

**Restructuring and Rebranding Public Universities
in Nigeria for Global Competitiveness:
the Emerging Issues**

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Abstract

The relevancy and employability of the graduates of Nigerian public universities and their ability to compete with their counterparts globally in a world where knowledge, technology and innovation are constantly advancing and changing the operations of socio-economic and political systems locally, regionally and internationally. This paper therefore advocates for restructuring and rebranding of Public Universities in Nigeria for global competitiveness and discusses the emerging issues. The paper brings to fore critical emerging issues for restructuring and rebranding public universities in Nigeria with action plans, deliverables and 2030 Agenda setting is articulated. The issues include; leadership for strategic management, ownership and autonomy, staff and students, curriculum and academics, funding and financial management, physical infrastructure development and facilities management, regulatory/quality assurance and external relations, general management, financial framework and strategic planning. However, the dwindling financial resources accruing to the university sector from the public treasury was noted with dismay and therefore the paper recommends a paradigm shift from public-funded to public-assisted institutions as basis for determining appropriate financial framework for sustainable university education in Nigeria. This framework shall be articulated for further policy and legislative actions aimed at enhancing global visibility of Nigerian Universities and

production of universally acceptable graduates of the system contributing meaningfully to Nigeria economy in particular and global economy in general in line with 2030 Agenda.

Keywords: *Restructuring, Rebranding, University education, Public Universities, Global Competitiveness, 2030 Strategic Agenda Setting*

Introduction

The Nigerian university, like any other public sector organisation in the country, is being confronted with the problems of sustainability, autonomy, public accountability, relevancy and employability of its graduates and more importantly, ability of its products to compete favorably with the counterparts at the global labor market. The world of today is knowledge, technology and innovation driven thus, promoting knowledge economy with constantly evolving dynamics. This necessitates the need for dynamic and positive response to these environmental challenges through restructuring and rebranding of public universities in Nigeria for global competitiveness and promoting global citizen through relevant skills acquisition. This requires image building and global ranking with qualitative service delivery in teaching, learning, research and community-outreach (Manpaey, schtemberg, schijns, Huisman & Waeraas, 2019).

University system globally have a sense of duty to maximize and open up the system to adopt new ideas and new approaches in terms of redesigning the curriculum, lecture delivery method and personnel management (teaching, non-teaching, technical and support staff) especially during the era of new normal as a result of the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic. For global relevance, universities need to change the way they function which should be geared towards internal and external drive for growth and development (Adekola, 2020). The enormity of the challenges facing the public universities in Nigeria requires general overhauling of the system and a paradigm shift from local or regional best practices to global best practices.

Therefore, critical issues such as funding which has been identified to be the greatest challenge facing almost all universities worldwide (Hershman, 2020), leadership for strategic management, curriculum structure and academic programmes, physical infrastructure, external relations, quality assurance, academic output, staffing, admission procedures, grievances management procedures, reward system, image making and global visibility should form the priority list of The 2030 Agenda for public universities in Nigeria and in return; a cutting-edge research skills for graduates of Nigerian Universities in the global labour market. In this paper, an attempt is made on topical indicators or deliverables for issues that require restructuring and re-branding in the ivory towers of Nigerian educational system in view of the technological and managerial sophistication at micro and macro levels of the global economy. This, therefore, is a wake-up call for managers of public universities to drive-home the goals of University Education in Nigeria as encapsulated in section 8 (64) of National Policy on Education (NPE) thus,

"University education shall make optimum contribution to national development by intensifying and diversifying its programmes for the development of high level manpower within the context of the needs of the nation".

Leadership for Strategic Management of Public Universities in Nigeria

Public universities in Nigeria have witnessed various management and leadership styles depending largely on who the Vice Chancellor/Chief Executive Officer is who at all cost must utilize the leadership opportunity to work within the lines of ethics, equity and the code of conduct for the organization. Studies and opinions had attributed issues related to underdevelopment and stagnancy in economic growth beleaguering the nation to public sector inefficiency and universities inclusive. Anenih (2018) figured out lack of institutional capacity or efficiency to be mainly due to leadership style /approach, leadership skills, personalization of leadership, insecurity and cultural disorientation among others. Though the general features or characteristics of the university management including participatory decision-making through the use of committee system, decentralised system, functional and spatial distribution of power and responsibilities, formalisation and documentation of matters, and a host of others are being practised, the results are not in congruence with global best practices. The current global trends politically and economically, the call for knowledge-based economy for Nigeria and 2030 Sustainable Development Goals make it so mandatory to promote strategic management and visionary leadership for effective coordination and control of human, material and time resources of the public universities in Nigeria for global visibility, relevancy and employability of the products of the university system thus impacting positively on the Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

Cheng and Farh (2000), identified five dimensions of leadership that can be applied for managing five fundamental aspects of educational organizations including public university. These dimensions include; structural leadership, human leadership, political leadership, cultural leadership and educational leadership. Therefore, leadership for strategic management, leadership for action learning and more importantly leadership for paradigm shift are inevitable styles for managing and transforming public universities in rapidly changing local and global environments.

Ownership and Autonomy

Public universities in Nigeria are established, owned and financed by either federal or state government which is statutorily responsible for appointment of principal officers, governing council members, visitation panel (if need arises) and appropriate funds for both the capital and recurrent expenditures annually, among others. However, autonomy is granted to certain statutory bodies or organs of the university system such as the governing council in the appointment of the principal officers, staff discipline and capital project management, senate on academic matters and students' matters, university management in the area of Internally Generated

Revenue (IGR) and a host of others. The university autonomy although dependent on the level of administrative control and financial dependency, compels university managers to become answerable to their constituent – the academic community-according to Akinwumi and Olaniyan (2001), this can guarantee purposeful leadership and all round development of the university system. The emerging issue in this context is that there are extant rules of the government that makes the autonomy not realistic and ineffective. For instance, Federal Character Act hinders competency-based appointment during staff recruitment, Quota system and catchment areas reduced the chances of merit-based admission, Public Procurement Act hampers capital project management and Treasury Single Account (TSA) inhibits the revenue mobilization and disbursement process. These interferences in the management of public universities slow-pace the response rates of the administrators and by implication affect their internal efficiency hence the need for restricting or eliminating them because they are unhealthy for global competitiveness. Responsibility with adequate authority must be encouraged and public university autonomy must be total and comprehensive. Abdulkareem & Gabadeen (2015) opined that innovation and creativity should be encouraged among institutional managers in discharging their managerial responsibilities.

Staff and Students

Staff and students are the most vibrant assets of any educational institutions including public universities and major predictors of the image of any institution of higher learning especially the quality of the academic and research outputs. It is highly desirable for any public university to attract, hire, retain, reward and develop a team of highly motivated workforce, capable and willingly ready to contribute meaningfully to the attainment of institutional goals and compete favourably with their counterparts globally. It is also highly desirable to attract, select and admit students that are academically sound, emotionally stable and physically fit to undertake and complete their chosen academic/professional courses or programmes at record time. The emerging issues in this context have to do with the staff recruitment and students' admission policies in public universities. Appointment of principal officers, academic staff, non-teaching/technical staff and support staff are often carried out with some extraneous factors that are not in line with global best practices in an attempt to adhere to extant laws for instance, a candidate that performed creditably in a selection process may not be employed perhaps as a result of federal character regulations. The percentage allocated to merit-based admission put brilliant students at the disadvantage and students with lower scores secured admission because his/her state fell within the catchment areas or Education Less Disadvantage States (ELDS). For public universities in Nigeria to compete globally, practices such as head-hunting for strategic positions of the vice-chancellor, deans of faculties and directors of institutes/centres with attractive salary and welfare packages should be institutionalized. Academic staff should register on Research gate, Google Scholar, Scopus for global visibility which are determinants of universities ranking globally.

Also, the learning environment must be fascinating with good working

conditions in addition to maintaining the involvement of highly experienced and competent academics such as professors and readers that will serve as role models and mentors to the poorly trained or inexperienced or young academics presently dominating the system as lecturers (Asiyai, 2014), merit-based admission attracting international students and, above all, a resounding academic output that guarantees employability of graduates of the institution at the global labour market.

The presence of federal universities in all the 36 states and FCT should either partially or completely outlaw the 25% admission quota allocated to catchment areas and add-up to 45% merit based admission. Consequently, 70% of newly admitted students shall be academically sound and a resounding academic output envisioned because quality of input is a predictor of quality output, all things being equal.

Curriculum and Academics

The thrust of a University rested on the comprehensiveness of the curriculum, diversity of the academic programmes and responsiveness to local, regional and international needs of the end-users of the products of the system. The emerging issues are curriculum structure and content, course design, pedagogical skills or instructional delivery methods, responding to societal needs, institutional-based quality assurance strategies and more importantly teacher-student ratio versus classroom management. All the emerging issues must quantitatively and qualitatively answer the pertinent questions of 4Ws on curriculum management. These have to do with; who is the curriculum meant for? What are the content of the curriculum? Why the curriculum? Where the curriculum will be transmitted to the learners? It is highly imperative that issues of curriculum and academic programmes in public universities should be rebranded by injecting marketing strategies into the conceptualization of the academic programmes, responsive curriculum content and technology-driven instructional methods. Regular town-hall meetings with captains of industries for their inputs in enriching the curriculum and redesigning the institutional academic programmes for the enhancement of the marketability and employability of Nigerian graduates locally and globally is a sine-qua-none for global competitiveness.

Funding and Financial Management Practices

The major driver of institutional programmes and projects is funding which the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN), in a bid to transform the country from developing to a developed nation, appropriated certain percentages of the Annual budget of the country to Education sector in general and University education in particular, for the actualization of educational goals in the National Policy on Education. The Budget speeches are usually given names to align with current trends in the society, for example; in 2011, the budget was tagged, "Budget of Fiscal Consolidation, Inclusive Economic Growth and Employment Generation". In 2012, it was tagged stepping Stone to the Transformation of Our Economy and Country". The 2013 budget was tagged "Fiscal Consolidation with Inclusive Growth" and in

2014, the budget was called, “Job creation and Inclusive Growth”. The name tagged to the annual budget underscored the importance of university education as an instrument par excellence for the realization of the appropriation goals and objectives. However, the present state of the Nigerian public universities is pitiable and quite worrisome in terms of adequate funding. Babalola (2001) remarked that Nigerian Public universities are presently in great crisis due to insufficient funds for quality teaching, research, and community services which are the core mandates of the University system. Though, the provisions of NPE Section 8 (62) of 2004 states that, "to supplement government funding, universities and other tertiary institutions are encouraged to explore other sources of funding such as endowments, consultancy services and commercial ventures". The emerging issue is that, government cannot be responsible optimally to its statutory responsibility of funding public universities for global competitiveness but weakens university administrators with stringent financial regulations such as TSA, IPPIS, etc. The meager resources coming to the coffers of university purse through subvention and IGR are not properly managed, a dimension which triggers lack of confidence from funding agencies and stakeholders (Briggs, 2014), and elimination of corrupt practices cannot be guaranteed, hence the shortage of funds for financing institutional programmes and projects. This phenomenon calls for restructuring the sources of financing public universities and rebranding the financial management practices by deploying powerful technological solutions to revenue mobilization, funds disbursement, projects monitoring and tracking of any sharp practices among the staff and students. ICT-driven financial management tools will promote efficient and prompt service delivery with customers' satisfaction and above all, compliance with global best financial practices and regulations shall be actualized.

Physical Infrastructure Development and Facilities Management

The physical infrastructure development and facilities management is to ensure maximum and judicious utilization of space and environment for the attainment of educational goals and objectives of the university. The planning and developing of physical facilities regularly as well as rehabilitation and maintenance of the existing facilities will definitely contribute immensely to the teaching, research and community-based services, for which the system was established. The specification, architectural design and building of physical facilities in public universities in Nigeria should meet up with global best practices. Robust maintenance culture among staff and students should be trendy on campuses of public universities in Nigeria. The current situation that was succinctly explained by Esumeh (2013), “Our Universities are dying and this is what ASUU is fighting for. He elucidates further, no facilities to teach the students; the classrooms are sub-standard, lecture theatres are not conducive for learning, many of them are too small to accommodate students and needed to be expanded, many of the chairs in the classrooms are broken down and no electricity, fans do not work, auditorium in the University are currently in a deplorable condition, students' hostels are congested and overcrowded, epileptic power supply and weak internet and banking services,

insecurity of lives and properties, among others. It is equally worrisome that despite the dilapidating structures as projected by Esumeh (2013), most of the academic programmes in those universities still passed accreditation exercise either at interim or full status which may not be connected with lack of integrity on the part of the umpires or insincerity of institutional administrators when presenting their programmes for NUC accreditation.

In this regard, there is need to make facility management more meaningful in the university settings by having in place a functional unit with special funds and separate management that will take special charge of maintenance and auditing of facilities. The TetFund intervention funds should be more judiciously utilized in providing state of art infrastructure that are conducive and befitting for a world-class standard university. Also, there must be proper sanction for any institutional administrators that are not complying with necessary financial and project management regulations in line with Standard Organization of Nigeria (SON) and/or International Standard Organization (ISO).

Dania, Obro and Orhorhu, (2016) established that a single administrator cannot competently combine facility management with the bulk of staff and students management especially with the global trend in science and technology. Apart from evaluating the physical conditions of existing facilities in universities, facility management is a tactical management activity for modernization and rebranding which can provide numerical rating for capital planning.

Gabadeen and Sadiku (2018) adjudged the funds appropriated for university education as grossly inadequate for capital project development in federal universities in Nigeria and more importantly, funds released fell short of the total appropriation, especially in 2015 which may be as a result of challenges faced by various MDAs on the application of Treasury Single Account or the adoption of zero-based budget as directed by the Federal Government of Nigeria. In view of the dwindling funding of capital projects by federal and state governments despite the establishment of TetFund as a palliative and intervention agency of financing infrastructural deficit in public universities, Public-Private Partnership (PPP) should be explored and extant rules on public procurement relaxed for public universities as part of their autonomy.

Regulatory/Quality Assurance and External Relations

Managing external relations and quality assurance through relevant regulatory agencies for university education centres majorly on governance, autonomy, transparency and accountability. The global trend differs from nation to nation with no universally accepted models of governance, autonomy, transparency and accountability. The school autonomy and accountability rest on the governance structure adopted by the country for regulating and funding public institutions. Government regulatory agencies such as National Universities Commission (NUC) should not sanction a university owned by federal government for inadequate staffing and facilities during accreditation exercise when NUC is the interface between the public universities and FGN. Centralization of academic programmes,

management structure and funding patterns has to be restructured and rebranded for global competitiveness. Government should encourage the promotion of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) within the immediate and remote environments of the universities by activating the Gown and Town relationship through impactful community-based programmes and projects such as advocacy campaign for inclusive educational system to reduce out-of-school children and sensitization for the public to curtail the spread of Covid-19 pandemic.

General Management Practices

The statues, laws or edicts that established the public universities in Nigeria clearly stated the principles guiding the management of each institution. Generally, the management team could be grouped into three; The Council, the Senate and the Administration or University Management committee (constituted by the Institution's Principal Officers or as deemed fit by individual universities). These three teams exclude “the offices of the Visitor and Chancellor whose powers are limited to certain special circumstances and are not involved in the normal functioning or operations of the university” (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2001, p.2). The university has various cultures which include academic culture, managerial culture, social culture, and by that, committee system is adopted in carrying out all the responsibilities in the system at the Council, Senate, Faculty or Departmental levels. This brings about dynamism and flexibility in management which could further enhance the management strategies of the system in order to accommodate changes and innovations that characterize the global economy. Strategic planning according to Abdulkareem, Akinnubi and Oyeniran, (2012), is a recent management technique in achieving equilibrium between the universities and its turbulent environment, helping it to absorb pressures, demonstrating competence, reducing unpredictability and establishing the basis for subsequent performance monitoring and evaluation (M&E). These are said to be done through the examination of the external and internal factors which paves way for the formation of mission, purpose, objectives, policies and programmes for implementation. As an exercise of foresight, all stakeholders should be involved in university strategic planning. The management of the university should then have a focus by working towards the realization of the features of management in any production or service-oriented organisation. The application of Management Information System (MIS) in the day-to-day running of the system by migrating from analogue to digital management system thereby promoting paper-less administrative environment is favoured. The restructuring should equally focus on staff and students' attitude towards rebranding them psychologically, socially, emotionally and intellectually. This will make students be worthy in character and learning which is a pre-requisite for global competitiveness and for a formidable workforce for the national development.

The Financial Framework or Funding model

The funding of public universities for global competitiveness is a crucial matter as the financial implication of restructuring and rebranding public universities

is a huge and herculean task for federal and state governments due to huge infrastructural deficit. The enormity of financial burden on the administrators of public universities is massive due to the fluctuating pattern of annual appropriation for education sector in general and university education in particular, the issue of funding university education to guarantee global competitiveness will remain farfetched for a long time to come. The philosophy of university education could not be achieved except through adequate funding (Oyeleye, 2020). Efficient financial management practices which involve financial accounting, auditing, and budgeting and budgetary control system is another emerging management issue. The resultant effect of these processes, if put in place, is to provide a financial framework upon which financial-based decision-making could be made during the fiscal year for the overall growth and development of the system Senft (2020). The shift towards university autonomy, the call for public accountability and due process campaign, all make it more mandatory now than ever to handle financial transactions with all necessary and technical care it deserves. Restructuring the sources of funding public universities and rebranding the institutional programmes and projects to drive additional revenue for university system require a paradigm shift from public-funded institutions to public-assisted institutions with a clear-cut expenditure items shared between the governments and governing council of public universities. The overall effect of this shift in funding public universities is that, a business-oriented approach shall be invoked though the university is a socio-economic venture and a not-for-profit organization. Global competitiveness requires that public universities in Nigeria will guarantee better working conditions, attractive remuneration packages for staff, and conducive learning environment for students leveraging on uninterrupted academic calendar. There will be provision for grievances management procedures, probity and accountability to justify additional revenues accrued albeit through service-charges, school fees and government subvention. Furthermore, there shall be a more dynamic and customer-friendly environment as one of the principles of modeling the university organization and thus promoting the right culture, a befitting organizational structure and strategic management of public universities in Nigeria for global competitiveness.

Strategic Planning for Restructuring and Rebranding Public Universities in Nigeria

Restructuring and rebranding public universities connotes making the universities 'sound' and 'functional' (Paul & Ike, 2019). This is a process that involves issues such as; organizational structure and policy, curriculum design and implementation, infrastructural development, funding, external relations and a host of other emerging issues. The management of the envisioned changes in public universities requires a structured approach in driving the individuals, team and organizational members from current state to desired state using a pre-defined framework or model with reasonable modifications/adjustments technique where and when necessary. Strategic planning is considered to be the most appropriate

management technique in swiftly responding to the emergence of global economy engendered with rapid flow of information, technological advancement and globalization which compels institutions to set priorities in decision making while having clear visions and values (Brandon, 2018). Strategically, the roadmap towards 2030 as the target year for completing the processes of restructuring and rebranding public universities between 2021 and 2030 (a journey of a decade) can be divided into three phases namely; preparation, management and reinforcement with key performance indicators for each phase. The preparation phase for rebranding public universities in Nigeria involves; definition of management strategy to be employed, selecting and training management/technical team members and development of funding model. The management phase has to do with; development of strategic management plan and implementation strategies with time lines/deliverables. The reinforcement phase; periodical evaluation through collection of feedback, analyse them and diagnose any lapses discovered with a view to developing and implementing corrective measures through a well robust scientific tool for proper monitoring and evaluation (M&E).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Restructuring and rebranding in education has been established in many studies to be closely related to education reform which has to do with the improvement or amendment of what is wrong, undesirable or unsatisfactory in the system. It is observed in this paper, that public universities in Nigeria are facing various challenges that require urgent attention especially in all the emerging issues highlighted in the paper and largely revolved round adequate financing of university education. Hence, a paradigm shift from public-funded to public-assisted institutions as basis for determining appropriate financial framework for sustainable university education in Nigeria was highly recommended. Universities also need to develop and articulate a unique, clear and coherent brand that responds to the needs of all stakeholders in the education industry by engaging captains of industry, government agencies and officials in a town hall meeting and build a responsive university system. The authors thus advocate for quick passage of the legislative and policy issues raised hitherto such as leadership, ownership and autonomy, structural, academic, staff and students, funding, infrastructure, external relations and general management in restructuring and rebranding public universities in Nigeria for global competitiveness with a view to implementing the recommended strategic plans, deliverables and timeline culminating in 2030 Agenda.

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