



## GOVERNANCE ISSUES IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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### Abstract:

In realization of the inevitability of education to the socio-political and economic development of the country, the government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria swung into action many years ago in a bid to grant its citizenry the fundamental human right to education generally and higher education in particular. Thus, this paper therefore, examined how practicable it had been for the government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to provide equal and adequate higher education to its citizenry as enshrined in the 1979 constitution. The paper dwelt on the issues of access, institutional and academic freedom; funding, curricula and management of university education. It was revealed that there is acute shortage of access to university education. There is the problem of dilapidated infrastructure and the existence of idealistic curriculum, poor funding, total erosion of university autonomy to mention but a few. Recommendations were therefore, made the Federal Government grant Nigerian universities a reasonable degree of institutional autonomy and academic freedom.

**Keywords:** governance, issues, higher education, Nigeria

### 1. Introduction

Education, be it formal, informal or non-formal when properly positioned, means a lot to any society. There is no disputing that before the coming of the Europeans in the first-half of the nineteenth century, there existed a form of education that was essentially social and democratic in character, hence, functional and responsive to the needs and aspirations of the people. Whereas, the wholesale importation of the present dominant

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Western education and culture, emerged with conflicting religious and ill-fated political undertones, thus received both good and bad welcome in Nigeria. With constant manipulations and politicking, the system has gained prominence, but in an asymmetrical fashion. It is important, therefore, to state unequivocally that such primordial political manipulations have continued to trail the Nigerian educational system up to the twenty-first century. The resultant effect of it, among other things, are the uneven distribution of educational opportunities, high level of school dropouts, perennial turn out of university graduates with unemployable skills, variously predicated upon philosophically self-contradictory and ethno-religious based government policies.

Nevertheless, reports have shown that education in general, and higher education in particular, is fundamental to the construction of a knowledge-based economy and society in all nations (World Bank, 1999). Yet the potentials of higher education systems in developing countries, Nigeria inclusive, to fulfill this responsibility is frequently thwarted by long-standing problems of finance, efficiency, equity, quality and governance (Saint, Hartnett, and Strassner, 2004).

Suffice to recall that the colonialists, courtesy of Arthur Richards Constitution of 1946, encumbered the regional governments with the shared responsibility of administering (higher) education in Nigeria in conjunction with the central government, by placing educational matters in the concurrent list. In fact, the situation was satirical since such a critical decision was much more political than being educationally informed. This is because it led to subsequent unhealthy competitions and disparities among the regions, as far as (higher) educational development was concerned. However, prior to Nigerian political independence, the Asquith and Elliot as well as Ashby (1959) commissions of enquiry were set up by the central government to advise it on higher educational needs of the emerging independent nation for the subsequent twenty years. The Ashby Commission, precisely, handed in its report in September, 1960, which has, hitherto, served as a veritable instrument for both political rigidity and flexibility in educational developments in Nigeria at all levels, including higher education.

Tertiary education, herein referred to as higher education is conceived by the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013:36) as the education given after secondary school in universities, colleges of education, polytechnics, mono-techniques including those institutions offering corresponded courses.

Similarly, the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013:36) lists the goals of tertiary education as to:

- a) Contribute to national development through high-level relevant manpower training;
- b) Develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of the individual and society;
- c) Develop the intellectual capability of individuals to understand environments;
- d) Acquire both physical and intellectual skill which will enable individuals to be self-reliant and useful members of the society;
- e) Promote and encourage scholarship and community service;
- f) Forge and cement national unity; and

- g) Promote national and international understanding and interaction.

It is further indicated that, tertiary educational institutions shall pursue these goals through:

- a) Teaching;
- b) Research and development programmes;
- c) Virile staff development programme;
- d) General and dissemination of knowledge;
- e) A variety of modes of programmes including full-time, block-release, day-release, sandwich etc.
- f) Access to training funds such as those provided by the Industrial Training Fund (ITF);
- g) Students Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES);
- h) Maintenance of minimum educational standards through appropriate agencies;
- i) Inter -institutional cooperation;
- j) Dedicated service to the community through extra-moral and extension services

All these, are indeed, the goals which higher education is set to achieve and the strategies through which they can be achieved. But today, the high crime rate emanating from the activities of youths who are supposed to be equipped with employable skills from higher institutions of learning coupled with the incessant strike actions embarked upon by ASSU, NASSU, ASSUP and other social organizations in higher institutions of learning show that all is not well with the management of higher education in Nigeria. As such, people have remained seriously doubtful about the relevance of higher education in attaining the laudable goals and objectives stated above. It is, therefore, on the basis of all these that this paper examined some governance issues in higher education.

## 2. Governance Issues in Higher Education

Governance is seen by Kezar and Eckel (2004: 37 1-398), at the macro-level of policy decision making as, *“a multi-level concept including several different bodies and processes with different decision-making functions”*. University governance is also regarded as *“the management of academics, human (management of men and women) and material resources in the production of persons that are found worthy both in character and learning”*.

Since Plato made the philosopher-king, the guardian of his ideal state, a union seemed to have been struck between politics and education (Kosemani and Anuna, 2008). This trend has for a very long time dominated the educational sector in many countries of the world, including Britain, United States, Japan, China, Nigeria among others. However, it is important to note that the philosopher-king in Plato's view epitomized a bona fide member of the society who possesses enabling cognitive disposition to improve and perpetuate his society. But the meaning of the same philosopher-king in the context of many developing countries of the world now-a-days has shifted to the contrary. The situation has become so obvious that more often than not public office holders- the new

philosopher kings are found wanting of one form of misdemeanor or the other including misappropriation of public (education) fund to mention but one.

Mango (2011), quoted in Kware (2008,) posits that government and politics in Nigeria is described as nothing but the organized expression of human greed. Similarly, Suberu (1989:177), added that:

*“One could argue, without much fear of being shown wrong, that no one in Nigeria believes that the state can act for the public good. There is no experience of this ever having happened and every public euphoria, after the overthrow of discredited regimes, in turn has fallen victim to new disillusion. Politics has become a thing to be feared, an activity which yields rewards only to the few and punishes in loss of life and property, the vast majority.”*

As such, the issues to be discussed among others are:

- a) funding;
- b) access;
- c) institutional autonomy and freedom;
- d) curricula, and
- e) management of higher education.

### **3. Funding of Higher Education**

Education is obviously a capital-intensive project but a veritable instrument for the attainment of any form of development be it political, economic or social in nature. However, the funding of (higher) education in Nigeria has remained a mirage over the years as politicians continuously relay empty campaign promises about their unquenchable desire to develop the educational sector. These have appeared to be mere gimmicks aimed at securing undeserved political victory. As such, nearly all the universities in Nigeria as well as the colleges of education are characterized by dilapidated infrastructure, ill-equipped library and laboratory, poor remuneration of staff members hence brain drain in the system.

Aina (2007) posited that *“government priority to education is still very low. That, such revelations expose the extent to which the government itself is a contributing factor to the financial imbroglio of the university system”*. Thus, this singular act has helped to legitimate the various aspersions cast upon Nigerian educational system both nationally and internationally. Ajayi and Ekundayo (2009), have observed that the government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria has been unable to meet the benchmark of 26 per cent of total budgetary allocation to education as recommended by the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). For example, from 1999 to 2007, the budgetary allocation to education ranged from 11.2, 8.3, 7.0, 5.09, 11.83, 7.8, 8.3, 8.7, and 6.07 per cent respectively (Osagie, 2009:3). Similarly, Omuta (2009) took a critical look at the UNESCO recommendation and observed that the benchmark assumes that an adequate foundation has been laid for the sector. Considering the long neglect of the educational sector by successive governments in Nigeria, it would require a budgetary

allocation of about 30 per cent for an unbroken period of ten years to redress past neglect, before dedicating 26 per cent for its maintenance and sustainability. If government is no longer interested in funding education, or cannot adequately fund the sector, then those who can or are willing should be allowed, and invited to do so.

This singular issue has apparently caused the series of incessant strikes by ASSU, NASSU, ASSUP and other affiliated bodies in institutions of higher learning in the country. In view of the importance of university education, Ajayi and Ekundayo submitted that the funds allocated to higher education should not merely be considered as an expense but a long-term investment, of benefit to society as a whole. These benefits are reflected on a societal level in terms of lower unemployment rates, better health, lower crime rates, more involvement in societal activities, higher tax returns and other trickle-down effects.

#### **4. Access to Higher Education**

Several worthwhile assertions have been made in respect to accessibility of higher education to the citizenry. The United Nations Declaration on Human rights reads in part *"everyone has the right to education and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit"* (Kaplan, 2003). Secondly section 18, subsection 1 of the Nigerian Constitution (1979) emphasized that government shall direct its policy towards ensuring that there are equal and adequate educational opportunities at all levels. (Baikie, 1999). Thirdly access to tertiary education is entrenched in the National Policy on Education revised in 2004. The policy recognizes the disparities that exist in the country. Nonetheless, Baikie further explained that problems have been created by noticeable disparities in education between sections of the country.

Since 1977, JAMB has been established and obliged by the Federal Government of Nigeria to conduct post-secondary examination and regulate access into higher education institutions. Nevertheless, it was embellished with the quota system and hacked up by the 1979 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The policy was defended by the government on the need to reduce the educational inequalities between different ethnic groups and at the same time forge national unity and integration.

However, applicants from the educationally advantaged states who fail to secure admission always genuinely blame their misfortune on the Quota policy which accepts less qualified students from educationally disadvantaged states. The Quota policy empowers JAMB to reserve 30% of a university's admissions for residents of its catchment area, 20% for educationally disadvantaged students, 10% to be admitted at the Vice-Chancellor's discretion while only 44% of the applicants are admitted on merit. Consequently, Adeyemi (2001), quoted in Saint, Hartnett and Strassner (2004), found significant differences in academic performance between students admitted on merit and those admitted on other criteria.

He (Adeyemi), clearly maintains that the drop-out and repetition rate for the former groups was three times higher than for the merit-based group. One can therefore submit with conviction that the political stride to resolve educational imbalance among

the ethno-religious groups in Nigeria has rather helped to dwindle the socio-economic destiny of the nation so long as higher educational development is concerned.

Besides, a cursory look at the statistics below reveals that the Federal Government, which promised equal and adequate educational opportunity for all citizens has instrumentalized JAMB and the Quota system phenomenon in robbing brilliant Nigerians of their inalienable rights to education as there is a high disparity between the level of demand and supply in respect to access to higher education.

**Table 1:** Enrolment in tertiary institutions in Nigeria: 2000 - 2010

Year	Candidates	Places offered	Percentage (%)
2000	400,000	80,000	20.00
2003	1,043,361	10, 148	10.40
2004	962,133	125,673	13.10
2005	1,030,870	107,161	10.40
2006	893,259	106,304	11.90
2007	1,028,988	129,525	12.59
2008	1,369,147	188,442	13.76
2009	1,373,009	356,981	26.00
2010	1,351,557	337,070	(UTME)24.04

Adopted from Oyedeji (2011).

This trend is a revelation of the philosophical contradiction associated with the National Policy on Education (NPE). This is because the policy advocates the achievement of a free and democratic society based on the principles of egalitarianism. Whereas a free and democratic society can never be attained where there is egalitarianism. The latter warrants a capitalist-oriented economy whereby private investors can run any form of legitimate venture e.g the establishment of private universities. In this situation, the unfortunate JAMB applicants are often left with no option than to relapse to their fate or surrender to the exorbitant fees charged by private universities.

## 5. Institutional Autonomy and Freedom

On the issue of institutional autonomy and academic freedom in the administration of higher education, Berdahi (1990), views academic freedom as *“the freedom of an individual scholar in his/her teaching and research to pursue truth whenever it seems to lead to without fear of punishment or termination of employment or having offended some political, religious or social orthodoxy”*. Amadi and others regard institutional autonomy as the corner - stone of higher education system. An institution without autonomy has consequently been regarded as not being an institution in the real sense. An institution that has no autonomy and academic freedom is, therefore regarded as a contradiction. This is because institutional autonomy is the relative freedom of an institution to conduct its own affairs free from outside interference, whether from the state, the market, donors or other stakeholders e.g. freedom to select staff and students; determine the conditions under which they remain in the institution; determine curriculum contents and degree

standards and the freedom to allocate funds across different categories of expenditures (Fourie, 2004).

Arikewuyo (2004) recounted how past and present governments have encroached into university autonomy to the extent that staff and student unions were banned and unbanned at various times. The ASUU and NANS were the most affected. Many Vice Chancellors have been removed for not complying with directives from the government. A Major General was even appointed as the Sole administrator in a first-generation University. Many academics have been dismissed, retired and unjustly jailed for teaching what they were not employed to teach. This is one, among the many areas where governance (politics) has affected higher education in Nigeria.

## **6. Curricula of Higher Education**

According to Saint, Hartnett and Strassner (2004), institutional responsiveness in terms of tertiary teaching and learning has two dimensions: curricular and pedagogy, ie., content and method. They contend that in today's globally competitive knowledge economy, updating curricular needs to be an almost permanent undertaking.

Clark (2001), suggests that university departments will need to change their curricula every two or three years in order to ensure that the content of their teaching reflects the rapidly advancing frontiers of scientific knowledge. From the standpoint of pedagogy, El-Kawas (2001) and Salmi (2001) pointed out that expanded access and higher participation rates mean that students populations will become increasingly diverse in terms of their academic preparation, means, capacities, motivation and interest.

But the reverse has been the case in Nigeria. Saint et al. rightly noted in Nigeria, three pieces of evidence suggest the need for greater attention to innovation in both curricula and pedagogy. First, students' success seems limited, dropout rates appear to be high. Secondly, the employers of university graduates, as well as the government, consider the quality of university graduates as unemployable, poorly trained and unproductive on the job and the university curriculum lacks quality.

Nevertheless, the government has strategized means of solving the aforementioned problems, but it has not been pragmatic enough in its efforts. For example, the government has returned to university senates the power (previously held by the NUC to determine curricula and to initiate or terminate courses. It has also established reference points for quality improvements and begun to develop academic benchmarks based on demonstrated student competencies. It has also reconstituted all university councils to incorporate broader stakeholder representation, accorded greater autonomy to university councils and managers in the effort to promote institutional responsiveness, and adopted a formula-based block grant resource allocation procedure that facilitates strategic planning and rewards institutional performance (S. Harthett and Strassner, 2004). Now, how many higher institutions have witnessed even a grain of these laudable objectives?

## 7. Management Issues in Higher Education

Amadi et al posit that, the main aim of the university management is the coordination of the activities of staff and students without interfering with academic decisions. Specifically, university education is managed both at external and internal level. At the external level the Federal Government, being the major stakeholder oversees the affairs of the school through the National Universities Commission (NUC), while the internal management is carried out by the principal officers of the university.

Typically, the principal officers of every Nigerian university are: the Vice-Chancellor; the Chancellor; the Pro-Chancellor; the Registrar; the Bursar and the University Librarian. Whereas, the statutory organs of the university comprises: the Visitor (Head of State); Deputy Vice Chancellor (Administration); Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic); Governing Council; Senate; Congregation and Student Affairs.

As noted above, the Federal Government monitors university education through the National Universities Commission (NUC). Ibukun (1997), explained that the main objective of the NUC is to ensure the orderly development of university education in Nigeria; to maintain its high standard and to ensure its adequate funding. Okojie (2007), posited that, the NUC activities in improving quality of university education in the country include; accreditation of courses; approval of courses and programmes; maintenance of minimum academic standards; monitoring of universities; giving guidelines for setting up of universities; monitoring of private universities; prevention of the establishment of illegal campuses and appropriation of sanctions.

It is worthy to note herein that the principal officers, the statutory organs and the NUC on behalf of the Visitor or government play distinct but collegial rules in the management of universities in Nigeria. But with the total erosion of university autonomy in Nigerian universities there have been frequent intrusion and overlap of functions among the stakeholders.

While lamenting on the erosion of university autonomy, Ajayi and Ayodele (2002), assert that, government involvement in university governance has been a point of strife between the government and the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) over some time now. University autonomy is essential to the advancement, transmission and application of knowledge and this is the more reason the ASUU has been more vociferous in demanding for it. According to Babalola et al. (2007), university autonomy and academic freedom has over the years been recurring issue in the ASUU's demand from the Federal Government. For Amadi et al, three aspects of the violation of university autonomy are particularly noteworthy:

- the violation of procedures for the appointment of University vice-chancellors;
- the erosion of the powers of Council as statutory employers; and
- the erosion of the powers of the Senate as the supreme organ in academic matters.

The fact remains that, at present some principal officers of tertiary institutions are appointed based on their affiliation with the power that be. There is no disputing that this has utterly violated the rule of meritocracy and objectivity in the discharge of duties. It is in fulfillment of the common parlance that who pays the piper dictates the tone.



Similarly, most of the principal officers are inexperienced in terms of university administration. Thus, they meddle with the functions of other top functionaries. Besides, NUC, on behalf of the government constantly overrides the vice-chancellors office to the extent of paying impromptu visits to universities and intimidating the staff, principal officers to mention a few. Such circumstances often give rise to public policy failure.

The extension of the Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System (IPPIS) to the Academic Staff in the year 2019 constitutes a vicious threat to autonomy and academic freedom in Nigerian universities. The IPPIS scheme is domiciled in its secretariat being a Department under the Office of the Accountant-General of the Federation. It is in charge of the processing and payment of salaries over 300,000 federal Government employees in the various Federal Ministries, Directorates and Agencies (MDAs). It is also responsible for the remittances of third-party payments including the National Health Insurance Scheme, National Housing Fund, cooperative societies, trade union dues, bank loans, and associations' dues among others. The implication of enrolling university staff members on IPPIS is that their housing funds and taxes would be deducted directly from their salaries by the Federal Government.

It is assumed that since the inception of IPPIS in April 2007, it has eliminated thousands of ghost workers thereby saving the Federal Government billions of naira. Whereas, the incumbent national President of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), Prof Biodun Ogunyemi describes the IPPIS scheme as a scam and a threat to national security. The ASUU leader argued that the (IPPIS) system does not capture the remuneration of staff on sabbatical, external examiners, external assessors, and Earned Academic Allowances. It does not address the movement of staff as in the case of visiting, adjunct, part-time, consultancy service, which academics offer across universities in Nigeria. Cajoling academic staff of universities into IPPIS has therefore been described as an outright violation of the Universities Miscellaneous Provisions (Amendment) Act 2003. <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2020/01/our-position-on-ippis-subsists-asuu/>

## **8. Conclusion/Recommendation**

The development of higher education in Nigeria specifically emerged primarily from the dire need of the people to advance a knowledge-based economy. Nevertheless, its contribution to the economy and the social wellbeing of developed countries of the world like China, the United States of America among others cannot be overemphasized. Both national and international organizations like UN, UNESCO and other reputable commissions of enquiry have variously itemized the development of higher education as the fulcrum of their agendas. But for over eight decades of the development of higher education in Nigeria as well as many other developing countries, it has not recorded satisfactory achievements due to some vices that have infested the socio-political structure of the nations in question. Thus, the system is still characterized by poor funding, incessant strike actions, idealistic curricula, brain drain syndrome, unemployable graduates, acute mismatch between demand and supply for higher

education variously occasioned by the erosion of institutional autonomy by the government.

However, this paper recommends that the management of higher education generally in Nigeria and university education in particular should regain its status quo—the era in which Nigerian universities attracted scholars from different parts of the world. In a nutshell, all the universities should be granted autonomy in planning and implementing policies concerning critical areas of the institution like admission procedures, procurement of facilities and equipment, recruitment and remuneration of staff members, appointment of key officers especially the vice-chancellors, frequent review of curricular in partnership with potential employers to mention but a few.

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