HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE ERA OF ENTREPRENEURIAL GOVERNMENT: LESSONS FOR NIGERIA

BY
OBOT, MICHAEL BASSEY

Abstract

Principles and techniques of entrepreneurial government are widely adopted in public sector in developed and developing countries. Higher education is no exception as traditional management methods are generally adjudged incapable of sustaining efficiency, economy and effectiveness. Adopting this new paradigm otherwise known as entrepreneurial government or New Public Management (NPM) has witnessed its attendant privatization, merger, down-sizing and subsequent right-sizing of higher education. In some countries, courses are offered on demand while academic researches are commercialized. The practice of NPM in higher education across the world shows areas of success and failure. Since 1999, there have been introduction of NPM influenced reforms in Nigerian public sector. This paper argues that there is no possibility of sudden transformation of higher education, but selective application of these reforms by capable change managers and acceptance by informed university stakeholders could place Nigeria strategically among comity of nations in the ever-expanding knowledge and information society.

Key words: New public management, Entrepreneurial government, Higher education, University reforms

Introduction

The public sector has witnessed paradigm shift in recent years. This greatly affected higher education which is synonymously used with university education. Generally, universities play significant roles in the process of social change and development as evidenced in the production of needed skilled labour and research outputs for public and private sectors as well as helping to build new institutions of civil society, in encouraging and facilitating new cultural values, and in training and socializing members of new social elite (Brennan and Lebeau, 2002). This becomes inevitable because the wind of globalization makes the traditional models of higher education invalid and outmoded in the face of contemporary realities. At the centre stage of higher education discussion globally are issues such as increasing access, e-learning, multi-national higher education, commercialization of research, commodification of knowledge and the issue of quality assurance (Eshiwani, 1999; Halsey and Slaughter, 2001). All these have implications for Nigeria as the country is not operating in isolation.

Higher Education Today

The transformation of higher education takes common historical roots as it is the product of European influence. Though there are variations in higher education across the world, there are increasing areas of overlapping. Notably are the basic institutional model and structure of studies. Today, English has become the language of science and scholarship and the internet is widely used for instructional delivery and source of unlimited data. Of greater importance is the continuous increase in the number of international students studying outside their countries and at times within their countries with the aid of the Internet which provides instantaneous communication (Altbach and Davies, 1999). The university workplace is now influenced by academic managerialism. Worldwide, the traditional control of the central elements of the university by the faculty is being diminished. The quest for efficiency and accountability informed the importation of business practices from the private sector to dominate the universities. This implies that the traditional autonomy in which the professorate had the ability to control the classroom, the curriculum, and the general conditions of academic work is seriously constrained by accountability which means that those shouldering the cost of higher education should have the right to determine how funds are spent (Altbach, 2000). Entrepreneurial government redefines the role of modern state. It emphasizes minimizing the cost of governance. Governments are downplaying interventionist roles because of consistent 'state failure'. The

academic public sector is focusing on generating more university funding from the students (Shattock, 2000). In the United States of America, both federal and state policies tend to encourage tuition and cost escalation rather than moderation (Haupman, 2000). In attempts to meet financial constraints, some academic systems have introduced loan programmes, privatization of some public institutions and the introduction of higher tuition. Australia for example has introduced a 'graduate tax', which is a repayment scheme based on postgraduate income (Altbach and Davis, 1999).

The ascendancy of 'entrepreneurial universities' is also evidenced in offering courses on demand. According to Gibbons, universities are no longer operating in isolation; hence, they are now in cooperative endeavours and partnerships with local, national and international stakeholders. This partnership allows universities to engage in research commercialization; and they have invested in establishing science parks, technology transfer centres and venture capital funds for assisting academics interested in commercializing their work. This is done to bridge the gap between university research and the market place (Council for Higher Education [CHE], 2001). In china, Peking University seeks to integrate teaching, research and industrial development thereby making the university to be practically involved in seeking and providing solutions to societal problems In the face of all these, access and equity emerge as issues of central concern. Though access is universally unequal, different groups are competing for access as academic credentials are still passports to adult roles and social status in the knowledge, achievement and democratic societies (Brenna and Lebeau, 2002). Really, access is limited but the academic system has expanded dramatically worldwide. This expansion has led to the movement from elitism to 'massism' in terms of enrolment in university education. The increase in demand led to population explosion resulting in capacity overload and private universities are in the rise (Eshiwani, 1999).

Academic faculties are also affected in multiple ways. Altbach and Davis (1999) observe that the academic profession is in crisis as there is growth of part-time faculty members in many countries. The professorate is being asked to do more with less, and student-teacher ratio, academic salaries, and morale have all deteriorated. The professorate is being asked to adjust to new circumstances but is given few resources to assist in the transition. Given the rising crises at the academic workplace and the challenges therein, the issue of quality assurance becomes an inevitable watchword. Quality assurance is the product of total quality management, which involves 'systematic improvement of quality of production' until organization achieves the production of quality products (Ujo, 2003). At the academic workplace, the products include graduates, researches, innovations, skills and competencies. Optimizing the production of these becomes inevitable as the academic workplace must meet the changing needs, aspirations, and interests of university stakeholders.

The CHE adds that quality assurance agencies undertake three main functions which are institutional audit, programme accreditation and quality improvement. This could be done through the making of summative judgement about the quality of institutions and their programmes. In Australia, the federal government provided a prize pool of $198 million for ensuring quality between 1992 and 1995. More so, the Committee for Quality Assurance in Higher Education ranked all the universities based on the quality of service and achievement. All universities participated because of in-built punitive effects. In addition, most universities adopted triennial self-evaluation for their various units followed by external review on a rolling basis. In addition, there was a Course Experience Questionnaire and Student Evaluation of subjects or courses primarily to ensure institutional effectiveness and customers' satisfaction (Gamage, 2000). Bryant (1999) and Webster and Mosoetsa (2001) provide an understanding of the contemporary academic workplace by comparing the old and new paradigms of higher education:

Old Paradigm of Higher education	New Paradigm of Higher Education

Multiple vision.	Shared vision
Take what you can get	Courses on demand
Inflexible/formal	Responsive to new ideas/flexible
Status quo	Innovation and change
Terminal degree	Life-long learning
University as ivory tower	University as a partner in society
Little evaluation & monitoring	Quality and excellence
Books are primary medium	Information on demand
Tenure	Market value
Elitist	Entrepreneurial
Student a 4-year revenue source	Lifelong revenue source
Student as a "pain"	Student as a customer
Delivery in classroom	Delivery everywhere
Multi-cultural	Global
Single discipline	Multi-discipline
Government funded	Government and market funded
Technology as an expense	Technology to facilitate learning
Content focus	Process and content focus
Research is a differentiator	Teaching and research is a facilitator
Reactive response to pressure for change	Proactive response
Large	
Control	Down-sized and delayed
Hierarchy	Empowerment
Centralization	Network
Separation of academic and non-academic	Decentralization
	Collaboration between academic and allied staff

Adapted from Bryant, 1999 & Webster and Mosoetsa, 2001

In the spirit of this new paradigm, institutional merger is now advocated and implemented. Though mergers attract argument and counter-arguments, Harman (2000) observes that they have 'substantial benefits' which include combining many smaller specialist colleges into large and strong units capable of competing in the current competitive knowledge society. These mergers normally take the forms of consolidation and acquisition. Harman adds that the newly merged institutions soon create appropriate new organizational structures, combining academic and administrative units, and appeared to be operating well. In Mexico, the trends are similar as there is growth in meeting potential demand for higher education, change in composition of enrollment in public education provision, strengthening decentralization, and redressing the historic lag in the most backward states. Also, there is greater concentration of school demand in vocational areas and professional courses associated with the services sector; and the growth at postgraduate enrollment level as well as the attainment of equilibrium in the proportion of men and women studying for first degree (Rodriguez-Gomez and Casanova-Cardiel, 2005).

All these new developments coupled with endemic practices in the academic sector calls for re-induction and re-orientation of university management and workforce. Sawyer (2002) sums up these global trends from developed to developing countries as the product of decline in public subvention to higher education because of the 'entrepreneurial spirit' that is transforming the entire public sector (Osborne and Gaebler, 1992).

Notable Responses to Academic Transformation

Though the contemporary awareness is that of collaboration between academic and non-academic, the academics still take the lead in facilitating knowledge production and reproduction. This means so much in the new dispensation. Merger provides staff wider range of courses programmes, which enhances professional contacts and allows for more flexibility in appointment of teaching and research loads as well as broader promotional opportunities. On the other hand, a considerable number of senior staff became redundant (Harman, 2000). As networking is paramount in promoting delivery effectiveness and efficiency, Mehralizadeh (2005) identifies relevant skills and attitudes to include high trust, high discretion and collective participation in academic relations, and greater demand for 'knowledgeable' staff as well as continuous training and education, and building up a learning organization that provides continuous improvement and multi-skills.

In addition, the organization system of work is based on proportional span of control by team leaders, continuous quality control, higher career path and promotion, flexible specialization, team work and participation with high autonomy and appropriate reward system. In a survey undertaken in South Africa by Webster and Mosoetsa (2001), academics recommended that universities should introduce interdisciplinary programmes, which involves redesigning courses with vocational contents which are in high demand. In China, this means changing patterns in the provision of higher education as there is practical need for articulation of education and work. Non degree *Min-Ban* higher education institutions are allowed to offer low cost flexible and adaptive certificate and diploma programmes to meet societal needs. Whenever there is oversupply, such programmes are cut back. These programmes attempt to check unemployment as these institutions are driven by labour market demand (Weifang, 1999).

This development is brought about by the issues of mismatch between university education and the world of work which results in what is popularly known as 'reverse education' in which university graduates turn to community colleges to acquire marketable skills to make them employable. The contraction of state makes the private sector the primary employer of labour. In this situation shining certificates, diplomas, and degrees are not what counts, but what an individual can do practically at the workplace. This consciousness makes vocational education to be highly demanded by informed populace. These developments place the university at crossroads and calls for proactive instead of reactive management of human and material resources. It further implies always maintaining adequate personnel supply in terms of skills, knowledge, experience to execute organizational goals and objectives. Besides these, universities use skill inventories to search to identify qualified employees so that they meet the challenges posed by this paradigm shift.

Higher Education Problematique in Nigeria

The academic workplace in Nigeria is crowded with old and new problems. The innovative consciousness of the late twentieth century which is universally accepted and implemented in the 21st century calls for identifying these problems and tackling them if Nigeria is to assert her relevance in the ever-expanding global knowledge society. Obot (2003) identifies political corruption as the most serious aspect of corruption because of its overbearing capacity to influence, shape and fashion the tempo of life in all sectors of the polity – the entire system. Based on the past and present conduct of politics and administration in Nigeria, Transparency International (TI) has been consistent in raking the country as one of the most corrupt countries in the world and the education sector is no exception. Mallum, Momoh, and Longbap (2003) and Adamu (2003) show forms of corrupt practices in academic setting and how they undermine realizing the objectives of university education. These include examination malpractices such as leakages, tampering with examination grades and giraffing, and impersonation. Certificate forgery through specialized syndicate; diversion of academic financial allocations for personal advantage which results in procurement of substandard chemicals, equipment and other academic materials. These sum up to poor service delivery. There is also abuse of power which led to nepotism and tribalism in personnel appointment and placement in academic sector. Of note is over enrollment of students because of not adhering to admission standard. Okeshola (2000) and Adeniyi (2002) focus on unrests in academic institutions which emanate from students versus students, students versus administration, students versus government, staff versus staff, staff versus administration and staff versus government.

The management of teaching and examinations is short standard. The observation by Sutherland-Addy that universities in African countries are indeed a mere shadow of past glory because of drain of teaching staff, inadequate equipment and teaching materials, degenerated infrastructure of academic environment, and general atmosphere of demoralization and incipient decay. (CHE, 2001).

Saint, Hartnett and Strassner (2003) show how quota-based admission is moderated by Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) – 30% is reserved for 'catchment' area, 20% for educationally disadvantaged students, 10% admission for Vice Chancellor's discretion while only 40% were based on merit. All these led to increased higher non-merit admission and the ultimate consequence of increased drop-out and repetition. Additionally, there is inadequacy in both curricula and pedagogy making recommendation for a shift in emphasis from staff teaching to student learning. This failure made Obot and Ogunwole (2005) to observe that the de-linking between university education and the world of work made Nigerian graduates to be out-dated at graduation and hence, unemployable. This new development places high premium on performance, flexibility and accountability in higher education Nigeria. Therefore, higher education, most especially in Africa, and Nigeria in particular needs unique repositioning to meet the challenges of the 21st century. Webster and Mosoetsa (2001) link the problem of university workplace to partial shift from personnel management to human resource management, loss of shared identity and sense of community between academics and management, feeling of powerlessness in the face of change and increase intensity of work.

These problems endanger the relevance of the university sub-sector in spearheading human and sustainable development in science, humanity, education, governance and general human endeavour in this era of technological change, globalization and international competitiveness.

Implications for Nigeria

The academic workplace is moving in an irreversible manner globally. In Nigeria, these universal trends are taking root in addition to long established domestic practices that need reconsideration. All these developments re-emphasis the need to overhaul the educational system so that all levels of education have shared visions. Defective primary and secondary school systems cannot engender qualitative university education. For quality assurance at higher education level, primary and secondary education should be given proper personnel, financial and infrastructural attention. Education should be treated truly as it is – a cooperative venture by governments, business organizations (local and international), non-governmental organizations and private individuals. Discriminative admissions on grounds other than merit accumulatively lead to academic suicide. This means that pre-mature entry behaviour of university matriculates would increase cases of examination malpractices, drop-in and drop-out. For a change, adequate primary and secondary education is a sure antidote.

Still on quality enhancement, improving the quality of learning facilitators (teachers/lecturers) is an inevitability through training and re-training in content and pedagogy. This becomes necessary as the quality of academic facilitators determines the quality of end-products most especially as the educational system reproduces through in-breeding. In order to ascertain students' satisfaction and measures of improvement, academic promotion should not over-emphasize journal publications. Attention should be given to the introduction of Course Experience Questionnaire and Student Evaluation of Courses. This is one of the ways of determining the suitability of academics and the kind of treatment they should be exposed to for remediation and improvement.

The benefits of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) should not be limited to electronic registration (e-registration). It should be extended to teaching and learning. Therefore, academics, students and management officers need comprehensive exposure to computer training. Failure to maximize the usage of this facility by academics would result in a situation that academics profess as knowledge what has long been discarded into academic and intellectual dustbin. It is becoming clearer that higher education is not possible without tuition fees as government is contracting in the spirit of entrepreneurial government. Nigerians have to be empowered so that they could sponsor their wards. Workable scholarships, assistantships, reasonable bursary, and loan programmes have to be adapted for domestic environment. This is justified in order reduce financial challenges from undergraduate to postgraduate levels. The knowledge

of Sociology of Education should be harnessed in higher education to make higher education relevant to the society. In one direction, this is capable of checking the problem of unemployment and underemployment common in Nigeria. Hence, non-marketable courses should be discontinued and general vocationalisation pursued. This calls for inclusion of real entrepreneurial education in university curriculum for all students in this era of entrepreneurial government. Importantly, all universities should establish and maintain links with business sector so that they could offer courses on demand instead of over production of unemployable graduates.

Conclusion

As entrepreneurial academic is gradually making in-road into Nigerian university system, all stakeholders need to understand the implications of these new trends in order to achieve cooperative transition. Principally, state officials need holistic understanding for sustainable policy formulation and implication. The paper highlights current trends in higher education that are adopted by increasing number of developing countries. Generally, these pose new sets of challenges for those who are interested in imbibing this global consciousness. In Nigeria, there are obstacles that impede outright adoption of entrepreneurial universities, most especially the human factor within and outside the academic workplace. Therefore, the human resources that have direct and indirect influence on higher education in Nigeria must be given adequate orientation that would allow the country to contribute meaningfully in the globalized and knowledge society that is ever-expanding.

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