

GLOBALISATION AND UNIVERSITY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

by

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Abstract

University education is highly valued in Nigeria and elsewhere in the world. A nation without education is in darkness and there can be no meaningful development without education. Every year the numbers of people who seek admission into the available number of university are overwhelmed with the result that more than half of the numbers fail to secure admission in the various courses available in these universities. Prior to the coming of the Whiteman, there was no single university in Nigeria and those who needed higher education went overseas for the programme. With the establishment of university of Nigeria, many people had the privilege of going to these universities for higher education. The product of these universities provided the needed skill man power needed in the public and private sectors of the economy. As time goes on, the quality of instructions provided in these universities started to witness a sharp drop in standard. The university education which was highly valued became a thing of the past. Even the operation and management of the universities had nothing to offer to the growing number of people who seek admission into it. The situation was further worsened by the entrance of the military into the university administration. With the military there was serious decay in both infrastructure and the products of the universities. This situation calls for urgent and serious attention to prevent the universities from complete collapse.

Introduction

The need to acquire education is high in Nigeria. University education is very much needed by the present generation of Nigerians and each year the number of applicants seeking to pursue university education continue to increase with the result that less than 50% of the applicants fail to secure admission into the available courses and the universities. The number of universities in Nigeria is grossly inadequate to meet the number of applicants each year.

Prior to the establishment of the first Nigerian premier university at Ibadan in 1948, university education was only possible abroad. With the establishment of the University of Ibadan, access to higher education in Nigeria became easier. The content of university education curricula now reflects more local content and has more relevance. In no small time the degree programmes in the major Nigerian

languages such as the Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo were introduced. This was in addition to the inclusion of indigenous folklore and other materials into the courses, especially in the social sciences and the humanities.

Since the establishment of the university at Ibadan, the number of universities has grown to over 80 or more, that is Federal, State and Private universities. These universities are classified according to the time of establishment. Thus, we have first generation universities (1948-1962), second generation universities (1963-1975), third generation universities (1976-1981), fourth generation universities (1982-1993) etc (Chizea. 1993, Bako 1994) and the era of state and private universities.

Irrespective of the time of establishment, universities are highly valued and revered in Nigeria and are usually referred to as the ivory towers. This may be as a result of the universities having the best architectural master pieces around the town. Many of the universities do not only have the most modern beautiful buildings but also well kept lawns, fields, parks and gardens which truly make them very impressive places to visit. Up to the early 1980, most of the universities are adored with modern facilities and majority of the students tend to live inside the hostels instead of outside as it is the case today.

Universities train and provide the needed skilled labour force for the society. Acquisition of university education is a pre-requisite for elevation to “senior service” or higher status in the civil service (Ayandele, 1974, Chizea 1983). The university trained person starts work at the senior cadre in the existing establishments while those without university education grow from the rank and file. As a result of this, the university admission are keenly sought after both by Nigerians and other countries. This trend is gradually beginning to change. The universities now are no longer regarded as ivory towers both in the standard of available facilities and more importantly the quality of students produced as well. The once respected ivory towers have begun to show cracks both in the visible structures and in the people’s mind. Unfortunately, the universities seems to be transforming into a market for the sale of goods and services for economic survival. This change may be due to the twin forces of the politics and policies of long military rule in Nigeria and the era of globalization. Globalization has its major share in the system and the university education turns to a commercial venture. The traditional role of academic excellence has paved the way to the doctrine of commercialization and market and this has serious implications to the new image of the universities. University graduates who are supposed to be worthy in character, learning and knowledge are no longer what the society expect from the system as most of them has derail from the objective of the university education.

Globalization and the University admission in Nigeria

In the recent past some universities have adopted the policy of giving admissions on the basis of the ability to pay. This led to the idea of the admission getting to the highest bidder where the rich in the society were able to secure admissions for their wards irrespective of their performance at the entrance examination. Core professional courses like Medicine, Law, Pharmacy, Accountancy, Engineering etc were offered at specific costs. Those who are willing to pay were offered admission. The university authorities attributed this to the decay in infrastructures and argued that the money realized will be used in infrastructural development. This idea has denied many bright candidates the chances of gaining admission into the university. In some cases the rich in the society went into buying admissions in the universities and later resale them at a profit margin. The obvious implication is that some people were admitted into courses where they are not suitably qualified for and consequently get dropped on the way. Some students as a result of not suffering to gain the admission get involved into so many anti social activities in the university. The university entrance examination introduced is based on guess or trial and error method as students are required to choose between alternative answers provided.

University Education and disparity in School Fees

There has been a sharp disparity in the school fees paid in the various universities. In many of the universities the disparity are noticed in the various facilities. Those in the science based courses pay higher than their mates in non-science courses. Those courses which attract large number of students also attract high school fees.

The disparity in the school fees varies from one university to the other. A sample survey carried out in the universities show that Private universities lead in the disparity chain and followed by the State and Federal universities. This has made many students not to seek admission into these private and state universities with the result that Federal universities are over applied for in the admission for the various faculties. Even the Federal universities have fee differentiation within the system.

Military Politics and Education in Nigeria

Nigeria gained independence from her colonial master in 1960. Since after the independence it has experienced frequent political turbulence manifested particularly by regular military interventions.

It may therefore be necessary to classify Nigerian post-colonial history into the First Republic (1960-1966), First Military rule (1966-79), Second republic (1979-83) and Second Military rule (1983-1998). From 1999 to date, there has been a civilian rule or democratic rule and it is hoped that this will continue to a very distant

future. The frequent coups and counter coups are explained by the unconstitutional role which the military has decided to arrogate to itself as the saving messiahs and political watchdogs. This factor has placed the military rule ahead of the civilian rule without any meaningful development.

Military rule in Nigeria in essence is the articulation of underdevelopment, unemployment, inflation and other social problems which characterize the era. These social vices are manifested in terms of public corruption, inefficiency and ineffectiveness particularly under democratic rule. Military after military with claims and counter claims and promises that the intervention would resolve the teething social problems.

Military intervention is thus presented as a messianic initiative to save the country and its people from various hardships. As Agbese has described it, besides having little substance or value, this messianic posturing becomes over time a game of musical chairs”.

The military, with its monopoly of the instruments of war, seizes the opportunity to throw out an incumbent civilian regime through a coup d’etat. The military promises deliverance from corruption and maladministration, just as it is easy to kick out civilian politicians. It is also easy for one faction of the military to over throw another faction (Agbese, 1991:320).

Each military over another sings a very good jingle and music and lays accusations and counter accusations against the other with a promise to provide the solution to the problem of the system which it may eventually not solve before being over thrown by another military junta. In all, Nigerians have seen that the military is not the messiah who can change and reshape the future of this country. The military in this country has done much more than dominate the political platform, it has in no small measure perpetrated gross human rights abuses and abuses of the civil society.

The military in some cases sponsor killer squads who gag the press, torture or imprison any other person or group of persons who criticize the system (Akpan, 1998, Tell magazine August 31,). The extent of this human right abuses may differ but the practice of torture and other forms of abuses are largely true of the military era of General Sani Abacha, Buhari and Babangida (Alubo, 1991). Long reign of military rule has also led to a militarization of the civil society. This trend is largely manifested in the use of such military language as choking arrogance, and exhibitionism such terms as deal ruthlessly with, would have himself to blame, with immediate effect etc. have all been appropriated by the civil society. It is common protocol to introduce a military officer by reciting all the honours and service medals received. Many civilians outside the military have followed to emulate this habit and take umbrage of their qualifications, especially those shared by the military (such as member of the National Institute MNI) are omitted at a public function. The military adopts a dictatorship approach in the implementation of a policy regardless of the

popular will of the people. This can be seen from the introduction of such policy like the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) despite the resistance by the labour and other voices of dissent.

The military have seriously flaunted the paraphernalia of office. In the recent time the traditional rulers use sirens to clear out the very people who they supposedly lead. This is copied from the military practice. This culture is generally manifested in the university system in several ways. The military introduced the appointment of sole administrators in the university administration, one of the most recent was a retired general in total disregard for the rules and procedures of appointing vice-chancellors. Some vice-chancellors have generally not only acquired the language of the military but are overlords to their colleagues. Many describe themselves as the “chief executives” in a striking reminder of a “commander”.

This military deviation from laid down rules and procedures is also widespread in the university system. Students and staff accused of wrong doings are frequently expelled and dismissed without a formal charge or fair hearing. The Vice-chancellors like the military masters now care more about planting stories in the press in total disregard to what is on the ground. This practice is vividly captured by the event in Edo State University where the Military appointed a sole administrator who enumerated several “achievements” in celebration, of his first one hundred days in office (Guardian newspaper of 2/11/97). Some vice-chancellors now move with a team of security operatives and sirens.

It is a common practice to see armed tanks and detachments of armed police or soldiers outside and inside university campuses, supposedly as deterrent against students protest (Alubo, 1997, Awopetu, 1997). These factors have combined to denude the university of the extant reputation as a place for learning good conduct and cultural behaviours. This is the changing image of the university. A newspaper editorial has it thus:

over the years, military incursions into politics have virtually turned the ivory towers into miniature barracks whose heads are dictated to by either the commander in chief or the military administrator in the misconception of their roles as visitors to the universities... such intervention have led to progressive deterioration of the universities (Post Express 22/9/98).

The military is not helping matters by teaching academics (nor are academics who are copying military ways) has to adopt the tactics of the barracks in administrating what in fact used to be a refined place and a unique community of brilliant men and women. The university is dead, long live hypocrisy (Abati, 1997:16).

The survival of the system is not in sight as the present generation of Nigerians are not interested in hard and honest work. Students in these universities are no longer prepared to go the hard way as most of them are busy in browsing the internet and leaving the reading of their textbooks. This is the ugly face of globalization on the university system. Many students can hardly move about without one electronic gadget or talking wireless.

Globalization and the University: From centres of learning to market places

As Claude Ake has shown, globalization is part of the overall hegemony facilitated by the end of the cold war and emergent new world order of unipolar existence. After the cold war, there is only one power block whose leaders act as though might is right. There is only one ideology, liberal democracy, only one religion, market forces (Ake, 1996:5).

Bello described Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) and overall globalization as sweeping strategy of global economic roll back unleashed by Northern political and corporate elites to consolidate corporate hegemony in the home economy and share up the north's domination in the international economy (Bello, 1994:2-3). In this sense, the phenomenon in question is globalization in a unipolar - more appropriately, unidollar-world and the accompanying massive restructuring (Aina, 1997). In Nigeria, this phenomenon has a telling effect on the social services in general including the universities. This has taken several forms such as visible decay of building and other physical infrastructures.

This general decay can also be seen in other social and cultural ways in the university. The mode of dressing has drastically changed and people have introduced one form of behavior or the other which are quite outside the norms of the society. It is now difficult to distinguish between males and females in the universities as they can have the same pattern of dress. The situation has brought about the commercialization of services, cost recovery and revenue generation, all of which now seem to dictate academic activities in the university system. In recent times, there has been low budgetary allocations to the universities which constitutes part of the overall de-emphasis on non-productive aspects of the economy. The decline in the local currency has resulted in the decay of the elegant buildings which were centres of attraction in the universities. Open sewers, gaping cracks in buildings, blown off roofs naked electrical fittings and dried water taps are common features of first generation universities in Nigeria today.

Since 1985, subsidized catering services for students have been discontinued in the universities and replaced with private sector initiatives where students pay as they go or eat. Across the country, the discontinuation of the centrally organized catering services have made some students to cook in the hostels and others to purchase food from food vendors, including mobile hawkers on wheels. The health

implication of this is obvious. These are in addition to other businesses such as photographers, stationery, book sellers, computer services and photocopies. It is now a common practice for university staff to run soft drink, food and other related businesses in their offices without hindrance

On many campuses, the university authorities have built shopping complexes which are rented out to private entrepreneurs. Apart from being landlords, many have commercial limited ventures and other businesses which are marked departure from the past when business and academic activities were thought to be strange bedfellows. There are so many drinking outfits now in many universities that many students resort to drinking parlours at night instead of reading their books.

Academic and non-academic staff who engage in business were compelled to retire during 1976 “purge” of Murtala Mohammed for what was called “divided loyalty”. Today, the image of the university as a market place of ideas has now been expanded to accommodate merchandise and services as well. Among other services commercialized are inter and intra campus transportation which were formally free. Private transport operators now provide transportation for those who are willing to pay.

In some universities, motor cycles and tricycles are part of this private arrangements. This has made the university so busy and noisy for effective learning. This has affected the courses offered in the universities. Courses in philosophy, classics, Nigerian languages and Psychology have either been “rationalized” or merged with other departments. As some courses are merged, others in Marketing, Business Management, Banking & Finance, Computer Science, Law etc are being expanded in other to increase the internal revenue generation (IGR).

The more worrying aspect of globalization is the restructuring of courses in response to the new philosophy of revenue generation. Courses which command large number of students such as business and management sciences and law are now widely available in outreach centres. These courses are usually located in large urban centres where universities offer part-time, mainly in the evening and week-end programmes. Many universities of technology have resorted to offering or run business courses in other to increase their revenue generation.

Admission requirements into these satellite campuses are mellowed down in other to attract sufficient number of applications. The nature of facilities, calibre of staff, teacher-student ratio are usually overlooked as far as revenue accrues from there. In the end, the students produced in these centres are not different from motor park drivers and conductors.

There is no marked difference between the students produced in these centres and the ordinary traders in the street. Private hostels have led many female students to become commercial sex workers. Students are no longer respected as you can find many of them in the private male houses/rooms of truck/barrow bushers for days or

totally residing with them. Some female ones even get married to these motor park drivers and barrow bushers. The problem is endless as one can see from the immediate environment. Except something serious and urgent is done, university education is about to give way to many social vices which may be difficult to control in the nearest future.

Managing and running universities as markets has included regular award of higher degrees in form of honorary degrees. This method of recognizing and honouring achievements has been commercialized with the result that honours are now available for sale. Many successful businessmen/women who have not seen the four walls of the University are decorated with honours. Honours for sale operates as a means of – internal revenue generation. If a university wants to embark on a project, it will just cost the project and find two or more people and give awards provided they can contribute to the cost of the project. It is not difficult to write a beautiful citation. It does not matter how that money was made provided the university gets part of the loot (Ikime, 1998:9). Thus, many internal roads and buildings are dedicated to one person or the other.

In the words of Wole Soyinka, this novel approach to revenue generation includes lobbying the wives of the military generals. Vice-chancellors are compelled to know how to know-tow to the first military ladies for funds to run their institutions, bribe them with honorary degrees or rename libraries, and students' hostels after these arrogant spouses (1998:28).

These changes have in no small way contributed to the lowering of the prestige of university students and staff. Students in the universities are no longer accorded any respect as special people to be envied; as people in a collapsing system, they deserve more pity rather than envy.

University workers are either excused from many community obligations involving money or given leeway to pay lower than the stipulated minimum. The university system in Nigeria and indeed Africa is witnessing a period of economic collapse. This unfolding process has brought with it new concepts and values as part of the overall process of globalization (Bako, 1994).

As these changes take place in the universities, the ivory tower image seems to have given way to that of a Garden of Eden in decay or “the paradise lost”. The decay in physical structures has extended to standard as well. The pre-occupation now shifts to revenue and not enforcing standards and quality. The changes have other profound implications such as access to university education for the poor.

As the subsidized meals are discontinued and transportation commercialized, it is a problem for the children of the poor to receive university education. The burden is getting tough that the poor is excluded from the race. This is so because the new philosophy of payment as a basis for services simply places the financially handicapped at such a disadvantage as to exclude them most of the time. Without

any remedy, the changes means rationalization out of education and with it, poverty is surely going to be hereditary to the poor. This also means that the universities can no longer be independent without which the enforcement of standards is difficult.

Conclusion

The future of the university as a place where degrees and diplomas are traded seems strong and therefore the future graduates will hardly have a good mastering of their discipline. What now seems necessary is for the university system to be transformed, run and be guided by market ethos. The messiah has not come to bail the system out. Except something serious is done, the Nigerian university education is heading to a serious halt and only God can save it from complete collapse.

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