

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE ROLE OF NATIONAL UNIVERSITIES COMMISSION IN UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATION: A CRITIQUE

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Introduction

The National Universities Commission (NUC) was set up in 1962 as an administrative unit in the cabinet office, consequent on the recommendation of the Ashby

Agriculture. Today, the country can boast of 37 universities, out of this number, sixteen are conventional, five universities of technology, three universities of Agriculture and a military university. Although the commission was set up to control Federal universities, it also extends its services to state universities especially in terms of maintenance of academic standards. The state owned universities numbering twelve are made up of eight conventional and four universities of technology.

The primary objectives of the National Universities Commission are to ensure the orderly development of university education in Nigeria, to maintain high standards and ensure adequate funding. It is the extent to which these objectives have been achieved that is the interest of this chapter.

Functions of the National Universities Commission

When the National Universities Commission (NUC) was founded, it was charged with the responsibility of advising government on the financial needs of the universities and to handle the planning of a balanced and coordinated development of university education in Nigeria

However, these functions were expanded by Decree No. 1 of 1974 which empowered the commission as a statutory body. By this decree, the commission was charged with the following functions:

- a. to advise the Head of Federal Government, through the Minister on the creation of new universities and other degree-granting institutions in Nigeria;
- b. to prepare, after consultation with all **the** state government, the universities, **the** National Manpower Board and such other bodies as it considers appropriate, periodic master plans for the balanced and coordinated development of universities in Nigeria and such plans shall include:

- i. the general programmes to be pursued by the universities in order to ensure that they are fully adequate to national needs and objectives;
- ii. recommendations for the establishment and location of new universities as and when considered necessary; and
- iii. recommendations for the establishment of new faculties of postgraduate institutions in existing universities or the approval or disapproval of proposals to establish such faculties or institutions;
- c. to make such other investigations relating to higher education that the commission may consider necessary in the national interest;
- d. to make such other recommendations to the Federal Government and State Governments or to the Universities relating to higher education as the commission may consider to be in the national interest;
- e. to inquire into and advise the Federal Government on the financial needs, both recurrent and capital, on university education in Nigeria, and in particular, to investigate and study the financial needs of university research and to ensure that adequate provision is made for this in the universities;
- f. to receive block grants from the Federal Government and allocate them to universities in accordance with such formula as may be laid down by the Federal Executive Council;
- g. to take into account, in advising the Federal Government on universities finances, such grants as may be made to the universities by State Governments and by persons and institutions in and outside Nigeria.
- h. To collate, analyse and publish information relating to university education in Nigeria and from other sources such information is relevant

to the discharge of its functions under this decree.

- i. To undertake periodic review of the terms and conditions of service of personnel engaged in the universities and to make recommendations thereon to the Federal Government where appropriate;
- j. To recommend to the visitor of university that a visitation be made to such university as and when considered necessary;
- k. To act as the agency for channeling all external aids to the universities in Nigeria; and
- l. To carry out such other activities as are conducive to the discharge of its functions under its act

National Universities Commission and University Administration

Towards the end of colonial leadership and dominance in Africa, university education was considered one of the keys of African countries' economic and social development. The reason being that the management problems experienced by most countries during the first year of independence were ascribed to a shortage of adequate trained personnel. The university as a fortress and citadel of learning was seen to have a great role of play in the building of a nation. This is because it acts as a ground where nation's brains are trained and profound researches are conducted, to enhance national development.

It is on these precepts that the Federal Government of Nigeria established the National Universities Commission and charged it, among other functions, with general over-seeing and ensuring the balanced development and growth of the universities in the country.

Ever since the commission's establishment, the administration of universities has witnessed some changes both positive and negative. The main intent of this presentation therefore is to examine the impact the Commission has made in some areas with particular references to:

Financing university education
 Maintenance of minimum academic standards
 Accreditation of courses.

Financing University Education

The Commission is the main channel for federal funds for university education. When the NUC was created, it became a mediator between the Federal Government and Federal Universities. It receives money directly from the Federal Government and disburses same according to the requirements of the universities as indicated in their approved annual budget.

₦7,507,664,829, broken down as follows:

| | | |
|------|---|-------------------------------|
| 1981 | - | ₦333,910,935 (₦333.9 million) |
| 1982 | - | ₦343,701,156 (₦343.7 million) |
| 1983 | - | ₦385,762,449 (₦385.7 million) |
| 1984 | - | ₦439,670,659 (₦439.6 million) |
| 1985 | - | ₦432,549,000 (₦432.5 million) |
| 1986 | - | ₦394,966,884 (₦394.9 million) |
| 1987 | - | ₦304,479,414 (₦304.4 million) |
| 1988 | - | ₦560,520,123 (₦560.5 million) |
| 1989 | - | ₦598,430,000 (₦598.4 million) |
| 1990 | - | ₦631,572,440 (₦631.5 million) |
| 1991 | - | ₦699,915,960 (₦699.9 million) |
| 1992 | - | ₦722,299,462 (₦722.2 million) |

**Plus 1988–1992 Supplementary allocation = ₦1,656,886,347
 (1.6 billion)**

From the figures above, one can attest to the fact that there were fluctuations and noticeable decrease in funds allocation from the period of 1985 - 1987. While the period of 1988 - 1992 showed slight steady increase. However Table 1 shows the capital and Recurrent Allocation to twenty-two federally funded universities for the year 1994.

| S/N | Institution | Main Capital Grant Allocation | Main Recurrent Grant Allocation |
|------------|------------------------|---|---|
| 1. | Ibadan | 28,800,000 | 248,282,481 |
| 2. | Lagos | 28,800,000 | 219,121,964 |
| 3. | Nsukka | 28,800,000 | 262,789,575 |
| 4. | Zaria | 28,800,000 | 272,177,238 |
| 5. | Ife(OAU) | 28,800,000 | 250,518,423 |
| 6. | Benin | 30,600,000 | 222,775,169 |
| 7. | Jos | 30,600,000 | 117,480,464 |
| 8. | Calabar | 30,600,000 | 116,480,464 |
| 9. | Kano | 30,600,000 | 99,139,046 |
| 10. | Maduguri | 30,600,000 | 117,671,660 |
| 11. | Sokoto | 30,600,000 | 70,616,075 |
| 12. | Ilorin | 30,600,000 | 155,128,058 |
| 13. | Port-Harcourt | 32,400,000 | 137,977,592 |
| 14. | Bauchi | 32,400,000 | 66,299,018 |
| 15. | Oweni | 32,400,000 | 48,611,610 |
| 16. | Akure | 32,400,000 | 38,316,202 |
| 17. | Minna | 32,400,000 | 54,789,673 |
| 18. | Yola | 32,400,000 | 40,923,868 |
| 19. | Abuja | 34,200,000 | 21,345,877 |
| 20. | Uyo | 30,600,000 | 90,134,170 |
| 21. | Akwa | 30,000,000 | 73,435,958 |
| 22. | Abuja Distant Learning | - | 14,892,895 |
| | | N 644,400,000 (N644.4 million) | N 2,778,725,899 (N2.7 billion) |

Source: National Universities Commission Annual Report 1994.

Information on the same report revealed that research grant allocation to these same universities (excluding Abuja distant learning) totaled N129,516,497 for 1994 fiscal year while a total of N429,600,000 was disbursed for teaching and research.

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It would be observed that in the disbursement of funds, the younger universities were given priority especially in capital allocations. This is to enable them carry out some long-term capital projects while the older universities received more funds for recurrent expenses. This might be as a result of number of staff, cost per student, the need to refurbish, repair and replace obsolete equipment, etc.

Generally, the tables and figures display a pathetic picture of a continuous proportionate decline in allocation on a yearly basis on each of the subheads especially the research grant to universities. It is expected that the federal government knowing that the technological development of the nation hinges greatly on the advancement of university education should appropriate more funds for research. It is through research activities that the academics account to society for the trust reposed in them to implement and improve the living standard of the citizenry. Nevertheless, the universities (especially the first generation universities) have enjoyed very good years as well as very bad years in terms of government financial support. Over the years, the universities finance has been affected by the state of the economy.

Apart from the pattern of funding being a function of economic down-turn, the increase over the years of the number of universities funded by the federal government and the population explosion of students are other contributing factors. The instability in financing these institutions has not made meaningful planning very easy in the system.

Minimum Academic Standard and Accreditation

It has been alleged that the Nigerian University system, noted for the quality of its products, is beginning to face subtle rejection or discrimination in some foreign universities with their insistence on entrance examination for its product before admission for higher degree programmes. Not only that the products cannot compete with their counterparts in other parts of the world because quality in university education has been compromised or sacrificed, the few available academic staff are over-stretched in an effort to teach, set curricula and meet standards. Programmes are duplicated across universities and

available funds are inadequate to meet the growing needs of both old and new universities.

Many writers (Ajayi, 1997; Ejiogu, 1997; Kabiru, 1998 and Mohammed, 1997) have expressed varying degrees of concern regarding the issue of quality, standards and excellence in our educational system especially, the university system. According to Adesina (Ajayi, 1997) the indicators for measuring the standards in education relate to availability and quality of the human resources for the educational system, the conditions under which students learn..., the nature of the physical facilities, the rich quality of the product of the educational system and the extent to which the product of the system can be productively used.

It is in line with the above considerations that the Federal Government challenged the NUC once more with the promulgation of Decree No. 16 of 1985 which was incorporated into the National Universities Commission Amendment Decree No. 49 of 1988, to ensure that graduates of our universities attain a minimum level of competence in their fields of study. The Commission was then mandated to draw up minimum academic standards for all disciplines in Nigerian universities. The minimum academic standards were in respect of course content, staffing (academic, technical and other supporting staff), equipment, space as well as a uniform application of the course system and grade point average. Minimum academic standard and the accreditation exercise, according to Fafunwa (1990), intend to profit the future generation of this country by ensuring that they attain a certain minimum level of competence in their academic pursuits so that they come out as productive and effective members of the society with enough background to make meaningful contributions to national development. The exercise was to eradicate intellectual mediocrity.

In the accreditation exercise, the NUC does not scrap university programme(s) rather it aims at identifying viable and unviable programmes and make appropriate recommendations to proprietors concerned. However, those found deficient would be up-graded in order to satisfy the required minimum standards. With this exercise, the centres of excellence would emerge and graduates of those universities would be more

accredited. For instance, the National Universities Commission accredit enrolment in universities by disciplines, staff/student ratios by disciplines, Science/Art ratios and the academic staff categories and their qualifications.

For the 1993/94 academic year, the total full-time enrolment by discipline in the Federally funded universities revealed that science programmes had the highest number of 41,504, that is, 20% of the total enrolment. Education and social sciences were second and third with 14% and 11.6% respectively. Pharmacy had 5,003 students representing 2.4%, while Veterinary medicine had the lowest number of students of 2,084 representing 1% (National Universities Commission 1994 annual report).

The global Science/Art ratio for all the indicated Federal Universities was 59.2:40.8. Table 2 below shows that a number of universities had actually attained or were almost approaching the national policy stipulation of 60:40 Science/Arts.

TABLE 2
SCIENCE/ARTS RATIOS FOR SIXTEEN
CONVENTIONAL FEDERAL UNIVERSITIES (1993/94
ACADEMIC YEAR)

| UNIVERSITY | SCIENCE/ARTS RATIOS |
|---------------|---------------------|
| IBADAN | 65.35 |
| LAGOS | 57.43 |
| NSUKKA | 57.43 |
| ZARIA | 60.40 |
| IFE (OAU) | 56.44 |
| BENIN | 63.37 |
| JOS | 45.55 |
| CALABAR | 59.41 |
| KANO | 54.46 |
| MADUGURI | 45.55 |
| SOKOTO | 49.51 |
| ILORIN | 49.51 |
| PORT-HARCOURT | 56.44 |
| UYO | 41.59 |
| AKWA | 49.51 |
| ABUJA | 29.71 |

Source: NUC Annual Report, 1994.

Below shows the mean staff/student ratios by discipline for the universities.

TABLE 3
MEAN STAFF/STUDENT RATIOS BY DISCIPLINES
FOR THE NIGERIAN FEDERALLY FUNDED
UNIVERSITIES (1993/94 ACADEMIC YEARS)

| DISCIPLINES | UNIVERSITIES ACTUAL | NUC GUIDELINE |
|-----------------|---------------------|------------------|
| ADMINISTRATION | 1.45 | 1.20 |
| AGRICULTURE | 1.13 | 1.9 |
| ARTS | 1.16 | 1.20 |
| EDUCATION | 1.29 | 1.24 |
| ENGINEERING | 1.21 | 1.9 |
| ENV. DESIGN | 1.17 | 1.10 |
| LAW | 1.30 | 1.20 |
| MEDICINE | 1.10 | 1.6 |
| PHARMACY | 1.14 | 1.10 |
| SCIENCES | 1.15 | 1.10 |
| SOCIAL SCIENCES | 1.21 | 1.20 |
| VET. MEDICINE | 1.7 | 1.6 |

Source: National Universities Commission Annual Report 1994.

The staff/student ratios computed for twenty-one federal universities show that none of the twelve major disciplines had met the NUC approved ratio. Eleven of the discipline had ratios less than approved ones, indicating of inadequate number of teaching staff and consequently, high workload for the available teachers. However, social science and veterinary medicine had almost attained the approved ratios. The Arts disciplines had an average of 1.16 instead of 1.20 as stipulated in the NUC guidelines.

The first comprehensive accreditation exercise was carried out for all programmes in all Nigerian universities between 1989 and 1991. The results of the exercise were released in 1992. Some programmes were given full accreditation, others interim accreditation, while yet others were denied accreditation. The cost implication for remedying the deficiencies found was reported to the respective proprietor governments (NUC, 1994). It is believed that if this instrument

is properly put in place, standards of all programmes would be ensured and the quality of university education guaranteed.

A Critique of the Role of the Commission

Looking at the roles of the National Universities Commission since its inception, one can truly say that, it has charted a new course in the coordination of the academic and physical development of the universities. With respect to programme development, it is worthy to acknowledge the achievements of the minimum academic standard approved for the various disciplines, especially for making the curricula more relevant to the Nigeria situation, and for reflecting the social, traditional, cultural and intellectual heritage of various areas in which our universities are located.

The NUC successfully provided the spiral arrangements by laying down the spiral arrangements

instrumental in most of the administrative problems faced by our universities. According to Ejiogu (1997), it is rather very discouraging that the federal government neither accepts the budgetary requests of the universities nor any of the recommendations of the -NUC which is set up to oversee the universities. The result of this reveals pitiable and abject situation of our Ivory towers. In our universities today, lectures are conducted in classrooms without desks and seats. No meaningful maintenance of facilities and equipment Adequate provisions are not made for lecturers to attend learned conferences both locally or internationally, etc. These situations call for urgent attention.

Problems of the National Universities Commission

The increase in the number of federal universities and the continuing demand for more, the establishment of several state universities and private universities and inadequate funds have been the biggest problems of the commission in terms of logistics.

In spite of the explosion in students' enrolment, there is no corresponding increase in facilities and qualified teaching staff. These problems have resulted to a decline in the quality of the products of the university system.

According to National Universities Commission annual report 1994, the first-generation universities were adequately funded because the number of universities and students enrolment were manageable. With the increase in students' enrolment, it is expected that the federal government would have complied with the recommendation made by the UNESCO that 25% of 'the annual budget should be allocated to the education sector. With so many universities and duplication of courses and the issue of rationalization of courses being treated as only an academic exercise by National Universities Commission and universities, the recourses available can only be sparsely distributed.

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Recommendations

To enhance the university education in this country, the Federal Government should:

1. Protect university autonomy and academic freedom the universities are demanding for.
2. Reduce the universities over reliance on government for financial support. To encourage this, there is need for National Universities Commission to see to the control and removal of certain bureaucratic bottlenecks that prevent the consultancy services rendered by these institutions from competing favourably with their counterparts in the labour market.
3. University education should be made more relevant to societal needs. The NUC should ensure that university curriculum emphasizes indigenous technology and cultural heritage.
4. The established National Science and Technology Fund (NSTF) as provided in the 1986 National Policy on Science and Technology, seems to be dying a natural death. It should be reactivated. This will ensure compliance with the recommended admission ratio 60:40 for Science to Arts based disciplines.
5. The laws establishing the universities and relevant bodies like the National Universities Commission, JAMB, need to be revisited and reviewed, and inconsistencies removed. At best in the case of inconsistency, one body must have overriding authority over the other.
6. Government alone cannot bear the financial burden of university education. The consistent inadequacy of facilities in the universities is still the primary cog in the wheel of educational advancement throughout the Nation. "Organised" private sectors should come to the aid of the government immediately, by providing research grants and establishing national endowment on science and Humanities.
7. Proliferation of universities with its under-funding and inadequate staffing is affecting the quality of our products adversely. It is the view of this discourse that

establishing any more universities will aggravate the situation. Instead, there should be a sincere nationalisation of the existing ones. This is because it is better to have fewer universities properly funded, well equipped and adequately staffed than parading some of our "glorious secondary schools" as universities. The National Universities Commission as the watch-dog of university education, should therefore remain resolute in enforcing all conditions laid down for opening new universities.

8. The under-funding of the universities, the obsolete and grossly inadequate teaching facilities, the ridiculous salaries of university professors and other members of university community should seriously be addressed. These, if sincerely carried out will go a long way to reduce to the barest minimum the attrition rate of teachers (brain-drain) and enhance university education in this country.

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