
**NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY QUALITY, WHY THE HERO FALLS: A
REVIEW OF UNIVERSITY ACADEMIA AND WHERE
THINGS WENT WRONG**

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ABSTRACT

Nigerian university quality, why the hero falls, was a paper published to uncover the causes of the gradual decline in the provision of university education in Nigeria between 1960 and 2015. The paper focused attention on the major reasons identified by past research for the fall. The paper was desk research, and left many areas of research dangling. The question of where things had gone wrong remained unanswered by the paper. However, this paper is designed to fill this gap using a critical realist qualitative approach to investigate where things went wrong. The paper collects information in the form of semi-structured interviews with 20 professors in the southwest of Nigeria, with a view to uncovering what the problems were, and are. The findings reveal that structure (including curricula and standards), mechanisms (such as funding, teaching methods and assessment), and agents' involvement (in terms of lack of continuity and politics) are all major areas with failings. The findings also suggest that impatience, time and money are responsible for the failure of universities' experience, and suggest a need to better know why things continue to go wrong.

Keywords: Hero, Academia, University, Quality, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is a blessed country in Africa, the 7th largest in the world with a population of 183 million people. The country is rich in many natural resources including oil and gas, cocoa, minerals and other things. The country became interested in education very early, due to the intension of the government that education would help develop human capital, which was expected to increase the economy. However, the delivery of the constitution of Nigeria in the early years of independence caused differences in many area of education, especially criteria for admission to university, which Adetunji (2015) listed as the quota system and catchment areas.

Adetunji explains that these techniques, or policies of the government, were formulated in an attempt to balance the education system in the country. Adetunji (2014) states that Ene's (2007) expression that the northern part of the country was not good academically, raised the need for balancing education opportunities. In another paper, Adetunji and Ogunleye (2015) claim that the approach was wrong as it was at the expense of quality provision. It was in an attempt by the government to balance access to education that standards were first compromised.

In another paper, Oyedeji (2011) claims that further attempts made by the government to create access were good, but the government did not strictly follow how university education is funded or managed, leading to many newly established universities not having the carrying capacity needed for learning. Likewise, Adetunji (2015) pointed out that the creation of more access without first producing enough academic experts to handle courses in the universities, led to overwork of existing staff, without the universities employing more academics. Moti (2010) presents evidence that government intervention in creating access without proper planning or at a time when the existing universities in the country were still under staffed showed evidence of decline and recorded this as the major reason why things had gone wrong for the sector. No wonder, there has been continuous outcry about the decline in the quality of services provided by Nigerian university education.

It is important to bear in mind that the quality of knowledge generated in institutions of higher learning is critical to national development and competitiveness. Akinpelu (2000) says that it is only quality education that can sharpen the mind of the individual socially, and help transform the society economically, as well as politically. Education is very important for national development, and the only way for a country to achieve sustainable development is by improving the higher level training and skills of their human capital. According to Peretomode (2007), higher level training is the facilitator, the power house, the bed rock and the driving force behind strong and healthy cultural, political, socio-economic and industrial development of a nation; being the key mechanism higher education institutions use to increase wealth and human capital.

According to Ekong (2006), quality education builds knowledge, skills, perceptions, life attitudes and values. When quality education is delivered well enough to meet set standards, the products of education should be able to perform well in the world of work and real-life situations. When the quality is low, performance cannot meet the set standards. Hence one can say that the quality of education has declined below a set standard, and it is of high importance to study what causes the quality to be low and why performance can't meet set standards.

RESEARCH

Norman (2013) refers to quality education as skills and knowledge, with the potential to reflect on the level of ability. It refers to what that level of education can do, based on its intent. Adetunji (2015) says that quality education produces a complete person, in the sense that the person is intellectually, morally, physically, emotionally and socially developed. Quality refers to the worth of inputs, in terms of instructional facilities, lecturers, teaching facilities and evaluation procedures invested in the system, which translate to outputs (Adetunji & Oladejo, 2016). While Adetunji (2016) says that many Nigerian universities even lack lecturers in the right quantity and quality, causing a gradual decline. However, a few studies carried out by Dabaleni, Oni and Adekoya (2002) and Mafiana, Olamide, Adesina and Shanty (2005) reveal that the quality of graduates produced by Nigerian universities is low. Another study by Onyeneye (2006) also concluded, after a review of relevant literature, that the quality of Nigerian university graduates had declined in recent times, against the demand for graduates in 21st century society and the expectations of the labour market.

Although it has been observed that the implication of this negative trend for the society is catastrophic, President Olusegun Obasanjo (quoted in Okojie, 2013) notes that “the implication of declining education has far-reaching effects on our civic, cultural, moral, and economic sustainability.” If university education is the ultimate vehicle for the delivery of critical developmental goals of the country, as enshrined in the NEP 2004, then the production of, what is usually described as “half-baked graduates”, by Nigerian universities will emasculate the growth and development of the country. The impact of this negative development is most visible in the security sector, where graduates, obviously lacking in moral character, embark on all kinds of social vices including burglary, theft, kidnapping, assignation, armed robbery, terrorism etc. Former President of Nigeria, Dr. Goodluck Jonathan, recently said that Nigerian graduates could not take up employment opportunities because they are lacking the basic skills and knowledge required by industry (Otokunfor, 2011).

Symbolising these anxieties in practical terms, the employers of labour resort to pre-job tests and pre-job training programmes to enable them to upgrade the knowledge and skills of graduates to meet the standards of industry. Sam Egwu, former Nigerian Minister of Education, stated that 80% of Nigerian university graduates were unemployable as a result of poor performance of the students as well as the institutions (Nigerian Compass, 5th March 2009). However, Bamiro (2012) states that the problems faced by the sector can be traced to where things went awry for the sector in the economic downturn of the 1980s. He claims that education, which was a protected sector before this period, showed signs of decline. The burden of funding education became too heavy for the government to shoulder alone.

Adetunji and Adetunji (2015) state that the government's approach to deregulation gained momentum with an emerging shift in perception from education as a public good to education for private benefit, in the structural adjustment programmes of the 1980s. The policy stated that education is not really an investment, but a cost. Less than a decade after the policy was introduced, institutions began to notice a gradual decline. Asiyai (2013) claims that this policy led to a declining resource base and deteriorating service conditions in many of the institutions of higher education. The approach compromised the aim of providing quality education in the country. Majasan (1998) maintains that quality education is value-loaded. He argues that quality education should be produced by hard work, disciplined behaviour, improved cultural heritage and students who possess mutual respect within and outside the school community. This agrees with the idea that quality education is education that produces a complete person - complete in the sense that the person is intellectually, morally, physically, emotionally and socially developed. Hence Akinpelu, (2000) argues that education without quality can be more dangerous than no education, stressing that without quality, education has no value. Therefore, it is important to know where things went wrong in the university education sector.

METHODOLOGY

This paper uses a critical realist qualitative approach to uncover the causes of an event where things went wrong. A critical realism philosophy holds that it is of high importance to get to the bottom of why a particular event occurs in a certain way, to find a profound solution to the problems identified, since events do not occur independently. Agents, through the use of mechanisms, within the structure, drive events. This means there can only be one reality of an event. However, events do not just happen, they are caused through the involvement of an agent using mechanisms, either rightly or wrongly. In the cause of this study, the author is interested in now the mechanisms were, or are, used wrongly, causing a gradual decline of quality. In the context of this study, the structure is the university system, the agents are the professors who take part in the daily activities of the university, and the mechanisms are the functionality of the structure through teaching and learning, as well as research. 20 agents were selected, using a purposive sampling techniques based on willingness and availability of the participants to take part in the study, from 5 universities. The selection focused on deans of faculties, who are usually professors. The study centred on 5 universities in the south-west zone of the country. All the universities involved are government owned universities, giving a cross view of the study. The 20 professors remain anonymous for safety and confidentiality purposes. Four of the participants were not available for data collection, based on workload. The findings from the interviewees were descriptive, narrated in a thematic form, to help understand where things had gone wrong.

Table 1: Participant Group

PARTICIPANTS	UNIVERSITIES				
	State (1)	State (2)	State (3)	State (4)	State (5)
Professor (A)	*	*	*	*	*
Professor (B)	-	*	*	*	*
Professor (C)	*	*	*	-	-
Professor (D)	*	-	*	*	*

The states are represented by 1, 2 etc. The chairman or dean or professor is represented by A, B etc. Therefore, the professors from the first university are A1, B1 etc. from the second university A2,B2 etc., and so on.

FINDINGS

Structure – standards

Four of the respondents explained that universities in Nigeria are no longer what they used to be. The universities they knew were great, with an atmosphere they were proud of and willing to be part of forever (B2, B4, C3, D4). One participant mention that the changes to the development and good practice in the universities started suddenly after the introduction of government policy in the 1970s (C3). Two other participants were of the view that the policy was introduced with the intension of creating standards for the smooth running of the university (A2, D1). Three informants mentioned that the introduction of the policy to regulate university education was a good concept (A3, C1, D3). Two of the respondents claimed that Nigeria is a very big country, and the formulation of one policy to fit all may be demanding, as the culture and religions of the people are different (C1, D3). One interviewee stressed that education could never be done in isolation, it has to be incorporated into the daily life of people, saying:

I think education that can respect norms and value of the society and develop on it to meet the immediate needs of the people is the type of education we need and that is what I will referred to as a well structured education (D3).

Another respondent explained that the introduction of the concept of policies or standards was the beginning of division in the country, because some areas were interested in western education while the north was very hostile to receiving western education based on reasons such as, “the white will marry our daughters away”:

I think the main reason was the fear of being enslaved again by the white or foreigners who brought education (C1).

Two respondents were of the view that things had gone wrong with the way the standards of university education had been designed (B4, D1). One respondent mentioned that university education standards in the 70s and 80s had the idea that education should be free for all, and those who managed to acquire knowledge at the highest institutions should go for better paying jobs (B4). Another respondent was of the opinion that from the start of the higher education system in Nigeria the country had misplaced the need for education:

I think our policies were design based on the need of the country, more reason why different assessment was designed for different area of the country. I believe the university structure needs to be re-visited now that the need for university education is changing (D5).

Low funding

Five of the respondents talked about funding issues as a major reason why they agreed that the universities in Nigeria, that had been a hero in the past, had fallen (A1, A5, B5, C4, D1). Two of the participants also mentioned and emphasised the continuous debate going on in the general literature on the major reasons for continuous decline in the provision of university education in the country to be due to nothing but low funding (A1, A4). One participant stressed that in the last decade there is no doubt that funding has continued to be a challenge to the progress of the institution:

I can tell you that, if government fail to fund the university system you can never get anything better from the institution. For example government have partially stopped funding research, which is the heartbeat of any nation. Even to pay staff salaries are becoming more and more difficult for the government (A4).

Another respondent emphasised the low funding of academia as a problem the university encounters, which is causing the gradual decline:

I think, if academia are allowed to do their job properly the country will grow very quickly, take for example we have good economist who emerged from the university system in this country and we still have economic problem in the country because these set of economist do not have opportunity to practice (A1).

Four other respondents were of the view that low funding is part of the issue but not necessarily the main issue as there is an opportunity for the institutions to generate funds for themselves,

through grants, research work or collaborative activities within or outside the country (B3, B5, C1). Three of the respondents said that the so called government officials have got their priorities wrong and focus on natural resources (like crude oil) to make budgets or plans for the whole nation, which is wrong (A2, A4, D5). One of these respondents said:

I can tell you that no institution is generating enough money in this country to run the sector, they all depend on the government to support them. Surprisingly when government gives them any money they mismanage it (D4).

Another respondent pointed out that although the government can be blamed mostly for low funding, the institution should also be blamed for misappropriation and non-productivity:

I believe if everyone is taking responsibility of the services they receive or given out to others then it will be easy to improve on existing problem (D5).

All the respondents agreed that low funding caused the fall in quality standards in Nigerian universities, and insisted that things had gone wrong in this respect. Five of the respondents pointed out that when university education started in Nigeria, the government allocation of funding to the sector was great. Every individual was motivated to learn or even be linked with the institution. Everyone wanted to be part of the university system one way or the other, which actually fostered good development within the country (B3, C2, C4, D1, D3). Three of the respondents were of the opinion that the glory days had gone, but if institutions in Nigeria are ever to relive the past they will have to start thinking of generating funds from their graduates, through various forms of empowerment (C2, D3, D4). One of the respondents lamented:

I think we as academia need to take the leading roles in re-shaping the country both economically and politically. What do I mean? Stop whatever is not good. I believe this point will encourage government to fund the institution better (D4).

Teaching methods and assessment

At the start of the interview, a few of the participants did not want to engage with the point of teaching methods and assessment, and where things had gone wrong. The researcher threw out a probing question from the structure and standards issue, that showed a few of the respondents believed that standards have to do with how teaching methods are assessed. Nearly all the respondents contributed to this point, although eight of the respondents shared a similar view, that teaching methods and assessments had affected the way institutions prepare graduates that flop in the market today. They also believed that problems that emanate from teaching methods are internal. Three respondents expressed the opinion that it is very easy to talk about mistakes

other people make, but talking about your own error is difficult (B4, B5, D4). One of the respondents, who made a clear statement on teaching methods, said:

I tell you what, teaching method is first area where we got it wrong. We as academia fail to flow with the innovation of new age, and suddenly we became old school academia (D4).

Another respondent, who shared a similar view, said:

I believe we have our own fault as lecturers, and we have failed in our professional practices, that is why we found ourselves in this condition. I can tell you 65% lectures that you will find anywhere in Nigeria today are still very traditional in their method of teaching and assessment (B5).

I think the NUC also have their own problem as they tell you what to teach, how to teach it which always go against the creativity of lecture to take informed decision on delivery method (B4).

I think the major problem comes from the lectures as they fail to mentor the new lecturers on what to do (A2).

One respondent was very upset with the way the university system in Nigeria was run, from the university governing council to other external bodies. He lamented that without a doubt one will believe that our teaching style in Nigeria is still backward. "Don't you think so?" the participant asked the researcher. The researcher responded, "how Sir? Can you expand further?" The respondent said:

There is no internet to conduct recent finding before going to class, I think sometime I spend lot of my personal money on browsing all in the name of searching for information I can use in the class. You know what, before now, as a lecturer you cannot go to class without knowing what is new in your field because if you do, student will embarrass you with questions but today it is not so any more (B5).

Another respondent also mentioned:

I cannot belief that education in the country had gone wrong this much, I will still say it again and again, everything still come down to both funding and leadership style. You know when you have money to carry out research in those days you motivate to go to class because you what to tell your student the new things you have discovered and then student will query it then you go back and improve on it before taking it to any professionals (D1).

Another respondent claimed:

I believe the traditional approach to teaching and assessment should have been out of the system by now but I tell you what it is very difficult. You get to hear from all this old professors saying you have to do it my own way. You just have to oblige because they will be the one to present the work at the highest level not you. I think this approach is taking us backward even when we young professors want to do something new (C3).

Another respondent lamented:

I am of the view that yes things had gone wrong especially with our assessment method. A question I kept asking which is yet to be answer is can examination test the true knowledge of our student learning? I have previously suggested that, student should be given another form of assessment not using class attendance, did you know what I mean. Okay let me explain, in university you hear lecturer saying attendance carries 30marks out of 100 marks just to encourage student to attend classes. This is rubbish, student at higher level of institution should know that attending class is mandatory not optional and should not be substitute for mark. This is where we've gotten it wrong (A4).

Lack of continuity

A few of the respondents were of the view that another major reason why things had gone wrong, in the university sector especially, is lack of continuity. Four of the respondents explained that sometimes, academics are just thrown into the job without proper orientation or mentoring (A3, B4, B5, C1). One of the participants said:

I think sometimes they believe academia are super competent, yes they may be but yet organisation are different to each other (C3).

Two other participants from the same university explained that although in theory there are rules to be followed, in practice nothing exist (B2, B5). One points out:

I can cite you an example of when you, as the dean of faculty, got a letter from the Vice-chancellor that this is governor 's candidate get him to start work straightway. I cannot do anything. I just have to start (B5).

The other participants also supported the idea that lack of continuity was not their problem, but lack of good continuity was a major issue to discuss:

I can tell you that nobody like change, but without a change in the ways we do things we can't get a better result (A2).

Three other respondents also mentioned that continuity was one thing that was very difficult to discuss, especially among the education experts. This problem was compounded by the lack of funds (D3, D5). One of the participants explains:

I can tell you confidently that when we do not have the right type of staff to educate our students we end up settling for any available hands. They will also do what they like not what we like because we are desperate to have them (D5).

Another participant claimed:

I think this problem is also raised by the NUC standard that all lecturers must be a PhD holders when the workload of existing staff is much and they are not even ready to motivate the academic staff by given them better remuneration (D3).

A few other respondents, who contributed less to the discussion, mentioned that the older hands of academia are the ones causing problems of continuity in the university, and if they continue, the things that have gone wrong, causing decline, will continue to go wrong.

CONCLUSION

The paper set out to find where things went wrong in the provision of quality education in Nigeria. The paper identifies four major areas, as discussed by the participants, as areas where things have gone wrong. It is assumed that if standards are followed there is the possibility that delivery of service will be on time, which will then meet the needs and demand of users. Likewise, increased funding will enhance teaching techniques, with staff willingness to take more responsibility. This paper's contribution is very important to the study of quality provision in Nigeria, because it uncovers where things went wrong. The study concludes that time not being taken to investigate the sector properly is responsible for the continued decline, while money remains the major bottleneck, causing decline. Likewise, if there is a sharp turnaround of the situation, the country's university sector may find themselves to be of great importance, and institutions of higher learning may re-discover their potential.

FURTHER RESEARCH

This study does not provide a solution to the problem of why the heroes have fallen, especially in the areas where things have gone wrong for the sector. The paper only focuses attention on gathering informed information that can help suggest appropriate methodology to address the problems identified in previous studies and this study. The researcher suggests looking at where things may continue to go wrong, in order to suggest a lasting solution to the problem. However, other studies can look at other areas where things go wrong, as this study does not

claim to cover all areas where things go wrong, but rather advises other researchers to dig more deeply into the study.

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