PERCEIVED DYSFUNCTIONAL UNIVERSITY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: NEED FOR A PARADIGM SHIFT

Olufemi A. Ajayi and Olugbenga A. Oguntamu
Department of Educational Foundations & Instructional Technology
Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijagun, Ijebu-Ode

Abstract
The public outcry more so from the employers of labour about the non marketability of Nigerian university graduates is gradually taking a more worrisome dimension. The ugly trend has its negative implications for the kind of training being offered by the universities. Questions about the nature and structure of the curriculum for each academic discipline, implementation process, infrastructure, teaching and learning facilities and manpower supply become pertinent. Reports on objective assessment of the situations on the campuses were presented in this paper. Pedagogical implications of this problem suggest a need for curriculum revolution of all academic programmes, as well as aggressive human capital development of the academic staff in order to keep them abreast of latest developments and information in their chosen fields. Meaningful recommendations to get out of the fundamental and persistent challenges facing university education were also offered.

Keywords: Employability, labour market, university graduates, curriculum revolution

Introduction
The age long maxim that no nation can rise above the quality of education it offers holds sway for the current socio-economic status of Nigeria. Human capacity building and development of theories are two major reasons for university establishment. Thus, the larger society stands to consume both the output and outcome of whatever is being milled in the university. The question is ‘how relevant is what is being produced to the need of the society?’ Otherwise, it is an economic waste to the university management and need denial to the society.

The utilitarian value of university education according to Obanya (2004) is captured in supply of ‘finished’ graduates for consumption by the economy in addition to serving the advancement of the entire society by applying its critical and creative arsenals to generating ideas, creating innovative mental and physical tools and training the creative minds for the continuous regeneration of society. Corroborating the above assertion, Ekundayo and Ajayi (2004) posited that higher education is regarded as an instrument of social change and economic development.

Essentially, education is a social service that must be heavily funded, more importantly university education, in order to secure the present and future. In this light, Ajayi and Ekundayo (2006) argued that the funds allocated to higher education should not merely be considered as an expense but a long term investment, of benefit to society as a whole. These benefits are reflected on a societal level in terms of lower unemployment rates, better health, lower crime rates, more involvement in societal activities, higher tax returns and other trickle down effects (Ekundayo & Ajayi, 2009).

Public outcry of employers of labour today about Nigerian graduates being not employable is on the increase, and this has diminished our universities in stature a great deal. Akinyemi, Ofem and Ikuenomore (no date) revealed the claim of employers of labour that recent graduates are lacking in analytical skills, good communication skills, good personal and social skills, technical and managerial skills and so not compliant for problem solving need and business productivity enhancement. The implication is an emerging training disconnect between the ‘gown’ and the ‘town’.

The historical dimension
University education in Nigeria dates back to 1948 when University College, Ibadan was established as an affiliate of University of London. According to Obanya (2004), higher education in its modern form came to Africa from the West, mainly as a
fallback of a colonial education system. Thus, in most cases, universities in the colonies were simply outposts or colleges/campuses of specific universities in the colonies and country.

University College Ibadan was a product of recommendations of Elliot’s commission (Adenokun, 2005). The sustained quest and aspirations for university education resulted in foundation of first five universities borne out of recommendations of Ashby commission (Fafunwa, 1967). The list includes University of Nigeria (1960), University of Ibadan (1962), University of Lagos (1962), Ahmadu Bello University (1962) and University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University) (1962). In 1970, University of Benin was added to the first five consequent upon the agitation of Mid-western region for a university of their own (Ekundayo & Ajayi, 2009). These six universities constitute what is now known as first generation universities.

In the third development plan (1975-1980) the government established seven more universities in 1975. They were universities of Ilorin, Jos, Sokoto, Maiduguri, PortHarcourt and Bayero University, Kano. These universities are referred to as second generation universities (Ekundayo & Ajayi, 2009). In a bid to satisfy the yearnings and aspirations of teeming population of the country for university education, Federal Government went ahead between 1980 and 1990 to establish the third generation universities. The list of these includes Federal Universities of Technony Owerri, Markurdi, Yola, Akure and Bauchi. Others are University of Agriculture, Abeokuta, and Federal Universities of Agriculture, Umudike and Markurdi. A number of state universities were also established within this period in Ogun, Lagos, Ondo, Oyo, Imo, Akwa Ibom and Cross River states.

The need to further extend the frontiers of opportunity for university education led to the establishment of the fourth generation universities between 1991 and 2000. This generation comprised federal, state and National Open University. The period also witnessed the birth of many private universities. We are presently in the era of fifth generation universities starting from 2001 to date. Only recently to be precise 2010, Federal government announced the establishment of nine Federal universities across the six geopolitical zones in the country. All together, the country has a total of 108 universities excluding the two state universities in Osun state that were recently merged with another earlier existing one.

The aims of higher education as itemized in the National Policy on Education (2004) include:
- 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 individuals to understand and appreciate their local and external environment
- To acquire both physical and intellectual skills that will enable individuals to be self-reliant and useful members of the society.
- To promote and encourage scholarship and community service
- To forge and cement national unity
- To promote national and intellectual understanding and interaction.

The managerial structure of the universities is of two dimensions: external and internal. The external dimension involves the activities of the National Universities Commission (NUC) for quality assurance of programmes being run by the universities. The commission was established in 1962 and reconstituted as a statutory body in 1974 (Saint, Hartnett & Strassner, 2004). The internal dimension is a structure that involves the visitor (the President, Governor or the Proprietor in case of a private university), chancellor, pro-chancellor and vice-chancellor who incidentally is the chief executive, directing the affairs of senate and day to day running of the institution (Ekundayo & Ajayi, 2009).

**Poor marketability of Nigerian graduates**
Nigeria today is bedeviled by problems of high rate of unemployment and seemingly low quality graduates for employment in the labour market. Recent World Bank publication according to Akanmu (2011) claimed that Nigeria has an average economic growth rate of 7% per annum. However, wage employment is estimated to have
declined by about 30%. Why? Simply because the jobs were not there and where a few opportunities exist, our graduates were not found employable consequent upon their deficiencies in technical and life skills required of them. Empirical information (Adeyeye & Tugbobo, no date) indicates preference of employers of labour for graduates from other lands over and above graduates from Nigerian universities.

Charles Soludo, erstwhile CBN Governor of Nigeria, while speaking with Meshack Idehen National Mirror correspondence (2011) remarked that more than 60% of graduates produced in the country were not employable nor qualified for employment at global level and so called for what he described as a revolution in the education sector in Nigeria. On a general note, employers of labour, more importantly non-governmental business outfits set out to maximise profit and for this reason will only go for recruitment of personnel that will add value in the required amount to their organisation, in terms of actualization of their vision and mission statements.

The argument was that, the training of these graduates was defective and deficient in technical and specialized skills required for the challenges of the labour market (Felix & Okpilike, 2010; Obanya, 2009). More often that not, employers of labour have to retrain their new recruits before they become useful to required taste. National University Commission (2004) cited in Akinyemi,Ofem and Ikuenomore (no date) argued that apart from the qualifications that graduates possess, there are other attributes such as analytical skills, good communication skills, good personal and social skills, technical and managerial skill among others that are appropriate for job fulfillment.

Apparently, the disconnect between the training programmes of our universities and the labour market was evidenced in a matrix below showing the mismatch between graduate turn out and graduate employment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Graduate turn out (A)</th>
<th>Registered Graduate unemployed (B)</th>
<th>Placement (C)</th>
<th>Official difference (B)-(C)</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>514,214</td>
<td>2,541</td>
<td>657</td>
<td>1,884</td>
<td>74.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>566,362</td>
<td>1,947</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>1,747</td>
<td>88.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>591,097</td>
<td>4,329</td>
<td>939</td>
<td>3,390</td>
<td>78.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>705,232</td>
<td>3063</td>
<td>758</td>
<td>2,305</td>
<td>75.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>754,100</td>
<td>3768</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>3,428</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The statistical information from Table 1 indicate that unemployment is persistently above 70% between 2003 and 2007. The two likely reasons for this high incidence of unemployment are lack of jobs and non employability status of our graduates.

Pedagogical implications

A product that cannot satisfy the need of the customer is certainly a bad product and so should be withdrawn from circulation for improvement. The same goes for the graduates of our universities, even though withdrawing them from circulation may not be possible, the feedback
information to the mill should help in getting an improvement of the rejected.

In a situation like this, the curriculum being implemented becomes a suspect. How relevant, adequate, and feasible is the curriculum? This is a million dollar question begging for an answer. Saint, Hartnett and Strassner (2004) reported the claim of NUC (2002) that the university curriculum lacked quality, considering the situation where only 11% of the 1,185 academic programmes reviewed across our universities were given full accreditation status.

The current curriculum in operation requires a revolution or an overhaul in wholistic term. According to Obanya (2004), current thinking on curriculum organisation in higher education shows a de-emphasis on specific forms of knowledge. Rather, specific fields of knowledge are useful only to the extent to which they can help in inculcating the following core generic skills: analytical power, communication, problem-solving, team spirit, creativity and versatility. There is a need to move from fixed curricula to more flexible curriculum frameworks; a focus on teaching to focus on learning and the transmission and acquisition of skills needed to continue learning throughout life (Obanya, 2009).

On the basis of the world (2002a) reports, Saint, Harsnett and Strassner (2004) remarked that many developing countries of the world, Nigeria inclusive have neither articulated development strategy linking knowledge to the economic growth nor built up their capacity to do so. For instance, Nigeria has only 15 scientists and engineers engaged in research and development per million persons. This is a sharp contrast to 168 in Brazil, 459 in China, 158 in India and 4,103 in the USA. Against this backdrop, efforts should be made to enhance the quality of university teachers. In specific terms, the challenge is there for the university management to equip their lecturers with relevant skills for contemporary challenges through regular and mandatory attendance at seminars, workshops and conferences. In addition, there is a need to set standards for teacher performance, research quality assurance and management capacity (Obanya, 2009).

Training challenges

While Nigerian universities pursue their mandate of manpower production and development, a number of constrains stand in their way. These are problems emanating from the government, management and the students. They are so endemic that they have diminished the quality of graduates being produced a great deal. A few examples of these challenges are here under listed.

1. Paucity of Fund- Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) persistently and consistently decry the situation whereby total budgetary allocation to education falls below UNESCO recommendation of 26%. According to Federal Republic of Nigeria (2001) cited in Saint, Hartnett and Strassner (2004), the agreements between Federal government and ASUU put the annual cost of training of a student at $1000. Before the agreement the subvention to the universities was at the rate of $360 training cost per student. Many years after there appears to was no remarkable improvement in the subvention received by the universities. Worst still, the actual amount released by the government to education sector is more often than not below budgetary allocation (Obanya, 2009). Consequent upon this, it is a herculean task running the engine of administration of the university (Ekundayo & Ajayi, 2009).

2. Infrastructural decay/inadequacy- Contrary to the world class infrastructural facilities noticed in university campuses in developed countries of the world, what is obtained in our campuses is worrisome and disheartening. The road networks are poor, the lecture halls, theatre, laboratories, workshops, academic offices and sporting facilities are all in deplorable state and grossly inadequate (NUC, 2004). The traditional architectural masterpiece kind of buildings typified of university was absent more so from the 3rd generation universities to date. What is available today could best be described as match-box buildings. Prof. Mahmood Yakubu the Executive Secretary of Education Trust Fund (ETF) acknowledged this while featuring on Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) network programme of Wednesday 21 September, 2011 anchored by Mrs Omotosho when he declared that no Nigerian university laboratory was among the first 12,000 university laboratories in the world. For this reason, ETF
intended to build a world class laboratory in six selected universities representing the six geopolitical regions of the country within the next one year.

3. Inadequate teaching equipment and materials- It is worrisome to note that basic equipment and consumables needed in training of our students in science and technical courses are lacking in most of our campuses today. In few cases where they are present, they are grossly inadequate (World bank, 1994 cited in Ekundayo & Ajayi, 2009). For example, many graduates of petroleum engineering never saw an oil rig throughout the period of their training. Similarly, those who trained as agricultural engineers never saw combined harvester. This is just to mention a few.

4. Staffing Inadequacy- Academic staffs constitute the engine room for the training programmes of universities and so, what obtains about them goes a long way to affect the teaching-learning activities. There is a sharp difference between required and actual number of academic staff on our campuses. Between 1977 and 1999, the numbers of academic staffs declined by 12% even as enrolment expanded by 13% (Saint, Hartnett & Strassner, 2009). In effect, the reports further have it that an estimated 30% of approved academic positions were vacant in the existing universities. Shortfalls are estimated at 73% in engineering, 62% in medicine, 58% in administration and 53% in sciences. Even today, the universities have not fared better, as evidenced in NUC accreditation report of 2009, where many programmes across a large number of the universities were denied accreditation based on a number of deficiencies, significant among which is staffing problem.

5. Human capital Flight- This has become a syndrome as every window of opportunity from foreign universities is taken up with enthusiasm. This is in connection with poor conditions of service hitherto offered. Lately, it has improved, but there is still room for improvement before it can be said to be at par with what is in operation in developed countries of the world and a few others in Africa such as South Africa and Botswana. Brain drain is not limited to movement across geographical landscape but other juicy careers like political appointment. This problem has come with negative attendant effects such as non-stability of quality from departments, incessant shortage of supervisors for post-graduate students, rising workloads associated with deteriorating staff-student ratio using its staffing norms per academic discipline, the NUC calculates a staffing shortfall of 51% within the system (NUC, 2002b cited in Saint, Hartnett & Strassner, 2004).

6. Political Interference: This is one problem that is fast eroding the quality and dignity that is often associated with the ivory tower. Undue interference from proprietors, most especially the state governments in the administration of the university leaves much to be desired. Visitation panels are constituted at will by the visitor without recourse to the law with the aim of getting at their political enemies and antagonists (Adegbite, 2007). Equity, justice, fairness and excellence have all given way to godfatherism and mediocrity.

7. Cult activities on our campuses: This is a hydra-headed problem that has remained unresolved. The menace of cultism has stretched the management of many universities to limit. It is a problem that has left many students maimed, dead and frustrated. In few occasions some university staff and principal officers were not spared. In fact, the issue of cultism among our students has opened a new and very dangerous dimensions to the situation of things in our educational institutions (Adegbite, 2007). The consequence is incessant closure of our universities and psychological trauma of fear.

8. Poor library facilities: Only few universities in Nigeria today can boast of a standard designated library. Even with the few, how many can boast of adequate and current book stock? Current journals, periodicals, bulletins and magazine are commonly absent. Until recently, the libraries were without e-library facilities. Effective research and teaching under a situation like this is highly constrained.

9. Examination malpractices: Examination malpractice often noticed with WAEC, NECO and JAMB examinations is being reported on our campuses as well, even though it is on isolated cases. It is a monster that should not be allowed to take its root on our campuses. It comes in various dimensions ranging from leakages of examination
papers to intake of incriminating materials into the exam halls and copying among students from one another.

**Way forward**
The government, university management, and private individuals and corporations all together have to be decisive in order to stop the downward trend in quality of graduates being turned out from our universities. In specific terms, the following which are suggestive of paradigm shift are recommended.

1. Government be it federal or state as the proprietors of the universities should begin to see education and university education in particular as an investment with profit being anticipated in future in the form of crime-free society, economically viable population e.t.c. Against this backdrop, increased funding of the university to a desirable level of the university should become a priority of the government. Essentially, university education is a serious business and highly capital intensive, thus, government should see it so. This will afford the governing council the opportunity to effect a turn-around of situations for better on our campuses.

2. The monetary intervention from Education Trust Fund (ETF) should be sustained and expanded too for rapid transformation in the area of infrastructure and capacity building of academic staff.

3. Philanthropists and well established corporations and firms should be encouraged to support the universities in the area of infrastructural development.

4. University management and corporations or companies be it government owned or private should form a synergy, wherein, students acquire relevant meaningful industrial experience. This way the corporation/companies become an important partner in the training of the needed manpower to run the economy of our country. Effective monitoring and evaluation procedure from both partners is essential to introduce sanity into the system.

5. To complete the above, one year internship period for medical doctors could be extended to other academic programmes. By so doing, the quality assurance is attained.

6. Besides, the professional skills, every student should be made to acquire entrepreneurial skills as it is being currently practiced in some universities typical example of which is Tai Solarin University of Education Ijagun in Ogun state.

7. The university management should be sensitive to the needs of each department in order to take them to an enviable position. In this regard, consumables should be replaced periodically while equipment is well maintained.

8. Better welfare packages including salaries that compare favourably with those in developed countries of the world should be offered to the academic staff by the government, in order to curb human capital flight.

9. University autonomy that has for long been agitated for by ASUU should be granted with appropriate legislation, in order to remove distractions being caused by incessant political interference.

10. Admission arrangement of the intakes should be improved upon to select only those who genuinely have potential for university education.

11. Departmental breakthrough in research and excellence should be promptly and handsomely rewarded in order to promote excellence which is the hallmark of university education.

12. Counselling services should be within the reach of students against social ills like cultism, examination malpractice, sexual harassment e.t.c. Further, the university management should engage in periodic meeting with students’ community in order to give them moral talk and obtain information on possible areas of their grievances. Moreover, counselling therapy and rehabilitation programme should be given to cultists who have renounced their membership.

13. Sporting facilities should be elaborately provided for students to have meaningful
alternative areas to burn their energy while social skills are simultaneously acquired.

14. Finally, there is a need for the university management to overhaul the arrangement and plan for the conduct of examinations without malpractice.

**Conclusion**

The non-employability opinion of employers of labour about Nigerian University graduates before being retrained or inducted properly into jobs for which they are employed leaves much to be desired by the stakeholders in University education. The situation portends danger for the acceptability of the certificate being issued by these universities. More so, that the current rating of any certificate is also the worth of the same certificate earlier issued and acquired. This is why we all should see the need and be involved in the efforts to improve the ratings of our universities on the global setting.

The policy makers and the university management should consider as a matter of national interest and urgency the need for a paradigm shift in the way the training programmes are run. Once this is done our universities and their graduates will continue to be relevant in world of work both within and outside the shores of Nigeria.

**References**


