

WHEN WILL THE GLORY DAYS OF NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES BE HERE AGAIN?

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Preamble

In 2004, His Excellency, Prince (Dr.) Olagunsoye Oyinlola expressed his desire to us at the National Universities Commission (NUC) to establish a one-of-a-kind university in Osun State that will be the wonder of all. We giggled because we had heard such political talk from some Governors whose intentions were far from genuine. “It can be done, Your Excellency” we replied “but you need a lot of money”. “OK. I will get back to you when I am able to raise some money. You know Osun State is not so rich”, the Governor said.

When he left, we told ourselves that he will not be back. True to our speculation, we did not see him again for about eight months. By 2005, he made personal contact and asked me to be prepared at very short notice to be part of implementing a plan for the establishment of a university in Osun State (now State of Osun). Contrary to speculations by his political detractors, there were two clear years before his re-election bid and his request to NUC as some assumed that the idea of a university for Osun State popped up at the eve of election campaigns. Within these two years, we sketched the outline of a plan for the proposed world-class university.

In September 2006, a month after I left office as Executive Secretary of the National Universities Commission, a call came from His Excellency requesting me to report in Osogbo to commence the implementation of the plan. I travelled to Osogbo accompanied by Dr. S.G. Odewumi and had a meeting with Prince (Dr.) Oyinlola in Government House. The long story leading to the establishment of Osun State University a year later, saw milestones in the establishment of a Planning Committee which transited to an Implementation Committee and later strengthened to become the foundation Council. Throughout the entire process, Governor Oyinlola kept harping in our ears, that he is a retired army General and a politician, not an academic and will not want to interfere in any way with our decisions and actions on any matter on

UNIOSUN. This free-hand provided the latitude to do what we believe was the correct thing in adopting global best practices in the setting up and running of a university.

In 12 short months, following approval by NUC and unhindered support by the Osun State Government, we put up 36 impressive buildings on six campuses, recruited the best principal officers and staff, the best students and by September 21, 2007, we opened our doors to a university that is poised to be the best in Africa in the shortest possible time. It is at this point that I wish to pay my greatest respect and tribute to a man- Prince (Dr.) Olagunsoye Oyinlola, who has bequeathed this everlasting legacy, not only to the good people of Osun State but also to Nigeria, Africa and the world. It is the collective wish of all of us who were part of the conception, birth and early years of this university that we will forever remember UNIOSUN as a model of a world-class university. All present and future students and staff should be conscious of this goal and not be part of any action that will bring the name of the university to disrepute.

The Nigerian university system has been brought into disrepute as a consequence of several years of neglect and management inefficiencies. We do not want UNIOSUN to slide along this path hence I have entitled this foundation lecture ***“When Will the Glory Days of Nigerian Universities Be Here Again?”***. In the lecture, I will reflect with you on the glory days of the Nigerian university system, highlight the dark clouds which envelope it and share a few thoughts on how the silver lining can be restored to the horizon.

Introduction

During the course of last week (September 15-20, 2014), 159 participants from 26 countries gathered in Bujumbura, Burundi, to discuss how the shine can be restored to the African higher education system. Among the participants were chief executive officers of national and sub-regional quality assurance agencies, Vice-Chancellors, leadership of the All Africa Students Union, top African Union officials, top political actors and development partners. Lessons were shared from Asia, Europe and North America and the African contingent was able to pick up valuable lessons to which we have all expressed commitment to try out in our different national contexts. I returned from the conference on Sunday the 21st and just catching my breath in time to give this lecture.

In the first section of the lecture, I will reminisce on the glory days of the Nigerian university system, setting it within the African context as reflected in the country reports received at the Bujumbura conference. In the second part, I will summarise the major impediments to the delivery of quality university education in Nigeria. The third part which in my view is the centre-piece of the lecture, I will draw lessons from best practices reported in the Bujumbura conference and from my on-going study of exemplary practices in promoting quality in higher education in the world in recommending the pathways to the restoration of the old glory of the Nigerian university system. Let us begin as I invite you to walk with me on the path that the Nigerian university system has tread between 1948 and September 23, 2014.

A Look Back

University education in Nigeria dates back to 1948 with the establishment of the University College, Ibadan. Two years after independence, the country had five universities owned by each of the three regions with the then Western region having three. The increase in oil revenue in the mid-70s coupled with the need to forge national unity following the end of the civil war, influenced the creation of a national system of higher education. This was achieved through the reconstitution of the National Universities Commission into an autonomous body charged with additional responsibilities and powers in 1974. The development laid the framework of the takeover of all the regional universities in 1975. The widespread agitation for an expansion of access to University education and increased high-level national human resource requirement and technological development contributed greatly to the establishment of the second generation and other specialised universities (of Agriculture, Technology) and a military university. The placement of higher education under the concurrent legislative list in the 1979 Constitution allowed state governments to establish universities. Today, there are currently 40 such state universities in the country.

Private sector participation in university education commenced during the second republic. However, in the absence of proper guidelines for their establishment, they all turned out to be universities only in name. All the 24 private universities established between 1980 and 1983 were abolished by the Federal Government in 1984. It was nine years later in 1993, that another law which allowed the establishment of private universities and spelt out procedures for such was promulgated. To further widen access to University education, a National Open University was established in 1983, closed shortly

after and re-opened in 2001 to offer education through Open and Distance Learning (ODL) mode. Today, there are today, 129 universities in Nigeria consisting of 40 Federal, 38 state and 51 private universities.

The past three decades have witnessed significant changes within the University system in Nigeria. Notable among such changes are the increase in the number of universities and programmes offered in these institutions. By the end of 2013, there were over two three programmes across the entire universities with a staff strength of about 35,000. By far, however, the greatest change has been in the explosion in student population and the number of aspirants seeking university admission. The total student enrolment in all Nigerian Universities grew from just over 2000 in 1962 to over 1, 131, 312 in the 2013 academic session. Data from JAMB and the universities confirmed that over 1.4 million students sat for the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination in 2013. Of this number, the entire 129 universities in the country could only admit about 500,000 candidates per year

The stress put on the universities in terms of demand and the limited expansion in physical facilities and academic staff to cater for this demand has taken a great toll on the quality of programmes in the institutions. Employers of labour and the general public have expressed concern over the quality of graduates of Nigerian universities. The situation is glaringly evident when they are requested to take qualifying examinations. Hitherto, Nigerian certificates were offered automatic recognition abroad. Similarly, an increasing number of employers are forced to practically retrain newly recruited graduates to give them the skills that should have been acquired in the University.

The state of university education in Nigeria has been captured in the 2012 Needs Assessment Report. It can therefore be described as one of massive explosion in student enrolment; increasing number of prospective new entrants in the face of inadequate and obsolete infrastructure and equipment; poor library facilities, inadequate academic staff in number and quality; lack of relevance of some academic programmes, low level of funding, cultism, examination malpractice and generally therefore low quality graduates. The world economy is however changing as knowledge supplants physical capital as the source of wealth. As knowledge becomes more important, so does higher education. The quality of this and its availability to the wider economy is becoming increasingly critical to national competitiveness. These challenges and problems call for a re-think of the sub-sector in terms of what it should be and how it is expected to play its mandatory role in the society.

It is noteworthy that there are on-going efforts to salvage the university system. For instance, the level of funding for recurrent and capital expenditure especially for federal universities has increased significantly especially in the last two years; digital library facilities are commonplace; the NigRen has stimulated installation of e-learning and research protocols in pilot universities for ICT-enabled delivery; since 2004, a monthly special grant is made to every department in the federal university system for the purchase of consumable items for the conduct of practicals, field work and the administrative running of the department; a massive overhaul of the curricula is underway to set new benchmarks and minimum academic standards, modernise the curriculum and make it more socially relevant with a slant on entrepreneurial education; there is enforcement of carrying capacity quota; access is enhanced through the licensing of more private universities. Together, these efforts are reported to be impacting positively on the system. However, the rate of improvement of the system which had suffered decades of neglect is perceived by many to be slow. There is an obvious need to catalyse the recovery process.

Let us take a deeper look at some of the elements in the university education delivery process. We take the case of the curriculum and curriculum implementation. Curriculum analysis shows that the contents of the minimum standard course descriptions as laid down by the National Universities Commission for Nigerian Universities agree well with course contents of reports in European and North American Universities. Thus, in terms of statement of intentions of what to teach, the quality of curriculum of Nigerian Universities can be rated as high. In Education, Medicine and Chemistry (used as example in the curriculum analysis), courses and their contents of the minimum curriculum standards for Nigerian universities have had a very high degree of agreement with equivalent materials in the US, Britain and South Africa. However, this equivalence does not go beyond paper.

A gap exists in the implementation mode as the detailed course contents at the Nigerian end falls short on the measure of relevance. What a Chemistry Student in Harvard is expected to study is, what the Senate of Osun State University will expect the same Chemistry student to study. What the student actually studies in UNIOSUN may not be equivalent to the Harvard experience largely on account of differences in laboratory, library and industry experiences. It needs to be mentioned as a plus, that the high recovery rate of the Nigerian students when placed in such Harvard setting is legendary. Examples are replete of products of Nigerian universities leading their class in

American and European universities after a very short period of adjustment. The same has been found to be true of products of the Nigerian secondary school systems. What can be deduced from these experiences is that with improved conditions for teaching and learning, the Nigerian community of teachers and scholars will be world leaders.

Let us look at facilities. Facilities for teaching, learning, research and management are important input element into the university system. For teaching, learning and research, facilities needed include classrooms, theatres, laboratories, workshops, office space, library and other specialised rooms. Hostels are needed as domiciles for students. In all cases, appropriate items of equipment are required for teaching, research and management. Because of large student numbers the space requirements for classroom; lecture theatres; laboratories and workshops are hardly met in over 70% of the universities. Facilities are over stretched thus presenting a recipe for rapid decay in the face of dwindling funds for maintenance.

What about research? The research profile of the Nigerian university system rose impressively in the late 1960s and remained top of the pack in Africa for almost two decades. In 1971, over 60% of papers authored by Africans in the top five journals in agriculture, medicine and the social sciences were written by Nigerian scholars. By 1982, this impressive performance went up even further to 63% (Okebukola, Shabani, 2007). The forces which propelled its rise were the rich corpus of skilled researchers mainly trained in top-ranking European and North American universities; abundance of well-stocked, state-of-the-art laboratories, workshops and libraries; good mix of international staff; presence of good-quality, well-motivated postgraduate students; respectable research grant; and good staff-welfare scheme.

Beginning from the early 1990s, the shine in research performance began to dim. This was not in isolation as the entire university system began to witness decay in infrastructure, brain drain and the general reversal of the direction of those forces which fostered growth two decades earlier. A breed of poorly-trained researchers began to dominate the scene and they infected the system with self-published books and journals of dubious scholarly quality. In 2005, the National Universities Commission evaluated a good number of these self-published materials with a view to supporting improvement in quality. The 2005 exercise found more than 30% of the materials unfit to wear the label of international quality.

A five-year review of ten of the journals with weak editorial rigour drawn from arts, medicine, science, social and management sciences showed that between 2007 and 2012, scholars from Nigerian universities authored 18.2% of the published works, the highest for any country in Africa. Authors were more or less equally drawn from federal and state universities with a sprinkle from private universities. Ghana, and Kenya came in second and third positions. In contrast, within the same period, Nigerian scholars were only able to chalk up 1.3% of the total authorship in high-impact journals that can be rated among the top ten in their discipline. The proportion of authors from South African universities relative to other African countries was found to be 23.5%. We deduct that what Nigeria gained in quantity, it lost out to South Africa in quality. The research rating of scholars in South African universities for the purpose of funding future research, scale of salaries and esteem could account for the shunning of "roadside" journals by the South Africans.

The online journals to which many Nigerian scholars subscribe are characterised by weak editorial rigour, rapid turnaround of manuscript after payment is made and are laden with spelling and grammatical errors. What they have going for them is impressive formatting and page layout. The non-scrupulous mind will be easily deceived into believing they are top of the range in scholarship until after a few minutes of reading an article and gaining insight into the respectability of the editorial base. Incidentally, respectable number have editors-in-chief in some obscure corner in Nigeria and nondescript American colleges.

Beyond the foregoing general statements, two points are noteworthy. First is that a number of the papers that are published in the "roadside" journals are of very good quality. The rush to get them published may be too tempting for the authors who may not wish to endure the tortuous review process of high-impact journals. Second, we predict that over time, the journals that are in the not-so-good category today, may improve over time and rise to the rank of the respectable journals. Until when such day dawns, we should keep discouraging Nigerian scholars from treading the line of least resistance in seeking outlets for their quality research.

Impediments to Quality

The Nigerian, indeed, the African university system is currently not capable of responding fully to the immediate skill needs in the medium term. There are several impeding factors. There is shortage of a critical mass of quality

lecturers, insufficient sustainable financing, inappropriate governance and leadership, disconnect with the demands of the economy, and inadequate regional integration, The average percentage of staff with PhD in public tertiary education institutions in Africa is estimated to be less than 20 percent (based on a study of 10 countries in the region by Materu (2007). Nigeria outperforms most African countries on this measure with about 30% of academic staff having PhDs. Most departments do not have more than one or two senior professors. This prevents departments and universities from establishing vibrant research environments. The lack of research funding and equipment provide disincentives for professors to stay in African universities (Materu, 2007; Okebukola, 2014).

Some other issues which the higher education system in Africa is grappling with as summarised by Materu (2007) include (a) efforts to improve educational quality at secondary level are still not yielding desired results, as shown by African countries' performance in international mathematics and science tests; (b) a review of distribution of graduates in 23 African countries shows the predominance of "soft" disciplines: social sciences & humanities (47 percent); education (22 percent); engineering (9 percent); sciences (9 percent); agriculture (3 percent); and (c) funding for research in African universities is low and is mostly supported by outside organizations.

Shabani (2013) identified challenges to quality in higher education in Africa to include increased enrolment; inadequate facilities and infrastructure; shortage of qualified staff and heavy workloads; outdated teaching methods; weakening of research and publishing activities; mismatch between graduate output and employment; low level of quality management system and limited capacity of governance and leadership; many countries yet to establish regulatory agencies for quality assurance and accreditation; and the problem of comparability (credit transfer). In a recent regional survey by Shabani (2013), the top ten challenges facing higher education in Africa are listed in Table 1.

Figure 1: Ranking of challenges to quality of higher education in Africa

| Rank | Challenges |
|------|---|
| 1 | Depreciating quality of higher education teachers |
| 2 | Research capacity deficit |
| 3 | Infrastructural/facilities inadequacies |
| 4 | Lack of a regional quality assurance framework and accreditation system |
| 5 | Slow adoption of ICT for delivering quality higher education including distance education |
| 6 | Capacity deficit of quality assurance agencies |
| 7 | Weak internationalisation of higher education |
| 8 | Management inefficiencies |
| 9 | Slow adoption of LMD reforms |
| 10 | Poor quality of entrants into higher education from the secondary level |

Source: Shabani (2013)

The challenge of funding recurs in all national reports (including Nigeria) on quality assurance in higher education in Africa. Partitioned into two, this challenge applies to higher education institutions as well as to national quality assurance agencies where these exist. Higher education institutions feel severely limited to deliver quality and assure same in the face of funding shortage. Funds required for provision and maintenance of facilities, funds for payment of attractive staff salaries that can reverse brain drain and funds for the modernisation of the delivery system are said to be in short supply. Public providers are short-changed in the volume of government grant and the quantum of fees paid by students. Private providers are inhibited by the level of fees charged to attract good number of students and remain financially able to deliver quality education.

Varghese (2012) reports that in Ghana, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Tanzania and Uganda, private universities live in a delicate world of establishing a balance among fees to be charged, the number of students who can afford such fees and the achievement of minimum standards for university education especially the provision of adequate facilities and payment of staff salaries. The inadequate capacity of managers of public and private institutions to be creative in internally generating funds through endowments, consultancy services and alumni contributions has exacerbated the challenge of funding.

The national quality assurance agencies are equally underserved with funds to effectively discharge their mandate of instilling a culture of quality in the system. Only a few, for example the Namibia Commission for Higher Education and the Tertiary Education Commission of Mauritius, are not hard hit with limitations of funds. Most, for example the national quality agencies in Botswana, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Lesotho, Nigeria, Uganda and Tanzania have to grapple with the funding gap between what is needed to run an effective and efficient agency and what comes in as revenue from governmental and other sources.

Human capacity deficit is another challenge. This deficit relates to knowledge and skills in quality assurance of personnel in the institutions and quality assurance agencies. On account of its relative newness, only a few have training and skills in quality assurance as a concept and disciplinary orientation. Over 80% of persons working in higher education institutions and the national quality assurance agencies have not received formal training in quality assurance. Many are learning on the job. This capacity deficit impacts negatively on how the institutions and the agencies conduct their quality assurance operations. Gladly, the situation is fast fading as training on quality assurance as part of in-service is gaining momentum.

Policies on quality assurance at the institutional and national levels are fairly adequate to address the demand for quality higher education in Africa. However, there is the challenge of inclement socio-political environment for the implementation of such good policies. Pressure of parents for admission of their children to already overstretched universities, interference by political actors in the day-to-day running of the institutions and disruption to academic calendar by strikes called by student and staff unions are examples of inclement socio-political environment. As long as institutional autonomy is not fully guaranteed, the challenge of political interference will persist.

Weakness in institutional governance is another challenge. Contributing to this weakness is inadequacies in the appointment system of vice-chancellors and rectors who are heads of the institutions. Where, as you find in most of the countries such as Ghana, Ethiopia and Nigeria, the vice-chancellor is appointed through a politically-steamrolled process, such appointee will be shackled by the desires of those who have played a part in his or her appointment rather than be guided strictly by the vision and mission of the institution. Another contributory factor is the lack of full deployment of the committee system in governance. On paper, all institutions are to be run through a layer of

committees. In practice, these committees are largely hijacked by a few powerful persons in the university with the connivance of the vice-chancellor or rector.

Turning specifically to the Nigerian university system, we should now isolate those factors which contribute to lowering quality. Depressed funding; capacity deficit in governance and management; political interference, low carrying capacity of the university system and corruption are some of the major impediments to quality assurance in the Nigerian higher education system. The contribution of poor funding to lowered quality is huge. The scenario that emerged especially between 1990 and 2000 is gross inadequacy of proprietor funding which pushed university managers to over-enrol poor quality students into satellite campuses and remedial programmes, primarily to earn income from tuition. Poor funding also explains infrastructural deficiencies and the engagement of university management in unwholesome income-generating activities. Occurrence of social vices such as examination malpractice and sorting as well as incessant strikes and closures may not be unconnected, directly or indirectly, with poor funding.

Capacity deficit in university governance and management impedes the quality assurance process through inability of management staff to respond in a timely manner to the demands of quality. Vice-Chancellors, deans of faculties and heads of departments who project weak disposition towards applying strict rules to governance in the pursuit of quality are increasing in number especially in the state and private university communities. They bow to political pressure to admit weak candidates and be soft on disciplining students of influential members of the society or their staff relations. They succumb to compromising quality as payback to godfathers who were instrumental in their appointment. Such university managers were usually appointed on a “man-know-man” basis and hence lack the capacity to run a quality system. Some, such as dean of faculty or head of department got to positions on the basis of ethnic affiliation or religious disposition rather than through merit. Hence you find a “son of the soil” lecturer grade II with low management capacity but with high local connection superintending over a department with senior colleagues including professors who are not indigenes.

Political interference stands as obstacle to the quality assurance process in the appointment of weak but politically well-connected vice-chancellors and council. Pressure is brought to bear on the vice-chancellor to obstruct the course of discipline and warp student admission and staff recruitment

processes. Council of some universities is laden with political office holders who lack understanding of the university system. Oftentimes, the mission of the university managers on quality diverges from that of such council members whose desire is to corner contracts and derive financial gains.

The low carrying capacity of the Nigerian university system poses a huge challenge to quality assurance. The deluge of secondary school leavers angling for the severely limited places in the universities brings with it a host of quality challenges. The capacity of 500,000 for new entrants into the 129 universities is a drop in the ocean for over one million aspiring candidates. Examination malpractice and admission racketeering show up as collateral damages. Those who manage to secure places will desire to keep such admissions. The weak students resort to “sorting” to progress their way through to graduation. Also, low carrying capacity is one of the causative factors for degree mills which pollute the quality environment of the Nigerian university system as detailed in the preceding section of this paper.

Corruption displayed by staff, students, parents and others that patronise the Nigerian university system affects quality. The quality process is compromised through corrupt practices in different shades and forms. Admission, discipline, and examination processes are most affected.

There are three major challenges to research in the Nigerian university system. Chief of these is the handicap of facilities for conducting frontline research. The other two are weak research capacity of staff and paucity of funds as grants to support quality research. As the 2012 needs assessment of the Nigerian university system shows, only a few universities have state-of-the-art laboratories and workshops for conducting good quality research especially in the sciences, engineering, medicine and technology. In most cases, the research laboratories are sprinkled with outdated equipment some of which are broken down owing to lack of maintenance.

On the human resource angle, the research landscape is populated by few scholars who have had the benefit of training overseas under world-renowned researchers and have used new technologies in their research. Most others have received local training using equipment that are not up to date and hence deficient in their research skills. The third challenge is non-availability of sizeable research grants to scholars. At the university level, paucity of recurrent grant limits the funds that are available as research grant to a token that can only purchase few reams of paper and a handful of reagents. At the

national level, the establishment of a national research fund is yet to gather momentum. A typical researcher in the Faculty of Science that applies for a grant of about N5 million to conduct a study on a pressing national problem may receive about 0.2% of this amount. Add the inability of the researcher to write grant-winning proposals, you end up with a frustrated scholar and a national problem unsolved. Other challenges include low level of multi-authorship and interdisciplinarity and tendency to be academically dishonest in data collection, analysis and reporting.

Restoring the Old Glory

Let me now share with you practical experiences of how university regulators and Vice-Chancellors from several African countries have been able to break the backbone of some of the problems we are currently grappling with in Nigeria. This is not for the purpose of our fully adopting the techniques but to offer options that we can adapt to suit the Nigerian context.

Take the case of funding which is a crippling problem facing the Nigerian university system. The Ghanaian university regulators reported that in less than 10 years from now, most Ghanaian universities will wean themselves off government in terms of funding. Today, a first generation university in Ghana is making more money than government can ever give it through goods and services, fee intake from foreign students and students' work-study programmes. About half of the funding needs of the university is serviced by fees paid by foreign students. This is the model that applies in Asia, Europe and North America. To make this happen, the Ghanaian university managers are deploying four strategies- maintain a stable academic calendar; aggressive marketing of the university all over Africa; build impressive, secure and friendly foreign students' hostels; and offer university education of passable quality. In contrast, the typical Nigerian university manager is less aggressive about fund-raising and satisfied with carrying the begging bowl to government or private proprietor for funds. There is an urgent need for more creative ways of funding universities in Nigeria. The Vice-Chancellors from Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo and Kenya provided additional tips. In these countries, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor is saddled with the technical running of the university while the VC is up and about canvassing for funds all over the country, all over the world. These efforts have translated into donations of buildings and funds for research.

Two Nigerian Vice-Chancellors also shared their encouraging experiences in this area. They invest about half their time in raising funds outside the university. My recommendation is to demand that government plays its expected role in funding the universities while university managers generate complementary funds internally and spend these transparently and through due process. The logic claimed by many is that if the Nigerian government is excused from providing funds for the universities, this money will go into the pockets of corrupt leaders and siphoned overseas which in turn will end up being used to support universities in Europe, North America or whichever hideout for their money and these universities will then be ranked better on league tables than Nigerian universities. I should add that the Nigerian TETFund is an establishment that has made impressive mark on the funding level of universities. It is a model that many African countries are studying and some like Ghana, are implementing.

On the quality of teachers, most African countries are now adopting the Nigerian model which insists that all teaching staff from Lecturer II and above should have a PhD. In a number of these countries, deadline of five years is given to all staff without PhD to earn one or be thrown out. Many have been thrown out already to explore other jobs outside academia. Still on quality of teachers, Vice-Chancellors from Kenya, CDR and Cameroon reported their efforts at strengthening their Postgraduate Schools to offer training which will upgrade the qualification of their teachers. The PG school system is strengthened with quality professors from all over the world and made efficient in terms of processing of students from admission to graduation. Nigeria needs to learn from this model where our PG Schools keep students for years and lazy students take full advantage of this inefficiency.

On the quality of students, many African countries are now adopting the Nigerian post-UTME model. In Kenya, Mozambique, Lesotho, Liberia, Tanzania and Zambia, the practice is gaining ground. What we should do is to keep improving on the process so that better quality candidates are admitted into the Nigerian university system.

On maintenance of facilities, Kenya, CDR and Cameroon reported the active use of students to keep the campus clean and maintain buildings and equipment. The work-study programme plays a major role. Student clubs and associations are encouraged to compete among themselves to adopt buildings. Assume the Science Students Association owns the biology block. It will raise funds to paint the building and keep it looking sparkling all year round. There is

an annual prize awarded to the student group that does the best in maintaining the building it adopts. This creative way which thinks outside the box is worthy emulating by Nigerian university managers.

Looking to the future with hope

Bemoaning the past and sulking over the present will not clear the layer of plaque occluding the shine of quality in the Nigerian university system. The profitable path to tread is to gallop to the future, pulling down obstacles to progress. The Golden Fleece to be sought is how Nigerian universities can be the model for Africa and a towering giant in the world, producing nationally-relevant and globally-competitive graduates. Several pathways can be described for achieving this goal and rising above the ashes of the sordid past. Some key strategies will be highlighted. We turn our gaze first to the quality, quantity and diversity of student intake.

A strong positive link has been established between the quality of student intake and the quality of graduates in an educational system. If quality of processing is held constant, the resultant of admitting poor quality secondary school leavers into the university system are graduates whose quality has a high chance of being compromised. Hence to shoot for five-star quality from the present one-star, the admission process through the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) and post-UTME should move a notch or two higher in stringency. The universities should cream off the best from the large army of half-baked secondary school leavers (only 30% had clean bill of health by NECO in the 2014 May/June Senior School Certificate Examination!). Those “left behind” should be worked through remedial programmes outside the university to prepare them better for university education. Re-introduction of the Higher School Certificate (HSC) could pull the magic. On the quantity front, enrolling beyond programme carrying capacity is a recipe for poor quality products. NUC should continue to apply sanctions to breaches of carrying capacity.

Over 90% of graduates spotted as “poor quality” are from over-enrolled programmes in satellite campuses, sandwich programmes and affiliations of colleges of education with universities. Since these arrangements are in place mainly as cash cows, for commerce rather than for scholarship, proprietors should improve allocative mechanism of funding so that Vice-Chancellors who are driven by income shortfall, especially to pay salaries, by engaging in black-marketeering in over-enrolment into satellite campuses and sandwich programmes can adopt a less quality-depressing methodology for their internally-generated revenue.

A measure of global ranking of universities is the proportion of foreign students (the diversity factor). In 2008, only 0.1% of the total enrolment in Nigerian universities was made up of foreign students. Efforts should be invested to make the Nigerian university environment attractive to foreign students. Conducive teaching/learning environment, good hostel facilities, high quality staff, secure campus with no cult activities and stability of academic calendar are some of the attractions the system can offer foreign students.

Staff quality and quantity is another area of improving international competitiveness and the quality of graduates. The total academic staff strength of the Nigerian university system in 2012 was 34,309 made up of 3,041 professors (about 10% of the total; 320 of the professors are female) This overall total reflects a shortfall of about 40%. With the ever-increasing number of universities, there is an urgent need to put in place an Accelerated Teacher Development Project to ensure that teacher production keeps pace with system expansion. The goal should be annual production of 1,500 local and foreign trained quality PhD holders in the next 20 years.

A high proportion of foreign teacher content should also be sought. Today, the system has a mere 1.9% foreign staff content. Attractive salaries, conducive environment for teaching and research, excellent housing and non-threatening external environment (kidnap for ransom!), will encourage foreign staff. These conditions will also slow down internal and external brain drain of staff. It will encourage Nigerians in the Diaspora to come back home to offer service for a semester or two and foster transfer of skills.

The quality of teachers is also key to enhancing global ranking and promote the production of quality graduates. Quality staff translates to quality research, giving conducive research environment. In turn, quality research results in high scores in international research citations and elevation on the global ranking of the university. There is the need to continue to build research capacity of Nigerian scholars through local and overseas training and collaboration with researchers from reputable universities all over the world. Insistence on the PhD as a minimum for a Lecturer Grade II position is a lever for stimulating the research culture. We should summarise other components of our “to-do-list” for attaining global competitiveness as elements of the institutional accreditation model. These are:

(a) Institutional vision, mission and strategic goals: Institutional vision, mission and strategic goals should be pursued in alignment with development agenda at the local (e.g. State Development Plans), national (e.g. Vision 20-2020) and international (e.g. Millennium Development Goals) levels; University curriculum across

Colleges/Faculties should be designed to meet the demands of the labour market and entrepreneurship. (b) **Institutional Governance and Administration:** Council appoints good quality staff at all levels, following due process and prudent and transparent in the management of university funds; Vice-Chancellor and other Principal Officers that are passionate about taking the university to great heights (c) **Institutional Resources including Teaching-Learning resources and student support:** Each College/Faculty should have a commodious, visibly impressive building; all Departments have ample space for staff offices, classrooms, laboratories, workshops and library in line with the minimum standards for programme(s) offered; academic buildings, on-campus hostels and staff quarters are supplied with at least 12 hours of electricity daily and 24-hour supply of water; network of roads feeding main university buildings are tarred and well drained; communication (intercom) facilities are functional; all academic buildings and hostels have functioning and clean toilet facilities in appropriate ratios to users; clean campus environment (not bushy, walls not defaced with posters); aesthetically-appealing landscaping; IT infrastructure in place and functioning. 24-hour Internet access for staff and students; clean and well-maintained on-campus student hostels with adequate bed space per student; availability of efficient guidance and counselling services and student support services including transportation; recreational facilities such as games and sports are well developed, in use and maintained; at least 70% of the buildings have fire-fighting and safety facilities; at least 70% of buildings have facilities to accommodate students with special needs; (d) **Quality of teaching:** Lectures should be based on the latest developments in the discipline as obtained from the most recent literature; laboratory/workshop practicals are hands-on and investigatory; there is evidence of ample prelab/workshop preparations; safety rules are obeyed throughout the duration of the practical work; and good use of instructional aids especially new technologies; (e) **Quality of research:** staff publications should be found in the top-rate local and international journals; (f) **General Management:** Admission process should be conducted within acceptable timeframes and in season; quantity and quality of student intake match minimum standards for the courses to which admission is made; registration process should be devoid of stress to students and executed in a timely manner; all staff are recruited through due process and in the correct category mix; welfare of staff and students not below generally acceptable standards; at least 95% of students' progress to the next level of degree programme annually; not more than 1% of students drop out (internally or externally) from degree programmes;

at least 95% of a cohort of students graduate within the duration of their course of study; pervasive culture of recycle and reuse of material resources e.g. paper; pervasive culture of conservation of water and electricity; and timeliness (sessional) in the release of results to students and sponsors.

Conclusion

In this 2014 Foundation Lecture, we reviewed the state of university education in Nigeria and concluded that we still have a long road to travel to bring the shine back to the system. About four months ago, I summarised the conclusions of 85 visitation panel reports to Nigerian universities over the last 15 years and found the recommendations to be largely in agreement with what I have highlighted in this lecture. These are:

1. Honesty in the accreditation process
2. Enrolling better quality students in the right quantity
3. Improvement in the appointment of Council
4. Improvement in the appointment of Vice-Chancellors
5. Elimination of manipulation in the professorial appointment process
6. Reduction of political/proprietor interference in the management of the university
7. Reduction of fraud in the research process
8. Better use of IT for teaching, learning, research and administration
9. Re-introduction of higher school certificate (Bring Back Higher School)
10. Facilities and infrastructure befitting of a modern university system

I forecast that UNIOSUN will be the trailblazer in this restoration of glory, on account of the slogan I suggested for it about two weeks which is ***“Forever the Best”***. All staff and students of the university should be part of this restoration crusade. Back to the question in the title of the lecture: **When Will The Glory Days Of Nigerian Universities Be Here Again?** The silver linings have started to appear. All we should do is to keep our hands on the plough and not look back.

Happy anniversary and may God continue to prosper Osun State University.

God bless you all.

Peter A. Okebukola, OFR

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