

A Review of Nigerian Tertiary Institutions of Learning and National Transformation

Christina T. Adu^{1*} Ajibola A. Lukman^{2*} Mohammed Nyah N^{3*}

Department of Integrated Science, Department of Educational Foundations and Department of Early Care
Childhood Education, C.O.E, Zing, P.M.B. 1021, Taraba State, Nigeria
Email: lajibola8@gmail.com

Abstract

The paper examines the status quo of Nigerian tertiary institutions of learning in the light of the ongoing national transformation. It could be said that national development remained main target of many administrations in the history of Nigeria. The paper contends that education is a weapon with which national development could be attained through inculcation of right attitudes and social interaction towards addressing the intricacy of national disintegration. To this end, tertiary institutions of learning hold a sensitive key to formation and transformation of our nationhood. When education is generally considered as a mechanism for development, the paper argues that tertiary education teaches learners to be transformative agents in order to sustain the development. In lieu of this, the paper concludes that tertiary education is a functional tool in achieving national transformation in Nigeria supposedly is properly funded and monitored towards blending and interfacing local wisdom with global knowledge, values and skills, which will equip the student to become a citizen of this country as well as a citizen of the global village.

Keywords: tertiary education, national transformation, national development

1. Introduction

Nigeria's President won the 2011 Federal Government elections on the groundswell of popular support, and the promise of a transformation agenda. Transformation is a strong word that portends a radical, structural and fundamental reappraisal of the basic assumptions that underlie our reforms and developmental efforts. The challenge before government is how to move the nation away from an oil-dominated economy, institute the basics for a private-sector driven economy, build the local economy on international best practices, transform a passive oil industry to a more pro-active one, and restructure the country along the lines of a more decentralized federalism.

But beyond this, there is a scourge of corruption that has stunted the growth and development of young people; especially the students, which has contributed to the management and leadership challenges such as building an efficient and effective polity, inspiring a shared vision, remodelling a corrupt polity, building character and integrity in our leaders, redefining the imperatives of transformational leadership, and creating the Nigerian dream that will inspire patriotism and commitment in the citizenry.

However, the recent findings on the state of higher education in Nigeria as conducted by the World Bank and UNESCO in 2006 had confirmed the degradation of the Nigerian educational system. In the 80s Nigeria was a country that produced world-class university graduates that could compete with their counterparts around the world and hard work was their watchword. Today, we only produce the worst set of uneducated tertiary graduates that cannot structure a simple sentence. For instance, the minister of finance, Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, while delivering an address at the second Prof. Bart Nnaji biannual lecture series at the Enugu State University of Science and Technology said that graduates from the country's higher institution of learning were not employable. This is because Nigerian higher institutions were plagued by inadequate science and technological facilities and materials for practical skills development and the country was shunning out thousands of unemployable science and technology graduates each year.

Odekunle (2012) blamed the political class for the corruption in Nigeria which stunted the development of the youth. He also identified incessant disputes, brain-drain in the academia, under-funding or poor financing of education, cultism, corruption and abuse of trust as some of the major challenges facing the educational sector. He therefore, advocated a return to sound moral and family values as a means of renewing commitment and patriotism among Nigerians.

In lieu of the above, national transformation needs functional institutions of learning that will equip Nigerian youths required skills for transformational agenda. This is because tertiary institution of learning occupies a central and primary place serving the functions of teaching, learning and research in the creation of new knowledge, promotion of current information in professional practice and transmission to posterity of the learning and culture of the present and past age (Lawal, 2004).

2. An Overview of Tertiary Institutions of Learning in Nigeria

The current state of education in Nigeria even in this 21st century leaves much to be desired. There is a general

neglect and decay of educational facilities at all levels of education in Nigeria occasioned by the long standing culture of poor funding of education by successive governments in Nigeria. This situation prompted the comment in the editorial of the Guardian (2007, May, 25) that there must be something anti-intellectual about the policies and allocation of resources in our country especially under past military governments, sadly, the civilian administrations have not fared any better. Still commenting on the same issue especially in the face of the proposal of the Federal Government to establish six more Federal Universities in Nigeria, the Punch (2010, November, 18) observed that:

“From the 1990s to date funding of tertiary education has been problematic as successive governments showed marked preference for other priorities and corruption became endemic. Budgetary allocation has declined to the extent that universities and other tertiary institutions are barely able to pay the salaries and allowances of personnel, libraries, laboratories and engineering workshops have long been in decay with the result that most products of the nation’s tertiary institutions lack the intellectual preparation and critical skills required to drive the development process in any sphere of national life”.

The Nigerian tertiary institutions of learning are far too ill-equipped to train and develop new graduates suitable for the 21st century, their products are mediocre. Analysis of the situation point to the extreme level of infrastructural as well as pedagogical deficiency in Nigerian Universities, this being the result of underfunding of public universities (Nwakanma, 2010). Sanni (2010) while commenting on the Nigerian content Act passed in 2010 to regulate the activities of the Nigerian content Division of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), lamented that so far the effect of the law is not yet felt in Nigeria. This is because the International Oil Companies (IOCs) are reluctant to comply with it. They complain that Nigerian graduate engineers required in the industry do not have the basic engineering knowledge and skills largely due to inadequate training in the Universities. It is perhaps in the light of such deficiencies that Okecha (2008) and Peretomode (2010) decried the very poor level of funding of Nigerian education and universities and referred to the world universities ranking in which Nigeria Universities did not feature at all. African Universities were also ranked at the continental level in 2007 and this revealed that the first Top 8 African universities are located in South Africa. Among Africa's Top 100 universities, twenty are based in South Africa, 16 from Egypt and 10 from Morocco. Only four of Nigerian Universities, featured among the 100 universities in the 44th - Obafemi Awolowo University, 65th, University of Ibadan, 79th University of Benin and University of Lagos in the 96th position trailing far and miserably behind universities in some African countries such as Egypt, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Senegal, Namibia, Kenya, Ethiopia and Morocco. (Okecha, 2008).

While decrying the poor state of education in Nigeria and the resultant effect on Nigeria, Ibrahim (2009) lamented that Nigeria was losing quite a huge sum of foreign exchange because of applicants seeking foreign university education. He hereby gave a comparison of universities in Nigeria and Britain, noting that in an average British university, all facilities are available for research with libraries having the latest books on different subjects unlike in Nigeria. The Nation (2010, November, 23) its editorial observed as follows:

“A recent report claimed that Nigerians are among the largest foreign students in the United States and Britain. Nigerians are also moving in large numbers to study in Ghana, other European and Asian universities ... but this is at a cost. For instance, a recent report suggests that Nigerian students spend N 137 billion to acquire education in Britain and the United States alone in the last two years”.

To say that the state of education at all levels in Nigeria is miserably poor is an understatement. Infrastructure is at abysmally low level, students are crowded in hostels and lecture rooms like animals, necessary equipment machinery and current journals are absent (The Nation, 2010, November, 23). Furthermore, while expressing anger over plans by the Federal government to scrap colleges of education and polytechnics in Nigeria, the union of colleges argued strongly that government's poor attitude towards the teaching profession has affected the quality of teaching and teaching practice in the country. It is clear from the policy summersaults and ad hoc measures" that government is largely responsible for the failing in the education subsector, (The Guardian, 2010, November, 30). While delivering his inaugural lecture titled, "What is Higher in Higher Education", Peretomode, (2010), was emphatic in his submission that the library should be given priority in funding in tertiary institutions of learning. This is because, for the educational institution to be strong academically, the library which is the heart of the college or university must be strong. He noted that the top universities in the world have strong libraries. For example, Harvard university library consists of 80 individual libraries and has over 15 million volumes of books thereby priding itself as the largest academic library in the world. This is the case with all the topmost universities in the world. Also, the University of California, Berkeley's library has 10 million volumes of books and 70,000 serial titles, Stanford university library has 8 million volumes of books and 19 libraries. However, in Africa, the University of Cape Town (South Africa) has one main library and 9 branch libraries containing 1.5 million volumes and over 27,000 journals titles. All these when compared with the situation in

Nigeria where the premier university of Ibadan which was ranked 65th among universities in Africa has one million volumes of books, 60,000 journals and subscription to 20 databases, gives a rather gloomy and discouraging picture of the state of the other tertiary institutions in Nigeria as regards their libraries. Thus, if the present state of the tertiary institutions of learning in Nigeria is left unturned, Nigeria and Nigerians may not compete with other countries of world economically, technologically, politically and otherwise.

3. Nigerian Institutions of Learning and National Transformation

Arising from the goals of tertiary education, the National Policy on Education (2004) specifies that university education will make 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, thereby;

- 1) Making professional courses contents to reflect our national requirements;
- 2) Making all students as part of a general programme of all-round improvement in university education to offer general study course such as history of ideas, philosophy of knowledge and nationalism.
- 4) University research shall be relevant to the nation's developmental goals.

In this regard, tertiary institutions of learning shall be encouraged to disseminate their research results to both government and industries, in the opinion of Okebukola (2009), in a developed society characterized by developed economics to which Nigeria aspires; higher education plays a key role. It provides high level human resources for driving the economy and ensures rapid societal transformation. The greater the opportunity given to the citizenry for higher education, the more expansive the horizon for rapid socio-economic development. The tertiary institutions of learning are at the forefront of this mandate of production of the necessary manpower for national transformation since they provide the higher level manpower required for national development. Aguolu (2002) noted that the tertiary institutions of learning are the heart of the societal development. It is equally true that the academic health, intellectual vitality and effectiveness of any university depend largely upon the excellence of its funding which is its lifeblood.

It is obvious from the foregoing that Nigerian tertiary institutions of learning have always had the mandate to produce higher level manpower for national development. Harbison and Myers (1964) opined that national development is the transformation of all aspects of life of a society - cultural, social, political and economic. Thus a well-developed nation is usually associated with high income per capital, many employment opportunities, availability of cheap food and other necessary human requirements, better roads, housing, water, advancement, among others. This goes to buttress the opinion of Todaro (2009) and Onokerhoraye and Okafor (2004) that development is a multi-dimensional process involving changes in structures, attitudes and institutions as well as the acceleration of economic growth, the reduction of inequality and the eradication of absolute poverty and a high birth rate.

Being the central focus of this paper, tertiary institution of learning is a key factor in the national transformation agenda of this administration. It could be affirmed that Nigeria is no longer stranger to economic reforms. For instance, before the 1980s, the reforms were purely in the form of extended national perspective plans that attempted to mobilize human, material and natural resources of the nation to achieve goals of national life. There was the 1962-68 Plan, then the 1970-1974 Plan, the 1975-1980 Plan, and the 1981-1985 Plan. Often, these Plans went beyond mere economic prescriptions to address social, human and political goals. Thus, the 1970-74 Plan defined the national objectives to be the building of:

- a) A united, strong and self-reliant nation;
- b) A great and dynamic economy;
- c) A just and egalitarian society;
- d) A land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens; and,
- e) A free and democratic society.

In implementation, these Plans hardly involved any fundamental restructuring of the national economy. They were in the main monetarist prescriptions that did little or nothing to address the structural and fundamental distortions in the economic, social and political life of the nation. By the 1980s the need for reforms paved the way for the Stabilization/Austerity Measures of the Shagari Administration. The sharp drop in the international spot market price for oil resulted in plummeting national revenues, putting in dire peril all the budgetary projections and planning for the period. The hurried and fire-brigade approach to the emerging problem, failed to address the root causes of a national economy in great distress and fundamental disequilibrium.

In 1986, the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) was introduced by the Babangida Administration to address the fundamental and structural imbalance in the economy, diversify the economy, strengthen the currency, and build a viable, sustainable industrial infrastructure upon which real economic growth and development can be founded. The reform exercise rested on a tripod of measures: Liberalization of foreign exchange transactions, Rationalization of public sector agencies and parastatals, and Optimization of the capacity for domestic production and stimulation of non-oil exports.

Next in the line was the Vision 2010 introduced by Abacha Administration in 1998. The aim was to “develop a

blueprint that will transform the country and place it firmly on the route to becoming a developed nation by the year 2010" (Vision 2010 Report, 1998). The general objective was to transform the country into "a united, industrious, caring and God-fearing democratic society, committed to making the basic needs of life affordable for everyone, and creating Africa's leading economy". The Policy projected that by 2010, the Nigerian people would re-discover themselves and revert to being God-conscious and God-fearing, caring, sincere, honest, accountable in their dealing with public trust, and proud of their country and heritage.

In 2004, the Obasanjo Administration introduced NEEDS - National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy. The NEEDS reform programme rested on four key strategies (NEEDS, 2004):

- Reforming Government and Institutions;
- Growing the Private Sector;
- Implementing a Social Charter;
- Value Re-Orientation.

The complimentary tools for the realization of the above goals included Pension Reforms, Energy and Power Reforms that led to the desegregation of NEPA into 18 successor companies, the GSM Telecommunications Reform, the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, the Corrupt and Allied Offences Commission (ICPC), the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, and the Reforms in the Financial Sector.

With the advent of the Yar'Adua Administration in 2007, the Federal Government articulated the 7-point Agenda for national development. The policy thrust revolved around the seven-point contract of that Administration with the Nigerian people: Energy, Education, Agriculture, Infrastructure, Wealth Creation and Poverty Alleviation, Land Reforms, and Security. The point was further made, that these reforms would catapult Nigeria to the rank of one of the 20 most developed countries of the world by the year 2020.

On April 16, 2011, President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan won a pan-Nigerian mandate that swept through the North and South of the nation. He ran on a promise to radically transform the nation and overhaul every aspect of the national life. The Transformation Agenda Final Report defines the goal of the reform exercise in these words:

During 2011-2015, the policies and programmes directed at addressing governance will focus on the public service, security, law and order, the legislature, anti-corruption measures and institutions, the judiciary, economic coordination, and support for private investment... These will be addressed through the implementation of the recommendations ... in the areas of public service reforms, judicial reform, anti-corruption initiative, electoral reform, land use reform, fiscal management reforms, power sector reform, police reform, financial sector reform, infra-structural development reform, and information and communication technology (p. 51; Cited by Asobia, 2012).

On the close examination, it seems that the NEEDS provided the common denominator upon which the 7-point Agenda, the Vision 2020, and the Transformation Agenda rest. The expectation was that all the above reform measures would culminate in the fulfilling of the 2001 Kuru Declaration:

To build a truly great African, democratic country, politically united, integrated and stable, economically prosperous, socially organized, with equal opportunity for all, and responsibility from all, to become the catalyst of [African] Renaissance, and making adequate all-embracing contributions, sub-regionally, regionally and globally (NEEDS: viii, 2004).

Sadly, after more than fifty years of policy reforms, Nigeria has painfully remained:

- i) A public-sector led economy with a bloated government presence in every facet of national life;
- ii) A nation with very weak private sector which has grown a "rent-seeking and unproductive culture of over-dependence on government patronage and contracts, with little or no value added" (Harneit-Sievers, 2004);
- iii) A mono-crop economy with preponderant influence of one commodity in determining the nation's revenue-expenditure profile and the balance of payment position;
- iv) An extractive and primary economy that produced unrefined raw materials for export, either in the form of agricultural products or crude oil. Manufacturing was at a very rudimentary stage, and industrialization remained an inconsequential factor in the nation's economic equation;
- v) A nation without an effective industrial infrastructure for economic take-off - no petro-chemical industry to fuel the industrialization process, no effective iron and steel complex to produce flat steel, a deficient power and energy sector, insecure and inhospitable environment, and poor communications;
- vi) An economy with a weak and tottering national currency that was the whipping boy of the international financial community.

The mandate to reform and transform Nigeria has been most emphatically communicated in the majesty of the democratic process. The dream is for bold and audacious transformation programme that will radically, fundamentally, structurally and massively transform the national economy, reinvent the politics of our nation, secure the polity, care for the underprivileged, and provide responsible, responsive and credible leadership to Africa's largest and most promising economy.

The above discussion points to the fact that education must inculcate core values of the land into the learners because it could be affirmed that men without values constitute a blot on the nation's psyche, in the case of tertiary institutions of learning: A Teacher without proper values will sell grades for sex and money; an Engineer without sound values will build roads and utilities that will neither endure nor give real service; an Architect without values will design buildings that will collapse and kill their occupants; a Judge without values would be a stranger to justice, selling and buying ex-parte motions, and standing fair conduct on its head; a Politician without values will be an opportunist in the corridors of power - greedy, malevolent, deceitful, master of double speak, dishonest and above all, dangerous to the nation's well-being; and, an Accountant without values will substitute "expediency for priority, imitation for innovation, cosmetics for character, style for substance, and pretence for competence" (Covey, 2003).

5. Recommendations

From the foregoing, the following recommendations are offered:

- 1) The Nigerian government must urgently mainstream tertiary institutions of learning in the education sector of the NV 2020 project in order to demonstrate seriousness in developing the necessary quality manpower to achieve its goals. This is the only way by which the NV 2020 project can be a driving force for the national transformation;
- 2) Government at all levels in Nigeria should change its poor attitude towards the funding of education especially at tertiary level. There should be massive injection of funds into the education sector;
- 3) That the display of ignorance by the government and people of Nigeria about the importance of education to national transformation should be changed radically. In this regard, mass media in Nigeria should mount aggressive enlightenment campaigns to enlighten the general public at all levels on the importance of education to the national transformation.
- 4) There is the need for a special National Policy on Information to be put in place by the government of Nigeria, so as to awaken the consciousness of all Nigerians to the importance of tertiary institutions of learning and research institutes to national transformation. This could be done through massive publicity in both the print and electronic media.
- 5) For the purpose of achieving the NV 2020 project, the government of Nigeria at all levels must rise to the occasion and do all it takes to bring tertiary education and the academic libraries in Nigeria up to the standards of the topmost economies of the world by providing the necessary funding and infrastructure. All that the government has been doing wrongly or failing to do in this regard should be corrected after a necessary study of the inputs being made in this regard by advanced countries.
- 6) The Education Tax Fund (ETF), has been giving financial support to tertiary institutions and other relevant institutions and their libraries to enable them develop better. These funds should be strictly utilized for the purpose. A situation where such funds are being diverted to other uses in some of the institutions will not augur well for the accelerated development of academic libraries. The utilization of funds should be closely monitored by ETF so that they can support the massive funding required for the national transformation.
- 7) For national transformation agenda to be realistic there is need for a genuinely interested leader in serving rather than being served.
- 8) Nigerians deserve a leader with the ability to create the vision, inspire and motivate followers, and through consistent, persistent and focussed guidance, empower individuals to achieve results greater than they ever imagined.
- 9) At this point of lives, Nigerians need a leader who will unite us rather than divide us, ennoble rather than demean us, truly transforms rather than deform us - who will diligently search out and celebrate subordinates better than himself.
- 10) Nigeria politicians are expected to model what they preach, and claim to leadership on the force of their convictions, the elegance and style of their performance on the job, and the integrity of life and practice. The mandate Nigerians gave to this Administration for transformation of the polity is one that seeks for the style of governance that will:
 - ▶ Recreate our value system as a people - replacing patronage appointment with an insistence on merit, and restoring the moral tone of our public officers;
 - ▶ Inculcate a healthy work ethic in the citizenry - developing the individual worker intellectually and equipping him to do a good job, providing efficient supervisory and management skills at the workplace, selection and placement of staff on merit rather than on nepotism and ethnic considerations, and a fair reward-incentive scheme that motivates;
 - ▶ Resolve our national identity crisis by forging one united people out of the diverse ethnic nationalities that comprise our nation. One of the enduring wonders of our age remains how the United States has become a melting pot of different nationalities living together just as Americans, notwithstanding the fierce nationalistic struggle and rivalry that described their past. Today, whether they are Italian-

- Americans, German-Americans, Anglo-Americans, or Afro-Americans, they all have one proud heritage as Americans. Perhaps, the best gift any Nigerian leader can bequeath to his countrymen today is to forge one united nation and people out of the disparate peoples of Nigeria.
- ▶ Lead the nation in a deliberate and determined battle against corruption. Corruption has penetrated the warp and woof of the Nigerian society. The boss and his messenger, the police officer and the recruit, the classroom teacher and his student, the politician and the voter, the judge and the lawyer, the pastor and his parishioner - none can remain untainted by this stigma. The greed of the ruling class, plays upon the poverty of the larger majority of the people to perpetuate this scourge. Unfortunately, the battle against corruption is being prosecuted by men who are not morally qualified to lead in the crusade. Success in this battle demands on the part of the leader, commitment, sincerity, and consistency, and must be pursued relentlessly, no matter whose ox is gored.
 - ▶ Redefine our national priority in favour of hard-work, diligence, honesty and patriotism. So long as people make it because of their connections, so long as tribe and old school ties are the basis for progress in public service, so long will all the talk about National Rebirth and Reorientation, be mere talk. We must build a system that respects excellence. No country ever went to the moon, or transformed into a developed economy by federal character. Excellence must become our national motto, if we are to remain relevant in the new millennium.
 - ▶ Unleash the creative potential of our people. This will mean encouraging challenges to current ways of thinking and doing, establishment of goals that explicitly contain creative components, cultivating an attitude of focussed freedom to apply natural and acquired skills in a defined area of activity, and associating creative efforts with specific evaluative domains.

6. Conclusion

The task of transforming the Nigerian nation from socio-political and economic perspective requires more than the hard factors of growth and development. Also needed, are the soft factors of management and leadership skills to be imbedded in our students especially at tertiary levels. Rightly has it been said that there are no under-developed countries; only under-managed ones. The need of the hour is for transformational leaders able to articulate their vision, possessing assessment skills, communication abilities, and at the same time very sensitive to the skill deficiencies of the graduates turning out from our tertiary institutions of learning. Therefore, tertiary education is crucial to national development and national transformation of current administration.

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