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LEADERSHIP ACCESS TO THE 21ST CENTURY UNIVERSITY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: ISSUES AND PROSPECTS

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ABSTRACT

Leaders in educational systems are the pivot on which the system revolves. This is because they are responsible for policy formulation, implementation and funding. Therefore, this paper focuses on leadership access to the 21st century university education in Nigeria: issues and prospects. The paper first presents historical perspective of the university education in Nigeria and the making of the 21st century university education. It also gives the hierarchical structure of university leadership and their roles. Issues confronting the 21st century universities such as challenge of internet services, computer based testing and underfunding. Cost of education was presented and prospect on how to make universities accessible were given. The paper concludes that the level of opportunities granted to students by leadership of the university to participate and acquire university education determines the level of development in the society.

Keywords: Leadership, Access, University Education, Issues, Prospects, Nigeria.

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INTRODUCTION

The roles of leaders in granting access to university education cannot be overemphasized; this is because they are responsible for policy formulation (Wali, 2018; Otoja & Obodumu, 2017), implementation and funding of the sector. The policies made by the educational leaders will influence access to university education. The world is facing leadership problems within the higher education institutions, leaders who are expected to design compelling vision, through their policy and program to increase access to university education have most times ended up implementing policy that restrict access to university education.

Leadership is the ability to influence a group towards the achievement of set goals. Leaders are those at the helm of affairs with the ability and authority to influence others for goal achievement. In universities, most leaders are political appointees who are assigned

responsibilities which in turn affect the organization either positively or negatively. They take directives either from the federal or state government. The university is administered by the visitor, chancellor, pro-chancellor, governing council chairman, vice-chancellor, deputy vice-chancellor, bursar, registrar, Liberian and director of works. Nwafor (1998) in Nkwor (2018) opined that this is the hierarchical structure of the university leadership, which takes order from either federal or state government. The university laws and status establish offices with authority to them, but allocate overall management responsibilities to the council, the senate and the vice-chancellor.

Education is not static, but dynamic in nature. Therefore, the educational system has been fast evolving and the term “21st Century University” is a model and has become an integral part of educational thinking and planning for the future. Educational administrators and educators are searching for ways to prepare students for the future. Since the role of education is to prepare students to become active, successful and contribute meaningfully to the society. Therefore, proper planning and strategies are required to increase access to the “21st Century University” in Nigeria, Improved access to university education will help produce effective and efficient human resources which in turn will apply what they have learnt to develop the society. The level of opportunity granted to students to participate in education will determine the level of development of the nation. The number of students granted access to university education will cumulate into the societal survival and development. This is because the students are very important and a central factor in the “21st Century University” and the government and university education system should create a holistic and comprehensive ways to create adequate access to university education.

The problems of admission into Nigerian universities and the maintenance of adequate standard have been associated with some of the policies adopted by the federal government of Nigeria to address the inadequacy in the number of admission policies in the university systems; such policies include catchment areas deregulation of university education, quota system. Koni (1996) in Okoroma (2008) opined that the above policies resulted in the reduction of admission standards and allowed poorly qualified candidates to be admitted into Nigerian universities. This is because the policy gives various categories of persons the rights of admission whether they are qualified or not. The quality of university education in Nigeria has also been lowered as a result of the federal government admission policies which no longer emphasizes on quality.

The admission policy of the federal government gives room for inequality which affects access to university education. It looks like there is no definite cut offline for all candidates, because there is variation in scores that grant access to different students in different states (Nworgu, 2015).

Also, inadequate number of universities in Nigeria coupled with high demand for university education have created problems of admission into the available universities. According to Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) annual report (2012) in Abutu (2015), every year, about 1 million or more candidate apply to enroll into the universities but barely 10% to 26% of them actually secure admission.

Furthermore, the emergence of private universities has not also helped in granting equitable admission to indigent students due to high fee charged by these private universities which keeps restricting access to students and limiting the broader social and economic benefit of higher education.

Therefore, there is need to properly plan university education as it will help in reducing wastage and help in solving the problems of admission into the universities (Akinyemi &

Bassey, 2012). The point is that the process of admitting students into Nigerian universities has some-in-built problems that prevent the most qualified students to be offered admission.

Based on the difficulties encountered by parents and students seeking admission into the university, this paper looks at leadership access to the 21st Century University in Nigeria; Issues and prospect.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

Leadership

Leadership is defined as the ability of a person in a group to persuade, inspire or influence the attitude, behaviours and action of others.

Access

Access as defined by advanced oxford English dictionary is the means or opportunity to use, enter a place or benefit from something. Access to education reflects the universal declaration of human rights which asserted that everyone has a right to education. It means the rights, opportunity or means of making education available within the reach of every citizen of a nation.

University Education

University education is known as a post-secondary education. It is education at higher level, hence referred to as a tertiary education.

Historical Perspective of University Education in Nigeria

The historical development of university is dated back to 1934 with the establishment of Yaba College in Lagos State. University College Ibadan was established in 1948 following the Elliot and Asquith commission. The university college of Ibadan became a full fledged university in 1962.

The Ashby report led to the establishment of university of Ife (known as obafemi awolowo university, Ile-Ife) in 1962 by the western region (Adenike, 2008). Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria in 1962 by the northern region while in the east the University of Nigeria, Nsukka was established in 1960, University of Lagos came to be in 1962 by the federal government. According to Adenike (2018), the mid-Western region was created in 1963 and was granted to have its university called University of Benin in 1970.

The need for expansion led to the establishment of more university between 1975 and 1980 (Adenike, 2018). These universities include—University of Calabar, University of Ilorin, University of Jos, University of Maiduguri, University of Port-Harcourt, Ado Bayero University Kano and University of Sokoto. These universities are known as the second generation universities.

Subsequently, other universities such as the federal university of technology Owerri, Federal University of Agriculture, Makurdi, Yola, Akure and Bauchi and state universities like Imo-state university, Ondo state university, Lagos State University, Akwa-Ibom State University, Oyo and Cross-Rivers State University were established between 1980 and 1990 and

were referred to as the third generation universities (Nwangwu, 2003 in Adenike, 2018). The fourth generation university dates between 1991 till date. They include private universities. Nigeria first open university: National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) and more state universities. Presently Nigeria has 154 universities (40 federal, 44 state and 74 private universities (Adenike, 2018).

The 21st Century University

Education is the sum total of one's experience. The place of education cannot be over emphasized as it affects all facets of human endeavour. The university education is the level of education where high level of human resource is developed.

The 21st century University should be such that depicts quality and the centre of it is the students which the system is meant for. The 21st century University is meant to prepare students to become active, successful and contribute to the development of the society (Adenike, 2018). In order to achieve this, different skills and teaching methods are required in every aspect of the educational sector. According to Adenike (2018), there are two major factors, the 21st century university education must possess such as students outcome and student support system. If this two factors are adopted in the 21st century University, students will be more engaged in the learning process and they will graduate better students who are prepared in today's world of globalization

The emphasis is for students to be skillful in other to be able to engage with global issues, learn form and work with people from different cultures, communities and ideologies (Adenike, 2018). The 21st century University should be one that inculcates skills in students which in turn creates positive financial behavior and enhances students' financial knowledge. This will go a long way to help the students know how to manage money and use credit card wisely. The 21st century University must as part of its roles ensures that students possess the ability to access information, recognize when information is needed and use it effectively. It should be able to help students develop thinking, skills, content knowledge and emotional abilities to help the students to pull through in complex life situation and work environment.

The system should be such that creates support learning environment that will enhance teaching and learning which in turn will enable educators to make possible equitable access to quality learning tools as well as online and face to face learning approaches. The 21st century University has to function in its support system, standard, assessments, curriculum, instruction, professional development and learning environment. It has to en-cooperate high quality standard testing with effective formative assessment that give feedback on students' performance, development of student for place of work and in-depth mastery of content. 21st century University investment must emphasis on curriculum and instruction that focus on providing opportunities for competency-based approaches to learning, enable high thinking and encourages the integration of community development which goes above the school walls.

Also, there should be high level professionalism; in ways teachers integrate modern-day teaching strategies into their classroom practices, balance direct instruction with project-oriented teaching methods, which helps teachers to develop their abilities to use various strategies, as well as modern day technology and sustainable model of professional development.

The learning environment must be conducive, create human and physical environment that will support teaching and learning, which in turn will help educators to collaborate, make

possible equitable access to quality learning tools, as well as support face to face and online method of teaching.

It is to this extent that the 21st century University should prepare students for leading roles in an innovation-driven economy and global society. Since the world is a global village and students must operate purposefully in such a village which will refine ideas and situate them properly to face the challenges of the 21st century.

According to Adenike (2018), quality University education will require excellent lectures that have the academic freedom and the institutional support to function in their job. Lecturers who are highly skilled in their field of endeavour and who will be able to compete with other qualified applicants for any job position.

Once quality candidate are hired in University and provides with the required freedom and resources to stay current in their field and develop effective method for teaching their subject matter, it will boost the students to compete with other students globally.

The quality of 21st century University will incorporate technology in ways that will help expand opportunities and maintain quality. This is because the 21st century University education emphasizes on technology, Internet has brought a lot of changes, which enhance teaching and learning in the universities and the world at large.

The Roles of University Leaders

The university has laws and statutory offices which is established with authorities attached to them. The overall management responsibilities are allocated to the council, the senate and the vice chancellor. The visitor and the chancellors are involved in the normal functioning and operations of the university. The policy they make will determine how accessible the university education will be.

The Visitor

The visitor is the proprietors of the university. In the case of the federal universities, the visitor is the President while the state universities, the Governor is the visitor.

The Chancellor

The chancellor is the higher principal officer of the university. He is the one that presides over the convocation ceremonies and other assemblies of the university. The conferment of degrees, diplomas, certificates and other awards of the university lies on him.

Council

The council is responsible for policy formulation, funding, staff coordination of service, discipline, property of the university and the smooth functioning of the university.

The Pro-Chancellor

He is the chairman of the university governing council

The Senate

The senate has the sole responsibility of handling all the academic affairs of the university, provision of courses, approval of syllabus, admission and progress of students in their examination. The vice chancellor is the chairman of the senate

The vice Chancellor

The vice chancellor is the executive and academic head of the university. The administration of the university lies on the policy decision of the governing council and senate (Nkwor 2018). The vice chancellor coordinates order administrators and the success and failure of the Vice-Chancellors depends on his ability to co-ordinate, motivate and inspire other administrative associates (academic and non-academic staff) as well as students in order to achieve the university goals.

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor

He is the nominee of the vice chancellor endorsed by the senate and confirmed by the governing council. Duties are assigned to him by the vice-chancellor.

The Registrar

In every university the registrar is the head of administration of the university. He takes order from the vice-chancellor for the day to day administration work flow in the university. He does the secretary Job for the council, senate, the congregation and convocation and sits in advising capacity to all. He or she is in charge of the university seal and other legal document and records.

The Bursar

He is the chief financial officers of the university. He reports to the vice-chancellor in all matters that relates to financial accounts and treasury services, purchasing and contracts, pension, gratuity, loans and insurance and the planning and budgeting activities of the university.

The Librarian

The Librarian is the academic head of the university library. He or she handles all matters about the university library and also responsible to the vice-chancellor on issues about library. He or she is responsible in procurement, organization of all teaching and research materials of the university.

Director of Works

He is responsible for physical infrastructural development, maintenance and care for other groups in regards to maintenance, service, rehabilitation and development of new structures and facilities of the university and responsible to the vice-chancellor.

The roles of these leaders are very important in creating access to university education. This is because they work with both the federal and state government in matters relating to the affairs of the university. It is the constitutional responsibility of both the federal and state government to own the university and the law enabling them to do that is found in the concurrent legislative list. It is the federal government that also grants private individuals and religious groups license to operate a university. This legal right of theirs will either hinder or grant access to student seeking admission into the university education.

Trend in Admission Policy

Access to university education is the extent to which people have unhindered opportunity to university education. However making university education accessible to all is one major problem facing the Nigerian government. This problem is compounded by population explosion and the desire of every individual to have university certificate (Owhonda & Kalagbor, 2016). In other to address the problems, there are a lot of emerging policies on admission. These admission policies are highlighted below:

Policy on Merit

The policy on merit authorizes universities to admit 45% of their qualified applicant based on merit. This implies 45% of the candidates who applied for admission into their institution must score equal or above the cut of mark they applied to study. Students with high scores in joint admission and matriculation board (JAMB) are given considerations.

Quota System

This policy grants certain percentage of admission space into Nigerian University based on population, ethnic consideration and state of origin.

Educationally Less Privileged

Furthermore, in other to increase access to admission, 20% is to be reserved for indigenes of states considered to be educationally disadvantaged or backward. This is the reason why most states in the northern Nigeria are given different cut off mark to bridge this gap.

Catchment Areas Policy

The essence of this policy is to grant 35% of admission for indigenes of the area in which the university is located. According to Owhondah and Kalagbor (2016), the states of the federation are grouped into catchment area of the university.

Science and Technology Courses

Science and technology have propelled many nations all over the world to great heights. This is because there is more emphasis on science and technology and it became part of the culture and

human civilization. The society presently is driven by ideas and products from science and technology which has great impact in the lives of people and the society at large.

70:30 Technology/Non-Technology Policy

This policy implies that 70% of admission should be granted to candidates who applied to study courses in the technology discipline while the remaining 30% should be reserved for non-technology discipline.

60:40 Science and Humanity

The 60:30 admission policies stipulates that 60% percent of admission should be granted to candidates that apply to study science courses such as engineering, medicine, and other science related area while 40% should be for humanities and arts

Online Registration and Internet Services

In other to increase access to university education, online registration found its way into the Nigeria university education system from 2003 (Adenike, 2018). Earlier than now, registration of students and candidates for examination were done manually involving the filling of several forms. But now registration and admission in almost all the universities are done online.

Policy of Deregulation of University Education

Deregulation of the university education is the offshoot and integral part of the global trend known as new public management (NPM), (ILO, 1998) In (Adenike 2018). This means privatizing, contracting and restructuring of the university education, deregulation of the university education is no longer the exclusive rights of the federal, state and local governments, but encourages private involvement, establishing private university to increase access to university education.

Establishment of Specialist Universities

In order to increase access to university education in Nigeria, the education sector is witnessing the establishment of specialist universities. Such as Pamo Medical University and Ignatius Ajuru University of Education.

Issues in Access to the 21st Century University Education in Nigeria

In the past, the number of universities in Nigeria were few and candidates seeking admission were equally few. However, the importance placed on university education by parent and government accounts for the demand for university education up-surge. The government has always tried to increase the number of universities to be able to grant access to the number of students seeking admission into the university. Despite this moves, there is a lot of issues that hinder students from gaining admission into the universities, such as:

The Challenges of Internet Services

The adoption of internet or online registration by the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) has posed a lot of problems on students seeking admission into the universities. Access to internet server is still inefficient in many universities and serving outlet, most times, it makes it impossible for students to download the required website for registration and processing of their forms. Also, the bank details are delayed in processing of transferring for the students to embark on their registration. Some students spend up to one week trying to process their JAMB form, some end up not being able to complete the form registration before the closing date, thereby depriving the students' the opportunity to sit for the examination.

Computer Based Testing (CBT)

Recently, JAMB embarked on computer based test (CBT) for matriculation examination into the university, which was before now paper and pencil test. Most of the rural school lack computer laboratory and making it difficult for these students to pass the computer based test. Also, the students are confronted with the issue of the computer having problems, there are also the cases of delay caused by the management policy of opening and shutting down the portal at a specific time. Most times, the students get frustrated and end up missing their examinations due to computer malfunction.

Underfunding of the University Education

One of the greatest challenges that Nigeria Universities are facing over the years is underfunding resulting from poor budget allocation to the education sector to match with the population growth and demand for university education. The university education requires enough funding in order to provide and maintain both human and material resources in the sector. The budget allocation to the sector falls short of the 26% UNESCO recommendation.

Cost of Education

Before 1978, education was almost free in Nigeria but overtime, the government removed all the subsidies from university students and introduced payments of fees. The cost of education has greatly increased and those who are responsible for paying fees, their income remains static and making it impossible for students to gain access and complete university education (Wali, 2007).

Facility Issues

Inadequate and obsolete infrastructures and equipment as well as poor library facilities remains the major challenges in Nigeria universities. Most of the infrastructures, equipment and books are obsolete or dilapidated (Federal Ministry of Education, 2009).

The provision of educational facilities are crucial to bringing education to the door step of all. The inadequate provision of human and material resources as well as instructional facilities due

to poor funding resulted into formation of carrying capacity which stipulates that admission of students should be based on available facilities and classrooms, staff, laboratory, equipment and materials (Ene, 2007). According to Nwaeke (2006), the absence of qualified teachers, lack of classrooms, furniture and instructional facilities in almost all the universities are big challenges to access to university education.

Government Policy on Admission

Another issue that hinders access to university education is percentage system of allocation which stipulates 60% of available spaces be reserved for students wishing to study science and technology based courses and 40% to other discipline. The existence of scholarship award available for those in engineering, medicine and other science related courses while fewer for those in arts also deprive students equal access to university education, this is because a large space is reserved for those in sciences while those in arts are deprived of the equitable access.

Another government policy that hinders access to university is the adoption of quota system, catchment area policy and less privileged states, these policies help to increase the disparity in access to university education. This policy according to Enemu (2004) encourages social discrimination of one group to the other.

Policy on Deregulation of University Education

The deregulation of university education in Nigeria, which brought about private universities has its own challenges such as unaffordable fees, the fees in private university is so high that many parents who would have keyed into this opportunity, cannot afford it, thereby increasing issues to access to university education

Problem of Absorption Capacity

According to Oduwaiye (2019), carrying capacity has to do with the number of students that each university has to admit based on the available facilities in the institution. By this policy the national university commission (NUC) pegged the number of students that can be admitted by each university in Nigeria every year. According to federal ministry of education (2009), which states that the carrying capacity of Nigerian university system stands at 150,000 while the actual demand for university education is about 1 million. Otoy (2007) in Okoroma (2008) opined that the insufficiency in the university carrying capacity has created problems of admission in the sense that most qualified students are deprived access due to carrying capacity policy.

Humanitarian, Emergencies and Insecurity

The effect of armed conflicts and humanitarian emergencies has a big toll on education expansion in Nigeria. Thousands of children are forced out of school by natural disaster each year, during the flood disaster of (2012-2014), only a small percentage of humanitarian aids were directed towards education (Nwogu, 2015). The recent Boko Haram and Fulani herdsmen in the North-east of Nigeria has encouraged attack on students, widespread rape of girls and women, kidnapping of lecturers and destruction of school facilities. The forceful kidnapping of girls in the north has inflicted untold hardship, fear and insecurity on young girls and women, thus,

untold damage on the education. Teachers, students and school environment are now prime targets. The consequences are fear on students to attend school, fear among teachers to teach and parents to allow their children to attend school.

Prospect to Access to University Education

There are a lot of issues highlighted that are confronting access to university education in Nigeria. The issues calls for positive action from government and those concerned. To increase access to university education, high level of funding is required. There should be adequate funding of the sector for it to be effective. Government should allocate more fund to university to meet the UNESCO recommended 26% allocation to education. Furthermore, the university management should adopt means to seek alternative sources of revenue generation to support the allocation from the government.

There should be establishment of more universities in Nigeria. According to Babalola (2007), which states that Nigeria has a population of 140 million and has fewer universities, compare to U.S.A. with a population 290 million and 8,407 universities, while India has a population of 1 billion with a total number of 78,407 universities, Argentina is with the population 38.7 million with 1,705 universities. In this analysis, he advocates for the increase in the number of universities in Nigeria, it will help to increase access to university education in Nigeria.

Regulation of fees charged by private universities: Government as the overall regulator of education and protector of citizens' rights should monitor and control the fees charged in private and state universities. Also, government should reduce the financial burden given to private university education partners before approval is given to them. If government do not reduce the financial burden, before approval is granted to these private universities, government will not have the moral stand to regulate the financial transaction of the sector.

Attention should be given to the facilities in universities. If attention is given to facilities in universities, there will be no need for NUC pegged number of students each university will admit. Government should employ more lecturers in the universities so as to have optimal staff-students ratio in order to have a good relationship with lecturers and quick access to easy feedback. There should be an establishment of more specialist universities. More specialist universities in the country will expand access to university education.

Improvement in the use of internet services by JAMB. Government in conjunction with JAMB should make sure that all secondary schools have information and communication laboratory, as these will enable students prepare for the computer based test (CBT). Also, access to internet should be sufficient to enable students access the website easily for their registration and processing of their forms without challenges. A better federal character should be introduced to ensure that equal number of citizens are admitted in the universities at all times.

CONCLUSION

Education builds knowledge, value, connects state or country to resourceful economy and empowers the nation which leads to meaningful life and societal development. Lack of access to university education will actually limit the strength and potentials of the students and reduce societal survival and development.

Therefore, the level of opportunity granted to students by the leaders to participate and acquire university education will determine the level of development in the nation.

The issues affecting access to 21st century university education in Nigeria can be seen in the operation of faulty admission policies. Misapplication of these policies in view to increase access amounts to retrogression in access to university education. Therefore, there is need for adequate funding of university education, approving of more universities as this will create more opportunities for students seeking admission into the universities.

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