

Emerging Issues in Tertiary Education in Africa

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Background

Phew! Finally I am here. I am in Nigeria. A country I dreamt to visit a long time ago. I am impressed by the people of Nigeria and their rich culture; their kola nut and their languages. I never imagined that a simple meeting with Rev. Fr. Prof J. Obi Oguejiofor would actually bring me to Nigeria. I met Prof Obi at a conference on philosophy in Cotonou, Benin end of November 2017 and we talked about many things including the demise of Robert Mugabe who ruled Zimbabwe for 37 years, unfortunately (or fortunately), as Chinua Achebe would say, Things [fell] Apart for him. Many unimagined things had taken place in a short space of time in that Southern African country just that November. Another November has passed, comparably uneventful. Today, am happy to be here at Professor Ezenwa-Ohaeto Resource Centre's Maiden International Conference all the way from Zimbabwe to deliberate on emerging issues in tertiary education in Africa. There could not have been a more apt theme for this conference. It is a suitable theme in line with the Africa of today and how the tertiary education sector has been disturbed.

Introduction

The theme of this conference 'Emerging Trends' which I changed to 'Emerging Issues in Tertiary Education in Africa' is topical and inviting, yet, very difficult to disentangle. For a better appreciation of the demands of the theme, I have decided to begin this talk by attempting to define some key words.

The term ‘emerging’ is extremely fluid and cannot be contained in a nutshell unless a time frame is considered because ‘emerging issues’ are influenced by a shift of time and space. Indeed, we are all products of time and the change it brings. After all, Shakespeare says there is nothing as constant as change. Change will always be upon us and change we must.

Emerging issues in our case would largely refer to issues that shape higher education presently for the future, bearing in mind that if we must see the colour of our future we have to begin looking for it in the present. ‘Emerging issues’ encompass matters that are contemporary as well as old age issues that have created vicious cycles around Africa and its institutions of higher learning. Let me hasten to say that, this is not the first time that a conference has focused on ‘emerging issues’ and it will not be the last. There were emerging issues earlier, even in the 60s and in the 70s and successive decades, as shall be highlighted within this presentation.

Changes ushered in by history per decade have transfigured Africa utterly. W B Yeats, an Irish poet, in his ‘Easter 1916’ poem talking about Ireland says:

... Now and in time to be, Wherever green
is worn, Are changed, changed utterly: A
terrible beauty is born.

Emerging issues are like the law of gravity one cannot defy it. Emerging issues are therefore inevitable. Tertiary education in Africa has changed so much with time that we do not need to ask to be shown signs. Talking of signs, I am reminded of Julius Malema’s eulogy at Winnie Madikizela Mandela’s Funeral (Winnie Mandela was former wife to the late President of South Africa Nelson Mandela). Julius Malema is the leader of an

opposition political party in South Africa, the Economic Freedom Front. He gave a moving farewell speech as Winnie's political son saying 'some of the people that sold you out to apartheid are here mama. The funniest thing is that they are crying the loudest. Some of them are playing roles at the funeral of a person they called a criminal. You never told me how I should handle them when they showed up at your funeral. Give me a signal, give me a sign on what I should do. Tell us, or come back because we do not have answers on how to deal with them. For emerging issues in tertiary education in Africa we do not require any such signs, they are glaring.

Deliberating on emerging issues Nabudere's concern as quote in Nyawo-Shava (2013: 2), is that there is need to worry about the manner in which mainstream knowledge is produced, articulated, managed and applied to meet today's challenges. Nabudere observes that while it is true that in prehistory; knowledge production and application was equally a 'complicated affair', today it has become not only complicated but also complex, contested and increasingly unmanageable in many cases due to its fragmentation and incompatibility even within the same academic discipline. Nabudere says in some cases knowledge has become too 'dense' and undecipherable; in others, it has become problematic to code and decode or manage in new ways that can bring greater good to humanity as a whole in their environments and cultural contexts.

Ladies and gentlemen, for instance, the conference theme here concerns itself with tertiary institutions located in Africa, yet, Africa is a contested nomenclature. One wants to understand what Africa is beyond being a geographical entity. Is Africa a homogenous group of countries? The question to ask is 'Does Africa exist?' Yes and no! This conference concerns itself with

Africa in its existence and its non-existence. The touting of a 'United States of Africa' back then is an indication that there can be strong enough similarities across the continent to warrant the creation of one unit but perhaps the failure of the concept to take root so far is a sign that the size and diversity of Africa cannot allow for such a generalization. As evidence to why Africa cannot easily be put in one basket, colonial Africa was subjected to a potpourri of ideologies, languages and cultures and as a result, post independent Africa emerged with different kinds of wounds resulting in different levels of radicalism towards decolonization. In fact, the independence itself came at different times 'differently' (as some were negotiated while others were through armed struggles) pointing to a difference in experiences, national trajectories, maturity and development.

Africa, like any other continent, comes in geographical and economic regional packages and there are further groupings of a different nature within these regions. I am thinking here of different colonial legacies, varying levels of wealth, divergent development focuses etc which point to an Africa that cannot be put together by a click of a button. Against the foregoing, can 'emerging issues in Africa' therefore be similar from the north which is ripped apart by the Arab spring, to the south where military interventions have become rampant, from west where civil unrest and religious conflicts have robbed communities to the east from which the wise should come, from first generation institutions through to fourth generation and beyond? There are more questions to be asked than there are answers. However, in the same breath, there are areas where the fragmented parts of Africa converge. These are issues that have shaped the continent and continue to dictate the direction that it largely takes in terms of challenges, opportunities and prospects in tertiary education.

On a Historical Note

While some issues are regarded as emerging as a result of a new dawn, others have lingered for millennia and they continue to mutate and haunt the continent under different guises. This lingering effect is expressed even in Ayi Kwei Armah's 'The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born' where a new bus is ushered in but the driver and conductor remain the same old guard from the old bus and the same old corruption and decadence are carried over. In the melting pot of these issues are colonialism and coloniality; decolonization and decoloniality; globalization, Afrocentricity, new imperialism, internationalism, winds of change, gender dimensions, economic dictates and growing populations and so on. This complexion of Africa that I paint here, ladies and gentlemen, has been reflected by the tertiary education as well. African tertiary institutions and by extension the education they offer are, therefore, a microcosm of Africa as a continent. As a result, the quest to conform, match, surpass, rise, compete, outshine, survive, stay afloat, 'publish or perish' and expand within this afore mentioned environment has led all these delegates to Nnamdi Azikiwe University to come and talk about emerging issues in tertiary education in Africa. As Jonathan Jansen titles his book, *We Need to Talk* indeed we need to talk as Africa about emerging issues on the tertiary education front.

Elements that make Africa an entity shape the African tertiary institutions in a big way. To begin with, tertiary education institutions in Africa come in different generations up to the fourth so far. These generations, of both public and private institutions, are informed by pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial historical events and there have been emerging issues coming with each generation of these institutions. First generation tertiary institutions as recorded by Ashby (1961) were created to

produce an elite required for colonial administration. These were for instance, Fourah Bay College in Freetown, Sierra Leone 1827 established by the Church Missionary Society of London, University of Cape Town 1829 and Stellenbosch University 1866 of South Africa, University of Khartoum 1902, Cairo University 1908, University of Algeria 1909, Makerere University of Uganda 1922, Egerton University of Kenya 1939, University of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland in Lesotho 1945, University of Ghana 1948, University of Ibadan of Nigeria 1948, Addis Ababa University of Ethiopia 1950, University of Zimbabwe 1952.

Following a workshop in Ghana in 1973 led by the Association of African Universities (AAU) run under the theme 'Creating the African University: Emerging Issues in the 1970's, the dawn of second generation tertiary institutions was ushered (Yesufu, 1973). Second generation tertiary institutions had a mandate to overcome intellectual dependency that had prevailed within the first generation of institutions through hastening the Africanization of staff and curriculum reform to retain ownership and reclaim colonial institutions (Ki-Zerbo, 1973). By this time, several African countries had gotten their political independence. The institutions, among others, would be Ahmadu Bello University in Nigeria, University of Science and Technology in Ghana, University of Dares Salaam and University of Nairobi among others.

Third generation institutions of the 80s and 90s faced challenges of inadequate funding, increasing student population, limited infrastructure capacity, challenges of quality and relevance and massive brain drain and a lot of other vices according to the World Bank (2009). Examples would be Federal University of Technology of Owerri, Bauchi, Yola, etc and State

Universities in Imo, Lagos, Oyo, Cross-River, and so on (Anyamele, 2004).

The fourth generation coming around 2000 to-date was introduced to face new demands for trained manpower as well as new forms of training that match the economy. Africa started to play a role in the increasingly knowledge intensive economy prevailing. The acceleration of technology and new products methods have demanded that both students and faculty be highly trained to keep the momentum of the economy. Tertiary education has become central to the economy and the issue here has been how to measure up. The question to be asked is whether governments have braced themselves to capacitate institutions of higher learning with funding, space for autonomy and promote research and development. Under this group here in Nigeria I am talking of statistics by Okojie (2007) on Federal, State and Private universities and much more by now.

Because of increasing need to perform to satisfy the private sector and markets, tertiary education has grown to include colleges, universities, vocational institutions and training centers and numbers continue to grow if statistics by Varghese (2009) are anything to go by. This expansion has seen a movement from an extremely elite based education to some kind of massification of tertiary education in Africa, for instance from having only one university in Zimbabwe by the 50s to 17 universities by 2015. Competition for students and quality staff at this rate would see affirmative action being practiced on ethnic, gender, regional locations as well as rural and urban bases. Low admission requirements and flexible program schedules have become the order of the day in both public and private tertiary institutions rightly and wrongly so.

Programs have gotten so flexible as to allow students with Ordinary level qualifications to be admitted for a degree via bridging where normally only students with Advanced Level were taken up. Learning times have also been made friendly as students who are straight from school and have passed well learn during the day in the conventional mode, those who have not so good results from their secondary education learn in the evening in the parallel mode, those who are employed come at the weekends in the visiting mode and teachers who have to wait for school to close for them to come to college are enrolled in the bloc release mode.

While this flexibility ensures that institutions are active all the time, administration to see all these through with international standards could be a challenge. For the most part, the lecture-room practitioner is overburdened and their research time is compromised. Bottom line, tertiary institutions in Africa presently grapple with issues of quality and equity as the education expands and as some institutions eye money. With the mushrooming of tertiary institutions to meet demand, Africa has a challenge to practice due diligence to demonstrate quality and set national benchmarks linked to world class standards. How does a lecturer, for example balance teaching during the day, the night, at weekends, during holidays keeping in mind the ‘publish or perish’ mantra. The end result in most cases is short cuts.

Findings and discussions

Guided by history, we observe that agents of change which include governments, societies, international donors, financial institutions, market forces and globalization have dictated the direction taken by tertiary education in Africa differently in different times. As such, the changing role of education in the

society has dictated what is taught in any given historical epoch. I have mentioned earlier, that, colonial higher education was to produce the elite required for colonial administration as opposed to enlightening African societies, Ashby, 1961. The few higher education institutions created in colonies did not even have autonomous existence, they were extensions of universities in the metropolis. Curriculum composition, modules, lecturers, graduation approval, funding and support were dictated by the colonial authority. Damtew (2003) goes further to state that Africa is endowed with more than 2,011 languages but these have not penetrated the academia as media of instruction. Bottom line, this education was for a select few, for the purposes of assimilation in Francophones, divide and rule in Anglophones, something else in Lusophones, separate development in apartheid set ups and so on. In the Africa of today not much has changed in terms of the use of indigenous languages as media of instruction and this matter remains an issue of concern for tertiary institutions.

21st century is a different millennia with new demands. There is a push for expansion of higher education to shoulder growing demand for that kind of education and a nagging need for change of curricula to address African issues such as the so much needed economic growth, forging of African identity as well as sustainable development. For, instance, the drive to decolonize Africa is being spearheaded by institutions of higher learning among others. Decoloniality of knowledge, in the different areas of teaching as it were, has partially given tertiary institutions their new role. Tertiary education students have taken it upon themselves to conscientize the society on the vestiges of colonialism that still hang around Africa, am thinking here of the 'Rhodes must fall drive' launched by students in South African

universities. The Rhodes must fall hush-tag was an era of violent viral demonstrations by students to demand for the pulling down of statues of colonial figures strewn around South Africa and beyond. The drive extended to cover revision of curricula in colleges and universities in order to suit the needs of the recipient of today.

With all this history at the back of our minds, higher and tertiary education in Africa surely experiences insurmountable challenges from emerging issues of the century. From high demand for availability and access, for quality, for competitiveness coming from a historical space of lack and segregation, to research output that measure up to the yawning gap, funding, governance, information age demands, brain drain and many more.

Emerging knowledge-driven economy

The globe has embraced a new knowledge-driven economy as a source of the future wealth creation necessary to improve and sustain standard and quality of life. This knowledge-driven economy is based on the discovery and development of new ideas and their successful commercialization in the form of new products, services and processes. The knowledge-driven economy is powerfully facilitated by the information and communication technologies which have broken through conventional institutional and bureaucratic barriers to allow the rapid and effortless exchange of info within enterprises, among institutions and across national borders. It operates in the global arena. The limits and controls of political geography have been eroded. Tertiary institutions especially universities are strategically positioned to be pivotal in this new knowledge-driven economy because of their traditional roles in higher education and in

advancing the frontiers of knowledge and understanding. Africa's success now and in future is dependent upon generations of graduates and the new knowledge they produce. This economy depends on people with creative, synthetic and critical talents to meet international standards in both education and research.

Like in all other tertiary education set ups in Africa, Nigerian tertiary education must acquire and own knowledge for local use, groom human capital and promote acquisition on technical know-how in order to deal with intractable challenges in its education system. Reading from the Elliot Commission of 1943, to Ike (1976), to Ibukun (1997) to Okojie (2007) the history of the growth of tertiary education through the university is clearly documented showing fortunes and misfortunes. Offshoots of the endemic financial meltdown have compounded the crisis with low salaries, unemployment and infrastructure decay. Nigerian education is also riddled with cultism which is not very common in southern African tertiary institutions where I come from. Lives and property are in great danger from this vice according to Ogunbameru (2004) as well as Smah, (2007). Sadly, on the increase in southern African tertiary institutions are suicides going up to 10 students per year. Reasons for these suicides have largely revolved around matters of the heart, love that would have gone wrong and in most cases it has been male students dying because a staff member snatched their girlfriend. Even as I boarded a plane to this place (08/07/19) Chinhoyi University of Science and Technology was mourning one such loss.

Considering staff and student caliber

Ladies and gentlemen, one of the overriding challenges for higher education in Africa is to continue to attract the best minds and to provide the resources and environment which will allow them to

express their full potential. This, however, is not new. What is new is the scale which is now expected, the magnitude of resources required. There is increased demand for the number of players on the field and there is an intensification of competition for gifted human capital both faculty and students. To attract the best candidates in a porous and highly competitive market, tertiary institutions in Africa must ensure that their programs offer excellent training and research experience. Regrettably, many graduate programs fall short in terms of time to degree, successful completion rate, effective supervision, supporting funds, access to critical research resources such as computing power, government will power as well as broader exposure during training to other disciplines and career opportunities. As I speak to you now Zimbabwe is experiencing power outages, with electricity being made available between 11pm and 4am in a day and yet someone must still run a university. Two things justify the existence of tertiary education, ladies and gentlemen, creating knowledge as well as transmitting it. In other words, it is more critical today for tertiary institutions in Africa to justify why they should be funded.

Tertiary institutions are essential if Africa is to meet the broad range of human, social, scientific, environmental and other needs and to fulfill their missions. These institutions must engage the world through their scholars, their staff and their alumni. Through research, teaching and dissemination of knowledge these institutions help meet the needs of the society so that the institutions do not become ivory towers. This is why our faculty as well as students publish their researches and work with companies, civil society organizations, advocacy and public interest groups and other entities that have the capacity to effect positive and meaningful change on people. What is also emerging

is the expectation that tertiary institutions will augment their effectiveness in technology transfer in a way that truly contributes to wealth creation in Africa.

Tertiary institutions are expected to exude new levels of accountability to perform at international standards of excellence, to use efficiently substantial public funds to promote commercialization of the resulting international property. Governments must learn to give tertiary institutions space to be the best they can be, independent of external influence.

Internationalism

African universities need to establish more convincing collaborations with the international world if they must decolonize without creating unnecessary isolation that would need disentangling in the future. There is need for a balancing act between discovering and fulfilling an education that demonstrates African identity overcoming intellectual dependency and establishing international collaborations with other knowledge nodes across the globe. African tertiary education should do more research on African problems in collaboration with the rest of the world. The challenge in achieving this position is Africa's external dependence for financial resources which prevents governments from enjoying sovereignty in making public policies including in the education area.

The stick and carrot scenario that was expected to diminish through decolonization policies is likely to rise again in the time of China's belt and the road project. In 2003 in Zimbabwe, former President Mugabe pronounced that Zimbabwe was now looking east where the sun rises and turning its back on the west where the sun sets – this utterance got popularized as 'the Look East Policy.' As a result of that utterance, Chinese commodities

flooded Zimbabwean markets disturbing domestic products. Currently, through some presidential scheme Zimbabwe sends hundreds of students to Chinese colleges and universities every year and to resurgent Russia as well. There is a back and forth kind of dance that Africa is in that also sadly reflects on its education no doubt. We should not forget that once bitten twice shy.

The debate between humanities and sciences

Ladies and gentlemen, to do or not to do humanities is an old age debate. However, tertiary education still grapples with this debate with some institutions being accused of overproducing humanities graduates and ignoring other critical areas. In recent years in Zimbabwe, secondary education has attempted to channel students more towards science subjects for instance through what is called Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics program (STEM). While there are advantages in offering science oriented subjects, failure to offer History, for instance, would doom a country into repeating its mistakes. But again today, for example, most tertiary institutions are guilty of teaching more European history at the expense of African history. Africa is then left to deal, among other things, with curricula that are not of benefit to its recipients. There definitely is need to reform in content and methodology to promote inquiry, discovery, experimentation and creation of products. The need to stop teaching and let students learn cannot be over emphasized in any discipline.

Winds of change

There are many factors that continue to transform the playing field for tertiary institutions in Africa. One cannot down play the

rewriting of history as a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union as a superpower at the close of the 20th century. The Soviet Union and the United State of America as two competing superpowers had divided the globe into two hostile camps as they competed for markets and territory during the cold war. The demise of communist Soviet Union would create a gap that China has since moved in to fill making friends with especially Africa.

The coming on stage of China has been felt even in contemporary tertiary education. Colleges and universities have had to introduce the teaching of Mandarin in response to the massive influx of Chinese into Africa. They say for every move there is a reaction in the opposite direction. China's influence in Africa has not gone unnoticed by the west and the ripple effects have echoed in the education front. It remains to be seen how things will play out as the air gets stiffer and stiffer in the atmosphere with China tightening its grip on Africa while the west and America are getting more offended.

Conclusion

Chair, as I conclude, allow me to think aloud and ask; are there any shared heritages that bind African tertiary education together? What gains, losses and lessons have African education learnt as years turn into decades and decades into centuries and issues continue to emerge? If China through Sino-Africa projects shall lead in the economic arena in Africa what will that mean for Africa's education? What has been the impact of the introduction of Chinese taught in colleges and universities in Africa so far? How much has financial dependence destroyed Africa's attainment of socially and financially feasible educational policies?

Chair, one would expect that any post colonial challenges in Africa should have their solution in the African graduate of the first generation tertiary institutions. As Africa endures 21st century emerging issues, where is the first generation class of graduates? Are they not the ones at the top echelons of the third and fourth generation institutions? Are they not the ones putting draconian policies against a fellow African brother? Take for instance the so called publish or perish policy, a lecturer is expected to publish in international journals which do not care about local African content. When one publishes at home they risk their research being thrown out with artificial criticism such as: not peer reviewed, not in accredited journal, not in high impact, it is fly by night, predatory and on. Yet when research that should be particularly consumed in Africa is published in a different continent, those who are supposed to benefit from it suffer lack of connectivity, affiliation, computer resources and knowhow where accessing is concerned. There are more challenges trying to retrieve even one's work if it is published in a foreign journal. It is embarrassing when you fail to access your own research because you wanted to publish to avoid perishing.

Finally, what has been the role of tertiary education in Africa in expanding African knowledge? There is need for a continued re-positioning of tertiary education in Africa for it to continue to be relevant, competitive and beneficial to its recipients. Tertiary education will have different tasks and roles as a different Africa emerges. As I take my seat, it is my hope that conference papers to be presented here will respond to my questions and those of the delegates in attendance.

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