

**The Future of Higher Education In Nigeria:
Global Challenges and Opportunities**

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Abstract

Among the numerous components of development of higher education are; growth in quantity, quality, relevance and diversity of curriculum [programme and courses]; widening of access and broadening of equity, innovation in teaching methods and techniques; improvement in the quantity and quality of research activities; more and better community services, as well as increase and improvement in facilities for teaching, research and administration. With these, University was specifically established to facilitate creation of new knowledge and innovation for the over all socio-economic empowerment of individual and community development. However, the recent findings on the state of higher education in Nigeria as conducted by the World Bank and UNESCO had confirmed the degradation of the Nigerian University educational system. This paper is therefore an attempt to highlight the current status of higher education in Nigeria, by critically examining major challenges facing Nigerian University education in particular and proffer strategic and symbiotic plans /objectives that would transform Nigerian Higher Education for efficient and effective educational delivery to meet global challenges.

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Introduction and Overview

It is rewarding to begin this discussion by first of all reflecting on the concept of education. The term education is quite elusive and very difficult to pin down to a single definition. This is because numerous authorities in different fields define and describe education as it appeals to them and their background. Education has to do with systematic development and cultivation of the mind and other natural powers: Oji (1982) put it in this perspective, that education refers not only to the process by which we acquire knowledge, skills, habits, values or attitudes to be able to become useful and justify related members of society, but also the results of that process, that involves both learning and teaching. In any case, education is what helps us to acquire suitable appreciation of our cultural heritage and to live a fully more satisfying life. This includes the acquisition of desirable knowledge, skills, habits, and values for productive living in the society. It equips the members of any human group with the capabilities of personal survival in and contributing to other group survival in the wider world (Alade, 2006). Education as well helps us to acquire suitable appreciation of our cultural heritage and to live a fully more satisfying life. The foregoing explain that the end and purposes of education include, one, psychomotor end, or the acquisition of mechanical skills. Two, cognitive end, or the development of deeper intellectual skills. Three, affective end, i.e. character training or citizenship education concerned with the appreciations, feelings and values of those educated.

It is also crystal clear that education refers to both the process by which we acquire knowledge, skills, habits, and values as well as the results of that process that involves both learning and teaching. So no one would doubt the value of being educated in any community. A clear testimony to this statement is in the adage; "If you plan for one year, plant rice; if you plan for 10 years, plant trees; if you plan for 100 years, educate a person". Yes, indeed, the best and long-lasting gift any one can offer to someone or a community in this regard is good education. This is unambiguously incomparable to the gift of silver, gold or diamond! Education is one of the correlates of socio-economic, cultural, political, democratic, technological and medico-legal development of a nation.

The above lofty objectives made education to be a very vital element in the process of social development and economic growth all over the world (Majasan, 1997). This explains why developed nations have expended a lot of resources on education and that is why from a global perspective, economic and social developments are increasingly driven by the advancement and application of knowledge. Therefore, education in general, and higher education in particular, are fundamental to the construction of a knowledge economy and society in all nations (Okebukola, 2000). However, the potential of higher education systems in developing countries to fulfill this responsibility is frequently thwarted by long-standing problems of finance, efficiency, equity, quality and governance. Now, these old challenges have been augmented by new challenges linked to the growing role of knowledge in economic development, rapid changes in telecommunications technology, and the globalization of trade and labor markets (Obi, 2003).

The importance of education to human beings cannot therefore be over emphasized. The relationship between education and development is well established such that education is a key index of development. It has been documented that schooling improves productivity, health and reduces negative features of life such as child labour as well as bringing about empowerment. This is why there has been a lot of emphasis particularly in recent times for all citizens of the world to have access to basic education. Education as a social institution therefore could be seen as a great value concerned with imparting knowledge and skills, which help an individual to participate in society. (Ramon-Yusuf 2003.) It is a treasure in which every human kind should heavily invest in and earnestly pursue to its indefinite end. Since it is designed by human beings for their fellow human beings, it ought to be accessed by all without any biases in terms of race, creed or gender. Thus, for education to be meaningful, it must be able to make positive impact on the society and should be an instrument for national development. It is also expected to foster the worth and the development of the individual not only for his or her ownsake, but also for the general development of the society at large.

Education at an index of development is often linked to schooling, and schooling improves productivity, health and reduces negative features of life such as child labour as well as bringing about empowerment. This is why there has been a lot of emphasis particularly in recent times for all citizens of the world to have access to basic education. Education as a social institution therefore could be seen as a great value concerned with imparting knowledge and skills, which help an individual to participate in society.(Ramon-Yusuf 2003). At the tertiary level, it is no news that university system is a medium through which the objectives of education are expected to be achieved. In an examination of the concept “university”, Adebayo (2005) declared that in the middle ages, the word *universitas* meant “*an association, a guild, a corporation*”, just like a guild of craftsmen or traders. The University at the beginning was an association of teachers or scholars. The University was a body of persons gathered in a particular place for the dissemination and assimilation of knowledge in advanced fields of study. Today the university is an institution of higher learning providing facilities for teaching and research and authorized to grant academic degrees. University education therefore is meant to facilitate creation of new knowledge and innovation for the over all socio-economic empowerment of individual and community development (Babalola, & Okediran, 1997).

Buttressing this view Cabal (1993), posited that the objectives or goals of establishing a university differ from one society to another. It is assumed that University generally are, by definition and long established tradition, meant to be places where all learning activities are normally governed by creative skepticism, constant questioning, disputations and argumentation. These are encouraged not as ends in themselves, but as a means for ensuring the discovery of novel, economic empowerment, human and societal development and better solutions to both the results of the shortcomings in the qualities expected of tertiary institutions and their products.

Section B sub-section 59 of Nigerian National Policy on Education articulates the goals of tertiary education in the country. To include;

- a. Contribute to national development through high level relevant manpower training;
- b. Develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of the individual and society;
- c. Develop the intellectual capacity of individuals to understand and appreciate their local and external environments;
- d. Acquire both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to be self – reliant and useful members of the society
- e. Promote and encourage scholarship and community service;
- f. Forge and cement national unity’, and
- g. Promote national and international understanding

(NPE, 2004)

World Bank (2002) in clarifying the above stated objectives of universities pointed out that “teaching and research” are the “intellectual functions” of the universities and they are in connection with the education mission or “education function” which incorporates “cultivation of the mind” and the “transmission of basic ideas and concepts”. Whereas, service is the “social function” or social role of the university which provides the link between the intellectual and education roles of the university and development of society on the other. In carrying out these functions, the components discussed in this paper along with mutual interaction within the university and with the society are major determinants.

Current Problems and Prospects

Unfortunately in Nigeria the current reality that stares us at the face is that in spite of the lofty objectives of education as documented in the National Policy on Education; our education has failed to produce appropriate and commensurate values and development. Education particularly higher education has failed to produce in school leavers a combination of skills and value system that could make them self-reliant. The Nigerian educational system has been beset with a number of ills over the years. These problems arose from the general malaise that beset the leadership and the society at large. Some of these include the high incidence of examination malpractices, extortion, cultism, sexual harassment, and incessant strikes among the various academic unions at all levels of education, as well as problem of data and decay infrastructure, etc. All these have led to fallen standards and the failure to realize the philosophy and the objectives of education. These have further been accentuated by the general ethical crises that are confronting the Nigerian society.

To say that the delivery of University education in the country today is in a state of crisis is perhaps, to put it mildly. Complaints are rife from every quarter. Employers worry that Nigerian graduates today are unemployable unless their prospective employers put them through a crash remedial programme. We hear of graduates in the Humanities who are hardly capable of putting a sentence of English together correctly and whose spoken

English is even worse. Fresh graduates in engineering, we are told, have little clue when put in a workshop... Worse still, graduates are unrefined in character. (Adebayo, 2005).

Adebayo (2005) buttressed further that the decay in our Universities was the object of concern of The Dean of the School of Agriculture and Agricultural Technology of the Federal University of Technology, Owerri, when he decried that:

Nigerian universities are under the siege of decay. There are no facilities for effective practicals for the students in most of our courses, especially in the technological universities, which require a lot of intensive training in terms of how the student can use his hand and how he can use some hi-tech equipment. Most of these equipment are either not there and if they are there they are not functioning, and money is not coming. And in fact, when universities face accreditation exercises, he continued, it is shameful to observe that in order to scale the hurdle of accreditation, some departments have to borrow equipment from neighbouring and sister institutions and present them, claiming that these are their equipment....

We can all agree that, indeed, the situation is worrisome and that the universities have been crippled academically, physically and even morally. For how else can one describe the situation where academics sacrifice the foundation of their profession, that is TRUTH, and engage in compromise as a form of survival even when it is clear that the major stakeholders in the university system are clearly to blame for the dilapidation of the university system that we have today! It can therefore be observed that Nigerian higher education and University education in particular, is facing unprecedented challenges. Not only is the demand for access unstoppable, especially in the context of Africa's traditionally low postsecondary attendance levels, but higher education is recognized as a key force for modernization and development. Nigeria university education faces obstacles in providing the education relevant to her society.

The Daily Sun editorial of 14 July 2005 decried 'Universities embarrassing science laboratories' and stated sarcastically that it is no surprise that Nigeria's attempt at scientific and technological achievements has so far failed. After an examination of nine universities across Nigeria, it arrived at the conclusion that:

They are saddled with obsolete British imperial system equipment in their engineering workshops. So there are equipments, which are in use, calibrated in imperial units, while the entire world has switched to the Systeme Internationale (SI) units.

Without the right equipment, chemicals, reagents etc, how could the universities impart the right knowledge in its students how can they fulfill their functions as producers and disseminators of knowledge? How could they advance the society at any level? How could the teachers compare favourably with their counterparts in civilized parts of the

world? Little wonder then that most academics are no longer published in reputable foreign journals because they are peddling obsolete ideas.

Adebayo (2005) concluded that the delivery of university education in Nigeria is therefore definitely far from the way the founding fathers conceived it. Its success has been hampered seriously by factors ranging from undue government interference and control through the National universities commission (NUC) and the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB), to financial strangulation, lack of planning and prudence, incompetence of both academic and administrative staff, lack of commitment on the part of stakeholders, insalubrious environment that is poisonous to learning, the wrong quality of students, students' fraudulent and cultic practices, among many others.

It must also be recognized that efforts to improve university system management and governance have been compounded by a pervasive culture of corruption within Nigeria society. A long tradition of weak governance oversight and limited management accountability under a succession of military governments seems to have made corruption endemic to Nigeria at the end of the 20th century. This led the global corruption watchdog organization, *Transparency International*, to rank Nigeria as the world's most corrupt nation in 2000 (TRANSPARENCY INTERNATIONAL 2000). Not surprisingly, this social malignancy has also extended to the federal universities. Reports of resumé falsification, plagiarism, cheating, examination malpractices, sexual harassment, contract kickbacks, and the obligatory purchase by students of professorial lecture notes have regularly appeared in Nigerian newspapers in recent years. Prior to becoming the head of the National Universities Commission in 2001, Prof. Peter Okebukola denounced the "growing menace of student gangsterism, cult practices, examination malpractice, and other forms of violence and disruptive behaviors" within the university system (Okebukola, 1997; Oni, 2005). Clearly, progress towards more responsive university governance and more innovative university management will be difficult until the political will can be found to tackle such deep-seated social dysfunction.

Moreover, frequency of strikes among academic and non-academic staff is also noticeable in our tertiary institutions, while the problem of quality control has also been noted by Babalola (2004) that government kept on spending huge amount of money on public schools and teachers' day-in-day-out with less than expected outcomes. In spite of its huge investment in public schooling, and unlike any private investor, the government makes minimum efforts to ensure and control the quality of the education it provides. Governments provide warmth and wages to their staff but are not very watchful about wastage. One could observe from the explanation above that Nigerian higher education system was excellent before, but now commonly accepted that the system has failed. Graduates have worthless degrees and that it is nearly impossible to find qualified staff to run the university and teach. Given the level of decay of our university system, can we aspire to a world-class system or cope with global challenges facing Higher education in this era of globalization? When? How? Where lie the responsibilities?"

These above manifestations, by implication, have largely affected Nigeria university education at various times. In addition, the current reality that stares us at the face in Nigeria is that in spite of the huge expenditure on education at the higher levels, education has failed to produce appropriate and commensurate values and development. Such education has failed to produce in school leavers a combination of skills and value system that could make them self-reliant and as agents to subdue their environment and engender development. Many of these qualities were undercut starting in the 1970s when the Nigerian government reduced allocations to higher education, while simultaneously establishing new universities, primarily for political reasons, and frequently installing military officers as chief administrators. The outcome was reduced research focus and reduction in other inputs that support excellence in higher education. During this period of time, allocation for higher education has dropped by nearly 30%, while demand has grown by nearly 80%. (Adebayo, 2004).

The situation was the result of larger civil and economic unrest and the introduction of government policy that:

- Impoverished the academic class through compensation reductions
- Generated unrest resulting in strikes and extended closure of universities
- Created a military-oriented, insular, academic class with little connection to international practice
- Promoted the flight of Nigeria's strongest academics to more developed economies
- Resulted in general isolation from the larger global education community.

Considering the above stated universally accepted objectives of universities, and the problem confronting Nigerian Higher education, which is preventing it from being relevant in this age of globalization, one can pause a little bit and ask, to what extent does university education system in Nigeria assist Nigerians to grow, develop and progress towards a more humane and liberated direction by transcending their limits? We may also need to ask ourselves, what should be the role of university education in Nigeria's National development in this age of globalization that will make Nigerian university education to be relevant to the need of her society and be ranked as one of the best in the World? In answering the above questions, there is the need for us to pause and consider those major challenges facing Nigerian universities.

Challenges Facing Higher Education in Nigeria

A lot of challenges are facing higher education in Nigeria, which made it difficult for it to achieve its objectives. This include among others:

- **Relevance of curriculum content and choice:** Okebukola (2003) showed that while the contents of the minimum standard course descriptions laid down by the NUC for Nigerian universities agreed well with course contents of universities in most developed nations, a gap still exists in the implementation. Instead of implementing the NUC minimum standard, most of the courses offered in Nigerian universities, which were initially meant to develop people for bureaucratic functions in the society, are still in operation in this age of

globalization since most lecturers merely dictate notes they copied as students without regular updating.

- **Quality of teaching and learning:** The increased enrolment in Nigerian universities in face of dwindling resources into the university system also affect graduate output. Consequently, there were incessant strike actions by academics, non-academic staff and university students between these periods. Thus, the time available for teaching and learning became disturbingly reduced; university teachers became unmotivated to teach, students became unmotivated to learn, classrooms and laboratories became non-conducive for educational activities, and teaching contents became alarmingly reduced within the time available. With this trend compounding itself in 1990s, universities in Nigeria increasingly continued to manufacture half-baked graduates from heavily congested and obsolete factories. Contrary to what it was in the earlier stage of university education in Nigeria, today, general commitment to teaching and learning (to scholarship) has become extremely very low.
- **Administrative and financial autonomy:** The increased in the number of university enrolment and wide staffing capacity and poor funding made the university to consistently demand for administrative and financial autonomy, with the hope that this will enable the universities to diagnose problem facing the system and be able to find a lasting durable solution. Most countries in Africa embrace this idea of autonomy but we need more scientific information for effective implementation of this policy in Nigeria to reduce the controlling presence and pressures for standardization exerted by the National Universities Commission and other buffer bodies by governments.
- **Campus crises, militancy and conflict management:** As unionism (Freedom of association) is a fundamental right of every worker, yet unionized staff militancy over salary issues has been a major destabilizing factor within the system in Nigeria. In similar vein, lots of disruptions have been witnessed through students' violence and campus violent cult crises. University is therefore facing the problem of how to demilitarize our campuses.
- **Research and innovation:** While funding of scientific research can be obtained through different private and public sources, governments, especially in Nigeria, play a dominant role in funding university research, which private sector ignores for lack of commercial value. Whereas research grants to universities are on the increase elsewhere in the world, the flow of such funds has been impeded by certain procedural problems in Nigeria, while government was making apparent efforts to fund university research, high inflation rates in this period mopped up the increase. This trend led to gross inadequate funds for university research.
- **Financing:** Nigerian governments have not been able to provide the financial resources necessary to maintain educational quality in the midst of enrolment expansion. By the end of the 1990s, university expenditure per student in Nigeria had fallen to \$360. In response, the government announced its decision in July 2000 to increase funding to \$970 per student and to encourage universities to generate an additional 10% of their recurrent budget from income-producing activities.

- **Access to University Education:** NUC, (2006) reported increasing number of people demand for university education, thus total enrolment in Nigerian Universities has grown by 1,205 per cent from 57,542 in 1979 to 750 in 2006. This indicates that the university system is only able to admit about 17 to 20 per cent of candidates seeking admission to the universities through the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB). The resultant effect is that the universities were seriously over – stretched leading to admission explosion and decline of quality.

Table 1; Trends of University Education in Nigeria

	1979	1999	2006
Number of Universities	14	36	76
Students Enrolment	57,542	300,618	750,765
Mean Annual funding of Federal Universities	N353, 000,000.00	N8, 233,131,535.00	N53, 682,343,757.00

Source: *National University Commission, March 27, 2006, Pp3, 4 & 11.*

Apart from the above there are others challenges like the problem of recruiting the right and qualified teaching staff, retaining and rewarding the caliber of academic staff needed to sustain and improve both teaching and research. The problem of maintaining the infrastructure for research and teaching, and the problem of making sure that the investment in university education is used to the best effect. (Nwana, 2000).

Although there has been a political context that degraded the quality of higher education in Nigeria through the 90s, the government’s inability to adequately fund higher education for current operations and address the deficits resulting from deferred maintenance results in serious barriers to measurable improvement. Which according to Okebukola (2003) can be summarized as:

- a. Inadequate facilities to support educational excellence
- b. The impoverishment of Nigeria’s primary and secondary education systems which has resulted in many undergraduates arriving at university without basic technical, writing and scientific skills needed for undergraduate study
- c. State control of the university system that has dictated massification of higher education without allowing for filtering of learners coming into the university system, setting faculty wages at a level that will attract qualified instructors and researchers, and restructuring to attract new resources through tuition and fees.

Higher education, though could be very important in assisting people to get jobs and gainful employment, there still remain palpable barriers to this effect, in the Nigerian context. The socio-economic connection, whilst always present, remains especially critical in a quickly globalizing economic market in which quality control and production according to strict specification can be crucial indeed. How do we remove these barriers and improve higher education in its totality in Nigeria?

First of all, it is very important for the Nigerian government to make significant progress in improving the quality and efficiency of secondary education prior to a focus on the higher education sector. Or still good enough, it could be pursued paripassu. Excellent examples of the socio-economic connection of basic education reside in Asia whence the speedy use of opportunities of global market for the reduction of poverty. In Japan, the fundamental Code of Education issued in 1872, expressed the public commitment to make sure that there must be "no community with an illiterate family, or a family with an illiterate person". Thus, with the bridging of education barriers, began Japan's remarkable history of rapid socio-economic growth. By 1910, Japan was almost fully literate at least for the young, and by 1913, Japan was publishing more books and twice more books than Britain and United States of America, respectively, even though she was still very much poorer. (Wasser, 2001). The concentration on education determined, to a large extent, the nature and speed of Japan's economic and social progress. Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore and other Asian economies followed similar routes later in the second half of the 20th century, with their visions firmly fixed on general expansion of education. It is my view that Nigeria can follow the trend of the Asian educational development to aspire to greater heights in the benefits of Higher Education. We can surely learn from history and thereafter remain committed, and be firmly focused for the times ahead.

The case for a World – Class University in Nigeria

The degrading state of education in Nigeria is becoming so alarming, which has made Nigerian universities not to be ranked among the first 5,000 University in the world and among the first 40 in Africa (see www.webometrics.info/top100). One could also observed that with the trend of globalization as a trend that is engulfing the whole world, which has become the panacea to many world problems, Nigeria needs a world-class university system, to accelerate her development and make her relevant in the new modernity. One could reasons therefore that an internationally-competitive educational system is the first step in building an economy that will bring home the dividends of globalization to Nigeria, which other developing economies throughout the world have been enjoying. Thus, there is the need for a genuine dialogue in terms of educational reform that will provide Nigerians with the skills needed to compete internationally. This reform should raise the level of knowledge capital to support an international society that has shed its colonial ties to agriculture and a sustenance social organization to sophisticated manufacturing and knowledge industries.

World-class universities are also necessary to incubate and support the development of local indigenous business. In spite of Nigeria's eroded higher education system, there is evidence of innovation and regional success. Although Nigeria is blessed with abundant natural resources and creativity, too many false starts failed efforts to improve education, or late entry into the race for globalization will put Nigerian society at a long-term disadvantage relative to other developing economies such as China and India.

Contemporary society can be aptly described as knowledge society – in which high premium is placed on ideas and information; and where knowledge strongly influences the development process. It can be said in this regard that knowledge is power and education (knowledge) is a necessary ingredient for national development. Indeed social

and economic development can only be accelerated through knowledge (education) and unless all stakeholders give education due recognition, and fiscal support, Nigeria may be further marginalized in a globalized and increasingly competitive knowledge – based society.

Higher Education for Global Information Network

Universities all over the world have the proud record of knowledge sharing that dates back to hundreds of years. In this respect, the academic world was a global phenomenon before the word "globalization" was coined. The global market place - and the information technology (IT) revolution that fuels it - simply accelerates a process already well under way. IT facilitates a free flow of research and expertise, making the best information simultaneously available in Port Elizabeth of Samoa, Sokoto of Nigeria and Los Angeles of the United States of America. In view of these constant and continuing developments in IT and new knowledge, a global electronic link server should be established in each University, solely for campus usage. The main aim of these electronic connections should be for the purpose of networking, collaborative research, studies and fellowship amongst students, graduates and their teachers, all within the perimeters of their offices, common rooms or lounges. Such Internet connectivity is now fully operational in a few of our Universities. This should be extended in more details to all the universities in the country. Apart from knowledge transfer, learning and training, such networks should get the students more focused academically and having less time for deviant behaviors such as cultism.

Therefore, in order to be a full participant in the already unavoidable globalization, every efforts should continue to be made to improve the status of higher education in Nigeria, so as to be able to admit and retain the services of talented and ambitious young men and women teaching in the system. The scope of higher education particularly University education should also be expanded to include a wide – spread use of multimedia technology in teaching. It has been observed that a lot of University teachers that teach today in Nigeria, do not know anything about computer. Many are unlikely to differentiate between a computer monitor and a television set, besides, many of them do not even understand what an e-mail means let alone sourcing for relevant information on the internet. How would a teacher then teach and be professionally functional in this age of globalization? When the world at large has become a global village if the teacher is not well equipped with the knowledge of ICT. What is the teacher going to teach? How is he going to teach it? More so, he is expected to teach current research knowledge, how is he going to teach it when he/she is ICT illiterate?

Strategies and Recommendations Towards Building a World – Class University in Nigeria.

We have established in this paper that challenges facing Nigerian higher education are enormous. Nigeria therefore needs to start with good, genuine and targeted policy to reform higher education. Reforms that will promote university autonomy, that will give University governing councils the responsibility for institutional governance, the appointment of key officers, restricting the powers of the National Universities

Commission and also, among others, allowing Universities to set admissions criteria, select students, develop curricula and restore grant funding.

To ensure an efficient higher education system that would deliver an effective educational service, strategic and symbiotic plans/objectives are considered central, and must be diligently pursued. These strategies should enable the Nation to achieve an overall goal of transformation of the Higher Education sector, that will make Nigerian universities to increasingly become market driven, in spite of the disillusionment of academics. To this end the universities require to embrace the following:

- Rapid technological and institutional changes
- Coping strategies for changing learner profiles
- Changes to education paradigms (emphasis on lifelong learning, mind powers, didactic innovation, equity access, flexibility)
- Digitalization of learning and teaching (Avu, e-learning)
- Strategies for coping with overcoming chronic financial difficulties
- The quest for quality and relevance in academic programmes
- Strategies to accelerate developments towards industrializations
- Provide increased access to Higher Education and to produce well-equipped graduates.
- Promote equity of access and to redress past inequalities through ensuring that students and staff profiles progressively reflect the demographic realities of the Nigerian Society.
- Build new institutional and organizational identities through local, regional and international collaboration between different institutions.
- Build high-level research and teaching capacities to address research and knowledge needs.
- Create and facilitate global information networking within each campus and/or adjoining campuses.
- Promote and sustain self-sufficiency in funding via the fostering of a triple helix of "University - Industry - Government" relations. This strategy would create more collateral partnerships and linkages with the 'middle' of the helical structure as important stakeholders, i.e. Industries, Business and Communities, who benefit immensely from the University. The Universities should, therefore also derive mutual benefits from them, which could be inclusive of funding of research relevant to their practices or specialties.
- Promote peace and security in the campus so as to ensure an enabling "education-friendly-environment" for easy learning and teaching.
- Promote an active and vibrant 'Parent-Teachers' - Association (PTA).

These strategic points, if successful adopted, will be able to assist in the lines of improved discipline, excellent cultural stability, awareness of negative effects of cultism and participatory funding. Why shouldn't an exemplary PTA, for example, support or

foot a good research proposal, or finance a post-graduate scholarship? All these points are sine qua non for boosting excellence in teaching and research in the universities.

The Universities themselves should plan to provide additional funding to promote excellence in teaching, to introduce new national professional standards for teaching and to provide better information on teaching standards to help students' choice and drive up the quality of education. It is a fact that there is a pandemic problem of under-funding in all our universities. However, this should not negate our drive to improve the quality of higher education. Naturally, it gets to a point when a son gets less dependent on the father. At this point in life, the son should source for its own needs and livelihood, and also fine-tune his spending requirements. The pervading problem of funding can be minimized if the triple helix of "University - Industry - Government" relations is given close attention.

Since government is burdened by numerous national problems, the universities should be less fully dependent on the Government. Each higher institution can pursue self-funding by; Promoting partnerships and linkages with all stakeholders - locally, regionally and internationally; Ensuring the provision of functional advisory, extension and consultancy services on issues that are relevant to the socio-economic advancement of the university and the nation; and founding of a government - initiated - body to be known as Higher Education Funding of Nigeria (HEFON). The creation of HEFON should be in partnership with oil industries and other corporate bodies. The funding from such a body should aim to assist and build on linkages and to develop a more strategic and non-prescriptive approach to the use of funds. The line of usage of funds should be for the Universities themselves to decide in the light of their own strategies and assessments of local requirements. HEFON should be concerned with promoting partnerships between higher education and industries, with the transfer of knowledge, and the encouragement of employment skills. I strongly believe that this should be a fourth core activity for the universities, alongside teaching, research and community service.

The programme should be made to achieve systematic and sustainable change within institutions in the manner they relate to business; more rapid and effective transfer of new ideas, products and processes generated in higher education to business and industry; and better relationships between people in higher education and industry/business. The success of such a programme had been documented after its first years of operation, in the June 2003 report of the Brazilian Embassy as put forward by Mondal (2006). This report confirmed that the United Kingdom (UK) and Brazilian academics benefited immensely from the opportunities of working more closely in international partnerships and linkages and had planned further activities in the future. The three Brazilian Universities were part of a larger program of nine priority research areas in the State of Rio de Janeiro which itself was part of a wider federal scheme. Two of these three were in engineering-related fields with strong links to the oil and gas industry in Rio, in particular, with the Brazilian oil company called Petrobras. These Brazilian research programs, in partnerships with consortia of UK Universities were focused on important and related research areas such as industrial catalysis, corrosion protection (both

primarily geared towards the oil and gas industries) and photo pharmaceuticals. So why can't a university or some universities in Nigeria and the NNPC or Shell take a cue from this excellent example? Any of our universities can work out a feasible ideology or program, which I have designated as "HEROIC" initiative meaning, 'Higher Education Reach Out to Industries and the Community Initiative'. Each Nigerian university should pledge to introduce "Centers of Excellence" to celebrate excellent practices in teaching and research.

In boosting academic excellence in teaching and research in Higher Education in Nigeria, very high quality research should be well funded, whilst keeping strictly to the saying: "gown for town". The results of the research and teaching, its discoveries and new knowledge should be used for the improvement of "town" or community. Higher education efforts should cover both basic and applied research, which should be responsive to the felt needs and expectations of Nigeria as a nation.

CONCLUSION

The Nigeria of 21st century is facing a lot of problems with regard to national development. The present state of our country is such that there is economic depression, infrastructural decades and social disintegrations. The desire of Nigerians is that this country must wakes up and moves forward. The required ingredients (human and natural resources) to move the country forward are there in abundance, university education is one of the vehicles needed to help Nigeria move forward.

University education is a great asset, since its contributions in the 21st century to the economic and social well being of Nigeria is of great importance. Its research shall push back the frontiers of human knowledge and be the foundation of human progress. Its teaching shall educate and skill the nation for a knowledge-dominated 21st century. University education should give graduates both personal and intellectual fulfillment. The contributions of university education to national development in the 21st century are far reaching and so, we cannot afford the risk of decline.

The university should impart non-esoteric knowledge on students for the benefit of the society. The primary responsibility of the university in this regard is research and production of quality graduates to function in various areas of the economy and society. The crucial role of universities can be better appreciated when we realize that it is primarily the universities (and other educational institutions) that produce the key personnel (such as medical doctors, engineers, farmers, lawyers, accountants, teachers, architects, dentists, economists, administrators, scientists and social scientists) who functions in various facets of our society – be it health institutions, industries and businesses, agriculture, mines, politics, the educational system, etc. The relevance of the universities is also shown in the outcome of teaching and research in universities as indicated in various aspects of our lives and the products, goods and services that we use and consume.

Universities as citadels of learning, are knowledge-producing institutions and repositories of knowledge, reflecting the best in terms of contemporary knowledge and academic content. The Universities should be in the vanguard of the development process and control/direct the society towards positive development. This is the basis for the notion of

the “ Philosopher kings”. For our country, the stakeholders in education look up to the universities to develop schemes to solve contemporary societal challenges, including: poverty (both poverty of the pocket, the mind and the intellect), political instability, corruption, terrorism, ethnic and religious violence, crime etc. Beyond this, university education in Nigeria must address the critical issues such as Access, Quality, and Funding etc against the backdrop of globalization, privatization, Internalization and commercialization.

In Nigeria there is need for education transformation such that the higher education system can be able to accommodate the changes occurring in technologies, markets and work organizations. All such changes place emphasis on adaptability of higher education to produce skilled and flexible graduates with global outlook. This has provided the fuel for the upsurge of interest in relevance of higher education in the global world, which is hinged on the integration of an international dimension into the core functions of universities relating to teaching, research and service.

For the universities to successfully face the challenges confronting them and make meaningful contributions to our National Development, the country needs an education-friendly government, a civil society and public sector that is ready and willing to invest in university education and give recognition to those who have chosen the path of knowledge industry. But then there is need for those in the universities to put their houses in order, thereby operating by examples, so that our would-be partners will be encouraged to join hands with us in facing the challenges of the 21st century National Development. It can therefore be concluded that that the most sustainable way of meeting national objectives for international integration and prosperity is to invest in Nigerians through higher education, and the best starting point is through *genuine* reform of the underpinning policy systems constraining the Universities.

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