

Revamping university education system

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Revamping university education system

There are too many problems with our university educational system. One of the first things that should be done to revamp it, is to perfect the proclaimed autonomy of universities in Nigeria, which should include absolute and total powers to the Vice Chancellor and university council. The search for a Vice Chancellor should be a nationwide search for the most qualified and credible candidate, regardless of state of origin and affiliation of the candidate. Once the best candidate is selected for the job, he should be given the support, freedom, and the long tenure required to build the university.

The current one-time tenure of five years is unreasonable. In the United States a university president is appointed for life or until he retires; but he can be removed from office if he or she is not doing the job well. The appointment of university council should not be politically motivated; rather, the best and most qualified candidates, with integrity and proper professional experience, are appointed to guide and interpret the policy matters of the university. The Vice Chancellor, as Chief Executive Officer, should have the latitude to administer the global and day-to-day goals and programmes of the university.

The deans and department heads should have the resources and authority to administer their respective units, including the authority to discipline erring academic and non-academic staff without interference by any union or group. Under an environment of proper structure and discipline, lecturers will teach diligently, set and grade their exams timely and fairly, and release the results promptly. Promotions and pay raises should be based strictly on merit, to reward only productive academic and non-academic staff. Students should be treated with better respect by both academic and non-academic staff and raised in a more cultured and cordial environment to enable them develop into responsible and productive citizens.

Poor quality of undergraduates produced by Nigerian universities

The quality of undergraduate education in Nigerian universities is poor because the students do not have the proper enabling environment to pursue a serious and focused life of academic development. In the United States of America, 80% of all undergraduate students have some sort of financial aid to enable them devote their time and energy to proper academic pursuits.

Some of the financial aids are grants, such as the Pell Grant, for the very poor and destitute whose parents could not earn a certain level of income the previous year. Some of the financial aids are low interest



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federal government guaranteed loans given by commercial banks. Those loans given to students in their name and guaranteed by the federal government are not due for repayment until about one year after the students complete their education and begin working. Other federal government guaranteed low interest loans are given to students through the endorsement of parent or guardian who has the responsibility to pay back the low interest loan amortized over a period of time. There is no grace period in repayment of this particular loan.

Through a combination of a variety of these financial aid products, every student in America has the ability to easily source sufficient funds to pay for tuition, accommodation and miscellaneous costs associated with their education, and some universities there pride themselves in the fact that 100% of undergraduate students who want financial aid get it at their school.

Poverty in Nigeria is a very real phenomenon. The middle class has almost been entirely eliminated in Nigeria. There are many students who deal with the reality of poverty. If the federal government will give grants and government guaranteed low interest loans through banks to these students, they will be able to pay for their tuition, accommodation and other living expenses. This will allow students to focus on their academic development, and eliminate the torture and humiliation endured by many students today, including prostitution to find the money to pay for their school expenses. And if in the end some students default on their loans, the government would

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still have made the best possible investment in the development of the future leaders and citizens of this country.

Accommodation of students in Nigerian universities

Proper students' accommodation on campus must receive better attention and policy from the federal government. The answer to the problem of accommodation and cafeteria services is not privatization. Privatization will render students vulnerable to higher costs from profit motives of entrepreneurs operating those hostels and cafeteria services. Besides, as long as students are not financially empowered through grants and student loans, they cannot afford to pay for privatised hos-

tels and cafeteria services, which will lead to more student unrest on campuses nationwide. Rather than privatise hostels and cafeteria services, government should allow universities to source government guaranteed loans from banks at 3%, with 2 year grace period, to build new hostels and cafeteria, revitalize old hostels, and government should also empower students financially to pay for their accommodation and food services through grants and guaranteed loans.

Why no Nigerian university was among the top 200 universities in the world

Actually, the study you referred to showed that no Nigerian university was among the top 6,000 universities in the world. Several factors contributed to this unfortunate and humiliating fact. The most significant factor is gross under funding of Nigerian universities. A single department in some American universities have higher annual operating budget than a federal government university in Nigeria. Nigerian universities are too dependent on the government for their operating funds. Some American universities receive only about 38% of their total funding from the government; the rest they must raise themselves. The lack of proper infrastructure such as adequate laboratories, reliable power and water supplies, equipment, etc. in Nigerian universities is an important factor.

In addition, a poor man or hungry man rarely makes a creative and productive research scientist. The misplaced material value system in the Nigerian society is a distraction, and a source of incredible pressure on our university scientists to pursue naira power, rather than a life of focused productive research investigation. Furthermore, the little that goes on in the name of research is driven by unhealthy appetite for publications to attain professorship, instead of a genuine desire to seek answers to relevant and useful research questions that will solve contemporary problems and contribute to a better society. There are several talented and intelligent Nigerians inside and outside Nigeria. Given the proper opportunity and enabling environment, they will perform as well as anyone anywhere in the world.

Research productivity in Nigerian universities compared to U.S. universities

As a graduate student at the University of Nebraska Medical Centre, I was in my laboratory working on my research project until 2:00a.m in the early morning sometimes, without any interruption whatsoever with supply of electricity, water, etc., and no concern about security or safety. In Nigeria, when the light goes off, you are compelled to go

home, while your colleagues in laboratories in the civilised world are busy working. Most people in Nigerian universities have become so used to poor productivity from decadence and poor infrastructure that their brains suffer from disuse atrophy. Some of these same men and women, if placed in New York, London or California, will be the engines that drive research productivity and research commercialisation.

Nigerian professors and their counterparts in U.S. universities

In the study on World University ranking that you referred to, Harvard University was ranked number one in the world. Although University of Nigeria, Nsukka where I work now was not ranked in the top 7,000, we can take comfort from the fact that professors and medical research scientists at number one Harvard University quote my published research findings and use a technique I developed for their research. However, much of my research work was done while I was at American universities. So it is not that American professors are more intelligent than Nigerian professors; there simply are much better facilities and support systems for American professors than Nigerian professors.

Goals of UNRED launched by UNN

The University of Nigeria Research and Economic Development (UNRED) Foundation was set up to help the University of Nigeria become financially self-reliant. For the first time in our history as an institution, we shall take our own destiny in our hands, and develop the resources we need to restore the dignity of man. The goal of UNRED Foundation is to raise N14 billion as investment capital over the next two years, establish a University of Nigeria Industrial Park where UNRED Foundation shall spin out several profitable companies and commercial enterprises whose profits shall be donated entirely to the University of Nigeria by UNRED Foundation for unrestrained revitalization of the university perpetually. Three broad levels of campaign have been planned: a campus campaign, a national campaign, and an international campaign.

The campus campaign is designed to serve as ownership of the UNRED vision, and a demonstration of good faith, by the university community to the nation and international community. On the day of the campus campaign, there was a massive and incredible out pouring of the community. Academic and non-academic staff, and some students, gave of their own money, and pledged from their salaries. UNRED Foundation raised over N105 million from voluntary contributions from the campus community. The next level is the national campaign, which will be followed by the International campaign. I am confident that we will raise the N14 billion.