

**CHALLENGES OF THE TERTIARY EDUCATION SYSTEM IN DEMOCRATIC  
NIGERIA**

**BY**

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***Abstract***

*The paper examines the state of higher education in the present democratic system of Nigeria. Higher education plays a crucial role in the education of future leaders which helps in the development of a high level of technical capacity that supports economic growth. Consequently, it becomes necessary to closely inspect the myriads of problems facing this education system, some of which include sectionalism, insurgency, militancy, inadequate funding and examination malpractice. The paper aims at proposing a number of steps toward ameliorating these challenges posed to education some of which are revising the admission policy and making merit the foremost criterion, adequate funding by the government and granting full autonomy to tertiary institutions. It concludes by advising stakeholders especially the government, to address the issue as a matter of national importance.*

**Key words:** Challenges, Tertiary education, Democracy and Corruption.

**Introduction**

In Nigeria today, education is widely accepted as the major instrument for enhancing and promoting development in all spheres, scholars agree that it is the basis of modernity. scientific and technological breakthrough which have made all nations of the world accord immense priority to it. NPE (2004) asserts that no nation can achieve self-sufficiency, economic, social and technological progress without a good educational system to sustain its achievements.

Tertiary institutions has a duty to educate future leaders there by developing a high level of technical capacity which supports the growth and development of any economy. Ibukun (1997) opines that the main purpose of University education in Nigeria is the provision of the needed manpower to accelerate the socio-economic development of the nation. However, with roughly over 160 million Nigerians, 36 states, a weak political and economic system and persistent ethnic and religious conflicts in Nigeria, this duty has been attended to as effectively as it ought to be.

This has created so many loopholes and lacunas in the entire system leading to either the denial of a merited right to admission the system or half-baked graduates sent into the labour market.

According to Abdullahi (no date), education provides the best alternative for national stability, security, unity and prosperity in this present democratic, multi-sectional an: religious Nigeria. This paper hereto has a central focus on exploring strategies toward ensuring that the tertiary education system operates on and delivers the ideal global expectations.

## **Conceptual Clarifications**

### **Tertiary Education**

Tertiary education is basically a post-secondary education which involves higher learning to gain mastery of a particular discipline. According to Moodie (2002), it could be defined Epistemologically, that is, by ways of knowing, learning or by discipline, Theologically for example by training for an extrinsic purpose compared with cultivation for intrinsic worth, training for work in contrast to education for life and training for work directed by others and education for self-directed work; Hierarchically by occupational, educational or cognitive levels; or Pragmatically by what happens to be the current arrangement of an institution.

The tertiary education system in Nigeria comprises of Universities, Polytechnics, and Colleges of Education. The higher education system is made up of 122 universities (36 Federal, 36 State, 50 Private), 71 polytechnics, 47 monotechnics and 79 colleges of education Bamiro, (2012). The history of Nigerian higher education began with the establishment of Yaba Higher College in 1934 which was meant to provide middle-level manpower for the government and private sector. According to Amadi (no date), in 1948, the University College Ibadan was founded as an affiliate of the University of London, which later emancipated to be a full-fledged Nigerian University (the University of Ibadan) in 1962. This was followed by the University of Nigeria Nsukka in 1960, the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ife (formerly University of Ife) in 1961, the University of Lagos and Ahmadu Bello University Zaria in 1962 and the University of Benin in 1970. These 6 Universities established between the periods of 1960 to 1970 are referred to as the first generation Universities in Nigeria. Amadi (no date) further submitted that the second generation universities were established between 1975 and 1977 and they include the Universities of Calabar (1975), Ilorin (1976), Jos (1975), Sokoto (1977), Maiduguri (1977), Port Harcourt (1977) and Bayero University Kano (1977). Ever since till date, there has been increase in the establishment of tertiary institutions such as polytechnics/monotechnics, colleges of education and universities of technology across the nation.

The tertiary education institutions in Nigeria are under three agencies that perform supervisory and regulatory functions under the Federal Ministry of Education. These are the National Universities Commission (NUC) for universities; the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) for the polytechnics/monotechnics and technical colleges and the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) or the colleges of education Bamiro, (2012). The purpose and functions of these agencies are similar in structure.

## **Democracy**

Abraham Lincoln defined democracy as a government of the people, by the people for the people. Nigeria began operating a democratic government from 1960 to 1966 and a full-fledged democratic government on May 29, 1999. According to Hertskovits (no date), took the American model of democracy which observes the separation of powers among the three tiers of government. The legislative arm make the laws, the judiciary interpret the laws while the executive implement these laws. The country also has a bicameral national assembly, senate representatives from each state, a Governor in each state and one President who could serve for two terms (8 years).

John Dewey, one of the influential philosophers in America believed that democracy was important not only because of its stand for equality and freedom, but for its educational consequence. Of a truth, Nigerians under the democracy over the years have always wanted good quality tertiary education based on equity and accessibility to every citizen. However, the failure of democratic Nigeria to attain her aspired liberty especially in the educational system is majorly as a result of the issues of militancy, tribalism, sectionalism, insurgency, inadequate funding, and examination malpractice, among others. Thus, relevance of the above concepts thus call for an in-depth examination of the extent to which education in the twenty-first century Nigeria is affected.

## **Challenges of the Tertiary Education System in Nigeria**

The first problem that faces the Nigerian tertiary education system is the issue of sectionalism which is made manifest in the admission policy of the government. The policy of the quota system introduced by the government has been a powerful tool used in the determination of access to admissions in tertiary institutions. The Murtala/Obasanjo administration admission formula into tertiary institutions in Nigeria was based on merit 40%, states quota 30%, catchment zone 20% and discretion 10% (Nwagwu, 1997). The first application of this policy was in 1983 by the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB, now UTME). Thus, admission into universities that year followed the order: merit (40%), locality (30%), educational less developed (ELD) (20%) and discretion (10%) by the six oldest universities in the country, while the second generation universities had merit (30%), locality (30%), ELD (30%) and discretion (10%). There was a scheme of inducement grants for compliance and penalty for non-compliance (Egwaikhide, Isumonah and Ayodele, 2009).

According to Joshua, Loromeke and Olanrewaju (2014), all the states in Nigeria were grouped into catchment areas of each university. Students who fall within the catchment areas of the university were given consideration for admission. Twenty per cent was strictly reserved for the educationally-less-developed states (ELDS), which is indigenous secondary school graduates from the states that are often specially considered for admission with lower cut-off marks from the JAMB examination. The criterion of the ELD left many Nigerians disappointed

and frustrated because candidates who were meant to be admitted by merit were not admitted while their counterparts from the educationally less developed states who performed poorly were admitted. In 2000, a new quota system was adopted; merit 45%, locality 35% and ELD (20%) (Salim, 2003). According to Duruji, Segun, Olarenwaju, Oviasogie, Ajayi and Loromeke (n.d.), these policies have placed the university education system in a quagmire. Its major consequence as they observed, is that it has been to the detriment of the educationally advantaged states. In the words of Moti (2008), it has led to the rejection of many brilliant candidates and the admission of weak ones because federally- Owned institutions are compelled to give equal opportunities to all applicants. A study by Adeyemi (2001) found a significant difference in the quality of performance of students admitted on merit and those admitted through catchment area of admission policy. Thus, Okoroma (2008) asserted that it creates room for the admission of intellectually deficient Candidates and ultimately resulting in the reduction of educational standards. It paves a way or mediocrity over merit and hard work.

The second challenges to education in the tertiary system are the issues of insurgency and terrorism. The nation in the last couple of years has experienced severe assault leading to the bloodshed of innocent citizens. Nigeria has in these years witnessed the insurgency of the terrorist group known as boko haram which began unleashing its attacks in 2009 and recently, the attacks by Fulani herdsmen. However prior to this time, as observed by Oladunjoye and Omemu (2013), Nigeria also witnessed several forms of terrorism which is a deliberate and systematic use of violence to destroy, kill, maim, and intimidate the innocent in order to achieve a goal or draw national or international attention to demands which the battlefield against a government army. As stated by Musa (2011), boko haram has been in ordinarily may be impossible or difficult to achieve under normal political negotiation or on existence since 2001 but did not become popular until 2009 when they participated actively in the sectarian violence which occurred in the Northern Nigeria. It is opposed to whatever of western origin especially education. Oladunjoye and Omemu (2013) noted that Ral Hausa language etymologically means Animist, Western or Non Islamic education; while Arabic meaning of Haram figuratively means Sin. This group opposes not only western education but western culture and modern science as well. The Fulani herdsmen are nor it out in the unleashing of attacks on unsuspecting communities. They let their cattle graze on peoples' farmlands thereby destroying the crops planted from which the famers obtain a living for themselves, families and communities. Their most resent mayhem are the killings and razing of houses in Agatu, Benue state and Nimbo, Uzo Uwani of Enugu state in February and April 2016 respectively. The constant threat posed by Boko Haram and the Fulani herdsmen undermines efforts at improving tertiary education especially in the northern region. Insurgency has led to the killing students and lecturers, razing down of structures and closing of some higher institutions. These have affected the attainment of a high standard in the tertiary education system in Nigeria because when and where there is Thirdly, militancy (quasi-terrorism) poses a big problem to education. The major activities of militant groups are seen in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria. Some of these groups include Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), Movement for the Emancipation of the

Niger Delta (MEND), People Volunteer Force, the Egbesu Boys, and Niger Delta Vigilante with a long history dating to the Adaka Boro Movement in the 1960's Ayangese, (2010). Their activities according to Abraham (2011) manifest in the form of disruption of activities of multinational oil corporations, vandalizing of oil pipelines, leg bunkering and more recently, hostage taking of both expatriates and Nigerians alike, destruction of oil installations. These activities affect education especially the tertiary system in that the poor environmental condition in most of these areas does not support establishment of higher institutions and learning. More so, the youths engaged militant activities do not go to school, as they are preoccupied or obsessed with militancy.

this point, Abraham (2011) observed that the quality of education in the Niger Delta can best be described as abysmally low. Furthermore, militancy in form of students restiveness also seen on campuses. Often, students go on rampage as a result of increase in school fees lack of water and power supply, among others, leading to the destruction of some educational facilities which otherwise would have been helpful in the bolstering of quality education cult activities, poor funding of tertiary institutions, insufficient and deteriorating social studies by Ajibade (no date) reveals that students crises emerge from such factors as Secret amenities and academic facilities, socialization influence, brain drain and poor attention students; declining economic conditions which have affected students lives and studio ideological and political reasons, poor communication between institutions authorities students, etc. Akindutire (2004) assert that the result of student militancy and violent unionism has been the constant closure of universities, removal of vice-chancellors among others.

Fourthly, inadequate funding is another challenge facing tertiary education system in today's democratic Nigeria. Funds have grossly been inadequate due to the increase in the enrolment of students. In addition to this, Ajayi and Ekundayo (2006) commented that the Nigerian government over the years has not been meeting up with the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) recommendation of 26% of the total budget allocation to education sector. This has led to shortage in the supply of resources for the enhancement of education processed such as library, social and laboratory facilities, students hostels, offices, lecture halls, among others in institutions. For instance, the budget allocation in 2016 was 8%, 7.04% in 2017, and 7% in 2018, was allocated for education. World Bank (1994) reported that the equipment for teaching, research and learning are either Jacking or very inadequate and in a bad shape to permit the universities the freedom to carry out the basic functions of academics.

Furthermore, constant political interference in our tertiary institutions affect the education system. Ekundayo and Ajayi (2009) lamented that the government, especially in state-owned institutions interfere a lot in the selection and choice of chief executives, deans, departmental heads, directors of programmes and above all the selection of vice-chancellors. When tertiary institutions are not totally free to choose who becomes their head without the intervention of the government, the performance of the system is most often affected as in some cases, chaos and

strike actions are elicited when the government appoints a candidate who is not of a popular choice.

Finally, the challenge of examination malpractice which is associated with poor preparation of students for an examination, and lack of self-confidence is another cancer worm eating deep into the tertiary education system of Nigeria. In some institutions, students pay some amount of money to their lecturers to get better grades, otherwise known as sorting. As opined by Odiya and Omofonmwan (2007), the rising costs of education makes students and their

parents not ordinarily want to be held back by any form of deficit or failure, hence they go to any length to ensure success. As a result, tertiary institutions produce both the good and the half-baked graduates for the labour market of which the half-baked ones are most often unable to defend their certificates. These undermine the ability and efforts of the tertiary education system.

### **Possible Solutions to the Problems**

The aims of producing a high-level manpower for national development for which the tertiary education is meant are not being achieved as a result of the aforementioned multi-faceted problems, it is hitherto necessary to suggest ways of making the system more effective and efficient in relation to contemporary democratic Nigeria.

Firstly, regards sectionalism: the implementation of the quota system admission policy should not be done at the expense of the other states. (Akinola, 2003, p4) puts it thus: "problem of UME [Universities Matriculation Examination] policy is the preferential and/or differential policy that designates certain parts of the country as disadvantaged areas. This policy is political in nature, and should be discontinued. This policy too has given many of Our children, who would have been admitted but could not, due to the policy, a lot of frustrations, seeing those who scored less than them being admitted. It is indeed unfair to the prospective students in some parts of the country, with higher scores in the UME, not to be given admission into the university, while others in the so-designated disadvantaged areas with lower scores have the opportunity of being admitted. This, indeed, is academic apartheid in disguise." A study by Joshua et al. (2014) suggests the revisiting and enforcing of the policy of free and compulsory education that was introduced during the Obasanjo administration in 1976. The quota system of admission should be reviewed such that the merit percentage is increased to accommodate the best candidates from each State in the Federation. In other words, merit must remain the major criterion for educational

Secondly, more efforts should be made by the government to increase the security in schools and communities. Locally based vigilante groups should be established in communities to prevent attacks by the Boko Haram sect and the Fulani herdsmen. Also. There should be effective dialogue sessions between leaders of communities and the inhabitant Fulani. Though, the effort of the federal government in curbing the activities of the Boko Haram terrorist activities has

made appreciable success, the few students in the secondary and tertiary schools risk school attendance. Consequently, a research by Oladunjoye and advancement.

Omemu (2013) among other suggestions, recommend that the federal government should enshrine security studies in the school curriculum and post security personnel to guide all schools from primary to tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The immigration department should also check the rate of immigration in the country especially at the northern borders of the country.

Thirdly, the problem of militancy in the Niger Delta would be better solved when the government and multi-national oil corporations become sensitive to the needs and aspiration of the youths in those communities. These oil corporations and government should also provide educated youths in the area, especially the host communities with good employment opportunities within and without their organizations to encourage and challenge other unrepentant youths on the need to embrace education and further get employed upon graduation. Militancy in the form of students' restiveness would also be ameliorated if not alleviated when tertiary institution authorities learn to use dialogue with the students, involve them in decision making; bridge the gap in communication between students and institutions authorities and also set up welfare committees to seek out the challenges and problems faced by students.

Fourthly, adequate funding is as important to the educational system as blood is to life. The government should adequately fund the education system. Hence, government should increase their annual budgetary allocation to higher institutions to increase the pay-package of academics and to enable the smooth operation of the system. Tertiary institutions should also seek alternative sources of revenue generation to augment the allocations of the government to them. They should also set up a committee to monitor the management a utilisation of these funds. To this, Mgbeke (2007) suggested that a reliable accounting system should be established in all institutions to guarantee accountability, honesty transparency.

Fifthly, the government should grant tertiary institutions the full autonomy they have always protested for in order to ensure ease in their operational management especially for those owned by state governments. This autonomy will enable them take responsibility the implementation of their managerial decisions.

Finally, teachers, parents and students should be re-orientated on the need to discourage examination malpractice in schools. Severe sanctions should be placed and implemented on students who engage in malpractices and those lectures who receive bribes (sorts) from students.

## **Summary and Conclusion**

Education system in Nigeria today, needs a total re-examination restructuring. This transformation is necessary to improve the performance of higher education in the country. The tertiary education system is the bedrock of development n any nation as and nation can develop above its education system. However, as is Nigeria of today, it is faced with myriads of problems.

They include sectionalism, insurgency, terrorism, militancy, inadequate funding, government interference observed in the democratic and examination malpractice among others. However, for meaningful development to take place in the system, the government and other stakeholders must be ready to address the issues adequately as a matter of national importance. Some suggestions have been made in this work in order to curb these challenges. These would go a long way to ensure that tertiary education system in Nigeria is improved and its goals under the democracy are achieved.

### **Suggestion**

1. Our admission should be based on merit so that the intelligent ones should not be left out.
2. Security issues should be every body's concern and the security agents should be well equipped.
3. More employment opportunities should be created for Niger Delta indigenes together with free education from primary to tertiary levels so as to encourage them.
4. All our institutions should be funded well for effective teaching and learning so as to produce qualified graduates.

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