

University Education in Nigeria: Challenges and Way Forward

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Abstract

University education in Nigeria is the education that prepares the youths for future. University education is the key to the realization of the social, economic and technological advancement of a country. The Nigerian university education faces many problems. The researchers employed the use of secondary data to discuss the points raised in the article. This article identified poor planning, weak administration, inadequate funding, inadequate academic staff, inadequate infrastructural facilities, poor supervision, brain-drain, strike actions, corruption and poor research programme as the problems facing the university education in Nigeria. To address these challenges, the article recommendations include government should effective planning of universities education, appoint capable administrators, increase the funding of university education, provision of adequate infrastructural facilities, motivate the academic staff, implement agreement, fight the corruption in the university system and increase the funding of research programme.

Keywords: *challenges, planning, programme, university education*

Introduction

The Nigerian higher education system according to Noun (2009) comprises Universities, Polytechnic and Colleges of Education offering programs in areas such as teacher education and agriculture. It is the largest and most complex higher education system on the continent.

According to Noun (2009) the first higher educational institution, the Yaba Higher College, was established in 1932. The agitation of Nigerians for a more comprehensive higher education provision led to the constitution of Asquith and Elliot Commissions on Higher Education. Their reports in 1943 favoured the establishment of universities in Nigeria. In 1948 however, the University College Ibadan was founded as an affiliate of the University of London. University College continued as the only University Institution in Nigeria until 1960 (Noun, 2009, Jubril, 2003).

In April 1959, the Nigerian government commissioned an inquiry (Ashby Commission) to advise it on the higher education needs of the new nation for its first two decades of Independence. Before the submission of the report in 2nd September 1960, the Eastern

Region government established its own university at Nsukka. (i.e University of Nigeria, Nsukka in 1960). The recommendations of the Ashby Report include among others:

1. The Federal Government should give support to the development of new Universities of Nigeria, planned in 1955 and open a few weeks before the publication of the Ashby Report in 1960;
2. Government should establish a university in the north using the old site of the Nigerian college in Zaria as its base;
3. Government should establish a university in Lagos with day and evening courses in business, commerce and economics;
4. University College Ibadan, should move away from its conservative position, widen its curriculum and develop into a full university;
5. All universities in Nigeria should be national in outlook;
6. There should be wider diversity and greater flexibility in university education;
7. All the universities should have B. A. (Education) degree courses;
8. Courses in engineering, medicine, law, commerce and agriculture should be offered;
9. All new Nigerian universities should be independent of one another and each should confer its own degrees;
10. A National Universities Commission should be set up to have undisputed control over the affairs of the universities, particularly in terms of finance, staff and courses (Noun 2009).

In the Eastern Region, the University of Nigeria, Nsukka was founded in 1960; in the West, the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife (formerly, the University of Ife came to be in 1961; and Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria was established in the North in 1962. In 1962, the University of Lagos was born, while in 1962, the University College Ibadan transformed into a substantive university. This made UCI, Ibadan and University of Lagos became the first two federal universities in Nigeria, while other three were regional. In 1970, the newly created Bendel State established a university known as the University of Benin. We refer these six (6) universities established during this period 1960 1970 as first generation universities.

In 1975, all the six universities mentioned above became federal universities, while seven new universities were established due to the nineteen states structure of Nigeria as created in 1976. These second generation universities include the University of Calabar (1975); the University of Ilorin (1976); the University of Jos (1975); the University of Sokoto (1977); the University of Maiduguri (1977); the University of Port Harcourt (1977); and Bayero University Kano (1977). They became federal universities because of Decree 46 of 1977, which provided for Federal Government takeover of all universities in Nigeria (Noun, 2009).

The 1979 constitution transfers university education from the exclusive legislative list to the concurrent legislative list, this arrangement allowed the states governments to establish state-owned universities if they so desired. Due to this development however, some states created new universities between 1979 and 1983. The newly created

universities include Bendel State University, Ekpoma; Anambra State University of Technology, Enugu; Imo State University; Ekiti; Ogun State University, Ago-Iwoye; Ondo State University, Ado-Ekiti; Rivers State University of Science and Technology, Port Harcourt; Cross River State University, Uyo; and Lagos State University, Ijanikin.

Seven Federal Universities of Technology emerged between 1981 and 1985. These were the Federal Universities of Technology Bauchi (1982/1982); Markurdi (1981/1982); Owerri (1981/1982); Yola (1982/1983); Akure (1982/1983); Abeokuta (1983/1984); Minna (1983/1984). The Federal University of Technology, Yola, became out-post of the University of Maiduguri. The University of Jos absorbed the Federal University of Technology, Makurdi as out-post of the former, while the Federal University of Technology; Abeokuta became a campus of the University of Lagos (Noun, 2009, Okon, 2006).

Following the dawn of the third republic (from May 29, 1999 till date), there has been an increase in universities' establishment across the nation. The fourth generation universities are those established between 1991 to date. They included more state universities, National Open Universities and private universities. Students' numbers are in scores of thousands. As for Polytechnics and Colleges of Education, they are in excess respectively (Noun, 2009).

The Nigerian university system is the largest in Africa and according to the National Universities Commission the total number of universities in Nigeria is 193 which comprises 45 federal universities, 54 state universities and 99 private universities. The Nigerian universities especially the public universities are facing many problems. The aim of this article is to discuss the problems facing the university education in Nigeria.

Concept of University Education

University education is the education that provides post-secondary school education for the citizens. University education is an advance education that develops the manpower of the country. University education focuses on teaching, researching and providing community services. The university education is the most advance education that gives directive to career development.

In Nigeria, the University education is grouped in the higher education which according to National policy on education (2013) The National Policy on Education (FGN, 2004), defines Higher Education as the Post -Secondary Section of the National education system, which is given of Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Technology including courses as are given by the Colleges of Education, Advanced Teachers Training colleges, Correspondence Colleges and such Institutions as may be allied to them. Higher education, including professional education, has the following aims:

- a) The acquisition, development, and inculcation of the proper value orientation for the survival of the individual and societies;
- b) The development of the intellectual capacities of individuals to understand and appreciate environment;

- c) The acquisition of both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to develop into useful members of the community;
- d) The acquisition of an overview of the local and external environments (FGN, 2004)

The Nigerian government established the National universities Commission to supervise and regulate the activities of universities in Nigeria. The National Universities Commission functions include:

- (i) Coordinating the entire activities in all Nigeria universities,
- (ii) Harmonizing and coordinating the development of Nigeria universities to meet the national goals,
- (iii) Advising the government on the financial needs of the universities,
- (iv) Distribution of fund to then Universities when such is made available by the government,
- (v) Setting the minimum, benchmark for Nigerian universities,
- (vi) Ensuring compliance of the Universities to the minimum benchmark set,
- (vii) collecting, collating, analyzing and storing data collected from Nigerian Universities for advising the government on the need to expand the existing universities or establish new ones,
- (viii) Setting standards to be followed in establishing universities in Nigeria,
- (ix) Issue operating license to Nigerian universities.
- (x) Accrediting courses in Nigerian universities,
- (xi) Taking part in universities' annual estimate hearings to determine the financial need of the universities, and
- (xii) Keeping of accurate and up-to-date financial records for all local and foreign transactions (Noun, 2008).

Problems facing University Education in Nigeria

The problems facing the university education on Nigeria include poor planning, weak administration, inadequate funding, inadequate academic staff, inadequate infrastructural facilities, poor supervision, brain-drain, strike actions and corruption.

Poor Planning

Poor planning is a major problem facing the educational system in Nigeria public universities. University education is not well planned in Nigeria, and this is responsible for the various problems facing the university education implementation. Ogunode & Ajape (2021) observed that higher education in Nigeria is the post-secondary school education. It is the most sensitive educational because of its roles in the social, economic and technological development. Higher education in most part of the world is well planned and managed. It is unfortunate that the Nigerian higher education faces many challenges due to poor planning. Ogunode & Ajape (2021) went further to identify: inadequate funding of planning education, inadequate data, and shortage of

professional planners in higher education, poor capacity of educational planners, shortage of planning materials, political instability, political influence and poor planning methods used for planning higher education as the challenges facing planning of higher education in Nigeria. For any meaningful development to occur in the university education, we must give planning priorities.

Weak Administration

Weak administration is a very big problem facing the university education in Nigeria. The administration of public universities in Nigeria is very weak. Ogunode & Abubakar (2021) identified some problems facing the administration of public universities to include; inadequate funding, inadequate academic staff, inadequate infrastructural facilities, brain-drain, incessant strike actions by the universities unions, institutional corruption, insecurity problems, weak administrators and poor capacity development of academic staff, political interference in the universities administration, indiscriminate issuance of licenses for establishing new universities, universities autonomy dilemma, poor Internally Generated Revenue (IGR) among others. Another problem facing the Nigerian Universities is the poor leadership style of Vice-Chancellor. Many Nigerian University leaders emerged without due process. They are appointed by politicians. They are less qualified to handle the Academic institutions like the universities set up. They lack competence, leadership skills, and managerial skills to transform the Universities for sustainability. One challenge facing the universities in Nigeria is the appointment of weak administrators. (Ogunode, & Abubakar 2020; Ogunode, Yiolokun, & Akeredolu, 2019; Ekaette 2001).

Inadequate Funding

Inadequate funding is a challenge to the administration of university education in Nigeria. Ogunode & Abubakar (2021) submits that inadequate funding is a major challenge facing the administration of universities in Nigeria. The university system requires a lot of funds for effective administration to be realized. The annual budgetary allocation for the administration of universities in Nigeria is grossly inadequate. The inability of the federal government to stick to the UNESCO 26% of national budget for education is affecting the management of Nigerian universities. Over a decade now, the annual budget for the entire educational sector in Nigeria is below 15% and this is affecting the effective administration of the different levels of education in the country, including the university system. The poor funding of education is responsible for the poor quality of the universities' education in Nigeria. The annual budget for the administration of universities in the country is not adequate to provide the needed infrastructural facilities and human resources that the various universities required to function properly. Ogunode, Abubakar & Ajape (2021) did a study that investigated the causes of inadequate funds in Nigerian Public Universities. The study reveals that poor government allocations, low internally generated revenue, low school fees, institutional corruptions, poor planning/projection, poor research income and poor contribution from private sector, NGO and alumnus. The study also confirmed that the effect of inadequate funding of Nigerian public universities is responsible for poor teaching and learning, inadequate infrastructural facilities, shortage of academic staff, poor research programme, poor staff development programme and poor quality of education.

Inadequate funding is a major problem facing the university education in Nigeria (Ogunode, Yiolokun, & Akeredolu, 2019; Okoli, Ogbondah, & Ewor, 2016; Ogbondah 2010 and Uzoka, 2007.

Inadequate Academic Staff

Inadequate academic staff is a problem preventing the administration of university education in Nigeria. Ogunode & Abubakar (2021) submits that academic staff or lecturers are faculty members in the higher institutions or in the universities. The lecturers are responsible for implementing the teaching programme; they are the line unit in the university setting, and they deliver academic services of teaching and assessing the students. The roles of the academic staff in the development of the university education cannot be underestimated. It is unfortunate that as important as the academic staff is to the development of the university system, many universities in the country are understaffed. The Nigerian universities face the problem of shortage of lecturers in many departments and faculties, especially in a programme like the sciences. The shortage of lecturers in many departments and faculties is responsible for high teacher-student ratio in the Nigerian universities. Ogunode & Adamu (2021) identified; inadequate funding, lack of strategic manpower planning, brain-drain, poor motivation, un-conducive working environment and corruption as the reasons for shortage of academic staff in the Nigerian higher institutions. They also identified that low productivities, poor quality of teaching, and poor quality of education as the effects of a shortage of academic staff in the Nigerian public higher institutions.

Inadequate Infrastructural Facilities

Inadequate infrastructural facility is a problem facing the university education in Nigeria. Many public universities do not have adequate infrastructural facilities to implement teaching and research programme. Ogunode (2021) evaluated the factors responsible inadequate infrastructural facilities in some selected public universities and discovered that that inadequate funding, poor planning and poor projection, institutional corruption, increase in students' population and poor administration and management are factors responsible for inadequate infrastructural facilities in public universities in North Central Nigeria. The study also showed that the effects of inadequate infrastructural facilities for students' academic performance include overcrowded lecture halls, prevention of students from reading properly, poor academic performance, postponement of lectures, slow down learning activities of students and increase students' cost of learning. Also, the study disclosed that the effects of inadequate infrastructural facilities on lecturers include poor teaching and research work, delay in teaching and research work, postponement of lectures, kills academic staff moral, increase the cost of lecturing and researching for lecturers, leads to poor quality of education and brain-drain in the universities. Salisu (2001) conducted a study that investigated the influence of school physical resources on students' academic performance and found out that there is there is a positive relationship between academic performance of students and school physical resources. The Inadequate infrastructural facilities like good classrooms, lecture halls and laboratories is a threat to the survival and sustainability system performance and its sustainability hence education to some extent is falling due to low standard. Ogunode & Abubakar(2021), Ojo (2018),

John, (2016), Udida , Bassey, & Udofia, (2009) agree that inadequate infrastructural facilities is among the major challenges the Nigerian universities are facing.

Poor Supervision

Poor supervision is another challenge facing university education in Nigeria. The supervision of university education in Nigeria is poor and ineffective. The poor supervision is responsible for the poor quality of education in the system. The National Universities Commission established to supervise the universities in Nigeria is weak. Ogunode (2021) opines that inadequate funding, opposition from ASUU, shortage of professional supervisors, inadequate supervision materials, and poor capacity development of supervisors, corruption, inadequate transportation facilities and insecurity problems are the problems facing the supervision of the universities in Nigeria.

Brain-Drain

Another problem facing the Nigerian university system is the problem of brain-drain. Ogunode & Abubakar (2021) views Brain-drain as the mass movement of professionals from the developing countries to developed countries for better working conditions. Nigerian universities are facing the problem of brain drain because of poor motivation and poor working environment. Many lecturers have gone out of the Nigerian universities to other countries like South Africa and European countries. Few among many factors responsible for the best brain of Nigerian lecturers going abroad are poor condition of service, strike actions, poor research, poor motivation and insecurity challenge. The implication of brain-drain in the effective management of Nigerian universities is huge; the capable hands that would help in administering the universities are let go, this creates room for inexperience and under qualified people to run the universities in the country.

Strike Actions

Strike action is a very serious problem facing the university education in Nigeria. Ogunode & Abubakar (2021) observed that Strikes action by different unions in the Nigerian universities is another problem preventing effective administration of the universities. Strike simply means protest by employees (mostly under labour unions) through concerted cessation of work due to an impasse with the employers. It is the last resort for employees to have their grievances addressed. However, the incessant strike action is adversely affecting the effective running of universities in Nigeria. For instance, a survey by premium times an online newspaper revealed that in the last two decades Nigerian universities were shut down fifteen times due to strikes and the period spent spanned about fifty months (still counting). This effect is massive; the most affected area is the academic calendar. Once the school is closed for strike, there must be changed in its existing plans of activities and the implication is that a programme that is designed to four years would have additional month(s) or year(s). This becomes a bottleneck in the smooth running of universities in Nigeria. Okoli, Ogbondah, & Ewor, (2016), Ahunanya and Ubabudu (2006) established that strike actions is one of the major problem facing the university system in Nigeria.

Corruption

Corruption is a very big problem facing the university education in Nigeria. Some officials have misused and misappropriated the funds allocated for the development of the universities within the university system. Ogunode & Abubakar (2021) observed that institutional corruption is one of the major problems facing the administration of the universities in Nigeria. The entire higher educational system is engulfed in corrupt practices. The budgetary allocation for the administration of university education in Nigeria is some time diverted by officials within the system. There are many forms of corruption in the universities in Nigeria. Some of them include sex for marks, bribery to get position, NYSC mobilization, issuing of fake transcript, illegal employments, promotion staff, formation of cliques and groups, inflating contracts etc. Ogunode, & Abubakar, (2020), Ogbondah (2010) and Dare (2008) agree in their respective papers that corruption is a challenge facing the higher institutions in Nigeria.

Poor Research

Poor research programme is another issue in the Nigerian university education. The Nigerian universities especially the public universities are not doing well in term of research programme. Ogunode, Jegede, Adah, Audu, Ajape (2021) argued that research programme is one of the major programme of the universities. It is a key to the university's development. Research programme of the universities is one of the key indicators used to measure the performance of the universities. The administration of research programme in Nigerian public universities faces many problems. They observed that inadequate research funding, unstable academic calendar/strike Actions, inadequate infrastructural facilities, brain-drain, insecurity, corruption, poor technological advancement/poor ICT literacy are few of the many problems facing the administration of research programme in Nigeria University. Others are poor participation of the private sector in research development and lack of conducive working (research) environment.

Way Forward

To address these challenges, the article recommends that government should effective planning of universities education, appoint capable administrators, increase the funding of university education, provision of adequate infrastructural facilities, motivate the academic staff, implement agreement, fight the corruption in the university system and increase the funding of research programme.

- a) Government should put sound measures down to ensure effective planning of the university education in the country.
- b) Government should appoint competent administrators to head the various universities in the country.
- c) Government should increase the funding of the universities to enable the universities acquire necessary human and materials resources for the development of the universities
- d) Government should provide more infrastructural facilities in all the public universities across the country

- e) Government should direct all the school administrators to employ more academic staff in their various universities, considering the need of each faculty and departments
- f) All forms of corruption in the university system should be fought by the government and its anti-corruption agencies
- g) The government should motivate all academic staff to prevent the brain-drain problem in the university system
- h) Agreement reached with various unions within the university system should be honoured and be implemented by the two parties to avoid strike actions in the universities
- i) The government should increase the research funding of the universities.

Conclusion

University education in Nigeria is the education that prepares the youths for future. University education is the key to the realization of the social, economic and technological advancement of a country. The Nigerian university education faces many problems. The researchers employed the use of secondary data to discuss the points raised in the article. The article identified poor planning, weak administration, inadequate funding, inadequate academic staff, inadequate infrastructural facilities, poor supervision, brain-drain, strike actions, corruption and poor research programme as the problems facing the university education in Nigeria. To address these challenges, the article recommends that government should effective planning of universities education, appoint capable administrators, increase the funding of university education, provision of adequate infrastructural facilities, motivate the academic staff, implement agreement, fight the corruption in the university system and increase the funding of research programme.

Acknowledgment

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