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Repositioning the Nigerian University System: Basis for Sustainable National Development

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Abstract

For the first time, teaching, learning and research at University level on Nigerian soil commenced on 18th January 1948, with a total of 104 students and 13 lecturers at the University College Ibadan. The Nigerian University System (NUS) has since grown considerably and currently comprises a total of 328 Universities. The total student population is in the region of Two Million and Five Hundred Thousand. Nonetheless, there are numerous challenges in the NUS, which need to be interrogated as part of efforts for better local and global relevance. This lecture has evaluated the issue of governance, autonomy, access, quality assurance and curriculum, funding, industrial and labour relations, and university culture as they affect the NUS. A number of case studies of succession crises is presented.

To investigate governance the concept of Vice-Chancellorship Stability Index (VCSI) is introduced to measure governance stability across 61 purposively selected Nigerian Universities as a practical quantitative metric for benchmarking institutional governance. Compliance with the Keffi Declaration in holding Convocation events annually has also been determined.

The average VCSI in the 31 Federal Universities sampled was 96.41% while for the 18 Private Universities the average VCSI was slightly higher at 97.19%; on the other hand, the average VCSI in the 12 State universities was low at 89.65%. This suggests that the Federal Government-owned and the privately-owned Universities have better governance stability than those Universities owned by State Governments.

The results have shown that the typical degree classification in a public university in Nigeria is a Second Class Lower while the typical degree classification from a private university is a Second Class Upper.

Convocation events are not held annually in many Nigeran Universities. In its stead, Combined convocation events are prevalent whereby graduates from different sets are lumped together. As a case study, out of the nine universities established in 2011 by the Federal Government, one has held only two Convocation events till date while the best performing of institutions in this cohort has held nine.

Each university should have an orderly and well publicised order of precedence to follow for the appointment of an Acting Vice-Chancellor when the position of Vice-Chancellor is vacant. To the extent that the absence of a Governing Council hampers the proper functioning of a University, actively instigates governance instability and is an anathema to University Autonomy, the National Assembly should as a matter of urgent national importance amend the Universities (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Amendment) Act, 2003 in Section 2A as to provide that if the Council of a Federal University is dissolved, a new Council should be constituted not later than three months. The State Houses of Assembly should domesticate autonomy in the Councils of their Universities including the power to appoint the Vice-Chancellor.

Keywords: Governing Council, Vice-Chancellorship Stability Index, University Autonomy, Quality Assurance, Curriculum, Entrepreneurial University