

The Nigerian University System and the Challenges of Capacity Building in a Globalized Economy

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Abstract: The scaring effects of globalization and the global economic shift have affected world economic order to the extent that the weak economies are still trying to grapple with the production processes. The necessity of international discourse, alignment and reorganization generated by the new economic order has not provided the needed solution. Rather, the process has continued to erode and reorder the traditional economic activities of the weak economies to the extent that there is unprecedented unemployment. This gives the impression that the university academic system, with the courses and programmes taught, is not structured in a flexible manner to arrest the situation. This paper on the synergy between the Nigerian university academic system and the challenges of capacity building in a globalized economy investigates why, in spite of the numerous international discourses, economic restructuring, etc. unemployment, especially among the products of universities, continues to escalate, economy continues to dwindle, political structures and governance continue to deteriorate. The observation is that the Nigerian university system has failed to achieve, among the beneficiaries, the expected capacity building, intellectual capital and knowledge necessary to drive the economy in this dispensation. The paper recommends inter alia, an overhaul of the Nigerian university system to take care of the critical requirements of current production processes, flexibilization of labour and employment, ensuring that the knowledge and skills acquired are information and communication technology oriented and the development of the power and energy sector because of its regeneration and multiplier effects on job and wealth creation.

Key words: Capacity Building; Flexibilization; Intellectual Capital; Nigerian University Academic System; Globalization

INTRODUCTION

The issue and influences of globalization have challenged and re-ordered relations and world economy to the extent that the weak systems have remained bemoaned watching helplessly at the scientific speed with which water passes under the bridge. It is however not surprising that the under nourished, fragile and underdeveloped economies would find themselves in such pathetic situation. At international and

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* Received January 1, 2011; accepted April 19, 2011.

local levels, questions have been asked, investigations made and scientific strategies developed to mitigate the scarring effects of globalization, yet globalization has continued to wax stronger and stiffer with its flogging war of exploits on these fragile economies as if to remind these economies of its initial warning that were not hearkened to by these recalcitrant, 'dissident' and technologically backward 'unbelievers'. World economies and political processes have changed from paternalistic to competitiveness to the extent that any economy that does not fall in line is crushed (Kwanashie, 1999; Iheriohanma, 2010). Most affected by the flagging world economic changes appear to be in the areas of employment, job creation and wealth generation. Human capacity development appears to be truncated. These issues have generated international discourses, alignment and reorganization; yet the solutions are far from sight.

University academic system is structured to impart on the products the intellectual prowess needed for self and societal development. The courses and programmes are designed to enable the beneficiaries to be masters and controllers of their environment. The system introduces and exposes the products to varied spheres of philosophies, thoughts, ideologies, methods, etc that should equip them for life after school. Essentially, important aspects of the university academic system include capacity building, knowledge creation and development and conducive environment for inquisitiveness. Etymologically, university is derived from the Latin word, *Universitas*, which when translated means, corporation. The word was not originally limited or restricted to institutions of learning. In a sense, the word came to mean *corporation of masters and students (teachers and learners)* i.e. *Universitas Majistorum et Scholarium*. As time progressed, the word came to be associated with exclusive meaning of a self regulating community that was made up of 'teachers and scholars whose corporate existence had been approved by the civil or ecclesiastical order' (Omeire, 2010). The word is a metamorphosis of a combination of two words, vis *Universitas Majistorum (corporation of masters)* and *Universitas Scholarium (corporation of students)*. A university product (an Alumnus, an ex-student) therefore, is endowed to be an all-rounder; through rigorous training and instructions he is scientifically found worthy in learning and in character; a controller of his environment and a manager of any situation that surreptitiously and or fortuitously comes across his way. These and many more are what the system is meant for and the Nigerian university system is not an exemption. University products form associations wherever they find themselves to particularly further their interests and desires. Alumni Association is conceived in this perspective as an association of ex – students who graduated from a particular university and are found and or residing within a particular city. They are united by a common goal and are psychologically bonded.

It is however, worrisome that most products of Nigerian university system have not demonstrated any iota of these privileges that universities all over the world bequeath to their products. It is observed that most of the ex-students have not represented their alma mater as ambassadors or have not put into practice those things they learnt from these institutions that should arm them for life after schooling. They are supposed to have acquired the intellectual capacity and skills for self and national economic development. If these beneficiaries demonstrate these eulogized attributes and attitudes, why then is Nigeria still classified as underdeveloped? Why is Nigeria regarded by Transparency International as one of the most corrupt nations of the world? (See Onimode, 2000). Why is it that these products keep mute in the face of bad governance, injustice, deprivation, marginalization, etc? They even connive with those involved in all vices in governance. If these university products really imbibed the tenets of knowledge acquisition and capacity building, why is it that about 80% of them are roaming the streets begging for jobs instead of creating jobs? If academic programmes in Nigerian universities are structurally functional as pre-requisites for economic and national development, why is it that the products are not critically positioned to galvanize their acquired knowledge and skills for technological and economic development of themselves, their various societies and nation at large? Nigerian youths have been found not only to be deeply involved in violent activities, as hordes of militiamen for deceptive and depraved politicians in selfish vendetta missions, they have been found to have initiated violence and disturbances (Iheriohanma, 2009) as well as organized themselves against development initiatives, programmes and activities in the guise of '*indeginship*', cry against marginalization and request for compensation. The Niger Delta militancy, the Aguleri / Umuleri saga in Anambra State, religious and ethnic disturbances in Bauchi, Jos and environs and even pockets of disturbances in Imo State and elsewhere are examples. Nigerian youths and mostly university products have been identified

to be deeply involved in the saga. These militants and ex-students have not demonstrated the expected critical capacities that should characterize ex – university products elsewhere, especially the technologically developed North. They have relegated their traditional roles of conflict management, peace initiative, entrepreneurship, self – fulfillment and actualization, independence, leadership and development that characterized traditional Africa, especially the traditional Igbo society, South-East of Nigeria.

UNIVERSITY SYSTEM AND THE CHALLENGES OF HUMAN CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

Universities are known all over the world as corporate conglomerates (Iloeje, 2004; Omeire, 2010) that impart knowledge and strongholds for knowledge and skills acquisition. Knowledge has been observed to be the critical factor in the production process in this globalized economic dispensation. Globalization has shaped and reshaped the world in various spheres and, at the root of all this is knowledge which has become an invaluable resource. It has created a world of differences between those who acquired and practically make use of it and those who do not. Since the division of the world into knowledge blocs, there exist different denotations as ‘knowledge society’, ‘information society’, ‘network society’, ‘creative economy’, etc. (Toffler, 1981; Drucker, 1993; Florida, 2002; Iheriohanma, 2009; Amiri, Jandghi, Alvani, Hosnavi & Ramezan, 2010). Knowledge is a critical factor in human capital that is defined as a combination of employee’s competence, attitude and creativity. These features characterize products of universities.

A critical assumption in this paper is that, with globalization, world economy has changed from an industrial into knowledge economy (Amiri et al, 2010) in which the competitive advantage of societies is based on the ability to exploit and apply knowledge resources. It is also observed that, since ages, societies and mankind have depended on the interpretation of knowledge as defined in the sphere of civilization and development. Knowledge is not a new phenomenon, yet it has become a critical scientific factor of competitive advantage in knowledge economy. The transition to knowledge economy is about the increase in scale of knowledge as a production factor. Knowledge is not a new production factor. However, it is the relative critical importance of knowledge in relation to other factors of production – land, labour and capital – that has substantially increased our interest in it since the past decades. As an invaluable entrepreneurial factor, knowledge capital directs and reallocates other factors of production. Knowledge is at the epicentre of this economic shift. As a challenge, the onus of this paper is to investigate if the Nigerian university system has lived up to these interpretations and expectations in the area of capacity building with regards to the economic shift.

A challenge to this paper is the investigation of the fundamental cause of university products, individually and collectively, not effectively harnessing their acquired potentials and capacities after graduation for self and national economic development, taking into consideration the fact that products of universities have gone there for the purpose of knowledge and skills acquisition. Is it the type of education they received from these universities or the environment they found themselves in after graduation that is responsible for this inundating incapacitation? Why is it that they are not able to effectively engage in ensuring the birth of sustainable democracy in Nigeria? Nigerian university products are found to have engaged themselves in sycophancy, indolence, election rigging, poor entrepreneurship attitude, indifference towards misrule, poor governance and leadership, economic mismanagement, poor spirit of patriotism, general insecurity/kidnapping and all sorts of vices, lost the enviable attributes of individualism and independence that were traditionally the driving forces of societal growth and development, thus denigrating the quality of the degrees and certificates they acquired. How then are they ‘found worthy in learning and character’? With the involvement of products of Nigerian universities in the above, it beats the imagination of any observer to think that these products can effectively compete in the universalized/ globalized knowledge- and information-driven competitive economy, productivity and management as demanded by the forces of globalization in this millennium (Iheriohanma, 2009). This investigation revolves around the above foregoing problems as it explores strategies for a way forward. The issue complements the earlier assumption and also hinges on the fact

that intellectual capital has positive impact on productivity as well as on the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of any economy.

The general objective of this paper is an investigation of the synergy between the challenges of human capacity building, Nigerian university system and the interaction of globalization in relation to the effects of the current economic shift and development. Specifically, the investigation explores incapacitations of university products in Nigeria's economic development in the face of the challenges of globalization. It also explores strategies for critical scientific knowledge and skills to effectively position products of Nigerian universities for challenges of globalization. The method adopted is explorative and analytical. This paper benefits copiously from library research and empirical observation.

NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY PRODUCTS, UNIVERSITY SYSTEM AND GLOBALIZATION: THE SYNTHESIS

Universities are established for the extension of the frontiers of acquisition of critical knowledge, skills, leadership roles, organization, etc. The roles of universities and their place in the society do not extensively occupy this paper. Suffice it to infer that university system theoretically equips an individual with the necessary tools for life exigencies after schooling where he practically demonstrates his potentials and experiences for self actualization, depending on where and when he finds himself. It is obvious that if societies need people for improved productivity and development, the people need both theoretical and practical knowledge to galvanize and integrate the endowments (resources and factors of production) for the development. Knowledge therefore, forms the pivot around which development revolves while the individual remains both the initiator and beneficiary. This knowledge remains the benefits and a leading edge which candidates gain from attending universities. This is where the issue of intellectual capital and human capacity development become relevant. With globalization as an increasingly close international integration of markets in goods, services and finance, the increasing growth and development of knowledge by and within any economy gives it a competitive edge over others. Production for exchange in the integrated international market depends on the relevance of critical knowledge put into the products exhibited. Globalization involves the internationalization and integration of autonomous economies into global markets through the processes of trade, investment and financial interaction with the instrumentality of technological development, advancement in telecommunications and developed structures for good governance. Globalization does not thrive in an unfettered ground but on developed economic structures that sustain it. This is necessary because of interconnectivity of sovereign nations, unrestricted capital and goods flow, liberalization, openness, interdependence, developed technology, market-driven economy, etc.(Kwanashie, 1999; Iheriohanma, 2010).

Globalization thrives with the presence of the following forces and unfettered conditions:

There must be a well developed technological base that supports a sustained growth in telecommunications, information technology and management. Information and communications technology (ICT) is driven by knowledge which is facilitated by intellectual capital. It is widely recognized as the critical source of true and scientific competitive advantage. Competitive pressure challenges competitive positions achieved by progressive knowledge economies and reinforces dependence on other economies. As the basis of intellectual capital, knowledge is at the heart of national economic capabilities.

There must be a vivid structure for economic liberalization that sustains open and competitive market system and macroeconomic prudence. There should be an evidence of accommodation and reorganization of structures that do not impede the operations of global corporations and foreign investment opportunities that are facilitated by the removal of barriers to trade and global movement of capital, labour market deregulation and 'flexibilization' of worker and employment.

There must be evidence of universally acclaimed democratic structures that do not hinder economic growth, human rights development, equality, constitutionality, accountability, due process, transparency, and which do not promote insecurity, abuses and marginalization according to gender, race or creed,

gagging of the press, etc.

There is an environment for human capital development. This is more important when considered in relation to economic development and the demands of globalization. There is also equal opportunity for all citizens to develop potentials and contribute to the economy. This brings about self-esteem and self-actualization; the foundation and end product of motivation for productivity and national economic development.

These forces and demands of globalization are contained and countered by a society that is imbued with requisite manpower and human capital which are largely the products of university systems the world over. However, in the case of Third World countries, and Nigeria in particular, that are infested with the cancer of underdevelopment, the question remains why the products of their universities have been ineffective in countering these challenges, expectations and demands in this era of globalization.

INCAPACITATION ON PRODUCTS OF NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES AND THE DEMANDS OF GLOBALIZATION

The exploration of the implications of incapacitation generated by the demands of globalization on the products of Nigerian universities stems from the general notion that the underdevelopment status and poverty trap in Nigeria could be traced to the inability of its manpower to arrest the cancer eating deep into the economic and political structures. To this end it is relevant to investigate if the knowledge each and every one of us have and the general knowledge scale at the societal / national level can position Nigeria strategically for the future with respect to economic development, management, power interplay and relationally at the international arena. Do we have the challenging vision that will strategically give Nigeria a leading edge in this age of globalization? Can the knowledge we have enable us to keep track of the critical issues that affect the nation's development? These questions, when evaluated, hinge on issues about: a) knowledge creation, b) knowledge transfer, and c) knowledge utilization. How has the Nigerian university system been able to effectively discharge its duty to enhance the above? It is expected that these interacting issues on knowledge and capacity building are built into the *Vision 20: 2020*. It is a fervent desire that there should be a structural foundation to extend the role of university learning and experiences in creating intellectual capital needed to build sustainable advantages for societal, organizational development and entrepreneurship in emerging economies, especially in Nigeria. This is necessary because, in these emerging economies, the advantages in creating different technological advancements may bring different implications for valuation of intellectual capital.

At different stages in a nation's development, there appear different indices of knowledge acquisition. In Africa in particular, the different levels include:

Individual level, involves before and during the colonial era, at which level knowledge development was for individual survival and latter for the services of colonial administration and their target goals.

Societal level, involves Industrial Revolution and independence era, which accounted for a slight shift to create structures for the emergent exigencies of the time. Knowledge creation was for economic exploration and exploitation of the colonized and for initial economic development and integration of the emerging capitalists. It served mainly the economic intentions of the protagonists of Industrial Revolution and colonial administrators. This age lingered up to the half of the 19th century.

Global level, involves part of the 19th century to the 21st century and beyond, that is the globalization period where issues like management, planning, need for fledging democratic structures etc. are universalized, thus creating interdependence. This is where the demands and forces of globalization earlier mentioned become relevant.

The issue at stake is where we are in the light of the curricula of Nigerian university system in ensuring that the human capital turned out are critically and strategically positioned to arrest the incapacitation of the current world economic demands on every economy, whether developed or emerging. The university system should be structured in a way that the products would be ready to give back to the society the required expectations. Knowledge consists of the technical and academic

knowledge that is obtained through school education, and it is theoretical. On the other hand, skill is the individual's capability of accomplishing practical assignments. It is obtained primarily through practice. Amiri et al, (2010) add that skill includes the tacit skills that cannot be literally expressed and which can also be developed through schooling. The development of these critical knowledge and skills by the products of universities is expected to curtail the enormity of poverty and underdevelopment in Nigeria and paves the way for the attainment of *Vision 20: 2020*. This is critical if it is evaluated and re-evaluated in line with the interpretations and expectations of the changing realities of the time.

The changing realities of the time demand practical experience and flexibility. Globalization demands this flexibilization which the Nigerian university system does not bequeath to its products. Production processes do no longer require pigeon-holing the indices of knowledge acquisition to the individual level, not even at the societal level. Environment dynamism dictates processes in the global economy and that is why all knowledge acquisition and skills development should fall in line rather than wait to be fogged into alignment. Globalization, for example, has eroded the traditional economic activities of Africans in the areas of crafts, guilds, basket-making, etc. that hitherto sustained their economy. New trends have emerged that demand changes and flexibility. Traditional economic fishing and boat-making engagements in the Niger Delta area for example, are no longer feasible as oil exploration and spills have destroyed the aquatic environment that supported such activities. Globalization process demands trimming down the size of workforce in the public sector as most activities have been overtaken by information technology. Casualizations of jobs, outsourcing and subcontracting have allowed global enterprises to reduce and externalize the costs incurred from the direct employment of labour. All these and more contribute to the unparalleled unemployment in the underdeveloped countries of the South, especially Nigeria. The implication of all these is that the environment dynamism in knowledge production demands a shift in the structure of Nigerian university education system to accommodate the new realities. The environment demands an education system that promotes entrepreneurship, re-evaluation of the traditional systems of industry and independence that were production- and development - oriented rather than continue to instruct on the inherited western colonial education system that encouraged job-seeking while tenaciously clutching on university degree certificates as wheels for meal tickets.

The environment in which these products find themselves after graduation is observed to be unfriendly. Granted that the knowledge and experiences these products acquired in the universities are not functional enough to propel them into entrepreneurship, the relevant governments and agencies should endeavour to create enabling environment for initial take off.

STRATEGIES FOR CRITICAL KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS ACQUISITION TO CHALLENGE THE DEMANDS OF GLOBALIZATION

This section attempts to proffer strategies that will assist to inculcate in the products of Nigerian university system the requisite knowledge and skills to arm them to contribute to the nation's economic and political growth. This is done to ensure these products effectively compete in the universalized and globalized knowledge- and information-driven competitive economy to the extent that critical structures are developed to checkmate the demands and forces of globalization.

The Nigerian university system needs an overhaul to enable the beneficiaries acquire functional education that will equip them for life after schooling.

The restructuring of education system in Nigeria should take into consideration the critical requirements of production processes in this global economic order in the sense that the economy should be production rather than consumer oriented. Products of Nigerian universities should be creators rather than seekers of jobs. Entrepreneurism should be encouraged starting from the artisan level.

There is need for flexibility in the type of skills and knowledge acquired so that the beneficiaries can readily fit into any environment, production processes, etc. This is necessary because of the need for

outsourcing, subcontracting, etc. that have enabled global enterprises and multinationals to reduce and externalize the costs they hitherto incurred from the direct employment of labour.

Knowledge and skills acquired should be information communication technology (ICT) oriented. This is necessary because global economy demands a concerted contribution of all economies or else those that recline on consumerism stand the risk of economic doom. We are all witnesses to the effect of the use of generating sets in the production process in Nigeria. In this regard, power and energy development is strongly recommended because of its multiplier effects in job creation.

The development of power and energy should not be left in the hands of expatriates. Home grown indigenous technology in line with current production trend is advocated. Good enough we have indigenes who are knowledgeable in traditional technologies and who should be encouraged with enabling environment. Indigenous technology should take its root from the culture of the people since no technology grows and develops in disregard to culture.

Above all, a critical knowledge leadership that has a strong political will is advocated for proper coordination in a world market economic structure that is driven by knowledge, interdependence and competition.

CONCLUSION

This exposition has scratched the interrelationship between the challenges of human capacity building, Nigerian university system and the demands of globalization, taking into consideration the requirements in the shift in global economy. It avers that the demands of globalization have challenged the products of these universities since they are not adequately equipped for their rightful positions in the present economic dispensation. Certain investigations were made to find out why this is the way it is. It was observed that the university system only prepared the products for meal tickets insisting on the inherited western colonial education system. The environment these products found themselves was also implicated as it was not found to be friendly either. Some strategies were also made as to how these anomalies could be tackled.

It is in the light of the foregoing discussions that this paper suggests that since the universities are corporations established for the interactions of masters and scholars who eventually turn out to be the crop of employees and entrepreneurs of our economy, they should be able to impart in these products such requisite knowledge and skills to the extent that they would be able to give back to the society what they gained from the various universities. If this is not done, then the developed economies of the North would continue to develop and be regarded as the 'developing economies' while those of the South would continue to be underdeveloped.

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