. 1970, the Mid-Western Region founded the Mid-West Institute of Technology. Two years later, i.e. 1972, this institution of higher learning metamorphosed into the University of Benin. This made the number of the nation’s universities to rise to six.

In August 1972, the federal government made the following policy statement:

“The Supreme Military Council has decided that the Federal Government should henceforth assume full responsibility for higher education throughout the country, with the proviso that the *status quo* in respect of the existing universities should be maintained. . . . It also decided that education, other than higher education, should become the concurrent responsibility of

both the federal and state governments, and be transferred to the concurrent legislative list.”<sup>5)</sup>

Curiously, though, the University of Nigeria and the University of Benin, which, already were having financial difficulties, were taken over by the federal government in April 1973 and April 1975, respectively. In April 1975, the federal government established six new universities. These were: University of Calabar, University of Ilorin, University of Jos, University of Maiduguri, University of Port-Harcourt, and University of Sokoto (known presently as Usman Dan Fodio University). In the same year, University of Kano (now Bayero University, Kano) was also founded. Universities of Calabar, Jos, Maiduguri and Sokoto started as full-fledged institutions. On the other hand, Universities of Ilorin, Kano and Port-Harcourt were, at a time, under a special relationship with the older Universities of Ibadan, Zaria and Lagos, respectively. *The seven sisters of 1975*, as these institutions of higher learning were called, began serious academic work at the beginning of the 1977/78 session. The federal government acquired the Ahmadu Bello University and the University of Ife, the remaining two regional universities, by fiat, in August 1975 in the spirit of federalization of all the universities in Nigeria. As at 1st October, 1977, the Nigerian nation had thirteen good universities. In the following year, i.e., 1978, the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) was created.

During the Second Republic (1st October, 1979 – 31st December, 1983), education, including higher education, was placed in the concurrent legislative list in the constitution. This made it possible to reverse the federal government policy of 1972 and both federal and state governments were now free to establish and maintain their own universities.

Between 1980 and 1983, the central government gave approval for the establishment of seven universities of technology and equally founded the National Open University. In addition, she planned to have at least one federal

university located in each state. Different states of the then 19-state structure too established their own universities. Some of them were: Anambra, Bendel, Cross River, Imo, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo and Rivers. The states' double-barreled motives were: to take care of their academically qualified indigenes who could not be given places in the federal universities and, in addition and more importantly, train their much-needed high-level manpower. In the early 1980's there were twenty-eight federal and state universities while twenty-four private universities were already in the pipeline (Oni, 1997).

The military staged a come back on 1st January, 1984. In the following month, the federal government closed down the National Open University as well as all the private universities. In addition, federal universities at Abeokuta, Bauchi, Makurdi and Yola were, in October 1984, merged with Universities of Lagos, Ahmadu Bello, Jos and Maiduguri, respectively. Four years later, i.e. 1988, the federal government demerged the four new universities. Those at Bauchi and Yola were re-founded and known as the Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University, Bauchi, and the Federal University of Tehnology, Yola. Those at Abeokuta and Markurdi were changed to Universities of Agriculture. In 1989, the federal government gave approval for the founding of the Oyo State University of Technology (later changed to Ladoke Akintola University of Technology).

The federal government appointed, in 1990, the *Commission on Review of Higher Education in Nigeria*. Its long list of terms of reference covers administration, enrolment, staffing and funding of higher education, amongst others. The 19-member commission was led by Chief Gray A. E. Longe. The commission's recommendations include the following: university should provide people of special qualification and motivation; and undertake periodic reviews of programmes and activities in order to meet national priority goals as defined from time to time.<sup>6)</sup>



In 1991, Nigeria became a federation of thirty states. There were a number of innovations between 1991 and 1997 including the federal government take-over of the Cross-River State University, Uyo, and renaming it University of Uyo, and the different states either changing the names of their former universities or splitting the institutions in order to meet the reality on ground.

Between 1948 and 1997, a period of five decades, Nigeria had thirty-six universities owned and administered by the federal and state governments. Since the return to civil rule in 1999, however, eighty-one new universities have joined the ranks. Eleven of them—of which nine were established this year—are federal universities; twenty-five are state universities and the rest forty-five are private universities.

Private universities first emerged in the early 1980's. As pointed out above, the military effectively scuttled the innovation in 1984. Fifteen years later, licenses were granted to individuals, religious groups and corporate organizations to establish private universities. Babcock University, Igbinedion University and Madona University, all established in 1999, were the first to emerge (Ajadi, 2010).

Presently, the nation has one hundred and seventeen (117) universities.<sup>7)</sup> These can be categorized in terms of proprietorship—federal, state and private; type—conventional, specialized (defence academy, open university, universities of agriculture, universities of education, university of petroleum resources, universities of science and technology, and universities of technology); and age—old and new.

Uninterestingly, though, none of the 117 is in the first ten in Africa. According to Ranking Web of World Universities, the University of Ilorin, which is Nigeria's first, is ranked 20th in the continent and 2,668th in the world; followed by the University of Jos which is placed in the 42nd position in Africa and 4,087th in the world which, in turn, is followed by the Universi-

ty of Nigeria, Nsukka which comes 54th in the continent and 5,176th in the world. The University of Lagos comes 58th in Africa and 5,253rd in the world.<sup>8)</sup>

As the number of universities in Nigeria grew, there was also corresponding growth in the number of students interested in studying in them. As at 1960, the University College, Ibadan, had 1,136 students. Two years later, the nation's five universities had 3,681 students. During the 1977/78 academic year, there were in all the thirteen universities 46,684 learners. By 1989/90 session, the number of universities and their student population were put at 31 and 180,871, respectively.<sup>9,6)</sup>

Admittedly, there has been tremendous growth in the number of universities; the increase is hardly commensurate with development. The nation now boasts 117 universities yet a high number of applicants cannot be admitted into them. According to Prof. Peter Okebukola, 800,000 Unified Tertiary and Matriculation Examination (UTME) candidates will not get admissions into the country's universities due to limited spaces and would have to roam the streets at the end of the 2010/2011 admission.<sup>10)</sup> Clearly, this disclosure by the immediate past Executive Secretary of NUC is a subject of concern.

### **Issues**

Many candidates seeking few spaces in the university is a problem. The problem, however, is not new. Right from the infancy of the University College, Ibadan, the yearly intake of students was low. This problem, amongst others, resulted in the men of the press and the nationalists criticizing the new institution of higher learning. They registered their displeasure and branded the university college as too elitist and conservative.

In an attempt to solve the problem, additional universities have been established over the decades. As pointed out above, the federal government established nine universities this year alone. Good as the number is, however,

the carrying capacity of these fourth-generation federal universities is pegged at 500 students per session. According to Prof. Ruqayyatu Ahmed Rufa'i: "The issue of carrying capacity is a directive because we do not intend to have more than we can carry. Actually, we want to start with 100 or 200 per session so that by the time the universities are on full stream, we do not intend to have more than 500 students per session." The rationale, as said by the Minister of Education, is "to have control so that we can have more effective teaching and quality graduates in these institutions."<sup>11)</sup>

The 800,000 candidates who cannot get admissions into the university this year, as mentioned in the last two paragraphs but one, are fairly large in number. That the youths will have to wander aimlessly as they will not be admitted into the universities is not in the best interest of the nation.

Social demand approach to educational planning charges the educational authorities with providing schools and facilities for all learners who demand admission and who are qualified to enter institutions of learning. In other words, it takes the view that demand for education should be met by planning to make educational facilities available to those who want it. Clearly, the country needs many more universities to take care of all those who are interested in university education and are really qualified for admission.

That a student has met the prerequisite conditions for admission, however, does not necessarily mean that he is, indeed, qualified for university education. This is because there are "examination centres nationwide variously called "miracle," "magic," "special" and identified to be promoting examination malpractices."<sup>11)</sup>

An examination is supposed to screen. The *National Policy on Education* indicates, in unambiguous language, that students who complete junior secondary school are, based on the result of tests to determine academic ability, aptitude and vocational interest, to be streamed into the senior secondary school, the technical college, an out-of-school vocational training centre, and

an apprenticeship scheme.<sup>12)</sup> If the junior secondary school continuous assessment and examination discriminate properly, who knows, many of the 800 000 candidates might not have gone beyond that level let alone qualify to write UTME examination in the first instance. The fear of their constituting themselves public nuisance would, therefore, not have arisen. Interestingly, the government, through the Minister of Education, has given a directive to a Federal Government committee called the *Implementation Committee on Release My Result* to blacklist the “examination centres for public examinations like JAMB NECO, NABTEB and WASCE and the GCE where candidates are guaranteed success in these examinations irrespective of their capabilities or levels of preparation.”<sup>11)</sup>

Proliferation of illegal universities is another issue of concern. It has assumed a new dimension. As at March, 2010, Prof. Julius Okojie, the Executive Secretary of NUC, did say that thirty-four universities were operating illegally in Nigeria. They are unlawful as they do not have the pre-requisite federal government approval.<sup>7)</sup> These included satellite or offshore campuses of foreign universities operating in the country and private institutions established by rich individuals and religious organizations. These institutions are neither recognized by NUC nor listed by JAMB. They only admit candidates who had a level of minimum pass in UTME but could not meet the cut-off of other universities.

Poor orientation of many Nigerians that university is the ultimate destination for every student may be a factor responsible for the mushrooming of illegal universities. Everyone is desperate to have a space in the university. Since the public and legal private universities cannot cope with the ever-increasing demand for university admissions, illegal universities have appeared to fill the gap.

Needless to say, unlawful universities serve no good, whatsoever. On the one hand, it is sheer waste of resources—money and time—on the part of

the beneficiaries of such university education. They cannot, on completion of their studies, be conscripted for the one-year compulsory National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) scheme. Since participation in the NYSC programme is a prerequisite condition for admission into postgraduate programmes and/or employment, the graduates of the unrecognized institutions cannot further their studies or gain employment in Nigeria. Their degrees and other qualifications, therefore, are worthless as they are not recognized at home and abroad for whatever purpose. On the other hand, the illegal universities dent the image of the country.

It is good that the NUC has alerted the general public of the existence of the illegal universities and the danger posed by them. Equally commendable, the commission ensured closing down seven other illegal universities operating in the country and was on with investigations and court cases against nine others.<sup>13)</sup> With religious zeal on the part of the commission and the cooperation of all Nigerians, it will be possible to get rid of all unauthorized universities in the country.

Inadequate financing is equally a problem plaguing university education in Nigeria. As indicated in the chronicle, one of the reasons for taking over University of Nigeria and the University of Benin, by the federal government, was the institutions' poor financial situation. The federal government could do this with ease in the 1970's, and even establish new universities, as a result of fewer number of institutions of higher learning and federal government relative comfort during this period. In the 1980's, however, things started to change for the worse. During 1981/82 academic session, the recurrent grants to all federal universities were # 339 million, and the student population was 82,952. In 1985/86 academic year, the grants increased to # 479 million, representing 41% and student enrolment too went up by 45% from 82,952 to 120,201. By this, grant per student declined from # 4087 dur-

ing 1981/82 academic session to # 3985 in 1985/86.<sup>14)</sup> The situation was not better either as regards capital grants.

An erstwhile Vice-Chancellor of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Prof. 'Wande Abimbola, summed up the ugly situation of poor financing of university education in Nigeria as follows: "More than ever before in the history of higher education in Nigeria, the university is going through a period of financial crisis which threatens the survival of the system. This financial crisis is a result of the general expenditure squeeze of the federal government due to the declining fortunes of the Nigerian economy. In a situation where the government is the main financier of the universities, the declining fortune of the government is bound to reflect on the university system."

This deteriorating financial situation of the universities has assumed such a pathetic dimension that many universities now find it difficult to pay staff salaries. As a result of declining revenue, essential materials for learning and day-to-day running of the universities are now in short supply. It has also become impossible to make money available for research and attendance at learned conferences. The driving wheels of the university system are gradually grinding to a halt.<sup>14)</sup>

In order to rescue the system, the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) had, from time to time, waged decisive wars against the government. In 1992, for instance, the university teachers went on strike for weeks. They were victorious as an agreement between the federal government and the university lecturers was signed on 3rd September, 1992. The agreement covered: funding of universities, especially the provision of Restoration Grant for the rehabilitation of all universities in Nigeria, university autonomy and academic freedom, and salary and non-salary conditions of service. The breaching of the September 1992 agreement by the federal government, uninterestingly, resulted in the resumption, on May 3rd, 1993, of the suspended strike. Ever since, ASUU has embarked on series of strikes. It was on strike in 1994

for increase in salary; in 1995 for the review of the 1992 agreement; in 1996 for the recall of its dismissed president, Dr Assisi Asobie, and the need to review the 1992 agreement; and in 1999 it was on strike for five months which led to the constitution of a federal government negotiating team to negotiate on salaries, wages and conditions of service in the system leading to signing an agreement same year. This millennium, hardly will a year pass by without the union going on strike, either at the national level, i.e. involving all the universities, or at the local level whereby one or a few universities are involved.

Each time ASUU was on strike, academic activities would naturally stop. The other groups in the university system: the administrative staffs whose union is Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities (SSANU) and the non-teaching staff who are members of the Non-Academic Staff Union (NASU) and the National Association of Academic Technologists (NAAT), too have cried loud and clear over inadequate funding; salaries and allowances, non-implementation of agreement; etc. Most of the times, upon the resumption of work by ASUU, these other groups—agitating for parity in salaries and allowances—would resume strike thereby leading to paralysis of effective teaching and learning.

Disruption of academic activities in the university system is caused not only by the members of staff. Since the 1970's, the university system has witnessed closures caused by the students. Of the many instances, two will suffice. In 1978, students demonstrated against new lodging fee and feeding charge introduced by the federal government. The attendant results of the nationwide demonstration were: loss of some of them; closure of all universities; and the proscription of their union—National Unions of Nigerian Students (NUNS). In 1986 during the students' commemorative anniversary of their 1978 dead colleagues, there was another nationwide students' unrest. The protests left behind them tales of woes: students were shot, maimed and four killed; men in uniform hurt; and the universities, as well as some other institu-

tions of higher learning, closed down. Their association, National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS), was sunk into oblivion by the federal government. Apart from these nation-wide student protests, individual universities have not known peace for several years now. The truth is that private universities have, in spite of their high tuition fees and other charges, thrived as a result of societal preference for them as the problem of incessant closures, peculiar with public universities, is alien to them.

University education in Nigeria has suffered from unstable political system. Very few people, if any, who are very familiar with the Nigerian political history, will agree that the nation has enjoyed stable political conditions. Over a long period, the political system has been inherently unpredictable. Unsettled political condition and/or premature or forceful termination of governments are serious political constraints on the success of planning for any sector especially education.

Between 1966 and 1999, government changed hands among eleven personalities, eight of whom were military personnel and the rest three being civilians. During the period, the country witnessed not less than ten different coups. Three of the rulers—Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, Major General Johnson T. U. Aguiyi-Ironsi and General Murtala Ramat Muhammed—were assassinated while in office. Sir Balewa was the first prime minister of Nigeria from 1960 to 1966 (a period of six years); Major General Aguiyi-Ironsi was a leader between 15th January, 1966 and 29th July, 1966 (less than seven months); and General Muhammed was Head of State between 29th July, 1975 and 13th February, 1976 (a duration of about six months). The ninth personality to rule the country, Chief Ernest Sonekan, assumed the coveted position neither through the ballot box nor through coup d'état. He was in office between 26th August, 1993 and 17th November, 1993 (about three months).

The national crises of 1960's snowballed, in the long run, into a 30-month old civil war. The crises affected all the five universities. University



of Nigeria, Nsukka, however, bore the greater burden. The military leaders of the erstwhile Eastern Nigeria used the university campus as a military bastion. Admittedly, the federal government directed its soldiers to leave the university intact; the federal troops were forced to open fire on the campus to ferret out the rebel soldiers. As a result some damage was done to the buildings. (Fafunwa, 1971). During the war, all the attention was shifted and resources diverted at security and defence.

Instability in the political system has also been noticed in inconsistencies in policies. In the early 1960's, the different regional governments founded and funded their own universities. As indicated above, these universities were taken over by the federal government between 1973 and 1975. Before the conclusion of the decade, precisely 1979, higher education was placed in the concurrent legislative list thereby allowing different states to establish and run their own universities. In another instance, when the military returned to power in 1984, the General Muhammadu Buhari-led administration shut the National Open University and the private universities and merged four universities with older ones. Four years later, the same military, though under the leadership of General Ibrahim Babangida, demerged the four new universities. Presently, the nation has an open university and private universities. Clearly, the arbitrary changes in policy were a reflection of the unstable polity.

During the long rule of military, erosions of university autonomy as well as curtailment of academic freedom were well pronounced. As good as JAMB and NUC—in charge of conducting entry examinations into the nation's universities and ensuring quality in the Nigerian university system, respectively—are, their assigned roles tend to interfere with the statutory functions of the Nigerian universities and, by extension, erode the universities' autonomy. Over the years, the problem of the merger of political and technical decisions and the nature of the political leadership has affected the nation's university education.

At a lecture entitled: *Descent into Barbarism: The End of the Collegial,* Prof. Wole Soyinka presented a picture of the Nigerian university system. He did say that “it was unfortunate to see university campuses turned into barbarian jungles where some vice-chancellors even engaged the services of cult members for sinister assignments.” He added: “the equipment is not there, the chemicals are not available for science students. Books are not in the libraries. Hostel facilities are over-stretched. . . . Yet, people are being graduated every year despite the most crippling circumstances in these institutions.” The society is thus raising a generation of ignorant and illiterate youths.<sup>15)</sup> Clearly, there are serious problems confronting the university system.

### **The way forward**

The Nobel Laureate, Prof. Soyinka, did not stop at showing that the system is thoroughly rotten. He went a step further to recommend a way out of the woods. In order to accomplish total reconstruction and rejuvenation, he suggested that the nation’s universities should be shut for at least a year and a panel “set up to look into university courses, the situation in the libraries and laboratories, while a disciplinary structure should be integrated into the tertiary institutions.”<sup>15)</sup> The call for one-year closure of all the universities has not been obeyed.

Perhaps the first and tallest hurdle to scale is the nation ensuring relative stability. If the macro-system stabilizes, all other things will be in shape. The micro-system i.e. the university system, will become normal. The polity will enjoy comparative security and calmness if everybody plays his own role effectively well. Much progress will be made if those in leadership positions have the interest of the nation at heart and, at the same time, the followers make their contributions.

Shutting the universities down for twelve calendar months would make meaning only if serious efforts are made to address the different problems militating against the survival of the university system. The determined efforts should start with the issue of adequate financing. To have quality university education, the system must have enough funding. According to a Pro-Chancellor and Chairman, Osun State University Governing Council, Prof. Okebukola, all the proprietors of the universities in Nigeria would need to invest #837 billion in one decade in the education sector so as to make it possible to have increased enrolment in the nation's institutions of higher learning.<sup>10)</sup>

Much earlier, 26% of government annual budgetary provision as minimum allocation to the education sector has been set as the benchmark by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Etsu Ndayako Review Committee on Higher Education recommended 30% and a one-time Head of State, General Abdulsalam Abubakar, while speaking at the University of Agriculture, Abeokuta, in recent time, argued for 28% as minimum in order to give education its rightful position as the pivot on which the nation's development revolves. The meaning is that the minimum of 26% yearly expenditure on education sector as a ratio of the total government expenditure, as recommended by UNESCO, is not too high. Rather, it is quite reasonable and of course attainable. Uninterestingly, however, government is far from meeting this funding formula.

It is rather strange, however, to hear Prof. Okebukola say that "the much-touted recommendation of 26 per cent budgetary allocation to education by the UNESCO was a myth."<sup>10)</sup> We cannot with one corner of the mouth be saying that adequate attention should be given to the financing of the education sector while with the other we say that doing so is just a fairy tale. Admittedly, the resources are limited and there are other sectors competing for the attention of the government, looking at the role of education being the

bedrock of a nation's development should make government show special interest in it and give it priority treatment. More than ever before, the government must prioritize its list of things to do.

The Education Trust Fund (ETF) was established through the Education Tax Act No. 7 of 1993 and amended by Act No. 40 of 1998. It is expected of it to deliver competent and forward-looking intervention programmes, through funding to all levels of the Nigerian education system in line with the provisions of its enabling Act. It is empowered to disburse 2 per cent of profits from limited liability companies, duly registered in Nigeria, to higher, secondary and primary education at ratio 50:40:10. Private sector participation in funding the university system should continue to be encouraged so as to augment government efforts. Equally, universities should be allowed to charge reasonable and affordable tuition fees and generate other revenues internally. Some of the internally revenue generating strategies, according to Ogunu & Ogbuehi (2004), are: university entrepreneurship, university industry collaboration, strategic fund raising programmes and university-community relationship.

Genuine political will, on the part of the government, will make it to fund well not only the universities but also the other levels of education. This is because all the levels of education form the Nigerian education system. No investment in education can be too much as any investment in education today is, indeed, investment in the future.

### **Conclusion**

Professor Wole Soyinka once expressed sadness that the secondary school he attended was better than many of the present-day Nigerian universities. If we agree that his secondary school was so good; the quality of university education he received at the University College, Ibadan (now the University of Ibadan) was even better. Interestingly, this highly respected play-

wright, poet, novelist, and lecturer, was the first African writer and the first black writer to win the Nobel Prize in literature. Another literary giant, Prof. Chinua Achebe who, in 2007, was awarded the Man-Booker International Prize in recognition of his lifetime literary achievement, obtained a degree in English literature and history from the same University College, Ibadan (now the University of Ibadan). There are countless others who are products of the Nigerian university education system and have become internationally acclaimed teachers, doctors, pharmacists, lawyers, engineers, economists, etc.

Hardly will anyone disagree with the fact that the standard of the nation's university education, from inception, was very high right until around late 1980's. The products during the period were awarded their degrees as they were found worthy in character and learning granted. Inadequate financing and other problems identified above have caused the university system to slip into its present inactivity.

Sixty-three years are not a small period. But this period is short when a comparison is made with older and highly reputable universities in the world. Some of these are: the University of Oxford, the oldest institution of higher learning in the English-speaking world dating back to 1117, the University of Cambridge, the second oldest university in Great Britain, founded in 1209; Harvard University established in 1630's; and Stanford University that was founded in 1885. Age apart, the cited world-class institutions of higher learning, and many others not mentioned, have made remarkable marks as their environment has been largely conducive. Each of them has enjoyed considerable autonomy and private financial support.

Universities have important roles to play in the development of a nation. These are: teaching, research and public service. When the roles are performed creditably well, universities improve the fortune of the society in which they are established. For the highest institutions of learning to perform these assigned roles, the environment must be conducive.

In order to fix the nation's university education now, all relevant authorities and stakeholders should be genuinely interested in the system. Government should take good care of the institutions through proper funding. The Nigerian university system will blossom if, like the high-ranking ones, it is allowed to enjoy substantial autonomy. Governing council and board of directors, in the case of government-owned university and private university respectively, and the senate—the twin organs in the university administration—should be given free hand in the management of their own institution. In addition, a lot of private endowments and gifts from corporate organizations and individuals will help the system. Proper funding and accountability will bring an end to the rot in the system. Once the stresses and strains of growth of university education in Nigeria are over and the system becomes relatively stable, all members of the academic community—lecturers, administrative staff and students—will naturally fall in line and be playing a new tune. The ills associated with the university education will be gone, culture of academic excellence will be in place and the good olden times shall return once again.

Admittedly, the nation now boasts 117 universities, new ones will still be established in the future. Selfish desires or political pressure should never be the underlying factor for founding a new university. Rather, there should be justified compelling needs for the establishment and the financial and staffing implications thoroughly weighed.

#### NOTES

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