

# **THE ROLE**

**OF NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES  
IN THE ACTUALIZATION OF  
DEVELOPMENT VISION**



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# The Role of Nigerian Universities in the Actualization of Development Vision

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### Introduction

In my analysis of the 'actualization of the development' vision for Nigerian universities, I would prefer to first provide a historical template which will give a basis for understanding where we should be going. I want argue then that because the original vision of a university was aborted at birth, thus limiting the vision the universities ought to have in realizing a development perspective. I will conclude by looking at the development challenges that needed to be overcome to actualize the development vision of the universities.

The greatest challenge faced by the Nigerian university in the years after independence from Britain was whether to retain its British legacy — the *gold standard* of Lord Ashby of Brandon (Ashby 1965: 82) — or open itself to other influences — as is the case with universities all over the world — and gradually evolve a distinct character of its own.

The desire to retain the British framework predominated quite simply because the Nigerian labor market — civil service, private sector and the industries — has not developed a system of assessing prospective employees except through their education and examination outcomes. And since the entire employment superstructure is based on British patterns, retaining British educational framework had the comfortable currency of predictability. An almost paternally condescending relationship between Nigeria and Britain also helps to retain Nigeria within the British ambit for a considerable period after independence.

### The First Wave: Aid Agencies and the Nigerian University System

Gradually, however, a crack began to appear in the relationship between Nigeria and Britain in the 1970s over geopolitical issues and this had the effect of orienting Nigeria gradually away from British influences, for as Gambari (1989:139) argued,

Nigeria shares with Britain the use of English as the official mode of communication, but the two countries rarely speak the same language on political issues. In spite of close historical, economic, trade, cultural, institutional, and other ties between independent Nigeria and the former colonial power, serious political discord has seldom been far from the surface.

This serious political discord (between Nigeria and Britain) appeared almost immediately after independence when, in 1962, Nigeria abrogated a defense agreement with Britain which was part of the independence package. But despite this move, Nigeria remained dependent on Britain for military supplies until 1967 when the Nigerian Civil War broke out (Ate 1987). The British policy towards the war — neutrality — deeply disappointed Nigerian leaders “and had a chilling effect on Nigeria-British relations” (Eke 1990: 133). This chill continued until 1973 when attempts were made by the two governments to normalize relationships on somewhat warmer levels. But the change in government in 1974 in Britain set in another chill when in that year the British government reduced its general aid package to Nigeria based partly on Nigeria's unexpected windfall in oil revenue following the rise of oil prices after the Yom Kippur War of October 1973 (see *The changing emphasis in British aid policies: More help for the poorest*. London: HMSO, 1975; and Hewitt and Sutton, 1980). This, of course, affected any British aid to Nigerian universities. Coupled with subsequent frosty relationships as a result of increasingly differing political standpoints regarding global issues such as South Africa, Angola, Palestine Liberation Organization, independence in Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), Namibia, competition between the British North Sea Oil and Nigeria's oil, (see Galloway 1987 for a detailed analysis of this development), the impact of British academic system on Nigerian universities went steadily into decline.

It would seem that subsequent changes in government — in both Nigeria and Britain — had the effect of further widening the gulf between the two countries because by 1984 diplomatic relations were at a point of rupture, and Nigeria almost withdrew its membership of the Commonwealth. Things stabilized, but whatever intellectual influence Britain might have had on Nigerian educational development has already withered away as early as 1960s, when, in 1969 the National Curriculum Conference in Nigeria organized by the Nigerian federal government advocated a restructuring of Nigerian education system along more American lines. Even politically, the image of Britain as a source of inspiration waned when after the failure in 1966, of the Westminster style of government adopted by Nigeria in 1960, the Nigerian government adopted an American presidential style of administration for its civilian government in 1979. And although a military intervention curtailed that system of administration, a subsequent military government (established 1985) adopted a loosely American defense structure replete with a President, and Joint Chiefs of Staff.

On the other hand, relationships between Nigeria and the United States, since the 1970s have been considerably warmer than with Britain (see, for instance, Montgomery 1961, United States 1980). The relationship between Nigeria and America was contextualized by Professor Jibril Aminu, a one-time Minister of Education in Nigeria who noted that,

Nigeria, in spite of its clear policy of non-alignment, has demonstrated in the last few years, its genuine desire for strong links with the United States, especially after 1977 when the U.S. policy in Southern Africa showed a somewhat favourable shift. There will also be need to show genuine appreciation, not only for the uninterrupted supply of oil, but for the more profound political development of Nigeria largely and freely adopting, in its first post-military era, a constitution modelled largely on the U.S. constitution. (Aminu 1986: 270).

However, the influence of American ideas in the development of education in Nigeria has as long history as American involvement in African education. In the 1920s the Phelps-Stokes Fund undertook a mission on African education and came up with a series of perceptions that did not go down well with Nigerian nationalists who rejected the patronizing proposals of the Fund on the sort of education an African should receive. Since then American aid agencies had been rather cautious in prescribing any specific educational development pattern, preferring, instead to provide funding through which Africans can develop their ideas using the aid agencies, through American universities, for consultative purposes. As Eberly (1962) pointed out,

The American-West African relationship until the late 1950s may be described as a slender two-way bridge with the traffic directed by the Americans. More recent events indicate the evolution of a partnership with American resources being geared to West African educational needs, as outlined by the Africans themselves (Eberly 1962: 49).

In this way, the International Development Placement Association, United States Agency for International Development, the African-American Institute, Operation Crossroads Africa, the American Council on Education along with about twenty or more other American organizations have all contributed to provision of fund and expertise to Nigerian education. In addition, U.S. colleges and universities aided in the process by sponsoring many African academics which included many Nigerians to study in American institutions. For instance on September 25, 1960, *The New York Times* reported that

A large scale scholarship program for students from tropical Africa, sponsored by twenty-four American colleges and universities will be expanded to include an additional seventy five to one hundred institutions...When the participating African nations have made known the kinds of training most needed for their development, the sponsoring colleges will enlist the cooperation of American institutions which offer established courses of recognized quality in these fields [E11].

The biggest contribution to the educational aid process, of course, was by the big three American aid agencies: Carnegie Corporation, Rockefeller and Ford Foundations. For

instance, the Carnegie Corporation made possible a massive training of African scholars through funding of Afro-Anglo-American Program in Teacher Education at the Columbia Teachers' College, and

by 1975 personnel from institutes of education at most universities in most formerly British colonies had been exposed to (if not influenced by) American pedagogical concepts as practised at the influential Teachers' College, Columbia University. Movement of personnel between African institutes and Teachers' College for advanced degree work was an integral part of the program. In this way, large numbers of influential African educators were exposed at first hand to American pedagogical concepts and practices (Berman 1977: 80).

And when the American National Science Foundation sponsored the review of science curriculum in the early 1960s, some of these curricula formed the basis for the Nigerian Secondary Science Project (NSSSP) materials, developed by the Comparative Education and Study Adaptation Center of the University of Lagos. The Center itself was set up with partial funding from the Ford Foundation. In 1985 the NSSSP materials were introduced in all the senior secondary schools in Nigeria as part of a compulsory National Policy on Education.

The Ford Foundation also played a very key role in the establishment of the African Primary Science Program in 1965 in Nigeria, which in 1970 became the Science Education Program for Africa, aimed at using the U.S. sponsored National Science Foundation approaches to teaching science in African primary schools.

The Aiyetoro Comprehensive school established in Ibadan was an even more explicit statement of the early transfer of American educational ideas in Nigeria: not only was it designed as an American high school in 1963, it also introduced *general education* philosophy of the American high schools in its curriculum.

But despite the barrage of American influence on Nigerian university structure and curricula organization in the 1970s, especially through training offered to Nigerian academics and defrayed by the American aid agencies, Britain nevertheless maintained a working interest in Nigerian universities, at least up till the mid-1970s. British involvement, however, had more to do with staffing the universities with British lecturers than making provisions for structural reforms, or even small scale innovations; in any event it was not likely that the British would support any radical departure from the inherited British educational format in Nigerian universities. The relationship between Nigerian universities and British institutions before and a decade after independence in 1960 was articulated through the Inter-Universities Council, formed on the recommendations of the Asquith Commission in 1946. The purpose of the Council was to

promote the foundation and expansion of universities in the British colonial territories as comprehensive institutions offering both liberal education and professional training (Kolinsky 1983: 37).

The essential tasks of the IUC were to provide a supply of British university teachers to the new developing universities in the colonies, as well as to help in training local promising graduates to supply locally needed academics (Kolinsky 1987). And due to the importance of the tasks of the IUC, it was incorporated as a company limited by guarantee in October 1970. Its operational expenses were borne by the British Ministry of Overseas Development.

In Nigeria, the IUC was most closely associated with the University of Ibadan, Ahmadu Bello University and the University of Ife (Obafemi Awolowo University), with nodding acknowledgments to University of Nigeria, Nsukka, and the University of Lagos (particularly the College of Medicine which benefited from a stream of short term British visitors brought to the College by the IUC) and the new universities established (not entirely to the IUC's pleasure) in the 1970s. Further, albeit limited aid to the Nigerian universities was also provided by the British Council, the Technical Education and Training Organisation for Overseas Countries, the Centre for Educational Development Overseas, the British Volunteer Programme, and most importantly for training young university academics in Nigeria, the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission (Griffiths 1980: 699; Hawes and Coombe 1986).

### **The Second Wave: Reform and Innovation**

However, the biggest outcome of the strained relationship between Nigeria and Britain was reflected in the total reorientation of the Nigerian educational system, from the elementary school all through to the university away from its British *gold standard* and movement towards a more diversified and cosmopolitan model. The University of Nigeria, Nsukka led the way to the reform right from its inception. Not only was it the first *indigenous* university in Nigeria (i.e. set up as a result of African, rather than British colonial initiatives), but it was also the first to be based entirely on an American model of university course structure and evaluation, complete with semesters, schools, and credit system in its courses.

Nsukka was established following an initiative by the then Eastern Nigeria Government in 1955 in collaboration with the Michigan State University. And

although the stated intention of Nsukka's founders is to draw the best from British as well as American experience and create something uniquely suited to Nigeria's needs, the approach is considerably more American than British (Conklin 1961: 9).

This American approach caused quite a bit of stir, laced with regional sentiments — even leading to the establishment of another university in the Western Region (the University of Ife). Further,

this break with tradition has opened the university [Nsukka] to a great deal of criticism, for British attitudes toward American education are still strong in Nigeria. Holders of American degrees have long had to face prejudice in finding jobs in both government and business (Conklin 1961: 9).

Official British participation in the establishment of the university was initially “not forthcoming” (Umeh and Nwachuku 1986 p. 76), although gradually the British were made part of the process, since after all, Nigeria was still a British colony then. British attitudes to the new university, according to Umeh and Nwachuku (1986) were further affected by whether or not the competition for students and staff would not adversely affect Ibadan (then a showpiece of educational institutional transfer from Britain to Nigeria), whether the magnitude of the proposed project would not impose too large a financial burden even if the university adopted a less expensive style than Ibadan; and whether the emergence of the university would not encourage an uncoordinated proliferation of universities.

Further, the Nigerian prejudice against American education was in a way amplified by the Ibadan axis some of whose members believed that in America,

there is a vast proliferation of so-called universities which have no academic standards and precious few of any other sort...It cannot be said too strongly that a first degree at an American university is worth no more than an English Higher School Certificate: even the best universities, Yale and Harvard, are compelled to spend much time imparting instruction which should have been given at school (Olubummo and Ferguson 1960: 14).

These views, coming from a staff in the Department of Mathematics (Olubummo) and Head of Classics (Ferguson) both at University of Ibadan further served as a commentary on British/Nigerian attitude to American education being tried at Nsukka in 1960. What made Nsukka a maverick was its unashamedly American orientation in virtually every way (although retaining the British concept of external examiner). For example, at Nsukka,

instead of reading in a single subject throughout their stay at the university, as is customary in the British-style African university, Nsukka students are required to spend their first two years in a school of general studies. There, American fashion, they are introduced to the concept of related disciplines as they take basic courses in English, a modern language, general science, and the social sciences. Only after a through exposure to this broad base do the students choose their area of specialization (Conklin 1961: 9).

And although Nsukka incorporated suggestions of university structure predominantly from America (or, to be precise, Michigan State University), nevertheless it used a sprinkling of British consultants during its initial days; a situation which was without its source of tension as, for example,

The British were concerned that the proposed General Studies curriculum not take away time from the students' area of concentrated study. They wanted external examiners to read the students' papers and assure that proper standards were being upheld. To the British, nothing was more fearful than the notion that one might become involved with mediocrity, and to the Americans, nothing seemed more frightening than the possibility that this should be just another traditional university which ignored the special needs of the Nigerian community (Zerby and Zerby 1971: 108).

The unease regarding general studies from the British consultants (and some of the students) was surprising considering the care with which Michigan State University consultants ensured that the program would be as Nigerian as possible, since

from the start it was recognized that the general studies work in Nigeria should be uniquely Nigerian. Thus it was not possible to import syllabi from other universities: teachers were forced to be creative (Zerby 1965: 10).

Unobtrusively, one of the texts used by Michigan State faculty to teach the general studies program in Nsukka was *Toward Liberal Education* — a text will no doubt ensure more converts to the general education philosophy!

Eventually Nsukka stabilized and provided a virtual model of the first American university transplant in Africa. Michigan State was chosen as model for Nsukka not just because they were willing to help, but also because of the land grant philosophy behind its establishment, which the founders of Nsukka were convinced should provide the most acceptable framework around which Nigerian university education should be based. As one of the Michigan State consultants argued,

High level instructional staff capable of tapping and developing the human resources in the primary and secondary schools is going to need to be developed. Production of such individuals in the technical, commercial and scientific fields for the secondary school level of instruction is especially urgent. The land grant philosophy, with its emphasis upon tailoring the curricula to meet whatever needs arise, whether traditionally acceptable or not, is ideally suited to countries facing such new needs (Hanson 1962: 53).

However, although elements of the American structure of undergraduate curriculum were gradually spread across other universities in Nigeria (and not necessarily through Nsukka's example), the land grant philosophy, despite Nigeria's oil wealth in the 1970s, did not provide a basis for mass higher education in Nigeria. Indeed, if anything, the *special relationship* that existed between Michigan State and Nsukka was curtailed in 1975 (Osuntokun 1985: 136) and all issues of external aid to Nigerian universities reviewed. Professor Jibril Aminu attributed this to the

militant *nouveau riche* foreign policy of the Government, whereby the country felt that it could pick and choose from where to receive external aid. Blood money was unacceptable even for the universities. There was also the general feeling that aid could be used to subvert the nation in some way. These prevailing official attitudes led to the Federal Government centralising the channels of external aid (Aminu 1986: 92).

There was certainly a drastic decline in the activities of the aid agencies, particularly the American after this period (1975-1979). Britain had earlier removed Nigeria from its list of poorest countries deserving aid and had also substantially cut back its aid to the country (see, for instance, Hodkingson 1976). Subsequently, the Nigerian government opened up new types of *agricultural* and *technological* Universities in Nigeria in the 1980s which, while not exactly based on the land grant framework, nevertheless shared similar philosophy and were geared towards using agriculture and technology as a means of rapid social transformation.

Before long, the Nsukka experiment started showing its appeal — at least in the structure of its curricula, if not in its philosophy — and when Nsukka's arch-rival, the University of Ife was being planned in 1960, a commentator noted that

it was evident that the committee [to set up academic programs of the university] would recommend that the new University borrow ideas from the American model. It observed that the adoption of the European model had hampered the successful operation of many African universities and that any new institution which adopted the European model was not likely to meet the demands of its society (Adediran and Omosini 1989: 14).

And although the University of Ife started off with conventional British university structure, by 1968 there were mounting criticism from faculty at Ife at the inadequacies of the current educational structure. As Akintoye (1973: 33) noted,

There had, for some time, been growing criticism of the existing curriculum and structure. It was widely felt that the existing system whereby every student had after his Part One (first year), to register for either a single Honours degree in one

subject or a combined Honours degree in two subjects was too restricting and did not allow for as wide a general education as was desirable.

This led to the university senate establishing a university committee on Curriculum Reform and gave it the task of creating frameworks for the reform of the curricula at Ife. The committee recommended, among others,

the introduction of 'units' and 'credits' for weighting courses, a method most widely used in the American university system. It recommended modifications of the examination system, especially the provision of examinations at the end of courses rather than at the end of the session (Akintoye 1973: 34).

In 1972 the university also introduced a general studies program "to enrich, broaden or meet whatever deficiencies exist in the academic or general educational background of students" (Akinrinade 1989: 37). The General Studies programs

were almost immediately accepted and incorporated into the structures of the various degree programmes. All students were expected to register for two compulsory General Studies courses, the Use of English and African History and Culture, as well as a third general studies course (Akinrinade 1989: 37).

By 1976 a complete change had occurred at Ife because that was when the course unit system was introduced "to enrich the intellectual diet of students" (Adediran 1989 p. 49), coupled with the introduction of a semester system, splitting the year into "Harmattan Semester" (September to February), and "Rain Semester" (February to July).

The University of Lagos, also established in 1962 with the University of Ife, started off on a *gold standard* footing reflecting British university structure. However, by 1966 it had undergone some changes and adopted a *school* and *collegiate* system for its teaching units. By 1975,

the university had experimented with the schools system for a decade, and students have successfully been trained under it. That notwithstanding the system suffered some measure of criticism. There was undoubtedly a greater degree of familiarity with the Faculty system operating in other universities. Besides, it was a bit confusing to have too many systems in operation. For, whilst Law and Engineering had the faculty system, the other seven 'faculties' operated under the schools system. Medicine and Education which have been brought more closely into the University fold ran the "Collegiate" system. This triple

system of organising the teaching aspect of the University soon became fatiguing. The question would appear not to be about the retention of this diverse system, but about the modalities of how and when it can be changed and streamlined (Gbadamosi 1987: 38).

And while some streamlining undoubtedly took place in the ensuing years creating a more uniform administrative structure at the University of Lagos, its most radical innovation was in the adoption of what it called Unit Course System in 1972. As the university's historians recorded, by 1987

the Unit Course system that had been introduced in the Faculty of Science since 1972 has now been adopted in all the teaching units of the University. The system has been designed to allow for flexibility in course offerings across disciplines and Faculties initially at the undergraduate level. In this way, students can broaden their knowledge at least in the first two years of their degree programmes while they specialise in their major disciplines in their last two years. This interdisciplinary approach is exemplified in the Faculty of Engineering where students take courses in the Faculties of Social Sciences, Arts, law, Science and Environmental Sciences (Agiri 1987: 62).

The first generation University of Ibadan, that bastion of *special relationship* with the University of London staunchly resisted any new-fangled reforms in its curricula structure for the first two decades of its existence. For instance, according to Professor Aliu Babatunde Fafunwa (1923-2010), another one-time Federal Minister of Education in Nigeria,

Conservatism, scholasticism, romanticism and a colonial outlook joined forces to frustrate curriculum reform in higher education from the time Ibadan opened its doors in 1948 until the early 1960's when the four new universities entered the scene. There was considerable optimism among a number of Nigerian educators, some sections of the press and the public that these institutions would blaze a new trail in higher education (Fafunwa, 1971: 274).

Even the Nigerian government found Ibadan conservatism rather too much, especially on account of influence it could have on emerging universities. For as the then Head of State of the Nigerian Military Government, Lt.-General Olusegun Obasanjo stated in an address to Vice-Chancellors and Principals of Nigerian Universities and University Colleges on Saturday September 18, 1976,

by an act of commission or omission the premier university of his country unfortunately emphasised the concept of ivorytowerism from its inception. Both physically and otherwise it maintained an aristocratic seclusion and remoteness

from the society it was meant to serve. Nobody seemed to appreciate the danger involved in this but today we realise that it was a bad precedent. That fact has been a big constraint in the expansion programme of all our Universities because all other Universities tended to follow the example of the University of Ibadan (Bayero University Kano Academic Development Committee Archives, Volume II: 249).

This scholastic conservatism, according to an observer, actually reflected a power, or more appropriately *influence* struggle among the faculty at *Ilosho* a.k.a. Ibadan, for as van den Berghe (1973: 137) noted,

in matters of curriculum reform, for example, the alignment is largely in terms of British versus American trained. The latter group are in minority and tend to favour a more American model. The British trained majority (both expatriates and Nigerian) naturally lean towards the *status quo*, and being in majority, often manage to prevent change, or at least slow it down. A good example of this inertia was the “course system” reorganisation of undergraduate courses, providing among other things, for more flexibility for teachers and students. The implementation of the proposal was delayed several years despite the absence of strong arguments against it.

Similar observations were noted by an Ibadan insider concerning the introduction of the course unit system and its perception at Ibadan who wrote that

In the University of Ibadan...it took almost two years of impassioned debate to get some faculty members who have been schooled in the British and other European traditions to accept the introduction of the American-type “course system”, because they saw in this move a plan to “cheapen degrees”! (Unoh 1970: 95)

The resistance went beyond course reorganization and extended to training. Not only were faculty at Ibadan reluctant to embrace American ideas, but it would seem they were also reluctant to accept even *free* American training, for as noted by Ajayi (1988: 11),

- In African universities and government circles, offers of American aid continued to be treated with suspicion though a few politicians and other alumni of American universities were also advocating the virtues of American system of education. Three times between 1954 and 1980 Ibadan University College authorities failed to take up offers of postgraduate studies at Massachusetts Institute of Technology for nominated graduates of Ibadan.

And while other first generation universities were imbued with intellectual nationalism, as reflected in a focus on African culture in their compulsory general studies programs, Ibadan University curricula structure remained true to its classical heritage, for as Ferguson (1965: 400) defended, regarding the non-introduction of General Education programs at Ibadan,

there is a major problem about any compulsory subject. If it is not examined, it is not taken seriously. If it is examined, you are confronted with a prospect of failing, say, a first-class chemist because he cannot write critical essays on African studies...The Nigerian members of the Board felt that the whole thing was too self-conscious; an English undergraduate does not have compulsory European studies; our culture surrounds us as the air we breathe.

The classical heritage of Ibadan was reinforced by the faculty's recommendation of the performance of heart stopping theater thrillers such as Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, Handel's *Messiah*, Gheon's *The Way of The Cross*, Sophocle's *Antigone*, and Shakespeare's *A Midsummers Night Dream*; works which Olubummo and Ferguson (1969 p. 75) were convinced will help Ibadan maintain good standards — although it was not clear in what. From Olubummo and Ferguson's account of Ibadan as an *Emergent University*, the only missing ingredient to a decent African university is a river flowing through the Ibadan campus; for that will provide a good starting point for the boat race team — along Oxbridge models!

But despite the disdain for American influences in Nigerian universities at early Ibadan, links were still made with an American university. For instance when in 1967 Ibadan setup an IBM 620 mainframe computer, the Rockefeller Foundation made it possible for Professor R. L. Wilson head of computing at Ohio Western University to be seconded to Ibadan for two years (*in a graduation speech given by the Acting Vice-Chancellor Professor John Harris on June 30, 1967, and reproduced in Minerva, Autumn 1967*).

Yet perhaps more significantly, the course unit system *was* introduced at Ibadan as early as 1969 — after a nine year delay; possibly in response to the introduction of similar reforms in other universities, particularly Ife, Lagos and Nsukka; a very healthy competitive development. The process, however, started as early as November 1960 when the Faculty Board of Science at Ibadan discussed a memorandum from D.H. Irvine of the Chemistry Department proposing a consideration of the degree structure of the university college, especially as it would soon become an independent university. This subsequently led to a new degree structure at Ibadan, approved in May 1962 (Ekong, 1973). In altering the existing structure of degree programs at Ibadan, a mechanism was suggested to deal with large student failures due to excessive specialization. This mechanism was first suggested by the Ibadan Faculty of Science in 1966. However,

instead of considering a *school structure* as urged by the then Vice-Chancellor Dr. Dike, the faculty proposed a *course unit system* should be introduced which would provide a more flexible framework for dealing with students of varying ability and backgrounds. This system was approved by the Faculty of Science in 1968, but became into effect in the faculty only in October 1969.

With the Ibadan Faculty of Science breaking the ice of conservatism by introducing the course unit system in 1969, the Ibadan senate recognized the inevitability of the system for the future of Nigerian university education by creating the Course System Committee in 1971 which worked out the modalities for the introduction of the system in the university (Awe 1981). It was practical considerations that led to the system-wide decision to adopt the course unit system at Ibadan in 1972. Obviously the Faculty of Science could not operate the system in isolation since many departments in the faculty offer courses to students from other faculties (Ayandele and Taylor 1973). In any event, it was just a matter of time before the other faculties joined in the new system.

Thus academic program reform and structure in the oldest four southern Nigerian universities (Nsukka, Ife, Lagos and Ibadan) from 1960-1975 was quite individual to the university, and was accompanied by an underlying tone of competition on two perspectives. First was regional competition to ensure that each university sets a high standard for itself consistent with the aspirations of those who set it up. Secondly, the four universities became theaters where the drama of British versus American educational traditions were played out. If anything, however, the intensity with which there were attempts to ensure that each university has the most American undergraduate degree structure and pattern reflected the total decline of British educational tradition in Nigeria in mid 1970s.

### **Northern Universities and the Reform Process**

While curricular structure reform and organization in southern Nigerian universities, and their affiliates and neighbors was embarked with enthusiasm, the reform in northern Nigerian universities was rather slower, and more cautious. The newer universities (Jos, Ilorin, Maiduguri and Sokoto), established in the mid-1970s followed the pattern set in by their southern counterparts and challenged in one form or another, their curricula structural dogma, and slowly, but gradually re-oriented their degree programs along the now more fashionable course unit system. The University of Jos, which started as a college of the University of Ibadan embraced the course unit cause right from its independence in 1975. At University of Sokoto some departments such as Nigerian Languages, started on the course unit system while other departments retained their traditional honors degree structures. Similarly, the University of Maiduguri started with honors degree programs in 1975, but almost soon after adopted the course unit system in most of its units. These developments were random,

rather than structured, and there was nothing much to indicate any degree of correlation between a departmental discipline and the speed and ease with which the department reformed its academic programs.

Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), the oldest university in the North (established on the same Ashby bandwagon as Ife, Ibadan and Lagos) was as a central cultural icon to Northern Nigeria as the University of Ibadan was to Western Nigeria, and University of Nigeria, Nsukka to East. As Professor Jibril Aminu noted,

If, as one Head of State once remarked in 1973, it is difficult to imagine what Nigeria would have been like without the University of Ibadan, it can be added here that it is becoming increasingly true that it is difficult to image what Nigeria, certainly Northern Nigeria, would have been like without the Ahmadu Bello University (Aminu 1983: 24)

Indeed ABU was seen primarily as a northern establishment, starting as it did as an unashamedly *Northern* University intended to portray northern Islamic values — a development which the powerfully influential Christian community in the north would probably have reacted against subsequently. As Sir Ahmadu Bello, the then Northern Region Premier and after whom the university was named himself stated,

if our staff and students are drawn from all parts of the world then the mixture of international minds working together under an atmosphere of academic freedom can produce a university true to its ideals and meaning. But we are, as well, the University of Northern Nigeria, and our character must reflect the needs, the traditions, the social and intellectual heritage of the land in which we live (*Speech by the Chancellor, Alhaji Sir Ahmadu Bello, Sardauna of Sokoto, Premier of Northern Nigeria, his installation as the first Chancellor of Ahmadu Bello University, Saturday November 23, 1963*).

ABU also served as the breeding ground for northern intellectuals. And although it is superfluous to talk of *northern* and *southern* universities in a federal (and extremely regionally sensitive) system such as Nigeria, the divisions are brought out to illustrate the combined effect of British colonial policies and social cultural norms to reform and innovation in Nigerian higher educational programs.

Thus despite the strong northern identity of ABU and its British roots, thanks to the Indirect Rule, yet surprisingly, when the University was being planned in 1961, the University of the North, as it was initially intended to be called, was expected to

develop its campus system along the lines of some of the Welsh and big American State Universities — that is to say different faculties and colleges of the University will be situated in different towns (Kirk-Greene 1961: 35).

Another alternative strategy for the establishment of ABU which was strongly favored by the Premier of the Northern Region, Alhaji Sir Ahmadu Bello, the *Sardauna of Sokoto* was to model the university after the famous Al-Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt (Chafe, 1987). *England* was neatly edged out of the possible models. In the end, the University of California system with its nine campuses dotted throughout the State of California provided an inspiration for Ahmadu Bello University planners (Kirk-Greene 1961).

This was more so since the Nigerian College of Arts and Science in Zaria which formed the nucleus of the university had associated institutions linked to it at Samaru, Vom and Kano, each a fair distance from Zaria (with exception of Samaru which was located in the same area as the university). And while the Ahmadu Bello University retained its British faculty and subject structure, nevertheless by 1978 it had also introduced General Studies (more as result of federal directive enshrined in the National Policy on Education, than a deliberate attempt at systematic reform).

And yet although there was no rapid embracement of American curricular structural ideas at Ahmadu Bello University, there was nevertheless a particular disenchantment with the *contents* of the inherited British curricula. Predictably, this manifested itself in the individual faculties — as in the case of Ibadan — rather than in the university as a whole. Generally, the period 1974-1987 signified the greatest period of change in ABU's curricular structures. In 1975, the University directed all faculties to re-examine the teaching/research programs of their departments and make recommendations on how such programs could be made more relevant to Nigerian developmental circumstances. In January 1976, the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, FASS, created a Faculty Development Committee to review the faculty's curricula which was considered predominantly Eurocentric. For instance, it was noted that degree structure of the Department of Geography,

- reflects the academic backgrounds of the expatriate teachers, largely in British, but also in Indian Universities. Thus there is virtually nothing in it to suggest that it was designed for a University in Nigeria or even Africa. *Only in the final year is Africa given specific recognition in terms of a (comparative) Regional Geography course* (Ojuwu et al 1987: 97; including emphasis).

As a result of these observations, the curricula in virtually all departments of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at ABU were Africanized and the Committee proposed the introduction of “Logic of the Scientific Method” and “Nigeria and World System” as

foundation courses to be common to all first year students of the Faculty. This proposal — providing the first glimmerings of a liberal General Education — was not however accepted by the faculty despite the fundamental review of the curricula just accepted.

This slow beginning at the radically oriented Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at ABU remained the only attempt at a wider scale curricular review. But there were clearly no attempts to use the American model. However, Professor Hamman Tukur Sa'ad's historical account of the development of the Faculty of Environmental Design provides an indication of the reasons for any slow pace of curricular structural reforms at ABU along American lines as already undertaken in southern universities; for as he observed with regards to his faculty,

our experience is that a minor course restructuring takes anything from one to two years while obtaining approval for the initiation of a new programme consumes anything from two to four years with a bit of luck. The case of the 4 year degree and course credit system that has taken more than nine years to formulate is an example. Even when finally accepted and approved, we should expect bottlenecks in the implementation of the programme as a result of inertia from Academic staff (Sa'ad 1987: 154).

By 1986 the Ahmadu Bello University has come to terms with the reality of curricular reform in Nigerian universities — and that is to adopt American course unit system. This was more so when the university's Academic Development Committee issued a circular requesting all faculties to reorganize their curricula and course structure in order to begin the 4 year Degree program with effect from October 1988. Professor Sa'ad noted that:

The changes proposed represented a real quantitative improvement in curriculum structure if not in content. However, the ultimate issues was how well the academic staff would adapt to the proposed structure and how willing they would be to operationalize the system. Staff that had been educated under the existing course structure and operated it all their academic life might be unlikely to find this new structure palatable (Sa'ad, 1987: 157).

Thus Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, the central beacon of university education in the north, delayed implementing its course unit system until the very last minute, 1988 — a year in which the National Policy on Education made it mandatory for *all* Nigerian universities to restructure their curricula along the course unit system.

Bayero University Kano (BUK), a former affiliate of the Ahmadu Bello University before being made a full university in 1977 also remained faithful to the tenets of its parent

university in its cultural and academic structural orientation. According to a submission of the University to the NUC concerning the academic programs of the newly created university in 1977, its founding philosophy was that

...overall, the basic guideline for the university is that whatever curriculum is developed must be inspired by the three constants of its environment: an Islamic culture, a time-tested commercial civilization and complex political community. Thus, whether in medicine or basic sciences, economics or geography, sociology or public administration, the starting point for our students needs to be the actual experience of this culture zone (BUK Academic Development Committee archives, Volume III, 1978: 397).

And while this may have little bearing with regards to the reform of academic structures in the university, subsequent debates of the university Senate and the Academic Development Committee made it clear that there was a polarization with regards to abandoning the British degree patterns adopted, and accepting an alternative. Indeed, between 1976 to 1983, there were three attempts to introduce the course unit system in the University — and at each stage, these attempts at reform were thwarted by the university senate. However, when it became an official Nigerian government policy for the universities to change their academic programs, Bayero University, like all the others had to respond to the new directives, although taking its time to do so. During the 1988 graduation ceremony of the Bayero University Kano (held in 1989), the Vice-Chancellor of the University announced what was the first clearly enunciated policy concerning the Course Unit System in Bayero University Kano:

I am happy to announce the successful take-off of the Course Unit and Semester Systems this academic year [1988/89]. The Course Unit System has several advantages especially for students. It...reduces the rate at which students fall casualty to that dreaded monster, examination. Under the system, students repeat course, not years of study. From the point of view of standards, the system ensures uniformity of the criteria by which courses within the University and between universities may be assessed. The Semester System, which goes hand in hand with the Course Unit System, ensures that students do not accumulate all their examinations to the end of the year. By splitting the academic year into two equal halves, it gives students the opportunity to study many more courses than was possible under the old dispensation (Graduation Day Speech of the Bayero University Kano Vice Chancellor, February 11, 1989).

It is significant that while southern universities were reforming not only the contents of their curricula to make them more sensitive to African needs, they were also experimenting with structural frameworks; yet in ABU and BUK the latter course was

not willingly followed, although the former courses were also zealously embarked on. A closer look at some of the reasons for the regional differences in accepting innovations in the academic structure of the programs might provide more insight into the mechanism of acceptance of the change process in higher education in a Nigerian setting.

There were three possible reasons for the slow reforms in northern universities. Firstly, northern Nigerian universities, reflective of their social and cultural environments, tended to be conservative, and resistant to changes. It took between 1962 to 1975 before ABU could challenge the Eurocentric orientations of some of its programs. Indeed, on the whole, northern political structures tended to be less antagonistic towards the British and subsequently British institutions than those of the southern Nigeria (Mackintosh (1966: 32) and consequently the region retained its British educational legacy quite faithfully — any educational reforms were based on a Federal initiative, rather than state governments in the region or even the individual institutions. The lack of antagonism to British institutions in the North might be attributed to the effects of Indirect Rule, a mechanism through which the British colonial administration ruled the Northern Region through the traditional rulers. These rulers, highly respected in the northern enclaves exerted powerful influences in all aspects of life in the north, making challenges to the British dogma difficult.

Secondly, northern universities had more expatriate academic members of staff than those of the south. Such expatriate faculty rarely allow themselves to get deeply involved in matters as politically sensitive as major academic reforms with geopolitical implications, thus contributing little to the impetus for change. As Ward (1971: 35) noted,

On various occasions...expatriate academics have either been praised or damned for intervention in local politics or in questions of academic freedom or human rights. The political and social pressures upon expatriate academics can lead them to perform their requisite duties in the most perfunctory manner, fearing controversy, participating in the university community only as observers, being overly sensitive to local prejudices.

A sampling of expatriate distribution among selected Nigerian universities during the periods of intense curricular reform, illustrates their number, as indicated in Table 1.

**Table 1: Percentage of Expatriate Academic Staff in Selected Nigerian Universities, 1980-85**

University	Nigeria n	Expatria te	% Expatriate
Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto	141	99	70.2
University of Maiduguri	265	180	68.0
University of Jos	231	134	58.0
Bayero University, Kano	216	114	53.0
Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria	840	351	42.0
University of Calabar	260	109	42.0
University of Nigeria, Nsukka	681	158	23.2
University of Port Harcourt	268	53	20.0
University of Ilorin	265	41	15.4
University of Benin	500	76	15.2
Obafemi Awolowo University, Ife	855	98	11.4
University of Lagos	897	67	7.4
University of Ibadan	1001	71	7.0

Source: National Universities Commission, Abuja, Nigeria, *Digest of Statistics, 1980/81-1985/86*

Thus the southern universities of Ibadan, Lagos, Ife, Benin, and Ilorin had a combined expatriate percentage population of 56.4% in the period surveyed, which is less than the percentage expatriate population of Bayero University Kano alone. Nsukka and Port Harcourt seemed to occupy middle positions. Far Northern universities such as Usmanu Danfodiyo, Maiduguri, Jos and Ahmadu Bello indicated their preference for expatriate staff overwhelmingly, with each, with the exception of the more cosmopolitan Ahmadu Bello University, having more than 50% expatriate population in the period. It is argued that the lesser expatriate population in southern universities which meant a larger population of highly sensitized Nigerian faculty would have created a more effective forum for reform than in northern universities.

. A limitation of the figures was that the *nationalities* of the expatriates was not indicated.

Third and finally, curricular structural reform in northern universities was comparatively slower than in the south possibly because of the relatively high turnover of the Nigerian academic staff in northern universities. Because manpower was still a developmental problem, especially in the 1970s, northern states tended to rely on northern *returnees* or those with high qualifications from Nigerian universities to man strategic posts in the civil service and the labor market. There was thus a constant movement of academic staff from the universities to the civil service — a fact which helps to partly explain why these universities have higher proportion of expatriate staff to begin with. At one stage, for instance,

shortage of teaching staff in some of the universities has reached a level where they now depend on other universities for the training of some categories of students. The University of Jos, UNIJOS, which has attracted some of the best lecturers from other universities in the past four years, not only allows its lecturers to teach in other universities hit by mass exodus of lecturers but had had to complete the training of medical students from at least two universities in the northern part of the country (“Universities Under Lock” *Newswatch Magazine* (Nigeria), April 13, 1992: 21).

Situations such as these which had been recurrent in northern universities since early 1970s do not promote experimentation in academic programs, and consequently little progress would be made in any reform of such programs.

### **Back to the Future: The Visions for Nigerian Higher Education in the 21st Century**

I have taken an essentially historical approach to the visioning process of Nigerian university system with a deliberate purpose. I wanted to establish where we are, and argue that we have not evolved much from the founding stages to the present day. By the turn of the millennium, higher education has entered into a new paradigm shift that saw a greater focus on highly technically oriented manpower, rather than quaint administrators churned out by the early stages of Nigerian universities. I would want to therefore focus now on what the vision of the future should be. The purpose of university education in Nigeria should be to:

- § provide increasing numbers of students, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, with specialized skills – specialists are increasingly in demand in all sectors of the world economy.
- § produce a body of students with a general education that encourages flexibility and innovation – allowing the continual renewal of economic and social structures relevant to a fast-changing world.
- § teach students not just what is known now, but also how to keep their knowledge up-to-date, so that they are able to refresh their skills as the economic environment changes.

§ increase the amount and quality of in-country research – allowing Nigeria to select, absorb, and create new knowledge more efficiently and rapidly than is currently the case.

These broad goals pose the main challenges to quality higher education in the country. Let us look at the source of these challenges.

### ***Enrolment Pressure and University Education Challenge***

Many studies had been carried out at both undergraduate and post graduate levels on the success or otherwise of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) program launched in 1996 and clearly show that the products of the system were those that filtered their way to the nation's higher education systems by the end of the 1990s. The massive projections and preparations made for the success of the UPE was not sustained at higher levels. In other words, and possibly under the pressure of development aid partners, most of the planning was at the lower level of education, without corresponding expansion in facilities at the higher level to accommodate the anticipated massive influx of students from the UPE program. The end product was a massive demand for shrinking places at universities in the late 1990s. A snapshot of the application/admission ratio of higher education from 1990-1994 is shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: Admission in Universities (1990 – 1994)**

State	Application/A dm	Application/A dm	Application/A dm	Application/A dm
	1990/91	1991/92	1992/93	1993/94
Delta/Edo	42,259(6,790)	61,780(8,756)	55,780(8,542)	73,137(9,866)
Abia/Imo	33,337(5,938)	53,982(7,409)	49,156(8,009)	60,957(8,908)
Anambra/Enugu	29,281(4,917)	43,443(6,887)	49,156(8,009)	60,957(8,908)
Oyo/Osun	36,683(5,037)	44,098(5,692)	33,986(4,139)	45,281(6,472)
Ondo	22,546(2,810)	30,027(4,196)	26,048(3,967)	33,299(4,871)
Ogun	22,086(4,147)	30,748(3,781)	28,733(3,468)	2,441(4,462)
Kwara/Kogi	18,153(2,746)	21,596(2,736)	21,512(3,989)	25,299(3,633)
Rivers	13,969(2,686)	21,811(2,401)	21,820(3,932)	25,391(4,836)
Lagos	14,175(2,936)	15,622(2,247)	15,820(2,182)	18,290(2,839)
Benue	9,724(1,527)	N/A	N/A	N/A
Akwa Ibom	10,068(1,334)	15,803(1,828)	13,583(1,380)	16,713(1,538)
Kano/Jigawa	3,196(86)	5,811(1,334)	5,130(1,380)	4,804(1,244)
Plateau	4,151(840)	5,850(1,324)	5,490(1,154)	4,982(616)
Cross River	5,974(972)	895(1,081)	7,590(1,077)	8,342(1,171)
Kaduna	4,607(707)	4,541(1,105)	3,645(804)	3,399(702)
Adamawa/Taraba	2,944(541)	3,807(1,120)	3,811(912)	3,728(857)
Borno/Yobe	2,628(463)	436(130)	3,121(783)	2,891(697)
Niger	2,870(573)	3,542(1,032)	3,121(783)	2,891(697)
Sokoto/Kebbi	2,437(487)	842(185)	2,349(865)	2,288(917)
Bauchi	2,033(366)	2,621(717)	2,980(716)	2,518(476)
Katsina	900(155)	1,456(396)	1,303(349)	1,065(295)

Source (Igbo 1997:209)

As can be seen from the table, it is clear that the admission of students is far below the number of applicants. The question to be asked is, what should those not admitted do? This is further exacerbated by the actual admissions in subsequent years, such as in 2001 as shown in Table 3.

		T	*%	M	**%	F	**%
1.	Igbinedion Univ.Okada Benin	7	0.01	5	71.43	2	28.57
2.	Babcock Univ.Ilisan-Remo	18	0.04	6	33.33	12	66.67
3.	Madonna Univ.Okija	27	0.05	18	66.67	9	33.33
4.	Ladoke University of Tech.	31	0.06	28	90.32	3	9.68
5.	University of Agric. Makurdi	37	0.07	32	86.49	5	13.51
6.	Alvan Ikoku Coll. of Educ.	46	0.09	17	36.96	29	63.04
7.	Univ of Agric. Abeokuta	171	0.34	101	59.06	70	40.94
8.	Edo State University	173	0.34	127	73.41	46	26.59
9.	Kano State University	194	0.39	118	60.82	76	39.18
10.	Fed University of Tech. Yola	218	0.43	159	72.94	59	27.06
11.	Bayero University Kano	220	0.44	177	80.45	43	19.55
12.	Adeyemi Coll. of Educ.	324	0.64	139	42.90	185	57.10
13.	Fed Univers. of Agric.Umudike	338	0.67	181	53.55	157	46.45
14.	Kogi State University	346	0.69	192	55.49	154	44.51
15.	Coll.of EDU.Port/Harcourt	404	0.80	185	45.79	219	54.21
16.	University of Ado-Ekiti.	410	0.82	291	70.98	119	29.02
17.	Ondo State University	432	0.86	267	61.81	165	38.19
18.	Ebonyi State University	524	1.04	301	57.44	223	42.56
19.	Benue State University	548	1.09	358	65.33	190	34.67
20.	Obafemi Awolowo University	653	1.30	457	69.98	196	30.02
21.	University of Ilorin	683	1.36	517	75.70	166	24.30
22.	Anambra Univ.of Tech.Uli	718	1.43	412	57.38	306	42.62
23.	University of Abuja	791	1.57	427	53.98	364	46.02
24.	Ogun State University	817	1.62	479	58.63	338	41.37
25.	University of Ibadan	874	1.74	613	70.14	261	29.86
26.	Fed University of Tech. Akure	953	1.90	770	80.80	183	19.20
27.	University of Uyo	956	1.90	605	63.28	351	36.72
28.	A/Tafawa Balewa University	980	1.95	767	78.27	213	21.73
29.	Fed University of Tech. Minna	1001	1.99	795	79.42	206	20.58
30.	Usmanu Danfodio University	1124	2.24	886	78.83	238	21.17
31.	Imo State University	1170	2.33	595	50.85	575	49.16
32.	Enugu State University of Tech.	1178	2.34	690	58.57	488	41.43
33.	University of Jos	1286	2.56	813	63.22	473	36.78

34	University of Maiduguri	1425	2.83	887	62.25	538	37.75
35	Lagos State University	1499	2.98	889	59.31	610	40.69
36	Delta State University	1507	3.00	803	53.28	704	46.72
37	Rivers State University of Tech.	1753	3.49	999	56.99	754	43.01
38	University of P/Harcourt	1869	3.72	1109	59.34	760	40.66
39	University of Calabar	1873	3.73	1119	59.74	754	40.26
40	Ahmadu Bello University	2080	4.14	1495	11.88	585	28.12
41	Fed University of Tech. Owerri	2711	5.39	2090	77.09	621	22.91
42	ABIA State University	2726	5.42	1368	50.18	1358	49.82
43	University of Benin	2772	5.51	1927	69.52	845	30.48
44	Nnamdi Azikiwe University	3444	6.85	1827	53.05	1617	46.95
45	University of Lagos	3874	7.71	2338	60.35	1536	39.65
46	University of Nigeria	5092	10.13	2892	56.79	2200	43.21
47	Total	5027	100	3127	62.20	1900	37.80
		7		1		6	

Source: Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) (2001b)

\* = % of the total Applications/Admissions to an institution to the total number of Applications/Admissions for academic year.

\*\* = % of the total Applications/Admissions to the total number that Applied/Admitted to a given institution for Applications

M = Number of male students

F = Number of female students

T = Total number of students

Of the 46 universities in the country, only three admitted more than 50% of the students who applied; and even then, three of them are degree-awarding Colleges of Education, and the last one is a private university (Babcock University, Ilesan-Remo) with only 18 applicants. The university with the highest applications, University of Nigeria, was able to admit only 43.21% of the applicants.

Similarly, a total of seven hundred and seventy-five thousand, nine hundred (775,900) candidates completed and returned application forms for the 2001 Universities Matriculation Examination. Out of this number, twelve thousand, eight hundred and forty-three (12,843) candidates did not turn up for the examination at their various centers across the country. The sum total of all those who sat for the examination therefore is seven hundred and sixty-three thousand and fifty-seven (763,057). Their distribution is shown according to the six highest and lowest number of applications per State in Table 4.

**Table 4: 2001 UME Applications – Highest and Lowest States**

Highest		Lowest	
State	Applicants	State	Applicants
Imo	78,495	Borno	3,076
Delta	66,211	Katsina	2,449
Anambra	56,159	Kebbi	2,190
Edo	54,368	Taraba	2,149
Ogun	50,101	Yobe	1,330
Ondo	37,346	Zamfara	523
<b>Total</b>	<b>342,680</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>11,717</b>

Source: Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB)(2001a)

Thus the total number of applicants from the lowest six States in the federation, all located in the north, was not even one third of the total number of applications from the State with the least applicants from the six southern states with the highest applications.

It is clear that demography is the biggest challenge facing Nigerian higher education. This has implications for expansion of provisions in the universities – which, in turn, has implications for funding. It is not enough to host a growing number of young people in different institutions. One must also offer them appropriate training which gives them access to the labor market and then ensures them a constant updating of their knowledge. Pertinence is a dynamic concept which differs according to the public and is the result of a dialogue and consultation between all the partners, including the students.

***Fiscal Challenges and Nigerian University Education***

A second major challenge facing Nigerian university education, which indeed affect all higher education, is the financing process, which is universal to higher education around the world. Indeed as indicated by the World Bank,

A dominant theme of higher education in the 1990s has been financial distress—the principal (although not the sole) condition underlying the World Bank's declaration in 1994 that higher education was “in crisis throughout the world.” (Johnstone 1988:4).

Johnstone (1988) contends further that four major factors affect the financing of higher education contribute to this pervasive condition of austerity. The first is enrollment pressure, especially in those countries combining growing populations of secondary school leavers with low current higher educational participation rates and inadequate

higher educational capacity to meet the growing demand. A second cause is the tendency of unit costs in higher education to rise faster than unit costs in the overall economy, a tendency accelerated by the very rapidly increasing costs of technology and by the rapid change in the fields of study in greatest need and/or demand.

The third cause of higher education's pervasive condition of austerity in most of the world, including the industrialized countries, is the increasing scarcity of public revenue. This scarcity, in turn, is a function, in turn, of three principal causes: (a) budget constraints being faced by governments all over the world, (b) competition from other public needs (like basic education, public infrastructure, health, the maintenance of public order, environmental stabilization and restoration, and addressing the needs of the poor), and (c) the inability of many countries to rely on former methods of raising public revenues, such as turnover taxes on state-owned enterprises.

A fourth factor behind the growing public sector austerity in so many countries is essentially political. It is the growing dissatisfaction in many countries with the rigidities and inefficiencies of the public sector in general, and a corresponding drift toward market solutions, including privatization, deregulation, and the decentralization of functions still considered "public".

When these factors are combined with the increasing demands for places in higher education as a result of the mass education policy, clearly a bigger challenge for quality of the instruction given to students is posed. It is in order to meet these fiscal challenges that universities started to commercialize their programs – at the expense of the quality of instruction.

### ***Government Regulation and Control***

Another challenge facing Nigerian universities is the issue of regulation and control, which in turn affects the autonomy of the systems, and the role of external aid agencies in ensuring the stability of the systems.

The Nigerian Universities Commission became much more powerful with the country's worsening economic situation in the mid-1980s. The public universities were forced to expend all of their discretionary funds held over from the period of prosperity. A 1985 decree of the Federal Military Government gave the Nigerian Universities Commission powers to set minimum academic requirements and by 1988 it had formulated an ambitious plan for "rationalizing" the undergraduate and postgraduate programs offered by the 37 federal and state universities which now enroll about a quarter of a million students. To discharge its new responsibilities for university planning, budgeting and accreditation, the Nigerian Universities Commission has tiled its staff since 1988. A 1990 World Bank loan provided the Nigerian Universities Commission with foreign exchange

. For full details of the process of the resistance, see Bako, S. (1990), "Education Adjustment in Africa: The Conditionality and Resistance Against the World Bank Loan for Nigerian Universities," Paper presented to CODESRIA Symposium on Academic Freedom and the Social Responsibility of the Intellectual in Africa, 26-29 November, Kampala, Uganda.

for staff development, purchase of library materials, laboratory equipment and consumables to be allocated to the federal universities on a discretionary basis if they adhered to its norms and directives requiring the abolition of programs, staff retrenchment and the introduction of cost recovery measures. The loan, small in comparison to the funding that will be needed to rehabilitate Nigeria's universities, sparked widespread protest from the academic community that has still not subsided. So far, only about a third of the federal universities have complied with the least stringent cost and efficiency criteria which all institutions were predicted to be able to comply with.

Through expanding the powers of the Nigerian Universities Commission, the federal government has been able to obtain greater academic and financial control over the university system, reversing a process of devolution that gave the states increasing responsibility for higher as well as primary and secondary education, and still has not succeeded in enticing many universities to change their behaviors. Part of the explanation is that public universities tend to become less rather than more efficient as the resources to support them diminish. This is particularly likely to happen when universities lose both academic and financial autonomy and, thus, lack the flexibility they need to implement controversial reforms.

There are several lessons that can be drawn from these cases. First, governments cannot exercise effective direction of higher education systems unless the mechanisms of control are linked to the financing of institutions and/or their students. The costs of controlling a higher education system like Brazil's with a large private higher sector may be unaffordable, requiring governments to be selective about the domains of training, level of instruction, or kinds of institutions they wish to influence. Second, powers to manipulate the behavior of institutions must be reinforced by the availability of discretionary funding. However, third, as the experience of Nigeria suggests, incentives will not be successful unless the universities have the autonomy to reform themselves (Holm-Nielsen and Eisemon, 1995).

The subsequent picture of Nigerian university systems therefore becomes one of struggle between government forces on the one hand and academics on the other, with each claiming a greater share of the responsibility for ensuring the quality of education in the countries' universities. However, since funding remains the key critical factor in ensuring quality of education, and since the government controls the funding process, the challenge for fiscal diversification is brought to bear on the universities to ensure their survival. Many universities respond by introducing commercial programs that are targeted at fulfilling the thirst for qualification, not quality of education. The end product is over-crowded classrooms and over-utilized limited resources.

### ***Challenges of Globalization and the Knowledge-based Economy***

A parallel and related development has been the changing structure of the economy: output growth, employment, and productivity gains have caused a shift away from the more traditional administrative and civil service jobs toward jobs requiring higher knowledge, a service versus product orientation, vertical management strategies and information technology.

The phenomenon of structural change in the economy over the past 20 years has been referred to, sometimes very imprecisely, by a variety of often confusing terms: new (world) economy, global economy, information age, hi-tech economy, and knowledge economy.

The rapid development of industrializing economies in Asia and new information technologies have contributed to the emergence of a truly global economy in the last ten years. A global economy is not a world economy. Neither is it an economy where trade, investment, and resource exploitation take place worldwide. It is not even an economy where the external sector is dominant. For example, neither the U.S. nor the bloc of Western European countries (taken as a whole unit) shows foreign trade as a major part of their economic activity. A global economy is one whose strategic, core activities, including innovation, finance and corporate management, function on a planetary scale on real time (Carnoy et. al., 1993). And this globality became possible only recently because of the technological infrastructure provided by telecommunications, information systems, microelectronics machinery, and computer-based transportation. Today, as distinct from even a generation ago, capital, technology, management, information, and core markets are globalized.

University education plays a crucial role in technology transfer and development at two levels: (a) It has the capability to develop the production and management skills required to utilize and organize the new technology; therefore, university education is important to the technology transfer process in those industries that use and produce information technology; (b) With the spread of science-based industries, the university is the site that can combine the basic research needed for the advance of such industries with the training of researchers and applications of research for industry.

In almost all societies, universities' institutional role was defined in an earlier historical context. And in many, if not most societies, universities were organized around elite formation rather than the production of new knowledge. This means that the discourse in most nations' universities has centered on state power and the kind of knowledge that serves to "produce" and obtain political power in state bureaucracies. Castells (1992), for one, suggests that such "politicization" of universities is inherently inconsistent with the kinds of knowledge production activities needed to complement the development of an information economy.

Some countries' university systems did develop along another model, one where universities became centers of research aimed at developing new technologies for improving agricultural and industrial output. Notably, in Germany and in the United States universities became closely linked with particular industries-chemicals in Germany and agriculture in the U.S. Most important, this German-U.S. university model served in those countries to unify research and teaching in one institution, linking the two into a state-financed innovation training system that not only produced innovations with consequences for the economy, but also highly trained individuals that could be employed by productive enterprises to produce innovations in the industrial sector.

In most already industrialized countries and those developing countries well along in their industrialization, this has not been the traditional role of the university (Ben-David, 1977); nor, perhaps, is it a "natural" role: "Far from being a natural match, research and teaching can be organized within a single framework only under specific circumstances" (Ben-David, 1977:94, cited in Schwartzman, 1984:199-200). Scientific and technological development has, in many countries, taken place largely outside universities in firms and specialized research institutes, while universities have provided professional training, often not basing the training on scientific research (Schwartzman, 1984).

These difficulties are compounded by the globalization of innovation in an increasingly knowledge/science-based global economy. On the one hand, national states are the main investors and managers of the education and training of future researchers and technological problem-solvers/innovators, down to creating a "problem-solving, innovative" culture through the public education system. Most recently this responsibility has been defined in terms of national competitiveness to rationalize higher levels of spending on education. It can be argued that short of such nationalistic policies, there will be under-investment in human capital and therefore in the necessary prerequisites for worldwide innovation (Reich, 1991). Further, state policies in the name of national competitiveness are also needed to develop the research-training university called for by Castells to promote national innovation systems consistent with globalized high tech production (Castells, 1992; see also, Carnoy et al, 1992)

More effort is needed on choosing technologies that meet people's need. For example future learning will continue to be web and learner-centric. The long-term implication of the web to African higher education in terms of cost, and operational issues should be understood. There is also a need for research on ICT policies that bring about faster changes in ICT introduction to higher education. Goals must be set for a minimum IT infrastructure for higher education institutions. A minimum level of connectivity is a pre-requisite for all higher education institutions. In addition there is a need for ongoing investigation on:

- § Best strategies to align ICT in the higher education reform process
- § Relationships between knowledge flow through ICTs and economic growth in order to foster policy making in the area of educational connectivity
- § The role of ICTs in mitigating structural problems in higher education including funding, access, quality, competition, intellectual property rights, learning outcomes, governance and relevance.

It is clear therefore that the visioning process for Nigerian universities require a **revolutionary**, rather than an **evolutionary** strategy. This strategy is something that can only emerge out of a larger, broader consultative process. But let us look at what separates them. An evolutionary university is a self-sustaining ecological system—growing simply because it is fed from the source. A revolutionary university, on the other hand, charts out its own future to serve its communities. At the base of this revolution is the need for reform.

From a student learning point of view universities continue to attempt to operate a system that worked well when higher education was for a small elite but does not work for a mass higher education model. Nor does it work particularly well for a highly connected society. We now live in an age of both mass higher education and high levels of connectedness so you have to conclude that way that universities manage student learning has to be reformed..

## Conclusion

The Nigerian higher education system thus needs to be reformed if education is to serve as a tool of development, enabling Nigeria to play its appropriate role as a respected player in the globalized knowledge economy of the 21st century. A comprehensive reform package should have components dealing with the curriculum, funding, and governance, among other issues. The graduates to be turned out into the labor market by the reformed and expanded system will have to be equipped with multiple life skills rather than facts and figures, and will have to be imbued with an entrepreneurial spirit and be ready to create their own jobs rather than expect jobs to be available on demand. This means that institutions of higher learning, especially the traditional universities, will have to come face to face with reality and stop pretending that there is no connection between what they teach and the world of work (or if there is, that connection is none of their business, for they exist in an esoteric world that prides itself on its lack of relationship with reality).

Secondly, it is simply not possible for the system to be expanded, as suggested above, under the current funding and governance arrangements. Already, quality has been declining largely because the government has been unable to discharge its funding obligations fully, and yet has been unwilling to deregulate the systems so that other

stakeholders can discharge theirs. The federal government, while substantially increasing its per student spending to meet at least 75% of the agreed academic costs of the students in the institutions it owns, should allow the institutions to consult their students, their parents and other stakeholders, and charge reasonable fees to make up for part of the 25% of the academic costs which the government cannot meet. Non-academic costs should be fully recovered from students but, as a corollary, there should be many scholarships, bursaries, grants and possibly student loan schemes to ensure that students are assisted and encouraged to continue with their education, thus rescuing them from dropping out on grounds of poverty.

Governance arrangements will also have to be overhauled. True autonomy will have to be given to the institutions of higher learning. This will entail the government withdrawing from any active participation in decision making, especially as this relates to the appointment of the chief executives of the institutions. However, the appointment of members of the governing councils should be the joint responsibility of the institutions and the proprietor governments. The institutions should set up transparent processes of generating nominations from the campus and local communities of potential members of such councils who are willing to serve the institutions selflessly, and who will not look upon the institutions as sources of additional income for themselves. Such nominations, which should always be in excess of the number of available vacancies on the councils, should then be sent to the proprietor government for vetting and approval. The Ministry of Education or the relevant regulatory agency should also set up an effective monitoring unit to periodically evaluate the performance of councils and their key members.

Finally, a reform package can only be effective if the right macroeconomic environment exists. In other words, Nigeria must as a nation (and especially as a government) get its act together. The production of highly skilled and entrepreneurial graduates who cannot access microcredit to start off their own enterprises, or who cannot sell their goods and services because of unfair competition from cheap imports that are subsidized in their countries of origin, can only heighten the level of frustration of the country's young people and their anger with society, thus raising the level of violence and insecurity in the land beyond their already unacceptable limits.

If there is a need for reform for the development vision, what models can we offer? What role should technology play in these models or visions? The vision for our universities should be based on openness, transparency and flexibility. This should be underpinned by rigorous, consistent and flexible assessment.

For the first time in human history we live in an age where knowledge can be made available to vast audiences at very little cost. The National Universities Commission as well as the universities themselves emphasize the 'teaching research nexus' and yet

most universities persist in locking up learning content within their learning management systems. Very few follow the lead of international universities like MIT in the United States and others in the Open Courseware Consortium who make learning content freely available to all. Thus the research output developed by our universities should be made freely available under appropriate agencies for the development of the country. Consequently, moving from static evolution to more dynamic revolution, one sees the following as some of the steps needed to be taken to begin the process of actualizing Nigerian universities along a development pattern.

1. Set a timeline for a move to a transparent, open learning system.
2. For all new academic staff, it would be a requirement for their course material to be made openly available. This would be explicit in the employment contract.
3. For existing academic staff I would set a time period for the transition of their courses from closed format to open. This might tie in with the review period for the course and program.
4. Extended support structures are required to help staff transition their content and to develop new delivery techniques based on open content.
5. Promotion criteria should be extended to include the development of open content and engagement in open social learning. These things are measurable and universities like to measure things when it comes to promotion.
6. Develop rigorous IT systems and policies and procedures for assessing learning and matching the learning being assessed against a curriculum developed by the university. Learning will increasingly happen all over the place. Assessment happens in the organisation accrediting the qualification. If universities don't do it properly then, in some cases, others such as professional bodies will step in and do it instead.
7. Provide much greater flexibility in the timing of courses and assessments. What value is there in a study period like a semester?

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