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## THE ROLE OF UNIVERSITY EDUCATION IN LEADERSHIP PREPARATION IN NIGERIA

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The paper articulates leadership roles and the relevance of leadership to the sustainable development of a nation, and evaluates the perception of the level of the role of the Nigerian university education system in the preparation of future leadership vis-à-vis the Nigerian polytechnic education system. The study was carried out ex-post facto. Subjects used in the study were purposively selected from university and polytechnic graduate employees in Ibadan and Lagos, as well as 100 purposively selected employers who rated the two sets of graduate employees produced by the tertiary institutions. Two instruments which were constructed and validated by the researchers were employed in data collection. The Chi-square, t-test and percentages were used to analyze the resulting data. Findings include, among others, that the Nigerian university system has been largely responsible for preparing leaders for the Nigerian nation and that it does better than its polytechnic counterpart in this regard. However, it was also discovered that it lacks adequate funds and facilities to enable it discharge this function adequately and creditably. It was also found that mentoring for leadership was negligible, though it is the practical component that can adequately bridge the gap between the town and the gown. Recommendations include increased level of funding, provision of relevant facilities, mentoring and leadership, as well as curricula revision to make leadership preparation a good combination of theory and practice.

### INTRODUCTION

Leadership is an essential component for any society to thrive and progress. However, it is common knowledge that there is leadership and, there is leadership. Therefore, as an art, there must be preparation for leadership. Leadership in the contemporary sense is a complex concept which requires a comprehensive and intensive training approach to prepare men and women for positions of leadership. In Nigeria, university education is expected to produce a very high level manpower. In the context of this study, leadership, which is part of human resources management, is approximated to mean the same as management. Onuka (2004a), recommends that manpower management for development purposes must be taken seriously if the Nigerian nation is to move forward. Bamiro (2007), quotes the Blair Commission's Report on Africa to buttress the fact that qualified professional staff are essential to the emancipation of the continent and indeed Nigeria, yet

they lagged behind in terms of producing the required management manpower (leaders). The report states as follows:

*Qualified professional staff are essential to all forms of development. The delivery of health, education and other services depends on them. They are crucial for collecting and managing data, and debating and developing good policies, based on the evidence of what works and does not. They are essential to implementing those policies and to monitoring how they are put to effect. ... Africa has been lacking skilled men and women in all these spheres, and fundamental to this shortage is the loss of much of Africa's pool of skills to the developed world. ... This shortage starts with higher education, which is the breeding ground for the skilled individuals whom the continent needs. ... But many of Africa's higher education institutions are still in a state of crisis (Bamiro, 2007: 4).*

The implication of this observation is the fact that though it is obvious that the university plays a major role in producing future leaders for any nation, yet Africa and indeed Nigeria, is yet to give university education the premium attention it deserves. The above quoted view confirms the finding of Onuka (2004b;

2007) that university education is grossly and inadequately funded.

Babalola (2008), states that some reforms initiated by the Nigerian National Universities Commission (NUC) are aimed at ensuring availability, accessibility, relevance, adequacy, and compliance with minimum standards of university programmes. Onyechere (2004), regards education as meant for advancing character and learning. Anoemuah (2007), views the university as an institution at the highest level of education where one studies for a degree or does research. He further opines that the university can also be seen as 'an institution organized and incorporated for the purpose of imparting instruction, examining students and otherwise promoting education and learning in higher branches of literature, science, art, etc....' Thus, the university is essentially in the business of building human capacity for national emancipation and development. Thus, it is imperative from these definitions that university education prepares youths for future leadership positions. Leadership indices include ability to forecast, plan, budget, organize, implement, monitor and evaluate, as well as optimize people's skills to achieve corporate goals. They also include the capacity to analyze, to think critically, to take risks, make quick decisions and a good mix of both firmness and flexibility, among others.

Leadership is leading and leading very well. Roebert (1996), posits that to lead implies 'to go before, guide, direct, precede, and tend to'. He further states that a leader is the one who leads or is the chief of a party, the principal wheel of an organization/institution. He equally quotes Hendricks who defines leadership as 'causing people to take effective action'.

By implication, therefore, leadership connotes the ability to plan, organize and mobilize the populace for a committed implementation of the planned developmental project or programme. It is invariably imperative that a leader must possess good human relations, integrity as well as command respect, so as to be able to mobilize the people through whom he would achieve his developmental programme. Roebert states that a true leader is neither a handsome looking man nor one that is charismatic, who can sweep people off their feet, but one who is always an effective and

consistent leader. Thus, he concludes that 'leadership is a definite set of activities that can be listed, learned, and lived out'. Invariably, the inference can be made here that though a person may possess some leadership qualities, he would nevertheless need to acquire certain abilities/expertise that will enable him to play the role of a leader very effectively and efficiently.

Whereas Wiwcharuck and Orr (1987), perceive leadership as distinct from management as opposed to the frequent interchangeable usage of the two by other experts (White, 1998; Onasanya, 1999; Onuka, 2006). They further state that leadership can either impact positively or negatively on the led and thus, on the national economy. They assert that it is the function of the leadership to set objectives, make decisions, solve problems and lead/direct people towards the realization of set objectives.

By and large, these are some of the things the Nigerian university undergraduate is taught during the course of his/her study, as inferred by Babalola (2008). Leadership possesses certain qualities that must be imbibed by any potential leader if he is to succeed in his leadership pursuit. Coincidentally, the university system is meant to fulfill the role of imparting the requisite leadership attributes and skills in the potential leaders for the development of the nation and its people. Onasanya (1999:21), cites Peter Drucker, an internationally acknowledged management expert as saying that, 'The future is not going to be made tomorrow; it is being made today, and largely by decisions and actions taken with respect to the tasks of today'. Thus, it can be safely inferred that decision-making is a great attribute that all leaders at whatever level must possess. For White (1998), leadership involves rendering of service to the led by the leader. He again sees it as involving some tasks that must be mastered, thus giving credence to the fact that there must be leadership preparation programmes, for which reason universities are normally established. White also opines that leadership portends that the leader must be visionary, unifying, equitable, epitomized by humility, among others, hence the concept of servant-leader, while Soola (1998), posits that communication is an essential part and indeed the live wire of an organization, implying that a leader must be a good

and effective communicator both verbally and non-verbally.

To what extent is the university education system fulfilling this role for which it was established? It is against this background that the study evaluates the extent to which university education preparation of the Nigerian youth for leadership positions correlates with practical leadership. It also examines the relationship between the university and polytechnic leadership preparations of the youth for leadership roles in Nigeria and also suggests how the university system can perform this function better.

### Research Questions

The following three research questions were posed:

1. Is there a correlation between the Nigerian university education which the youth acquires and his preparation for future leadership roles?
2. Is there any significant difference between the Nigerian university graduate and the Nigerian polytechnic graduate in terms of leadership qualities acquired?
3. What can the university in Nigeria do to better prepare future leaders?

### PROCEDURE

The study was carried out ex-post facto, as no variable was manipulated. Sample sets of 100 each of university graduates and polytechnic graduates were purposively selected for the study, as it was the most convenient sampling technique to employ in the circumstance. Anyone who has not had three years post-graduation experience was not included in the study, and anyone who had graduated for over ten years was also excluded. One hundred employers of both university and polytechnic graduates in Ibadan and Lagos were also purposively sampled for this study.

A 30-item leadership index rating scale was developed and validated by the researchers.

The instrument possessed the following psychometric properties: reliability coefficient of 0.69 using test-retest technique as the instrument was administered twice on a sample of fifty graduates, 25 each of polytechnic and university during the pilot testing. Content validity was carried out by

administering the instrument concurrently on two congruent samples of fifty each after the reliability had been obtained. The validity correlation coefficient was 0.78. There was another 15-item checklist on suggestions as to how the university education can further and better prepare future leaders for the nation. The rating scale was then administered on all the subjects irrespective of their status (employer or graduate employee). An inventory on Constraints and Suggested areas of improvement in University Education Leadership Preparation containing 12 items on constraints and eight items on suggested areas of improvement constructed and validated by the researchers (at 0.69 test-retest reliability coefficient and expert affirmation of the validity of the content) was also used to collect data during the course of the study. Data resulting from the study was analyzed using the Chi-square and t-test as well as percentages.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1  
Summary Data on the Congruence between University Education and Expected Leadership Preparation (Nigerian University Graduates' Perspective)

Respondents	DF	X- Observed	X- Critical	Crammer's V statistic	Significance level
Nigerian Graduates (100)	98	129.56	71.31	0.67	0.05

The Table above shows that the congruence between University Education and leadership preparation as perceived by the graduates of Nigeria Universities is significant as shown by the chi-square value of 129.56 at 0.05 level of significance, while the Crammer's V statistic of 0.67 reveal a little above average level of significance which is put at 67%, an indication that though relatively high, much could still be done to bring it to 100% level. This finding corroborates the finding of Umoru-Onuka (1996) that a high congruence exists between the expected training result of Agricultural and Rural Management Training Institute (ARMTI), Ilorin and the actual result, which he attributes to the level of input into the programme. Though this high level of perceived congruence between expected University Education leadership

preparation and the actual output cannot be attributed to the level of input into the system, as it is a well known fact that Nigerian Universities are poorly funded (Babalola, 2001; Onuka, 2007). Thus, it could perhaps be attributed to perhaps the way Nigerian University graduates perceived what leadership is. It confirms the earlier stated assertion of Anoenmuh (2008), that the university is the highest place of study and research. Research trains one to be independent and to be able to provide professional leadership, thus corroborating the finding of Umoru-Onuka (1996) that the need for sectoral leadership/management training cannot be over-emphasized.

Table 2

**Summary Data on the Congruence between University Education and Expected Leadership Preparation (Employers of Nigerian University Graduates' Perspective)**

<i>Respondents</i>	<i>DF</i>	<i>X- observed</i>	<i>X- Critical</i>	<i>Crammer's V statistic</i>	<i>Level of significance</i>
Employers	98	354.3	67.8	0.52	0.05

The results in Table 2 shows the congruence was significant at  $p < 0.05$ , and the Crammer's V statistic reveals the relative magnitude of significance, which is 52% less than the graduates' own perspective who could have not thought otherwise, since they benefit directly from university education, which they often believe is the ultimate leadership training programme that can ever be accessed. This thought-pattern of the Nigerian Graduate could be due to what Onuka (2006), referred to as the highly analytical, critical thinking and the logical sequence of the university education content. This finding conforms to the finding of

Umoru-Onuka (1996) that employers of ARMTI, Ilorin training programme products rated the impact of the training less than the programme's beneficiaries themselves. This level of rating of the graduate leadership preparation by employers conforms with the view expressed by Bamiro (2008) that Africa and Nigeria have not fully come to terms with the role of the universities in Nigeria and indeed all of Africa for their development. Yet no development can take place without the appropriate leadership in place.

The result in the above Table shows that the t-test of significant difference reveals significant differences between the two sets of graduates in favour of the university graduates as better suited for leadership through the type of training offered by the university, as opposed to the polytechnic in the Nigerian educational system.

The t-test statistic used to compare whether any significant difference exists between the leadership performance of university and polytechnic graduates in the workplace shows that there was a significant difference in favour of the university graduates rated by the employers as performing better in leadership roles than their polytechnic counterparts. The mean score of the polytechnic graduate stood at 65.05, that of the university graduate was 89.20 with a difference of 24.15. The t-test calculated at 13.61 was significant at 0.05. Evidently from this rating, it can be inferred that the university graduate, because of the level of the general logic content of their courses, particularly the managerial/leadership aspects such as high level of seminars and analytical approaches to decision-making, as well as the opportunity of being in committees with their lecturers and seasoned university administrators alike, have contributed to enriching their

Table 3

**Summary Data of t-test of the Level of Significant Difference between Leadership Preparation Offered by the Universities and Polytechnics in Nigeria as rated by their Respective Graduate Employees**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>No of cases</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>S.D.</i>	<i>Computed-t</i>	<i>Critical t</i>	<i>Level of significance</i>
University Graduates	100	89.20	12.55			
Polytechnic Graduates	100	65.05	12.12			
Difference		24.15	0.43	13.61	2.09	0.05

**Table 5**  
**Depicts the Suggested Areas of Improvement in**  
**University Education Leadership Preparation as**  
**Perceived by both Employers and**  
**Graduate Employees**

<i>Description</i>	<i>Graduate Employees' Perception in %</i>	<i>Employers' Perception in %</i>
Adequate funding	87	67
Increasing Mentoring level	68	83
Provision of Relevant Facilities	86	78
Continuous fora/seminars on Leadership	57	85
More involvement of the students in decision-making processes	81	67
Inculcation of character-molding into university curricula	76	94
Constant Interaction between town and gown	78	83
Practical Leadership training attachment programme for all undergraduate students	69	78
Frontal fight against Vices	64	73

employees, only 68% ever thought of having mentoring level increased. This finding depicts the fact that little mentoring of the students takes place in the Nigerian university system. Also, 86% of the graduate employees state that more facilities are needed for adequate leadership preparation while 78% of the employers think likewise. This is an evidence that there is the need for more relevant technological facilities to be provided, which is equally a function of adequate funding and prudent funds management (Onuka, 2007). With respect to continuous relevant practical leadership education through the mounting of regular workshops/seminars/fora for the students in an attempt to bring town and gown together, 57% of the graduate employees and 85% of employers respectively affirmed that it is a necessity. On the other items in the inventory, there was not much disparity between the views of the two sets of subjects as can be seen from Table 5 above.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Conclusion

From the analyses and discussions above, it could be inferred that leadership training of the youth of any nation is a matter of utmost importance, which must be taken seriously, if the future development of the country was to be assured, as no country can make any appreciable progress without good leadership. Yet, despite that the Nigerian university educational system owes the duty of producing future leaders for Nigeria, the study has revealed that much improvement is needed if it were to meet the modern industrial and other sectoral leadership demands. It also shows that universities are better positioned by reason of the critical thinking and decision-making components of their curricula. The study also brought to the fore, the fact that the system cannot act beyond the capacity of the funds available to it and, the fact that mentoring is a necessary way of teaching leadership, because it involves coaching, observing, doing and being corrected to effect improvement. It also exposes the fact that the beneficiaries of university education attach more importance to the current level of university education in the country than do their employers whose main purpose in business is high productivity and profit making.

### Recommendations

Consequently, based on the findings and conclusion of the study, the following recommendations are hereby made:

Those with interest in the suitable and sustainable leadership and development of the nation must find ways of improving the funding of the university system and raising it to an acceptable world-standard, especially in this era of great emphasis on quality human capital and entrepreneurial production.

The provision of the requisite facilities and infrastructures for leadership training in the Nigerian university sub-sector must be made a national priority, as it is the university system that produces the manpower for the other levels of education in the country including the polytechnics and colleges of education.

The Nigerian university system must devise sustainable and durable mentoring programmes in mentoring the university students at every level.

Efforts should be made towards ensuring a closer relationship between the town and gown in the process of future leadership preparation, in order to close the gap between theoretical leadership preparation and practical leadership utilization, as this process may result in the industries spending less on management/ leadership training programmes.

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