

UNIVERSITY EDUCATION AND MANPOWER DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: CHALLENGES IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract

• University education is aimed at training high-level manpower for national development. In pursuance of this objective, the premier university (University College, Ibadan) was established in 1948. As at the last count there are 49 Universities in , Nigeria. Evidences have shown that. Universities have been hampered in the fulfillment, of their mandate by a number of factors. These include the poor quality of graduate turn out, unemployment of graduates, the triple evil of examination malpractice, cultism and drug abuse. It was viewed that these problems have definite impact on the education process of University students. The paper therefore concluded that stakeholders of the system should provide funds for the University to expand its facilities for manpower training among others. Parents, guardians and their children and wards should not regard University education as the ultimate in life. Other helpful alternatives do exist and should be exploited.

Introduction

The ambition of every individual or nation is to improve his or her total circumstances through a mastery of his or her environment. Man's three basic needs of feeding, clothing and shelter constitute some of those daunting circumstances to combat. Until these needs are met, it becomes impossible to attempt to meet other ones, no matter how important they seem to be.

A child, for instance, cannot go to school unless his clothing, feeding and shelter" are guaranteed. The man who cannot feed his family well, clothe them minimally and put a roof over their heads to protect them against inclement weather, is yet to come into the realization of his manhood. Therefore, man is constantly in search for a means of not only providing basic needs for himself and the family but also improving his existence.

Education has proved to be an indispensable instrument in this regard, not only for eradicating ignorance but for effecting individual and societal/national development. With it a man can improve his access to¹ the good things of life. According to Denga (2002), education is the pivot of national development which produces manpower, socialization of citizens politically, improving of citizens³ standards of living and production of employable skills.

Federal Government of Nigeria realizes these lofty roles of education hence it sets levels for its acquisition by the citizens. Education in Nigeria is offered throughout Nigeria at three distinct levels namely, primary, secondary and tertiary levels. The National Policy on Education specifies the philosophy, aims and objectives for each level.

The university is one of the institutions at the tertiary level responsible for "making optimum contribution to national development by intensifying and diversifying its programmes for the development of high level manpower within the context of the needs of the nation (FRN, 1998: 25). Clearly from this policy, the central role of the university is to produce high-level manpower for national development. This means making available to the national economy adequate number of people who have been educated in employable skills and who must be found worthy not only in character but also in learning.

To what extent have the Nigerian universities fulfilled their mandates? Today Nigeria faces daunting problems which have constituted set back to the nation's educational system. According to Akandc (2003:11), some of these challenges include:

Mounting debt burden, threat of economic stagnation and decline, rapid population growth, widening economic disparities between the few haves and have-nots, civil strife, violent crimes and widespread environmental degradation.

The question to still ask is why do all these problems still persist if the universities were fulfilling their roles? As we all know, functional education should inculcate the right values, attitudes and skills in the individual to help him function effectively in the society to which he belongs (Akpan, 1999). Certainly there should be some inside problems that have been responsible for the less spectacular evidences of the impact of university education on the Nigerian populace.

This paper therefore examines these issues, which appear to be impeding the effectiveness of the university system in fulfilling its mandate in the area of manpower development.

A Brief History of University Education in Nigeria

Agitation for university education in Nigeria dates back to the 1930s. when early beneficiaries of higher education from Yaba Higher College were no longer satisfied with the mere acquisition of certificates and diplomas. They longed for a university education in Nigeria. At first, the colonial masters did not listen to them because they did not envisage self-governance for Nigerians as senior posts in the public service were reserved for expatriates. Immense pressure continued to be mounted on the British colonial administrators for the establishment of a university in Nigeria to provide high level manpower for the overall development of the society (Aloba, 2000).

In response, (the Asquith and Elliot Commissions were set up in 1943. According to Wilson (2002), the majority and minority of the Elliot Commission both agreed on the establishment of a residential university college in special relationship with the University of London. These reports were submitted to the colonial government in 1948. thus the premier university in Nigeria (The University College, Ibadan) was established in 1945 with an initial student enrolment of 104 (faculty of Education Prospectus 3998-2000, University of Ibadan).

Following the adoption of the federal system of government in 1959 which placed education high on the concurrent list, the Ashby Commission was later set up to review the manpower needs of the whole country. According to Aloba (2000), the commission recommended that several universities be established to provide the much needed manpower requirement of the country. This led to the establishment of the University of Nigeria Nsukka, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Universities of Lagos and Ife (Now Obafemi Awolowo University) all in 1960. Later in the 1970s seven other universities were established.

Since the last 56years the number of universities has been on the increase. As at the last count Nigeria has a total of 49 universities (JAMB/DE Brochure,. 2004/2005). These include 33 conventional universities and 18 specialized ones (Universities of Agriculture and Universities of Science and Technology). Twenty-four (24) of these universities are owned by federal government and nineteen (9) by the state governments, while six (6) by private individuals and groups. The National Universities Commission however, acts as the quality control organ for the federal government of Nigeria. The specialized universities as well, are to pursue objectives related to the kind of courses they teach. For instance, the Universities of Agriculture are mandated to among other things offer academic programmes in relation to the training of manpower for agriculture in Nigeria. Hence, it is clear that the overall aim of universities is to train high-level manpower and expand the frontiers of knowledge by engaging in systematic discourse and research for the overall development of the Nigerian society.

A number of signs and symptoms show that the universities have an uphill task in fulfilling their mandate to the Nigerian populace. These are the issues examined in the subsequent sections of this paper.

The Fate of University Graduates in the Job Market

If we remember, the mandate of every university is to churn out graduates who have been found worthy in character and in learning. This means that Nigerian graduates ought to have been properly toned in morals and well grounded in the knowledge of some subjects. By these qualifications, they would have been ready to take up jobs in the society towards development of self and the society. Two issues bother one's mind in this regard.

One of the issues is the quality of training graduates receive and the other is availability or otherwise, of jobs for graduates. These issues constitute major challenges in this century both for the Nigerian government, the universities and the larger society.

Anowor (2002) reported that university graduates are finding it difficult to secure gainful employment that will enable them fend for themselves and take care of their social obligations. He quoted a recent World Bank Report from Mkpa (2002) which scored Nigerian graduates so low in the possession of skills to the related field in which they belong. They were presented as unfit for the labour market and the larger society.

In a similar scenario, a youth corper who was said to be a graduate of English language had a problem in her place of primary assignment. She was posted to a secondary school to teach English language but could not make a correct sentence in English consistently. The principal of the school had to send her to the library.

Outside the country, it is also reported that graduate students from Nigerian Universities are being made to take remedial programmes to qualify them for postgraduate work in the Universities.

These instances call to question as to the quality of education the sample of graduates used by those who gave these reports. Whatever the case may be, the indication is that the Ivory tower faces a crisis of confidence. The products who they certificate as being found worthy in character and learning are no longer found to be so by the society or the employers of labour. This certainly calls for concern.

The second issue is that of the paucity of job opportunities for the graduates. According to Ajayi (2000), there is massive unemployment of university graduates in Nigeria. To find job is now a job (Denga, 2002). Young graduates from Universities-roam the streets without jobs. By this they constitute high risks in the society that can make the nation unstable economically. The spate of armed robbery and all kinds of fraudulent behaviours rampant in our society today may be traceable to these idle youths. This poses a great challenge to the nation.

University and Labor Relations: Implications for Manpower Development

The-Universities are made up of staff and student who work symbiotically towards realizing the objectives of the institutions. Apart from working for institutions, the various groups constitute themselves into unions for the purpose of promoting, protecting and improving their welfare through collective action,

Many times in Nigeria, the operation of labor unions within the campuses has had negative impact on the education of students. In the Nigerian Universities today about four Unions exist v;z; the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), the Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities (SSANU), the Non-Academic Staff Union of Universities (NASD) and the Student Union Government (SUG). All these have their aims and objectives, which they pursue from time to time.

Whenever they fee! that government or the management has infringed on any of their rights they could hold the entire system to ransom. As a result of the interdependent nature of the various unions'on the campuses, the inactivity of one could impede the functioning of the others and indeed the entire university machinery. For instance, when ASUU goes on strike, academic activities get grounded and students merely get stranded.

In December 2002, ASUU went on a prolonged strike which ended in June 2003. SSANU and NASU also joined to press for their welfare needs too. During this period academic activities in most University campuses were in jimbo. This had a significant impact on the system in many ways. Universities could not graduate their candidates for the NYSC as expected, candidates who were admitted by JAMB could not take up their places in the Universities, federal government suspended the payment of salaries to the striking workers, the morale of University workers fell very low Now it is very difficult for the Universities to regularize their sessions. While some are battling with the first semester of a previous session others are already in the second semester of the same session. There are some who have lost an entire session.

The end to these irregularities is not in sight because the staff are asking for the suspended salaries of the 2003 and government does not appear to be ready to give them. In the face of all these, fresh problems are still brewing. About two weeks age. government contemplated increasing the accommodation fee of students -per bed space to ten thousand naira. Students indicated that this was a pill they were not ready to swallow. A different approach is presently being adopted to the matter. Who knows what the outcome of the committee's work on this matter will be? How will the students take the report?

These developments have implications for manpower training in the ivory tower. For new, lecturers are being hurried up, contact periods for lectures are shortened, students are made to buy books and hand-outs, and the required practical periods/workshops and tutorials are no longer there.

In the face of all these students are to study the materials hurriedly for the purpose of passing examinations. This they do by all means.

A system which is bedeviled by these kinds of experiences can hardly produce students whose worth can change society for good. Instead of the universities to pursue their mandates and churn out individuals who are accomplished in their professional training, what the society now has is individuals who are not only morally bankrupt but people who are unskilled to fit into industries and other job places. The contention of this paper at this point is that incessant labour unrest in the Nigerian University campuses is counterproductive and makes the Universities to fail abysmally in their role to train high level manpower for national development.

The Triple Evils of Examination Malpractice, Cultism and Drug Abuse and University Education and Manpower Development

The emergence of examination malpractice, drug abuse and cultism on the campuses of Nigerian Universities has generated profuse writing in educational literatures in recent years. These writings have clarified these concepts that feel no body is actually in doubt of what these practices mean.

However, for the avoidance of doubt I shall feature a few definitions of these terms. My job is actually to explicate what effects these practices have on the Universities and manpower development.

Examination malpractice, according to Ongom (1994) is any form of wrong doing in examinations. Oyekan (1996) views it as deliberate acts of indiscipline adopted by students or their privileged accomplices secure facile success and advantage before, during or after the administration of the tests and examination. Examination malpractices may also be construed as an act which prospective candidates for an examination illegally gain access to the question papers in advance of the date of the examination, during or at the end of it, through or without the help of the teachers (Inyang, 2002).

The forms and causes of this evil are diverse. But their effect on the development of manpower in the Universities are pervasive. Students who indulge in this practice show that they have not subjected themselves to the rigours of learning to become masters and practitioners of their professions. They come out with certificates that they did not merit. If haply they get employed, they become shysters in their offices and a wreck of the society. Enumerating other harmful effects of examination malpractices, Ongom (1994) said, they lead to loss of self-confidence, honesty and integrity on the part of the students. These qualities are very important in the development of high level manpower, which the Universities seek to inculcate in the trainees.

Drug abuse according to Jaffe (1975), refers to the use especially by self administration of any drug in a manner that deviates from the approved medical or social patterns within a given culture. According to Igwue (2003), certain drugs which adolescents frequently abuse include;

- (a) Central nervous system stimulants
- (b) Central nervous system depressants
- (c) Hallucinogens
- (d) Narcotic analgesics
- (e) Alcohol and;
- (f) Tobacco.

These drugs change the mood states of students who indulge them and cause them to put up abnormal behaviours on campuses. They become rude to their teachers, bully their colleagues and lack the kind of composure that will enable them study their books well. This practice is largely responsible actions which destabilise the campuses. The overall effect of examination malpractices on manpower development is that it interferes with the University's educational process of churning out high level manpower whose impact is meant to transform the society. These effects in the lives of the individuals even transcend the campuses to the working experiences of the abusers. They become indolent irresponsible and incapable of running public offices without aberrant behaviours.

Cultism is another anti-social phenomenon which found its way into the University campuses some years back. Denga (1991) considers cultism as a system of religious belief and practices which are peculiar to members. According to Eko (2002), they seek to protect their members, and avoid loneliness.

Recently, their activities have extended beyond the known objectives stated above. They have been incidences of rival clashes among the different groups of cultists on the campuses. Such clashes have been so violent that losses of innocent lives often result. These activities often disturb the peace of the campuses thereby hampering the educative process of developing high level manpower.

These triple evils of examination malpractice, cultism and drug abuse have eaten very deep into the fabrics of University students as well as students at lower level. Their effects on the quality of education which the children receive are pervasive and require a very drastic approach to redress if the University as a-citadel of learning will fulfill its role of fashioning out individuals with sound character and qualitative education.

Accessibility to University Education in Nigeria

One of the provisions in the Act establishing the University of Ibadan states among other things "it shall hold out to all persons without distinction of race, creed, or sex, the opportunity of acquiring a liberal education" (Wilson, 2002). All Nigerian Universities are still mandated to give admission to candidates in fulfilling their objectives for training high level manpower for the nation. How this objective is pursued today by the Universities and concomitant problems have implications for manpower development in Nigeria.

A little background of the progressive rise in student enrolment in the Nigerian Universities for a few sessions will help to put these problems in perspective.

Table 1. Student Enrolment in all Nigerian Universities by Session

Session	Student Enrolment
*1948/49	104
1962/63	3646
1966/67	8888
1971/72	17093
1976/77	40914
1981/82	90751
1986/87	151967
1991/92	232282
1994/95	309433

* Refers only to University of Ibadan (Faculty of Education prospectus, 1998).

Source: National Universities Commission, Abuja.

; The trend of student enrolment in the Nigerian Universities for the selected years up to 1995 is only to give one an idea of what the situation has been. From an initial enrolment figure of 104 in the premier University, the figure rose steadily to 309433. by 1995, the number of Universities had increased to several of them.

This picture is only meant to give one. an insight into the kind of pressure the university campuses have been facing in those years. One should now appreciate what the current situation is likely to be terms of students enrolment.

The fact examined in this paper is that there are still more candidates seeking University admission who do not have access to it. This is in spite of the fact that the number of Universities has increased. A number of factors are responsible for this limited access of candidates to universities education in Nigeria. These include limited facilities, indigenization policies and span of control. These have definite impact on University education and manpower development.

Universities, according to Aloba (2002), are not adequately funded hence, infrastructure have generally collapsed. The halls of residence are over-crowded and serve as breeding places for cultists and other indecorous behaviours. Underfunding of Universities is a key factor which accounts for most of the problems within the system. There is an extent to which available funds can go in the provision of facilities in the Universities. Hence admission of candidates is now tied in a way to the quality and quantity of facilities available to cater for the learning needs of students. Since these facilities for many Universities have become decrepitcd, they have placed restriction on the number of students to admit every year.

Another limiting factor on students enrolment in the University is the indigenization policies. JAMB recognizes catchment areas for Universities where chances for admitting students are enhanced. Besides, many Universities reserve most places for indigenes of the states where the Universities are situated. No recourse is usually made to merit. In most cases candidates are denied admission on the ground that they are non-indigenes.

Span of control is one other consideration for limiting the number of candidates who get admitted into a university. University management often want the number of candidates or student population they can control. An over populated University environment is a breeding ground for vices, they say.

The point of interest here is how all these measures impact on the manpower development functions of the University. The position of this paper is that it is alright to filter the number and quality of candidates for admission into Universities but merit should take precedence over other factors. It is by so doing (that the desired high level manpower can be developed otherwise, the present practice seems to be enthroning mediocrity).

Recommendations

In the lights of the fore-going discussion it is recommended that:

- 1) Whoever sets up a University should find it adequately to enhance its manpower development roles.
- 2) Rampant infringement on the rights of students and staff should cease so that the campuses can enjoy stability. Disregard for dialogue as an instrument for resolving conflict on the part of the government, which often gives rise to strike action by worker, should be decried.
- 3) Let this point be accepted that University education is not meant for all. Parents/Guardians and their children/ wards must not think that attaining university education is the ultimate in life. Hence, they should accept other alternative forms of education which earns for them a meal ticket and other fulfillments in life.
- 4) The on-going fight against examination malpractice, cultism and drug abuse should be sustained. Parents should join in the fight by threatening to disown their children should they be found to be involved in any of these unwholesome behaviours.
- 5) Government should create employment opportunities for university graduates even if it means at a reduced pay from what is now known in civil service.
- 6) Merit should be the principal yardstick for admission into Universities. Other criteria should be down played so as not to enthrone mediocrity in this citadel of learning.
- 7) Universities should set up measurable parameters for determining those who are found worthy in character before they are certificated

Conclusion

University education and manpower development in Nigeria faces the ardent challenge of relevance. The philosophy is sound but implementation is shackled with problems. The products now face rejection in the labour market. In most cases jobs are not even available for the teeming population of graduates who are churned out of the system yearly, other problems that militate against the fulfillment of the mandate of Universities in training high level manpower include the effect of the triple evils of examination malpractice, cultism and drug abuse. They make the job at the ivory tower herculian and tell adversely on the quality of the products from the system.

The paper posits that it may be helpful for all and sundry not to regard university education as the ultimate. This will prevent them engaging in all the unorthodox means they adopt in seeking for admission in the Universities.

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