

THE UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATOR & THE MAGICIAN: The Nigerian Paradox



by

Prof. Isaac F. Adewole, FAS
Vice-Chancellor, University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

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OF

PROF. N. D. BRIGGS

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INTRODUCTION

I am honoured to have the opportunity to deliver this important lecture in honour of a great Nigerian clinician, scholar, teacher, mentor and administrator per-excellence, Professor Nimi Dimkpa Briggs. He attained the age of 70 on 22 February, 2014 and we give glory to the creator, Almighty God for a life committed totally to the service of humanity. I thank Prof Briggs for the privilege. This is unique. He also gave me the opportunity to speak on any subject of my choice. That could make things simpler or complicated depending on the situation.

Our paths crossed in 1985 when we met at the Ovarian Cancer Unit at Royal Marsden Hospital, then ably led by the tough and indefatigable Gynae-Oncologic Surgeon, Dr Eve Wiltshaw. One star quality that attracted me to ND was his simplicity, and unassuming character in spite of a good frame. He continues to display this uncommon attribute till today. He does not intimidate and he is ever looking young. He relates with juniors like myself with great ease. Sir, I can only attribute the nobility in you to your upbringing and wish to dedicate this lecture marking your 70th birthday to the good memory of Rt. Rev Dimkpa Tobin Briggs and Lady Esther V. T. Harry of blessed memory. I congratulate your darling wife on this special occasion. Our dear Lady Data Nimi Briggs, you deserve a special treat today and always. This handsome gentleman has remained largely the same since we met almost 30 years ago. The secret could fetch you a patent that should be a gold mine.

With a free license to determine my topic, I had a real battle trying to settle for something appealing to an anticipated broad-based audience. I tried a medical angle but defected to something more broad-based that is related to my present assignment as an

administrator in the Nigerian University System. Distinguished Ladies and gentlemen, the real challenge is to sustain your interest without messing up your appetite for the good food that will follow. Moreover, Professor Briggs himself is a distinguished university administrator who has served with distinction at the pinnacle as the Vice-Chancellor of a Federal University.

Prof Briggs consented to be my referee in my first attempt at becoming a University Administrator in 2005. I came second and bided my time for a repeat attempt in 2010. In the course of preparing in 2005, I stumbled on the writings of the famous University Administrator and Scholar, Clark Kerr, former President of the University of California. In one of his publications, he listed the qualifications required of a good Vice-Chancellor. The list remains famous and the most comprehensive I have ever seen. These include, Good teacher, fund raiser, manager, diplomat, friend of students and unions, a dedicated faculty, good speaker, lover of travels, good family man and able to eat at odd times and places. At the end, I breathed a sigh and said, why not simplify an advert and say...A Magician is required urgently to take the mantle of office of the Chief Executive officer of the University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria. CV not required but interested candidates are required to take part in an exhibition scheduled for date and time indicated at the University Sports Arena. I succeeded in 2010 and in my 4th year, I remain convinced that in Nigeria, the Vice-Chancellor would do better if he or she is a magician. Staff and Students alike expect him or her to provide almost everything even when the funds are not there. In the delivery of this presentation, I shall discuss briefly, the concept, goal and function of a University System, the challenges facing the University System, dilate into the new role of the Vice-Chancellor Administrator, discuss the magician, draw parallels and offer a few recommendations while deliberately avoiding controversies on a day like this.

THE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM

Globally, Universities have existed for over a thousand years. Originally established for the elites to further create inequality, the concept, goal and functions have evolved with such rapidity over the last 100 years. Certain words continue to ring out loudly. These include, Knowledge creation and dissemination, delivery of private and public good. In "A Manifesto for the Public University" edited by John Holmwood, the issue of public benefits or how Universities function for the public or publics stood out clearly. All over the world, the old order is giving way to the new. This has been largely facilitated by information technology and improvement in global communications.

At the beginning, the challenge was to create workforce for specific purposes, facilitate research both basic and applied, generate knowledge and disseminate the same. The role of the University in the transformation and total development of the human mind is amplified in the unique architecture and layout, residential facilities, dining areas/cafeteria system and the worship areas.

The knowledge of different universities such as the University of Al-Karouine established in 859 in Fez, Morocco and Al-Azar University established in 975 in Cairo, Egypt shows the African origin of the oldest universities in the world. Presently, universities cut across continents and those in Europe and America remain dominant. The first generation universities in Europe include the University of Constantinople, the University of Salerno, the University of Bologna established in 1088, the University of Paris established in 1150, the University of Oxford established in 1167, the University of Cambridge established in 1209, the University of Salamanca established in 1218 and the University of Montpellier established in 1220 (Ruegg, 2005; Aronowitz, 2000; Pedersen, 1998). Religious Organizations influenced the establishment of universities in Africa and Europe.

However, the influence of religious organizations waned during and after the enlightenment era, which bequeathed different revolutionary legacies followed by unprecedented proliferations of universities especially since the 19th Century.

The influences of the political, industrial, and intellectual revolutions reflected in the development of universities across the world. As an aftermath of the revolutions, universities occupied prominent positions in the world but the principles guiding their operations vary across countries. Scholars recently showed that "many universities can trace their origin to the outcome of a conflict, whether over ideas, beliefs or human relationship" (Kraus et al, 2008). Let me illustrate this position with the emergence of universities in Nigeria. The establishment of Universities in Nigeria largely followed nationalist struggle against colonialism and movement for political independence. The University of Ibadan became the premier university in Nigeria by virtue of its establishment in 1948 and different regimes of universities followed suit since 1960s. About 140¹²⁹ universities presently operate in Nigeria. It is clear from this little exposition that Universities were established as a response to some perceived belief of a desire for a purposeful change to, and contribution to the societies in which they developed, which can only be maximally achieved through research.

AT THE BEGINNING

The University System in Nigeria dated back to 1943 when the Asquith and Elliot Commissions were established. The two reports submitted in 1945 agreed on the need and the fundamental principles designed to guide the path of the new University. Not much was recorded until 1948 when the formal opening took place at the old site occupied by the 56th Military General Hospital, Eleiyele,

Ibadan, on 25th March, 1948. Arthur Creech Jones, who was Secretary of State for the Colonies on 17th November 1948, turned the first sod. This has remained the foundation day of the University of Ibadan.

At the beginning, the student population was 104 (including 49 students who were admitted to read teacher training and survey courses). The students lived like kings. The staff was a rich mix of white and black. It was a truly international university established for the acquisition of liberal education as appropriate for a University of the highest standing. The products of the University included such stars as Felix Ohiwherei, Olola Ogunlana, Gamaliel Onosode, Michael Omolayole, Emeka Anyaoku, Wole Soyinka, Jubil Aminu, Bola Ige, Adamu Ciroma, etc. The roll call is who is who in Nigeria and it is simply intimidating. Today, we have over 140 Universities with the Federal Government owning at least 40 of these Universities and perhaps all the healthy ones.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY SYSTEM

The guiding philosophy of the Nigerian University System (NUS) was to produce human resources for the Colonial Administration. The goal was to offer liberal education and to establish a University of the highest standing. The focus was clearly humanities, science and medicine. Law and engineering were not on the priority list. It was certainly an elitist club. The residential areas were intimidating. There were cleaners not only for the external but also the internal environment. The teachers were thoroughly dedicated and committed. The laboratories were truly laboratories, water flowed and electricity was taken for granted.

CHALLENGES FACING NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES

The rosy picture painted above has since vanished. The NUS is on the decline in parallel with a pan-national decline.

Some of the challenges faced by the University system include inadequate funds, weak research infrastructure, lack of synergy between researchers and users of research outcomes, among others. The most critical is lack of a clear-cut philosophy for higher education. Many of the current challenges got amplified during the era of military intervention. The military by the rigid structure resented the academic freedom and autonomy treasured and enjoyed by the universities.

FUNDING

In modern times, operating a university has become expensive. This further exerts considerable pressure on inadequate traditional government sources of funding. The Federal and State Governments poorly fund our public universities and quite often this translates to inadequate funding for teaching and research capacity development. In contrast, the United States, Australia government and many countries in Europe and Asia expend hundreds of billions of dollars annually in academic institutions on teaching and research capacity building.

This economic problem compels universities to explore new revenue mechanisms. As a result, every university has to aggressively embark on diversified ventures of increased internally generated revenue for resilience and sustainability. Indeed for survival, almost all the internally revenue generating enterprises that were moribund had to be reactivated, and boosted with more viable and internationally acclaimed money spinning enterprises (Yusuf, 2010).

Quality university education is a function of adequate funding. Inadequate funding and ineptitude in administrative and management practices and very stiff opposition to university entrepreneurship are the three major devastating issues that have kept Nigerian universities crisis ridden for two decades now. Funding was never an issue when the first generation universities were growing up. As the number of Nigerian universities increased rapidly, funding has become very chaotic, epileptic and dwindling. This is in spite of the fact that studies have shown that funding is critical to the survival of the university system in Nigeria as it is in other African countries. The privatization of public universities has become a common phenomenon since public funding is inadequate to support these institutions. In Nigeria, as it is in most other countries of Africa, the annual amount voted to cater for education is demonstrably far below acceptable and widely quoted benchmark of 26% of total government expenditure.

The needs assessment commissioned by the Federal Government and the approval of a new memorandum of understanding between the Federal Government of Nigeria and the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) has however opened a new window of opportunity for the NUS. Two hundred billion Naira was allocated to Public Universities on 17th February, 2014 for the revitalization of Public Universities. This represents the 2013-funding block. It is our expectation that releases of N220.0 billion annually for the next five years will create a turn around for the NUS. I will return to this later.

WEAK INFRASTRUCTURE/POLICIES

Inadequate funding has affected the quality of the infrastructure, such as laboratories, equipment, spacious libraries with up to date journals, books, etc, and effective system of information storage, retrieval and utilization are unavailable in many universities.

Continuous access to high-speed Internet facilities is another major support system that is sadly lacking in most institutions. Other hindrances which have been identified include the absence of policies that facilitate the research enterprise including effective research management systems, lack of appropriate incentives that recognize and reward high quality research. It is expected that this would be addressed as funds are released as part of the revitalization process.

DECLINING RESEARCH CULTURE

A rather non-tangible issue, which also adversely affects research, is the low level of institutional culture supportive of research inquiry. Due to the absence of academic leadership at the departmental and faculty levels, many young researchers are left virtually on their own to develop their research skills. This situation is quite different in most universities in high and middle-income countries where young researchers have opportunities for formal training in conducting research. The individual also participates in ongoing research being conducted by senior academic staff and this provides an excellent opportunity for research capacity development.

LOW LEVEL OF TOWN AND GOWN SYNERGY

With the rising costs of university research due to expensive laboratories and equipment, large interdisciplinary scientific research teams, and other factors, raising funds to support research gets more difficult. Altbach (2009) observed that even large and well-funded universities in the industrialized countries struggle to support cutting-edge research. In some fields, only the richest institutions can support frontier scientific research. Appropriate links with private sector companies, including multinational corporations,

may be necessary, and a balance between applied and basic research should be worked out. The changing funding philosophy for research has created a major challenge for Universities in developed countries.

This has seriously eroded on the concept of the ivory tower as we used to know it. Many universities do not have ivories or towers. The time honoured traditions are fast fading in several universities as we now have graduates who passed through the Universities but the Universities failed to pass through them.

ACADEMIC ADMINISTRATION

This is a branch of university or college employees responsible for the maintenance and supervision of the institution and separate from the faculty or academics, although some personnel may have joint responsibilities.....wikipedia...accessed on 18th February, 2014.

There are several cadres of officers involved in governance. These include, Vice-Chancellors, Deputy Vice-Chancellors, Registrars, Bursars, University Librarians. For the purpose of my discourse, I intend to leave out Deans and Heads of Departments out of this debate but focus essentially on the Vice-Chancellor (VC) as a symbol of the university administration. This is for no other reason than the fact that the buck stops at his or her desk.

The complexity of University governance as well as the processes for the appointment of a VC has evolved over the last few years. The tenure has also changed from prolonged, to one-term renewable once, to single non-renewable. The adoption of a single term non-renewable has brought some measures of stability. The petitions that do flow in towards the end of a first term have thinned out according to the Chairman of the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) Mr. Ekpo Nta. The VC is the one who is expected to provide all services without any consideration for

the resources available. He or she is responsible for all; to provide funds for roads, electricity, water, teaching and learning facilities. He or she must make things happen. In the Nigerian context, the VC is a super minister responsible for all portfolios but without the enablement to do so. In the Nigerian environment, the VC spends about 70% of his or her time on issues or matters without direct academic relevance. We spend it addressing municipal challenges of water and electricity supply.

THE MAGICIAN

Magic (sometimes referred to as stage magic to distinguish it from paranormal or ritual magic) is a performing art that entertains audiences by staging tricks or creating illusions of seemingly impossible supernatural feats using natural means. These feats are called magic tricks, effects, or illusions.....wikipedia...accessed on 23rd February,2014

The free online dictionary defined a magician as a sorcerer or a wizard; one who performs magic for entertainment or diversion and one whose formidable skill or art seems to be magical. A more appealing definition is that of a person who has extraordinary skill, influence, or qualities. This is more attractive to me in the context of the university setting.

I first encountered magicians during my secondary school days at Ilesa Grammar School, Ilesa. The encounter featured two magicians of different backgrounds- "Professor" Peller and Chief Aladokun. As the name suggested, Peller was the foreign-trained magician. One thing was strikingly similar. They were able to make things happen with little or no input. Aladokun would simply walk to you, remove your cap and sweets, biscuits as well as other edible materials will start rolling down from the cap like a flowing stream.

UNIVERSITIES FOR A NEW WORLD

I seek to use this sub-title and to acknowledge that I am borrowing it from a publication edited by Deryck M. Schreuder and launched during the centenary celebration of the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) in October, 2013. Our colleagues in USA, Europe and probably all of outside Nigeria would expend considerable resources on grant sourcing for first-rate research and building bridges between academia and industry. The debate in those places now is about the changing functions of the Universities, delivery of public and private goods, level of fees to be paid, building entrepreneurial cultures and the evolution and sustenance of knowledge economy. The key issues of concern are: drop-out rate, through-put ratio, portfolio of grants won, teacher/student ratios, international mix, awards, patents, Nobel prizes won, papers in world class output channels and number of students gainfully employed after graduation.

THE NIGERIAN PARADOX

A paradox is a statement that apparently contradicts itself and yet might be true. Most logical paradoxes are known to be invalid arguments but are still valuable.....wikipedia.....accessed on 18th February, 2014.

The paradox here is captured by the inherent contradiction in the Nigeria University System. The VC is expected to produce electricity even when there was none from the national grid. Students who came from homes with prolonged period of outages would demand for uninterrupted power supply. They expect water to flow from the taps in a city with difficult underlying rocky terrains and deep or impossible water tables. The NUS is completely detached from the town.

A NEW ORDER

The recent strike by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) provided a window opportunity for Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) to enunciate its philosophy on higher education. The strike lasted for almost six months and government conceded on all grounds. With the new commitment by the Federal Government, I wish to advise my colleagues and members of ASUU to re-dedicate ourselves to the true revitalization of the University system. There is the need to articulate the roles of the Universities to themselves, the students, and the society. Now is the time to chart a new course for our Universities. The role of education in knowledge generation, economic development and production of a healthy workforce must be articulated. This is in addition to the vibrant role it can play in generating alternate views and promoting social justice.

There is clearly a need for a new charter with a clarion call for a re-definition of the roles of universities in the Nigeria context. The issue of autonomy has to be clearly weighed, as there are no privileges without responsibilities. Universities are noted for academic freedom and intellectual creativity. These values have been eroded over the years with little or no opposition from increasingly quiescent NUS. The loss of autonomy has been gradual but progressive. These are evident by the politicization of governing councils, reduction in funding and or the introduction of the “envelope” system. Others are centralization of admission, centralized negotiation and uniform salary scales that had no bearing with workload and specialization as well as intrusion of religion:

All of these issues have to be thoroughly discussed for our Universities to be truly global Universities. I cannot but share the perspectives of Nicola Miller and John Sabapathy in “A vision for the Public University in the Twenty First Century”. It asserted that the future must be sustainable. Universities must develop a new vision

that defines responsibilities for Universities, Staff, Students and the Society. Key to this vision is a commitment to responsibility. I cannot agree less that the job of a University is to act as an incubator to enable young students to mature, to produce graduates with ability to think critically in relation to various bodies of knowledge and disciplines. It is not the job of universities to turn out products ready-made for corporate workstations. While I agree that Universities should be open to society and to their local communities, I beg to disagree with the notion that "if you turn universities into businesses, you will not have universities anymore". We must adapt and evolve. Our portfolios will include but not limited to teaching, research, publishing, knowledge transfer, public engagement, marketing and entrepreneurship. The current emphasis on internally generated revenue calls for greater creativity. The allocations for overhead and capital votes keep tumbling yearly. The magician in Vice-Chancellors must come to the fore. We need to be creative and generate resources to keep our core businesses alive.

The good thing for us at the University of Ibadan is the establishment of UI Ventures Ltd, a company wholly owned by the University. The University has had course to diversify into a variety of businesses to improve on our Internally Generated Revenue. These include fish farming, dairy, beef and poultry production. We must continue to provide electricity even when the entire country is unable to do so. We must fund research and keep our students in the hostels and accommodate all of them and look for funds to maintain them. All laboratories must be furnished. These are tasks for the Nigerian-magician at the apex of administration in our University system.

CONCLUSION

I hope I have not bored you with my address. I have deliberately presented the complex nature of University Administration in the face of scarce or dwindling resource allocation. The job calls for creativity, energy and tact. In all of these, the job calls for a new orientation. The time interval between appointment and assumption of office should be devoted to orientation and training. This is to enable the new VC to perform well in a role for which he or she has not been trained. The period should be devoted to development of a strategic plan with measurable indicators. The Committee of Vice-Chancellors (CVC)/Association of Vice-Chancellors of Nigeria (AVCNU) of National Universities Commission (NUC) should midwife this new assignment. This is to prepare the new VC for success in a new role. The alternative is to bring on board magicians.

Thank you for listening.

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Bio-Data



Prof. Isaac F. Adewole

*MB; BS, FMCOG, FWACS, FAS
Vice-Chancellor, University of Ibadan*

Professor Isaac Adewole, is a professor at the College of Medicine, University of Ibadan, Nigeria since 1997. He is the current Vice-Chancellor of the University of Ibadan, Nigeria and immediate past President of African Organisation for Research and Training in Cancer (AORTIC).

A product of the prestigious College of Medicine, University of Ibadan, he won the Glaxo Allenbury Prize as the best student in Paediatrics. After obtaining his MB BS degree from the University of Ibadan in 1978, he underwent further medical training in Nigeria, becoming a Senior Registrar in the Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at UCH in 1984. He then travelled to the UK for a Research Fellowship in the Department of Medical Oncology at Charing Cross Hospital in London. Professor Adewole was appointed Lecturer 1 in 1987 at the College of Medicine in the University of Ibadan. He was promoted Senior Lecturer 1992, and Professor in 1997. He was acting Head of the Department of Obstetrics/Gynaecology at the University from 1999-2000. For the next 2 years, he was Dean of the Faculty of Clinical Sciences & Dentistry, before

becoming a Provost at the College of Medicine, University of Ibadan from 2002-2006.

Professor Adewole is the Principal Investigator of the AIDS Prevention Initiative in Nigeria (APIN) at the College of Medicine, University of Ibadan and co-Principal Investigator of the Medical Education Partnership Initiative in Nigeria (MEPIN). He was a former Chairman of the National Task Team on Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission (PMTCT) of HIV in Nigeria. He is also the country's Principal Investigator for 'Operation Stop Cervical Cancer' in Nigeria. He was Secretary-General of the Nigerian Medical Association (NMA) (1990-1992) and the Confederation of African Medical Associations and Societies (CAMAS) from 1997-2003, Professor Adewole holds memberships of many learned societies, including the Nigerian Medical Association, the Society of Gynaecology & Obstetrics of Nigeria, the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO), International Gynaecologic Cancer Society (IGCS) and the International AIDS Society (IAS). The Society of Gynaecology and Obstetrics of Nigeria (SOGON), conferred on him the 2013 Distinguished Service Award for Excellence in Research. This is in recognition of his contribution, in research to improvement in the health of Nigerian women

A leading advocate for nationwide access to cervical cancer screening, Professor Adewole's current research interests include evaluating novel ideas for promoting cervical cancer screening in developing countries, a multi-country study on HPV in cervical cancer among African women and evaluating interaction between HIV and Pregnancy. He has published over 180 articles in peer-reviewed journals and books on

gynaecological oncology, abortion, HIV/AIDS and perinatal medicine. He is the Guttmacher Institute's 2008 Bixby Leadership Fellow in Reproductive health and the current chair of the sub-Saharan African Cervical Cancer Working Group (CCWG). He is on the Governing Council of the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU), London, UK and the Ethics Board of the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), Lyon France. A widely travelled man, Prof Adewole is a Patron of the Boys Brigade, He is married with children and grandchildren.

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