

NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY EDUCATION IN CRISIS - THE ROLE OF THE ALUMNI*

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In the Name of Almighty Allah and with the Blessings of Almighty Allah. Amen.

This Motivational Paper, to the National Executive Council, of the Conference of Alumni Associations of Nigerian Universities ["CAANU"], is in only four parts. They are:

1. Introduction
2. Brief list of issues in the crisis of University Education in Nigeria: Issues of Perennial Under-Funding; Inadequate Infrastructure; Bad Maintenance Culture; Managerial Corruption; Faculty Immorality; Admission Crisis of 74 % of nearly 2 million admission seeking students; Staff Strikes and Uncertainty of Academic Calendars; Cultism and Drug Abuse; Unaffordable Fees; Proposal to Create Even More Institutions.
3. What and Where is CAANU today ? What has CAANU Achieved Thus Far? What Has CAANU Not Achieved, and Why? And What Should CAANU Now Focus Upon?
4. My Concluding Remarks.

Part 1 - Introduction.

2. I am aware that it is the norm in academic circles, for an author to review the works of other authors who had written on the subject assigned to him or her, quote and evaluate their views, acknowledge the authors, and make his or her own submissions. However, I have, as of today, written some 20 papers, on different issues of public concern, both locally and internationally, but where I feel incompetent to address an issue entirely from what I personally think about it, no matter how exiting or topical, I would politely decline the request to speak. What therefore follows, are entirely my personal, albeit very limited thoughts on " Nigerian University Education in Crisis - the Role of the Alumni".

3. I earnestly hope that despite this absence of academic flavoring, which I very much always respect, and would have liked to provide, you would find this paper relevant and thought provoking. I would also plead that unlike what happens to most papers presented at important gatherings such as this, namely get quickly forgotten soon after their delivery, I would count my time taken to ponder about the subject, reduce same to writing, and travel all the way from Idowa Ijebu, to

personally deliver it, very worthwhile, if your group would mandate a few of your members, to dissect it carefully, and recommend positive follow-on actions, which your EXCO should take, to implement the practicable ideas and suggestions it may contain. Thank you very much.

Part 2 - Matters in Issue

4. A brief list of what I consider the most critical issues negatively affecting University Education in Nigeria have been given in Part 1 supra. We would now proceed to concisely broach some of them herein, where considered useful.

5. Perennial Under-funding, has been the most critical underminer of tertiary education in Nigeria from about 1966. This is evident both in the government owned universities, as well as in private ones. A number of Nigerian universities, parade courses that could not be accredited by respective accrediting authorities, either because of inadequacies in the faculties, or in basic facilities and or equipment. We have learnt of computer science departments, without modern computers, science degree departments without tangible laboratories, and medical colleges without the basic teaching tools and facilities. I once took part in the graduating ceremony of a Nigerian University where the "academic gowns" worn for the parade, made the professors look like infant masquerades! In my area of speciality, accounting, ICAN could not accredit the programs of some universities because the faculty could not boast of even one Chartered Accountant ! The issue of gross under-funding is most pronounced in the majority of private universities. In most universities in Nigeria there is an imbalance in the ratio of teachers to students, with up to 200 students in a class instead of 20! In most universities classes are over crowded, students' tables and chairs are insufficient, making students crowd on windows outside the lecture rooms. Where lecturers are provided, some go for months without their basic salaries, standard agreed allowances are not paid, and annual leaves and leave allowances, are anything but annual.

6. Lack of basic infrastructure and relevant modern technology equipment, found in most respected universities, even within Africa, are lacking in several Nigerian universities. Residential accommodations are few and over-crowded, most often with three or four students, sharing a room meant for only two. The toilet facilities in most halls of residence, are woefully too few, dilapidated and most unsightly. Most conveniences are an eye saw ! Well kept lawns and walkways are in only a few universities. I am not aware of any Nigerian university that can boast of either a fully equipped medical centre for its staff and students, or of an adequate, well maintained fleet of vehicles for transporting its staff and students from one part of the sprawling campus to the other. Street lights and constant supply of power are a huge challenge in many campuses. A number feature broken down generators that had long been out of use, whilst those that are working suffer long periods of shortage of diesel. In my days as a pioneer student of the OAU in its original Ibadan campus, those of us in halls of residence had three very nourishing meals per day and lived like princes and princesses. The university authorities even provided money for our yearly students parties. I feel so bad that my son in one of the best of the best institutions, has to cook his own breakfast, lunch and dinner, or go empty stomach ! Overall, the environment in most Nigerian universities of today, are far from being ideal or conducive for learning.

Managerial Corruption and Faculty Immorality:

7. A number of university top administrators, are very upright and prudent. But quite a good number have joined the brigade of Nigeria's very corrupt elite. Not only do they engage in inflated contract rackets, they also do fake "due process" of fake bidders, and other abuses of office. A number divert university funds to commercial banks in order to earn huge private interest revenue.

8. The issues of admission crisis of two million students chasing 500,000 available places, has been with us for years and getting more competitive, year after year. The challenge of cultism and

drug abuse amongst our university students are well documented. So also is the prevalence of faculty malpractice of sex for money or gifts for marks, widely brought to public glare from time to time. These have made it really difficult to distinguish which of our university graduates merited a high grade, from those who bought their rankings. We have also read so much about poor quality graduates who cannot write a simple letter with correct English grammar, show personal initiative as employees, or make any significant contributions or add any value with their hands, to the production activities of their employers. I

9. Of all the challenges facing the university system in Nigeria is the combined incidence of prolonged and ritualistic strikes by the Academic Staff Union of Universities, ASUU and the associated unpredictability in the academic calendars of all public universities in Nigeria, with the exception of University of Ilorin.

10. Universally, three elements make a service providing person, establishment or authority very successful and sustainable. It must be respected, it must be trusted, and it must be needed. These constant strikes and devastating closure of all public universities in Nigeria have nationally and internationally eroded the trust and respect which not only University education but also ASUU currently enjoy amongst Nigerians and sister international educational institutions. You as top leaders of the Alumni groups in Nigeria are even better informed than me of the terrible consequences which these seasonal "ASUU strikes" have on the millions of Nigerian students in the midst of the cross fires and their parents.

11. The most worrisome of these is that once the strike is over, transmission of knowledge to the students that should normally take two or three months are crammed into 7 days! To every living Nigerian, the word ASUU is readily associated not with honour, glory or edifying national service but with conscienceless, greedy, self interest anti children agitations ! While ASUU members are entitled to fight for their rights as any group of employees, but I honestly do not believe it is part of the duties of an employee or group of employees to compel their employer on how to capitalize or fund the objectives of his enterprise ! As any employee, you have every right to stay on or quit ! No one made this the business of ASUU. It is a job mainly reserved to the civil authorities, the Parliament and the electorates, not teachers ! Not other employees ! The current quarrelsomeness and agonies for students and parents over funding gives one the impression of a bunch of Nigerians selfishly agitating for their own share of national treasury available for looting ! The time appears to me to have come for university education in Nigeria and the future of succeeding millions of Nigerian students and the well being of their parents to be taken off the hands of ASUU and similar unions. At the same time, the governments, federal and state should be restrained from compounding this very serious problem by playing highly irresponsibly hide and seek games with the future of our children by not fulfilling or timeously full filing their purely employer/employee lawful obligations to their educational sector employees, the time has come to put a stop to the irresponsible conducts of both parties in issue.

12. What is the way forward ? The National Assembly should as a matter of topmost priority create, say an "Independent Educational Sector Arbitration Commission" ("IESAC") of three retired Judges, three retired Vice Chancellors and three former Presidents of CAANU, ASUU, NASU and the NUT to resolve all issues in dispute amongst employers and employees in the Nation's education sector, compel the CBN or any other financial institution, to effect its judgments by direct recourse to the funds of any of the employers, in favour of the employees or employee groups, provided a majority of 5 of the 9 sector arbitrators so direct. The judgement of the commission on all disputes shall be final. However, in return, it will become unlawful and a serious crime, for any employee or group of employees in the educational sector in Nigeria to strike or undertake any industrial action, that the Commission or the public may declare or deem, as inimical to public good and interest.

13. How many universities do the German, American or UK Government, own or fund ? Consequently, the ultimate solution to a large number of these issues will be for each and every

Government owned universities to be owned and managed by members of the public, hand in hand with availability of massive scholarship and students loan banks to support indigent students. Pending this, since governments are enjoined by law to accord equal fair treatment to all Nigerians, the existing subsidy to students of Government owned universities, should be ascertained and be also extended on an average per capita basis, to privately owned universities. This would make their fees more affordable to most parents. In my honest opinion the current plan to establish yet still more higher institutions of learning in Nigeria at this point in time when the existing ones are being crippled by perennial understaffing is not different or better conceived than the now abhorred plans of creating a new national airline when all earlier ones had woefully failed. The idea should be jettisoned! In its place a pilot Scheme, may be initiated with say three or four universities being provided with 24 hour uninterrupted power supply, adequate number of additional staff, to begin a 2-stream, full time, academic programs of say from 8am to 2 pm and 2pm to 8 pm daily, in all faculties. Rather than piling up year after year, and increasing the number of millions of qualified students that will not secure admissions into the existing limited university places, but join evil gangs and dangerous groups, the existing university admission capacity can be doubled without the very huge capital costs and time associated with establishing and running every new university. It is true that as a consequence, the output of the university system will be doubled, putting even more pressure on the demand for employment opportunities. However, the existing graduate self employment and empowerment schemes, should be reviewed. An independent study will show the attrition rate of all previous youth self employment schemes as near 90%, if not more ! Most of the enterprises die within 2 or 3 years ! Instead, Nigeria should quickly modify the current strategy by doing three things:

- 1). Create a nationwide platform to register all unemployed graduates etc on a local government basis, through the Internet;
- 2). Encourage more mature adults, from say 40 years and above, who have been gainfully employed either in the public sector or private sector, to form graduate employing enterprises;
- 3). Provide seed capital for these enterprises, and on the condition of employing at least 3 graduates from the Labour Platform, pay 50% of the wages of the graduates each employs, whilst the entrepreneur funds the balance of 50%. This approach will be much more useful and sustainable than giving monthly handouts to unemployed graduates. The graduates will learn and can either remain employed, or sufficiently experienced to be able to realistically start their own sustainable enterprises. Although a few of the current beneficiaries of the various youth empowerment programs may survive and prosper, but the ultimate cost per sustainable employment, if computed by empirical studies, will be so monumental, given the very huge project failure rate. Also, providing monthly stipends for the teeming unemployed youths, will prove inadequate, minuscule and unsustainable.

What and Where is CAANU today ? What has CAANU Achieved Thus Far? What Has CAANU Not Achieved and Why? And What Should CAANU Now Focus Upon?

14. When your representative called to see me, I enquired what CAANU meant and what it does, because until that day, I had never heard or read about the group. After he left, I searched the Internet, but this body had no website ! I was shocked that an aggregation of the top leaderships of alumni of all 165 universities in Nigeria, 43 Federal, 47 State, and 75 Private, could not even afford to have a website that costs less than N 50,000 ! Yet it was said to be over 30 years in existence !

15. These thoughts immediately signaled to me, that the body needed waking up, had never been activist, and probably was suffering from "extreme lackfunditis" ! "Lackfunditis" is a disease of sustained acute lack of funds and financial liquidity !

May you and I and CAANU, never know Lackfunditis again ! Amen.

16. If the average admission into universities is nearly 500,000 out of which about 400,000 graduate in one field or another, CAANU should be representing not less than 8 or 10 Million university Alumni! That it has only about 50 universities out of 165 within its fold, also seems to portray some lack of proactivity on the part of its past leaders and its secretariat. To also learn that each Alumni Association within whose membership there must be hundreds and in some cases thousands of very successful old students, who had become millionaires in their different fields and callings, pay collectively only a ridiculous subscription of N25,000 per year, appeared to me inexcusable ! Many clubs demand a personal annual subscription of N1 million per year, whilst a large number of professional bodies stipulate a yearly membership subscription of N10,000 per member. Therefore a serious group like this, with its enormous amount of yet to be discharged national responsibilities could not operate on a budget of less than N20 million annually. Therefore it's ridiculously low levy of only N25,000 per alumni association will leave it comatose !

17. To enable CAANU to rise up to its rightful powerful position of an authoritative voice of the several millions of students who over the years, have graduated from all the universities in Nigeria, and a defender of both students and faculty, a major stake holder and a loud voice, to be reckoned with in all matters affecting each and every university in Nigeria, CAANU should immediately embark on the following fundamental re-engineering initiatives:

- [1]. CAANU should IMMEDIATELY take steps to review its Constitution;
- [2]. It should set up an Organizational Restructuring Committee to drive the process;
- [3]. No President should serve a total of more than 2 years to foreclose anomie. Also should each Alumni Association, like ECOWAS not be better represented by the serving President who can more effectively influence the payment of levies and subscriptions due to CAANU and boost its activities ?
- [4]. Its Annual Dues should consist of two elements, namely a university age related annual capital contribution and a per capita membership annual subscription. The university age and category capital contribution may be structured into 7 Categories as follows:

Recommend ended Table of Annual Capital Contribution per Alumni Association

	University Age/ Category	Annual Capital Contribution
1.	Above 50 Years	N 500,000
2.	40 to 50 Years	450,000

3.	31 to	40	Years	400,000
4.	21 to	30	Years	350,000
5.	11 to	20	Years	300,000
6.	6 to	10	Years	250,000
7.	Below	6	Years	50,000.

A **Per Capita Annual Subscription** of **N1,000** only should be paid per and on behalf of the member of each University Alumni Association. Also, should Alumni Associations continue to be structured along their years of entrance and graduation? What professional or career value does this provide? I think CAANU should seriously consider encouraging its member Association to consider the numerous and huge advantages that will accrue to both individual members, the Associations and their universities if each Alumni Association is restructured along their specialist faculties and disciplines, and cutting across all ages. For instance, an ABU Public Administration Alumni will bring Ministers and Governors and large number of public administration graduates of all ages together in direct contact with all ages of graduates of public administration. A UNILAG Law Faculty Alumni will bring the most influential Law Professors and leading SANs into contact with youthful law graduates with enormous mutual networking opportunities and much better funding for the Alumni Associations and the respective university faculty or department than meetings of all kinds of old classmates, the mere sight of some of who will only provoke pity and feelings of guilt. With this organisation of the most successful graduates of each discipline, much more substantial professional support and external funding will accrue to each Alumni Association and university, as say all lawyers coming into direct fund provision competition with say Architects, Medicos, Pharmacists, Accountants, Public Administrators, Economists and Engineers etc of each university! Also imagine the enormous leverage that a Federation of professionalized Alumni Associations, can deliver to the university system all over Nigeria!

[5]. Within the next 12 months, the CAANU should have established a properly staffed and adequately equipped Secretarial Office, which is capable of maintaining its records, keeping its accounts, interfacing with member associations, canvassing for more members, and collecting its dues and subscriptions. It should also delegate an effective member of the Exco as its Public Affairs Officer. It should apply immediately, for allocation of land for erection of its permanent secretariat in Abuja. CAANU can also apply for lands to build zonal branch offices in Lagos, Kaduna and Enugu, and obtain government allocations for CAANU Housing Estates in key cities for development on Joint Venture basis, as a means of sustaining its financial viability for decades yet to come, and not continually having to tax its members.

[6]. The Conference should henceforth function as, and be seen and heard, by all governments, Federal and State, as well as by all Nigerians, as the mouthpiece of

all the students, past and present, in each and every university in Nigeria, and number 1 champion and defender of their interests.

[7]. CAANU should quickly be financially empowered by all its member Alumni Associations, to, within 2 years, become the legitimate fighter for the proper funding of universities and capable of intervening strongly and assertively, in all future conflicts between all employers and staff unions, in all Nigerian universities in the national interest, and most especially, in the interest of our university students and their parents.

[8]. The Exco should map out each year, by say October, a calendar of its programs of activities and meetings, well publicized visitations to governments, law makers, select university Managements, staff groups, and media houses, every year, to boost its image and sell its well researched ideas, for solving specific problems mitigating against elevating our universities to acceptable international standards.

[9]. CAANU should organize a highly profiled CAANU Annual National Awards event with the support of the NUC, CBN, TETFUND, banks, telcos, leading corporates and respected individuals to celebrate and honour -

The Most Peaceful University of the Year

The Cleanest University of the Year

The Most Academically Distinguished University of the Year

The Most Effective Alumni Association of the Year; and

The University Philanthropist of the Year, amongst others.

[10]. Having got its yearly program of activities approved, it should compile a budget of its projected income and expenditure and how to fund it.

[11]. It should organise a number of fund raising activities, to effectively solicit and receive the significant support of several well to do Nigerians, especially Alumni.

[12]. It should within the next three months, have deployed its well designed website, and a monthly electronic newsletter, not only for its members, but also, for interface with all the universities in Nigeria, for circulation to the media houses, members of all Alumni Associations, and all important stake holders in university education in Nigeria.

Part 7 - My Concluding Remarks

18. There is no doubting, that University education in Nigeria is, and has for many decades, since the regime of General Yakubu Gowon Retired, been beset by many daunting challenges. Financial resources are not sufficiently available for containing some of the problems. Even where available some of the scarce resources had been stolen or mismanaged. Most parents especially of students, know only when their children commence a university degree program, but never when they would graduate, because of the frequent strikes by either one group of staff, or another most especially the most dreaded of all the unions, ASUU. But these serious issues

are not beyond human resolution, especially through the famed creativity and ingenuity of Nigerians. In this paper, I have tried to examine a number of these issues, and made recommendations that I believe are practicable and will be effective if implemented by CAANU. I thank the Chairman and all the members of CAANU, for inviting me.

I thank you all.

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