

Historical Analysis of the Management of Public Universities in Nigeria

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Mini Review

ABSTRACT

Change they say is inevitable. In Nigeria, the higher education sector has gone through myriad of changes with the different regime that ruled the country. As against that backdrop, this paper seeks to analyse the disposition of the different eras towards the management of universities in Nigeria. The paper examined government management of universities in four phases starting with the genesis of higher education in Nigeria, management of the university college, management of universities during military regime and the democratic era of university management. This paper also highlighted the both the problems and successes of Nigerian universities. It concluded by proffering solutions to the dwindling fortunes of the universities.

Keywords: University autonomy, Promulgation, Management, Technical education, Agencies

INTRODUCTION

Education is the process of acquiring knowledge, skills and other capabilities. Education could be formal (within the four walls of the school), informal or non-formal. It helps to transform and preserve knowledge therefore it is desirable for any nation to spell out its goals. The early aim of higher education in Nigeria was primarily to train people for ecclesiastical order and this aim was dynamically translated into action by the establishment of Fourah Bay College in Freetown, Sierra Leone in 1827. This college played a very significant role before the establishment of Yaba Higher College and then subsequently the Nigerian universities.

The Concept of Higher Education

Higher education or Tertiary education as stated in the National Policy of Education (2014) states that 'it is the education given after secondary education in universities, colleges of education, polytechnics and monotechnics including those institutions offering correspondence courses'.

Tertiary Education is aimed at:

To contribute to national development through high level relevant manpower training.

To develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of the individual and society.

To develop the intellectual capability of individual to understand and appreciate their local and external environment.

To acquire both physical and intellectual skills this will enable individuals to be self-reliant and useful members of the society.

To promote and encourage scholarship and encourage community services.

To forge and cement national unity

To promote national and international understanding and interaction.

Genesis of the Nigerian Public Universities

Higher education in Nigeria dates back to the post amalgamation period precisely 19 January, 1934 when Yaba Higher College commenced its operations in Nigeria. Although, scholars, writers and experts like Odebiyi Al et al. ^[1] in the field of education identified different periods concerning educational management.

At the inception of higher education in Nigeria, educational management was solely in the hands of colonial government. The management of the sole higher institution faced great challenge due to the economic depression of the 1930s which affected government finance and caused severe set-back in personnel for education and reduction of salaries of officials. The bigger problem however was the compulsory acquisition of the campus for the Second World War in which the students were either recruited or dispersed to their homes. It must be noted though, that the graduates of Yaba Higher College went on to form a vast number of assistants and technicians in the independent Nigeria.

Analysis of the Management of University College, Ibadan

The Yaba Higher College became the nucleus of the University College established in 1948 at Ibadan. It must be mentioned that Dr. Mellanby who was appointed the Principal (Vice Chancellor) of the college was faced with a heavy burden as there were little facilities to work with. Mellanby and other foreign principals (Saunders and Perry) were faced with inadequate infrastructure despite government intervention. The University Teaching Hospital which commenced operation in November 1948 had to wait nine years before the 500 bed teaching hospital was finally built in 1957.

The British colonial administration consistently ignore the growing need for more access to university education partly based on costs and maintenance of academic qualities as less than 1,000 Nigerians enrolled in the college between 1948-1959. This along with the Ashby commission showed the colonial government's attitude towards the management of higher education. Eric Ashby raised the problems of equity and access in higher education. It also reported that there was an imbalance in educational opportunities between Southern and Northern parts of the country.

Analysis of the Management of First Generation Universities during the First Republic

The first generation universities before the military regime competed globally. The transformed University of Ibadan, Ahmadu Bello University, University of Nigeria Nsukka, University of Ife, University of Lagos and University of Benin were pushing the frontiers of education in the early independence period. UI and ABU as they are fondly called produced world class research in the field of Agriculture and Tropical Health. This progress might be attributed to autonomy and financing because despite the creation of NUC in 1962, they were only an advisory body in the cabinet office.

These early universities were not only serving the Nigerian populace but Africans in Diaspora; it was also an avenue for different race, ethnic groups, people of different background and religion. The management of these early varsities was the finest in the land despite the role of the vice chancellor a pure political appointment. As at 1971, UI had already produced the likes of Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Professor Grace Alele- Williams and Ambrose Alli. It must be mentioned however that these Universities had a multiple admission problem as students uninformatively dropped courses for other institution leaving a department unfilled. Also, the University of Nigeria, Nsukka also faced a huge problem during the civil war of 1967-1970 as some parts of the school were used as war camps, leading to bombardment of some of its edifices.

Analysis of the Management of Universities during Military Era

The management of universities during military era cannot be compared to that of the previous years. The era deviated from institution of merit to massification of universities. This is coupled with the ethnic bigotry prevalent in the post- civil war era. The quota system which was the brainchild of Interim Common Service Agency (ICSA) a group of former military governors of northern states proposed this system, which was to create an opportunity for educational access to northerners as opposed to educational merit.

The Gowon era particularly arrogated exclusive responsibility of university education to the federal government which did not help matters. Furthermore, the powers of Nigerian Universities Commission was further extended from being an advisory group to one with statutory power which includes, receiving block grants for allocation to universities and advising the federal government on the creation of new universities. The creation of seven new universities instead of four was largely political, as they were deliberately sited mostly in the disadvantaged states of the north. The creation of Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) in 1977 by military government to help harmonize and standardize admission process also eroded the autonomy of the universities. JAMB advertently was an establishment to monitor quota system campaigned for by the monolithic northerners.

In the oil boom era of the late 1970s, the Nigerian universities emerged as centers of vigorous protest and often violent confrontation against the authorities ^[2]. The National Union of Nigeria Students (NUNS), the Nigerian Association of University Teachers metamorphosed into Academic Staff Union of University became a torn in the flesh of the military

government in 1978. The paucity of fund led to huge problem for the government coupled with the fact that it is a military government.

Other problem authorities saddled with managing universities faced was the problem of cultism. Internally, the military leaders beginning in the 1980s began to see confraternities as a check on the student unions and university staff, who were the only organized groups opposing military rule. The most notable single attacks occurred at Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU) in 1999 when the secretary general of the student union government was killed along with several innocent students.

In summary, the military era mismanaged the Nigerian higher education starting with the violation of university autonomy, imposition of vice chancellors, nepotism and inadequate facilities. It must also be mentioned that some of the universities were also part of the problem like the internal strife ranging from student unrest to community conflict.

The brief return of the civilian era (1979-1983) must also be stated. This period removed higher education from the exclusive list to the concurrent list, thus, states incapable of running a proper higher institution all competed against each other thereby creating underfunded universities which in turn hampered lecturers' productivity and learning outcomes.

Conclusively, between 1990 and 1997, the real value of government allocations for higher education declined by 27% even as enrollments grew by 79%. The resultant effect being a precipitous fall in the quality of university education and research, as implied by the 62% drop in the real value of recurrent expenditure per student during this period [3].

Analysis of the Management of Universities In the Civilian Era

The return of the civilian era has seen a lot of review of policies like the establishment and mandate given to Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFUND Act 2011), as an intervention agency setup to provide supplementary support to all level of public institution. TETFUND was alleged to have mismanaged funds in the education sector from 2011-2015 by lending to other government departments, contrary to the law establishing the agency, as revealed by the senate (273 billion naira) November 4, 2016.

The widespread renunciation of cultism in the early 1999 must however be commended. Though cultism rate reduced in school campuses however it has rear its ugly head in secondary schools, residential areas and as well as creeks.

Highlighted Success So Far In the Management of Nigerian Public Universities

The Nigerian public universities have been able to produce some eminent scholars including a Nobel laureate.

It has served as an effective check on the excesses of the Nigerian government especially during military era.

It has also liberated a vast number of people from the net of oppressors, tyrants and mischievous element.

The Nigerian varsities have served other neighboring nationals.

Highlighted Problems So Far

Human resource development issue

Issue of decline of quality in the Nigerian higher education

Inadequate government funding

Curriculum irrelevance

Menace of cultism

Examination malpractice.

CONCLUSION

Major educational transformations will be required if the Nigerian higher education is to take its rightful place in the comity of higher education. Nigeria has a role to play in the development of both West Africa and Africa. One of the biggest tragedies of the last decade is the collapse of the educational system that was properly planned and implemented.

The Nigerian government must seize this moment to renew their mandate by reviving the fading higher education that was once adjudged the best in Sub-Saharan Africa. This effort can be learnt by always revisiting the times past. There is evidence that this present government is all out against corruption, which in the past has been an Achilles heel. This is a solid foundation in which other platforms can be built upon.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the conclusion the following are recommended:

There should be new orientation in order to have strong consciousness and commitment toward our nations' educational development management and administration.

There should be proper funding of public universities by the government, nongovernmental organization, private individuals, parents and the society since no meaningful management can take place without adequate funding.

There should be continuous training and retraining of university managers, administrators, policy makers and implementers in form of workshops, conferences and seminars. These should be vigorously pursued and made compulsory.

The entire management and administration of the nation's public universities should be in the hands of professionals and experts in the field. Political favoritism should be avoided.

The erosion of university and academic autonomy should be avoided if the country seeks to change her educational narrative.

Technical and teacher education in universities should be taken serious as the both work in tandem for the progress of the country.

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