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THE UNIVERSITY IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

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Abstract

The university is a place where rational solutions are found to problems. It is a place where one acquires professional and or occupational development. Spurred by this belief, this work ex-rays the system in the contemporary society, briefly, looking at its “strangled asphyxiated” state beyond the present Nigeria and zeroes down home. Regardless of the level of industrialization or ideological posturing, the system is no longer the way it was in the early 19th century. As we are into this millennium; development, expansion, quality of output of products of teaching, research and community service have “ad-abinitio” been affected. Rational suggestions are not given opportunities for rational solutions to emerge.

Introduction

Universities, indeed, carry with their name the ideal of the totality, the “universal”. This first bears the quest for the universal knowledge, of the absolute truth, of the existing, of the “ens verum”. It is that tertiary education level where one acquires professional (intrinsic) or occupational (extrinsic) development obtained either formally or informally. As a learning community, it can be provisionally construed as an ideal type of higher education culture that seeks to overcome current tendencies toward individual alienation and intellectual fragmentation with regard to present academic specialization and special interests. The learning community does not deny the value of research or the scholar’s freedom of inquiry but, as a moral community, it does seek to organized them within an ethical domain of connectedness and mutual responsibility (Wilcox, John and Ebbs 1992 p. 347). Structured into two main spheres- the academic management and professional bureaucracy, the university is a place where rational solutions are found to problems (Banjo 1998). Education in every country is a three-legged project. You train the student academically in terms of knowledge of subject matter and then character, discipline and finally practical skills and industry.

Worldview cursory look

University of Bolona in Italy has been associated as the oldest in the world with Paris as the oldest in Europe. Critical to the specialist function of universities are the three P’s namely:

(i) The profession of truth and knowledge through teaching;
(ii) the promotion of truth and knowledge through research and
(iii) The protection of truth and knowledge (Enaohwo 1989. p. 78), Frieburg has become the oldest university in the FRG, Germany. Any by 1971. There were 2,573 institutions of higher learning in United States, (Millet, 1973 in Enaohwo 1989 p. 80).

Societies all-over, have established universities as centres of competent through, lefty behaviour and places where genius blooms best. Where frontiers of knowledge expand and civilization advanced. Venues for transmitting culture and values, for training the inheritors of the society to manage the future from the age of 23 (the traditional age of graduating from the university) Aminu (1988 p. 14). To maintain a modern industrial sector. 10 percent or more of the youth of each generation must receive further education. The developed countries have exceeded this 10 percent in terms of training to the diploma and degree levels-Japan 35, USA 32, U.K. 27, France 25, West Germany 21 and Netherlands 18 (ibid).

Academic quality

The chronicle for Higher Education (1987) survey revealed that academic quality is often a casualty of worldwide enrolment boom. Evidence is accumulating that greatly increased access to higher education over the past two decades has come at a tremendous price: a severe and pervasive
many educators, and students, are strongly questioning whether the end result has much value. Most governments have seemed both unwilling to limit enrolments and unable to increase appropriations sufficiently to solve the system’s basic problems. The Chronicles goes on to cite samples of findings in many individual countries:

In Argentina, no one in Government seems willing to revert to more restrictive admissions. Many universities in Britain are now having great difficulty in maintaining their financial integrity let alone achieving much by way of purposive development in widening access and furthering research. Canadian higher education is retrenching and Canadian students are graduating with an average personal debt of more than 20,000 dollars. Universities in Columbia are in danger of being “strangled, asphyxiated” (ibid). In Eastern Europe, a partial solution has been to allow selected graduates to study abroad, with the calculated risk that some may never return.

Prospects for higher education in the year ahead do not seem good in Ecuador. Enrolments have reached 300,000 compared with only 20,000 in the 1960s and the resulting overcrowding and financial strains have caused deterioration in the academic quality of almost all of the universities.

In Canada and because of financial considerations, every year budget had kept pace with inflation with some universities apparently reducing rather than expanding their enrolments. Israel’s Higher Education is in such dire financial straits that some top university officials have warned that their institutions might not be able to open due to excessive expansion and, mismanagements have also contributed to the problem. The problem and story is the same in Japan, Mexico, Peru, Soviet Union (where institutions are producing doctors who can not diagnose diseases and engineers who know nothing about computing), regardless of the level of industrialization or ideological posturing.

The Universities in contemporary Nigerian Society

The year 1962 marked the end of colonial and highly restricted access to university education in Nigeria with the implementation of Lord Eric Ashby Commission’s report and our march towards general access to university education. However, up to the 1940s, the measures of success that advocates for the establishment of university education achieved were the opening of the Yaba High College in 1943. Consequent upon the Asquith and Elliot Commissions Reports of 1945, the University college of Ibadan was established in January 1948 as a college (satellite) Campus of the University of London.

Ashby’s Commission’s recommendation established “Ashby Universities” (or Babies) between 1960 and 1962 in the following sequence:
(1) UNN in 1960 as the first Nigerian initiated University.
(2) UNIFE (OAU) though not recommended by Ashby, was founded in 1961 by the Government of Western Region.
(3) The ABU was founded in 1962 by the Northern Nigerian Government.
(4) The UNILAG established in 1962 by the Federal Government. University of Ibadan became autonomous in December 27th 1962 while UNIBEN was finally founded in 1972 as an off-shoot of the then Mid-West Institute of Technology.

The “seven-sisters” or second generation universities located in states where there were none at the time were established as a result of the provisions of the Third National Development Plan. Those are Unical (1973), Unijos (1971), Unimaid (1975), UniSokoto (1975), Unilorin (1977), Uniport (1975), and Bayero Uni (1977). The 4th National Development Plan advocated for more universities and by October 1st 1979, Federal Government announced the establishment of seven Federal Universities of Technology to be located in Bauchi, Makurdi, Yola, Akure, Owerri, Abeokuta and Minna. Due to fiscal measures, only Bauchi, Makurdi, Yola and Abeokuta were later merged with older universities in 1994. Plans are now underway to merge them (NUC p.
140). Few State governments have also established universities. In all, there are now 39 universities in Nigeria with a population of above 100 million.

Critics argue that under the circumstances we do not need thirty-nine universities in this country, thirty-six years after the establishment of UNC.

Internal and External Problems

Universities being what they are must all be kept alive through, among other things, international links to ensure benefiting room current knowledge and prevent academic decay. When the committee of Vice Chancellor requested for NUC, it was for a body that will channeled these funds appropriately without interference.

But what we have today is UNC that has “robbed” Universities of academic freedom and autonomy. Be it in Nigeria or elsewhere, the fundamental issues confronting the university in contemporary society are primarily development, expansion in size, quality of output of products of teaching, research and community service. The pursuit of answers and solutions of politico-socio-economic are problems facing the society, accountability both financial, quality and quantity of their graduates.

In Nigeria, we see a rich assortment of universities, classified, regardless of ownership as:

1. Conventional universities (for the largest in number and size),
2. Universities of Technology,
3. of Agriculture
4. Polytechnics Awarding degrees,
5. Colleges of Education Awarding degrees,
6. A Closed Open University and
7. The National Mathematical Centre.

This has lead to a call on rationalization. Yet, the Decree on education (1993, 19A), allows “the Government or any company or individual or association of individuals who are citizens of Nigeria and who satisfy the criteria set out in the schedule of the Act” to set up institutions of higher learning including the minimum land area of 100 hectares for a university, 50 hectares for a polytechnic or monotechnic, and 25 hectares for a college of Education. However, empowered by Decree 16 of 1985, NUC and JAMB have become too powerful to enhance academic freedom and university autonomy (Enaohwo opcit p. 82).

Future trends

If students are to be in tune with a world view of what their mentors have known, the course of study will have to be changed in fundamental ways still to be determined, discovered or made. For greater effectiveness of our university system in the contemporary society, research in Nigeria should assume an enhanced priority. Research being the catalyst to the technological advancement of any nation and Nigeria is now in search of the technological break through that will lie to rest her nagging economic problems. Universities need to look again at their curricula challenges of the new millennium. Managers of our universities need the academic freedom which can enhance autonomy and are up-date (in line) with the vision 2010 committee report as it relates to education (USN 1998, p. 12). With regard to crisis, consultation and dialogue should be a regular pattern in Nigerian universities (Enaohwo 1985, p. 60).
References


Federal Republic of Nigeria Official Gazette, p. 75


USN (University system News) 1998 Vol. 8, No. 1, March.