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## UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATORS AS ENDANGERED SPECIES: THE NIGERIA'S SITUATION

**K. A. Bakare**

Deputy Registrar, Obafemi Awolowo University Ile-Ife

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**ABSTRACT:** *In Nigeria, most organizations like the Nigeria's Football Federation could boast of abundance of talents but lack **managerial skills**. There is the consensus that the main problem of Nigeria's football is administration; the maladministration, the in-fighting, the lack of synergy between the 'backroom' experts and the field experts. This invariably led to the inability to entrench proper structures and logistics to ensure that the nation occupies its rightful place on the footballing map. Furthermore, it shows how important **administration** is in any setup. In the music space, the maverick afro music maestro, Fela Anikulapo-Kuti once expressed the commonplace sentiment in Nigerian polity through his song captioned 'Suffering and Smiling', reflecting the difference between **appearance** and **reality**. An Igbo adage also states that; "The way the kolanut sounds is not the way it tastes." The place of the Nigerian Universities' Administrators could best be described in this mold and with this ominous contradiction where the outside smiles and the inside weeps. The picture of a suave, well-clad university Administrator behind a big and polished table cut a picture of a self-satisfied policy implementer, while in actual fact, this is a professional whom by his action or inaction is fast becoming a relic by ceding qualities and powers he once possessed. It is a story of a system that needs revamping as evidences abound to show that the system has ruptured across all known cleavages. This paper calls into question, the nature of the administrative process and functionaries in Nigerian universities, taking into consideration the actual role performance vis-à-vis the role expectation as it affects the achievement of university's goals and objectives. In doing this, the place of the administrator in the university is probed and examined in the background of factors militating against his continuing relevance and existence. It concludes by examining the concept of endangerment in Nigerian universities and how it has affected every facet of the system.*

**KEYWORDS:** university, administrators, endangered species, Nigeria's situation

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### INTRODUCTION

WRITING in the *Journal of the World Universities Forum*, Jandhyala B. G. Tilak traced the diachrony of the university through the ancient and medieval periods to the present. In all, the development of the university spanned through five generations starting from the ancient to the new millennium, the present generation, when the concept of the university had become majorly warped by definition, nature, mission and functioning. He set out to specify ways to recover the original concept as, left in the present state, the university appears endangered.<sup>1</sup>

In Nigeria, the concept of the university came into being with the establishment of the University College Ibadan (UCI) in 1948, which was an affiliate of the University of London. The Ashby

Commission set up in 1959 was given the mandate to advise on the higher education needs of a newly-emerging independent nation, and in its report, regional universities were suggested in addition to the UCI, which had claimed a federal status. Thus, the University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University) in the Western Region, Ahmadu Bello University in the Northern Region, and University of Lagos, were all established in 1962, with the latter established as a Federal institution. Prior to 1962, another university had been established in the Eastern Region in 1960 before the release and implementation of the Ashby Commission's report, hence ensuring the establishment of universities in the three regions of Nigeria, in addition to two federal universities.<sup>2</sup> Presently, the nation can boast of over 100 universities with federal, state and private ownerships.<sup>3</sup> It is a known fact that universities in Nigeria today are more of crisis management centres confronted by myriads of challenges which threaten their very existence. The administrator, as a facilitator in the complex university organization is key to the realization of its goals and objectives. Unfortunately, rather than becoming a solution to the challenge of the endangered university, he has become instead, limited in his scope and service delivery, due to factors that we shall mention in the next part of the paper.

Going by the *Endangered Species Act (ESA)* in the United States, species that have aesthetic, ecological, educational, historical, recreational and scientific value to the nation should be preserved and protected. By this, it means that if the value of such specie cannot be calculated, it should be protected *'whatever the cost'*.<sup>4</sup> As facilitators of the administrative process in the university system in Nigeria, can we really aver that our values and usefulness are so invaluable that the system cannot afford to do without us? In the midst of the ocean of serial antagonism and myriads of challenges from the academic community and the system, can we and do we still have the capacity to prop up the system and soar above the generalist concept of the job and become professionals conforming to defining ethics and ethical orientation? All these we should address in the next few pages.

## JUSTIFICATION

By now, our version of reality (VOR) is made explicit with respect to the features that have endangered the administrative class in our universities. To start with it is worrisome to admit that taken together, all these identified minuses have negatively affected the administrative setup in the universities fomenting black market options over authentic intelligence. The university idea in this part of the world has been subjected to multifarious interpretations and colorations. It was never accepted but only tolerated; which explains why what is taken as issues in this clime becomes a non-issue in western universities. We have been able to show that **administration** understood as a set of rules, laws and regulations is driven by **leadership variables**<sup>5</sup> in ensuring efficiency and effectiveness in an organization. Our intent is to underline the centripetal features affecting university administration in Nigeria with the hope of forcing a redress from the principal actors so as to restore enduring structures in our universities and soar above cultural configurations and ego trips that had led to system failure in our universities. Thus, we have attempted to promote a new hypothesis, which is that universities thrive only when each and every part work together like a well-oiled machine. By serializing the defective features in our universities which are primarily relational, we posit that humanistic theory like the LMX (Leader-Member Exchange) theory<sup>6</sup>

would stand the universities in good stead because of its liberal, democratic and participatory nature and the motivating aspect. In order to have a working university, the pros and cons must work together towards achieving a common target, in this case, the mission and vision of the knowledge factories in the Nigerian polity. The **significance of the study** therefore, stresses, not the failure of the workings of the universities for its sake, but the failures as correctional, to achieve strings of success so as to be at par with other western universities. It is not right to keep doing same thing same way and expect a different result. To break new grounds, new moves, new steps, and new modes of thinking should be cultivated to improve general understanding, change concepts and promote new hypotheses for the overall well-being of university administration. Though contributions have been paltry in this direction, the issue of endangerment of this set of professionals had been a discourse of concern over time even if not expressly stated. Seminal writers like Professor Adeniyi<sup>7</sup> and Andre Spicer<sup>8</sup> had in the past dwelt on centripetal and centrifugal issues on university administration and how these have affected our status as universities, but to a large extent the emphasis had always been on institutional identity and not on individual identity. It therefore appears apt at this juncture to alert about the dangers inherent in **‘not doing things right’** and **‘not doing the right things’** in our universities in Nigeria over time especially as it concerns a set of professionals in the system. In the final analysis, in order to achieve results (effectiveness) and to achieve results within the shortest possible time (efficiency), it is only relevant to recruit the right people, do the right things, create the right environment and treat people right, so as to be able to carry out research independently, make the product of research available, maintain independence from outside interference and be able to speak the truth to power (university autonomy). It is only when we have attained this height that we can confidently subvert endangerment of all class of staff and the university concept.

## **UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATION: THE CENTRE AND THE MARGIN**

### **(a) Mutual Mistrust**

The university is designed for teaching, research and community service. It is for the purpose of transferring knowledge, acquiring knowledge and marketing knowledge. The staffers are divided into two broad categories, namely teaching and non-teaching. The two groups are supposedly, partners or bedmates, working towards the realization of the university set goals and objectives. The administration of the university is mostly centered around the Governing Council, Senate, Faculties/Departments/Units for academic decisions, and Registry, Bursary, Library and Maintenance unit for supportive functions. In other words, on the one hand, there are the educators, while on the other, we have the bureaucrats offering all necessary support for the good of the system. In all, the relationship between these two classes is marked by inherent tension and condescension that often-times, heat up the polity. The teachers who see themselves as more relevant as a result of their calling, at times, tend to be arrogant and high-nosed, and go about with airs. The bureaucrats, whose duty is to prop up the system spend more time identifying areas of inequalities between him and the educators, and will not hesitate to unionize his interest. Professor Peter O. Adeniyi said it all when he described the *‘tom and jerry’* relationship between the university teachers and the administrative class thus:

*“In the beginning, all university staffers were one and treated each other with respect. Today especially in Nigeria, the academic staffs have largely operated in isolation of the other staff, and in reaction, other staff fought and got an identity, thus leading to fractionalization; unhealthy rivalry; over-unionized polity and industrial disharmony at the slightest provocations.”<sup>9</sup>*

Skewed government policies showing obvious partisanship favoring the teaching class often aggravate the relationship as disparity in salaries and threats of retrenchment or downsizing act as salt to spite the wounds. Also, the administrator is aware that mainly, all the key policy-making positions are occupied by the academic, hence, the saying that when handed the hoe, even a madman will hoe towards himself. The matter is made worse when the Vice-Chancellor who is administrative head and primarily, an educator, is seen as taking side with the academic and wielding the big stick to curry the favour of members of his class. Coupled with this is the belief in certain academic quarters that though universities had been growing for long, the growth had been mainly in the area of university administration rather than in academic units. It was touted that massive expansion in administration had equally encouraged expansion in what they called **empty administration** or **bullshit jobs** thus, deflecting from the real business of universities i.e. teaching, research and community service. According to Spencer,

*“In the UK, two thirds of universities now have more administrators than they do faculty staff. One higher education policy expert has predicted the birth of the ‘all-administrative university’”<sup>10</sup>*

Eutaxy. A system works on the principle of complementarity. In an organization, every worker is important. The functionality of the workforce is determined by the overall contributions of all, be you higher, middle or lower level. No class is subservient to another. To affirm that one class is subservient to another is demoralizing. It fosters unhealthy rivalry. In this precarious situation, having been battered from all sides, the bureaucrat feels estranged, insecure, marginalized and endangered.

### **Academic Bloat in Administrative Setup**

The growing number and influence of academic staff in administrative processes is also a matter for concern. The committee system adopted by the university enterprise though largely effective, is equally complex and cumbersome at some levels thus slowing down the decision-making process and requires large capital to maintain. More importantly, it has become virtually impossible to draw a distinct line between administrative and academic activities in some instances. This gives rise to the issue of academic administrators where academic members of staff are *“appointed for various administrative positions simultaneously.”<sup>11</sup>* The dehydration of the administrative class was best captured in this statement:

*“...the non-teaching staff members have become weaker and more routinized than ever before. The observed weakness has led to the gradual taking over of several of their duties by the academic staff; unfortunately to the under achievement of both leading to the poor performance of the system.”<sup>12</sup>*

The Provost, Deans, Heads of Departments, and Chairman, Committee of Deans are senior academic staff whose primary responsibilities should be teaching and research, but who are entrusted with administrative responsibilities. Beyond this however, there are instances where similar appointments have threatened to elicit strife between the academic and the administrative classes. In some universities in Nigeria, appointments of heads to offices like Students' Affairs, Academic Affairs, Admissions and others had been a touchy affair in the past, especially when such appointments were taken away from the control of administrators and given to senior academic staff to man. The administrative class viewed this as an affront, a usurpation of functions and deliberate attempt to push them out of relevance. It is the belief of the average university administrator that the academic class is in constant rivalry with him such that at every given opportunity, it attempts to undermine his functions and erode his relevance. On his own part, the 'hard-wired' academic believes that the administrators are careerists and pseudo-managers who downplay the importance of teaching and research.

At a higher level, it has been argued that the introduction and proliferation of the offices of Deputy Vice-Chancellor was a deliberate attempt to erode the powers of the Registrar, who in the past was second in hierarchy only to the Vice-Chancellor. The dearth of best practices in academic purview was also advanced as one of the reasons why administrative responsibilities should be exclusively left for administrators to manage. Apart from the fact that teachers appointed to take charge of administrative positions no longer have time to devote themselves to teaching and research, the Professors who have got to the peak of their profession deliberately and lackadaisically relinquish their responsibilities by refusing to 'profess', claiming that they have paid their dues to the system and will duly mark time and take a rest. It is argued that such people cannot be drafted to take charge of administrative activities as they are not 'professionally' qualified in the first place. This position is aptly stated by the Senate of a Nigerian university, at its Special meeting held on 15<sup>th</sup> November, 2004 thus:

*“Senate noted with great concern the allegation that many Professors hardly conduct any research, publish any paper in external journal or hardly supervise postgraduate programme, and DECIDED to refer this to the Appointments and Promotions Committee for verification.”*

Algo D. Henderson in one of his books opined that until about a century ago, the responsibility of running universities were entrusted upon religious leaders. He noted that this trend was changed because it is believed that academic scholars with intellectual interest and a knack for academic freedom would make better alternatives, but that this had been proven to the contrary in recent times, as:

*“A man trained in the arts or sciences will probably have these values, but he may not have developed the skills necessary to administer an institution or assume the role as an educational leader.”<sup>13</sup>*

In the extreme, it may be argued that academics have no business in administration as the case was in a university in the United States where a business mogul was appointed to manage the university as Vice-Chancellor.

### **Unifamily/Unifellowship**

At the inception of most of the universities in Nigeria, it was believed that the academic class should 'naturally' comprise of the '*best brains*' cerebral staffers, while the administrative and other classes should constitute the second fiddles. In those days, there were the unwritten laws about recruitment of these two classes, especially when staffers were being lured from overseas university to form the foundations of the newly established Nigerian universities. In the seventies and until very recently when brainy administrators who could hold their own in any society had emerged, the belief and indeed, the practice was usually to invite male lecturers from overseas universities to take up appointments in Nigeria, while giving the graduate spouses of such lecturers 'automatic' appointments as administrative staffs. At a point, the administrative profession was being overrun by the female gender that it would be considered as unthinkable to have a male Registrar. In addition, it was the tacit code that a fresh graduate with a first class or second class upper is only good for a lecturing job, while those with lesser classes of degree could only be absorbed by the '*all-comers*' administrative profession. Thus, in order to keep families intact, the new universities ensured that jobs were reserved for both the husband and the wife, in '*unifamily and unifellowship*' settings. Hence, in the long run, what we have are situations where university businesses are done and perfected in the homes, and as extension, in clubs, churches, societies and the likes. The principle of meritocracy which formed the foundations of the university is therefore compromised for patronage and interpersonal fraternities.

### **Upturned Organogram**

In the beginning there was order. The management team of the universities at their inception was distinctly structured along strict and clear responsibilities that do not conflict with those of the other officers. In that pattern, the Vice-Chancellor was at the apex of the ruling clan, followed by the Registrar, the University Librarian, and the Bursar in that order. As time goes on, new developments set in. Functions were 'replicated' and responsibilities quadrupled. One may argue that this became inevitable as a result of increase in intake of students who are our primary clients, and consequently, increase in the number of staff employed and of course, the functions and tasks to be performed. Whatever might have informed the change in the organogram that used to be the pattern, the structure at a point, changed drastically as new principal officers were interpolated and administrative functions shared or duplicated to warrant the inclusion of Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Administration) and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) in the organogram and above the Registrar in hierarchy. Or at least, their offices feature before that of the Registrar in the structure. In other universities, three Deputy Vice-Chancellors positions were introduced up and above the Registrar, i.e. Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academics), Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Management Services) and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research Technology and Innovation). University of Ilorin is an example. Whatever one may say, the fact remains that their introduction at a particular point in time was seen in some quarters as political moves rather than as necessary establishments; a usurpation, a reductionist act and an endangerment to the administrative class.

### **CVC/ARNU Fraternities**

The CVC (Committee of Vice-Chancellor) is the highest and by far the only umbrella body that exist in Nigeria for Vice-Chancellors in Nigerian universities. Over the years, this association has been able to garner immense power and influence, and has been at the vanguard of policy formulation and policy change for its members. Of course, its immediate concern is the academic class. But the image of the association is not at its best even among the academic class. While quite a number of academics (especially the hardwired ASUU academics) and non-teaching see them as a group of self-serving Professors, others see them as a necessary stop-gap between the Federal Government, the National Universities Commission and the universities. In all, they have been able to achieve things and negotiate for the academic class in government circles. However, the same statement could not be made for ARNU (Association of Registrars in Nigerian Universities). The image of this apex association for the administrative class is not very complimentary. It is the image of a group of administrative glitterati whose impacts are not felt in the administrative circles. It is either that they do not deliberate or proffer solutions to emergent challenges on the job or formulate workable policies, or that they do not publicize whatever it was they have been able to achieve over the years. There is an obvious gap, a lacuna, between the Chief Executives and the minors who prefer to align more with their unions than bother about the high-up officers who to them are merely grandstanding, especially, as they feel the usual mistrust and hostilities of the CVC towards any policy that might benefit the non-teaching class. The highest body of the administrative class is not seen as functional or relevant by the generality of the administrators. Thus, the profession is endangered and needs re-armament and re-alignment.

### **Professionalism**

In the present day Nigeria, an average university administrator is not a 'professional' administrator. He is recruited into the system and is expected to learn on the job. It is believed that the university education has equipped him with the basic skills needed to function effectively as an administrator, and that the secondary skills will be acquired with experience. This is so because of the diverse nature of the job. The skills expected from an administrator differ depending on the office, section or unit he serves. An administrator working in Central Administration for instance will need to internalize the modes and manners of the job in this place, the structure and cadence of its minutes, the ways to service the committees and sub-committees, what to do, when to do them and how to deliver the services. The case is not different in the Students' Welfare, Staff Welfare, Faculties/Departments/Units etc. The terms of reference are different from one section to another and can only be learnt on the job. Having said that, it is also important to note that the acquisition of professional acumen is significant and becomes inevitable if one wants to function effectively in the system. To be a 21<sup>st</sup> century administrator requires more than limiting oneself to performing routinized paediatrics. One needs to acquire modern skills that will keep one abreast of new trends in the profession and make one achieve and maintain the gold standard of practice. The ethics of the job should be internalized. The generalist myth that peddles the misconception that the job is for all-comers should be discouraged as it has become highly challenging and competitive and has got to the stage where your being sustained on the job depends on how versatile and conversant you are. Unfortunately, most administrators are still asleep and are contented with drawing their regular salaries, living from paychecks to paychecks. In view of the prevailing financial crunch in the system, each university might soon start seeing the need to offload the dregs, re-structure and

downsize to be able to keep the system vibrant. Thus, the job of a static administrator is put on line and he is endangered.

### **Lack of Succession Plan**

Mentoring is meant to bridge the gap between the outgoing generation and the new generation. It is to ensure the steady supply of quality services and enhance service delivery. In our universities in Nigeria, little attention is paid to mentoring. In a nutshell, it has become the legendary eagle that has the potential to fly to the top of the *Iroko* tree but cannot, due to the heavy meal it ingested. Effective mentoring has eluded the system because of the shoddy nature of recruitment in some universities. In recruiting some staff, merit was not considered. Most administrators got enrolled into the system through the backdoor, courtesy of their godfathers, godmothers, and church affiliations. Proper tests and interviews were not conducted to ascertain basic competence level. Some were invited for interviews just to 'show face', while some others received their appointment letters at home. As a result, some administrators are in the system who cannot write a simple and coherent expression of English. How does one reconcile this especially when the same language is the primary tool of communication in the profession? Mentoring programmes are not designed to address grammatical inadequacies, but to impart competence and bridge generational gaps. The importance of mentoring cannot be overemphasized, especially as it is meant to replicate excellence, job ethics and best practice. However, in the absence of a solid mentoring programme in the universities, it may be difficult to build and maintain quality staff as the old class of consummate bureaucrats is fast disappearing. The administrative profession is being endangered by this avoidable inadequacy.

### **Complacency of The Mandarins**

The high-up Ivy League administrative class, the staff usually referred to as **the mandarins**, are too insulated and high-nosed to midwife effective service delivery. They display high level of complacency, and are satisfied in being rooted in the daily routines of their offices, not minding to change or challenge 'the established order.' For them things are and should remain what they are as long as benefits and emoluments are not affected. In many instances, they would rather keep mute than stand up for what is right, and are certainly not the ones to assert the interest of the 'cheated' subordinates. As a result, a vibrant, young administrator who has good ideas that can advance the cause of the university knows that his superiors would naturally balk or antagonize him when there arises an opportunity to proffer or suggest solutions. He would keep shut and die with his ideas because he knows fully well that his boss would rebuff him by saying '*wait-for-your turn*'. The obvious failure of leadership had dug a lacuna between the leaders and the followers such that the followers see most of the high-up bureaucrats as nothing but **glorified domestic servants** especially in relations to their academic bosses and counterparts.

### **Ivy League Administrators and their Staff Union**

Staff unions in the universities naturally advance the causes and concerns of their members. This is in addition to their demands on adequate funding for the system, university autonomy, and of course, the salary and conditions of service of members. No doubt, welfare issues as they concern members form the major parts of their demands.



The Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities (SSANU) is the umbrella body for administrators and senior administrators in Nigerian universities. Over the years, it has championed and has successfully impacted on the lives of its members, while at the same time, has managed to maintain a level of cordiality with the management of each university. This is so because of the policy maintained by its national body which is non-confrontational, but firm. However, as a result of the level of understanding of leaders of the union in several universities, the senior administrative members of the union are always treated with suspicion. They are oftentimes regarded as ‘management staff’ bereft of fundamental freedom of expression or alignment. It is believed that at their level, they dare not antagonize or be seen to speak against management policy, even when such policy is against their interest. The union therefore, sees them as blacklegs and boot-lickers whose primary devotion is to management, and who, despite being financial members, are not to be trusted. Alternately, management is quick to wield the big stick on any divergent senior administrative staff that conspicuously aligns with the union, and bring them to ‘order.’ In essence, the senior administrative staff is threatened and endangered on both sides, and the union is not enthusiastic to protect his interest whenever the need arises, because he is seen as a potential betrayer and a ‘traitor.’ He is therefore, dumped between the devil and the deep blue sea.

Adjunct to this is the diverse posture and approach to issues bordering on staff welfare between the two major staff unions that cater for the interest of the non-teaching class, that is, the Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities (SSANU) and its counterpart, the Non Academic Staff Union (NASU). The former, (SSANU), which is a breakaway subset from the latter, has over time been viewed as a passive group when it comes to the issue of solving welfare matters as they affect its members. At most times and in many universities in Nigeria, its ‘*maturity*’ posture which tends to be non-confrontational towards the ‘*headlong*’ stance of management runs at cross-purpose with NASU’s firmness and ‘*militancy*’. The classes of the workforce that make up its members are divergent, spanning across the university Drivers, Chief Clerical Officers, Chief Typists, to the professionals like Senior Administrators, Accountants, Technicians and other high-up professionals. In essence, their interests, mode of thinking and approach to issues differ and are as divergent as their classes. This in most instance, constitute a brickwall and prevents a unified vision and approach to solving labour matters. This is unlike their NASU counterpart which comprises of workers of ‘lowly’ status. Thus, while NASU members apprehend issues together and with singleness of purpose because it contains people of like minds who are confrontational and non-conformist when they deem it fit, SSANU members think and act along multitudinous and tangential lines. This crack in the ‘senior’ body only encourages lack of stability, apathy and sometimes, migration of its members from SSANU to NASU. Hence, the endangerment and marginalization of not only the Administrators but other senior members of the workforce is complemented.

### **Unaccomplished Facilitators**

In her article captioned ‘*Why I Am Dropping Out of Administration*’,<sup>14</sup> Carol J. Pardun in a plangent tune, recalled how for hours she was compelled to facilitate limitless opportunities for

the academic counterparts to achieve their dreams. She observed that having spent eight years in administration, she has actually achieved less in the area of self-development, and that his man hours were dedicated to making others realize their goals and dreams at a steep cost. Practically, the university administrator carries the university on his back throughout his service years and is never off duty. His handset is perpetually on to receive calls from clients and superiors at any hour. He is constantly engaged in a battle with his table sorting out the stream of documents that need urgent and immediate attentions and that oftentimes might result to personal and corporate embarrassment if not treated at the appropriate time. While his academic counterpart is granted juicy opportunities to lure him to intellectual self-development at a cost to the university, the administrator is condemned to signing documents, approving unseen funds, clerking committees, vetting results, etc. He is under the illusion of being a leader while his daily chores preclude leading but serving for others to enjoy. And for all his troubles, he gets more knocks in the course of duty, as his bosses get commended when things go right, while he gets condemned when things go wrong. In all, the costs and sacrifice for him far outweighs the benefits. In recent times, the outlook of the job is becoming less attractive to the young generation, and interest in the job may decline under an improved economy.

### **Self-Mismanagement**

The **university idea** is not alien to Africa. The earliest universities in history were set up in Africa, and were established between 13<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, i.e. Al Azhar University in Cairo, Kairouine University in Fez and Sankore University in Timbuktu in the defunct Songhai Empire comprising parts of Nigeria, Niger and Mali.<sup>15</sup> However, despite its long history, the university idea is not accepted in Africa. Rather, it is **tolerated**.<sup>16</sup> This explains why some ideas alien to the university system are imported into the scholarly arena. The present-day university in Nigeria is culturally configurated, hence insistence on merit which should form the foundation of universities have been greatly compromised. In turn, this has affected the three-pronged functions of the University namely; to generate knowledge, to convey knowledge and to market knowledge. The marketing aspect of the idea is weak and in most cases, nonexistent, as most universities still depend on government's dwindling subventions to survive. In the middle of this drama are the multi-tasking University Administrators who are meant to manage the University in all ramifications. They manage their tables, manage their bosses, manage their subordinates, manage their families but stop short at managing themselves. It is no longer new to hear stories of Administrators who break down in their workplaces. Most of them take the pressures of work without bothering to exact commensurate reprieve health-wise. Annual leaves are accumulated, useful time spent in the office, weekends spent in the office and less time spent with families and friends. To make matters worse, these professionals seldom take time off to do a regular check of their health status and as a result end up with degenerative diseases like hypertension, diabetes and stroke.

### **Inappropriate Bureaucracy**

The depreciation of standards among the bureaucratic class in Nigerian universities if not checked, would bring about quick and imminent fossilization. The Nigerian system has over the years, reified history as the term '*bureaucracy*' in itself has a pejorative connotation right from inception. Etymologically, the word is a combination of the French, *bureau* (desk or office) and the Greek

*kratos*, which literally means rule or power. The word, which was coined in the 18<sup>th</sup> century by the French economist Jaques Claude Marie Vincent de Gournay was portrayed as an **illness** that has plagued the administrative polity in France of that era. It was viewed as a form of **office tyranny** by the British novelist Lady Morgan, and one ‘*with an opprobrious connotation*’ by Austrian economist Ludwig von Mises. It should however be noted that though with negative root, bureaucracy in recent times, has gained favorable interpretations from theorists like Max Weber, Woodrow Wilson, *et al* who viewed organized hierarchies as veritable tools for human management especially with regards to **maintaining order, maximizing efficiency and eliminating favoritism**.<sup>17</sup>

In recent times, bureaucracy has gradually de-robed itself of these three key elements. Evidence abounds in ancient civilizations of the attempt to ensure standards and enshrine efficiency. The Byzantine Empire which broke away from the Roman Empire, developed a complex and elaborate administrative hierarchy which led to socio-economic stagnation and a *cul-de-sac*. However, in ancient China, the Song dynasty instituted a reform which held competitive examinations for applicants to various administrative positions. What became known as **Chinese Imperial Examination** gained in-roads into Her Majesty’s Civil Service through the Northcote-Trevelyan Report which in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, recommended that:

*“recruitment should be on the basis of merit determined through competitive examination; candidates should have a solid general education to enable inter-departmental transfers; and promotion should be through achievement, rather than preferment, patronage or purchase”*.<sup>18</sup>

Rather than following these templates, most Nigerian universities based recruitment and advancement in the system on **filial arrangements, church affiliations** and other forms of **patronage**. As a result, ethics and supervision were compromised, **godfatherism** enthroned, and workers give primary allegiance to their patrons rather than to the system; thus encouraging **personality cults** and **bootlicking**, what is known in local parlance as **eye service**. Even in places where exams were arranged, the veracity of the results that emanated from such exams was subject to doubts. Hence, the decline in overall standards of the profession, and the apathy that came to being as a result of lack of equity in the system could lead towards only one direction: fossilization.

### **Neo-Tarzanist Restrictions**

The administrative profession is an honorable profession. It is a profession laden with fineries, attitudes and etiquettes dating back to years. It is a gentleman’s profession. However, through the years, the finesse, power and attitudes had become retarded, effete and irrelevant to modern thoughts and discourse mostly as a result of increased democratization of the contemporary spirit. One could find such spirit in the **support staff** concept in Nigerian university workspace. The categorization of the workforce to **main staff** and **support staff** had gone a long way in setting clear-cut boundaries along the lines of ‘**who is more relevant to the university than the other**’ in Nigerian universities. In some other universities overseas, this distinction may not be ‘a big deal’. But in a place like Nigeria where people enjoy **ego trips**, it is a big deal. The administrative workforce is a class comprising of the support staff. For the **hardwired academic**, this is enough

to declare the administrators as less relevant to the university concept, less important, commonplace and dispensable. To him, the university is set up for **knowledge generation** through **research**, **knowledge dissemination** through **teaching** and **knowledge application** through **community service**. The administrative staff is not found in this triadic angle, hence, he is irrelevant. Period.

The idea of a support being less irrelevant and inferior to the main has generated controversies over time. It is incontrovertible to state that the mainstream is important, but the support of any phenomenon is equally as important as the main. The legs of the chair are the supports of the chair. A chair without legs cannot be called a chair and would be less useful as a chair. A vehicle without the body and the tires cannot be called a vehicle. Hence, a stand-alone engine does not make a vehicle. Therefore, the support is equally as important as the main, because from the support, the main derives its relevance, its completion, and its full definition.

The '**write, don't think ...**' syndrome foisted on the administrator is one of such examples where **secretaries are to be seen and not to be heard**.

### **De-compartmentalization of Functions**

A new trend is taking over in the present-day Nigerian universities, most especially, in private universities across the nation. The practice, which may be termed **job pooling** is the practice of using minimum manpower to achieve maximum goals. It is the act of using single individuals to perform both academic and administrative functions in the universities. An individual is being made to wear two caps, first, as an academic staff, then, as an administrative staff. These set of people are different from the **Academic Administrators** who, though are full time academic members of staff, but are made to perform functions that are administrative on part-time basis. In this instance the individual performs administrative and academic functions **on full time basis**. It is therefore, not unusual to find a member of staff doubling as '*Dr...so and so, Senior Lecturer, Department of English, and Senior Assistant Registrar, Senate Office...*' In other private universities however, the preference is to have a **shared registry**, where members of administrative staff are drafted from time to time to perform various functions in different offices as the need arises. This is different from attaching administrators to fixed offices to perform fixed schedules for a period of time. Rather, it is making use of them in various offices at various times as the occasion demands. As a result, the number of administrators on ground is greatly reduced as a limited number of people are made to perform a great number of jobs at different offices and at different times. This displays the height of multitasking. It also underlines the reality of a reduced workforce. Simply put, it is more job for less people leaving more administrators with slim chances to get employed. This practice could be seen as the advent of the **lean thinking theory** in university administration.

### **Virtual Administration**

For the University Administrator in Nigeria, the future is viewed with apprehensions. The onerous factor that endangers them is technology in the form of digitization. The merit of new inventions in the turn of the century has introduced speed, accuracy, precision and neatness into the performance of administrative duties, and has thus enhanced efficient service delivery. More

importantly, it is gradually rendering some professional cadres reductive and dispensable. The secretarial cadre falls in this category as every professional administrator is fast becoming proficient in typing owing to the over-simplification of typing functions by the computer. The paperless space which is being canvassed in most of the institutions is a future state that would ultimately enthrone a thoroughly virtual environment and would introduce a sharp reduction in the number of manpower presence in our universities. A scenario, where four or five people could do the job of a multitude in the comfort of off-campus offices would lead to automatic downsizing of the workforce, and would benefit the institutions who hitherto were spending heavily on payment of salaries and allowances. Union concerns would also be eliminated.

The future state, if and when attained, would quadruple efficiency at a lower cost. The downsizing which is inevitable would bring about a Darwinian type of '*survival of the fittest*' evolution where only administrators with honed skills would be left standing.

### **Lack of funds/Facilities**

The pecuniary report from our universities in Nigeria is saddening. The ivory towers can no longer boast of solid financial base to sponsor projects or initiate veritable community services. It is increasingly becoming a herculean task to even pay the salaries of the staff as a result of the dwindling subventions from government. Both the administrative and academic staff no longer have the benefit of adequate training on the job to facilitate good role performance. Computers, photocopiers, and in the case of the academic staff, reagents, bunsen burners and other scientific appurtenances have become rare luxuries in our universities. Our libraries are filled with 'Lugardian' books that bear little or no relevance to the present-day scholarship. In the midst of these inadequacies, our government revels in money, wasting it on invisible and profligate projects. Our universities have become more of crises management camps as Vice-Chancellors and other principal actors try to maintain a façade of good universities. Even as hard as it seems, most universities in Nigeria still maintain standard as reflected by the Webometric ranking. The university enterprise is endangered as both the educators and the support staff find means to survive. Ethics, best practice, good scholarship, etiquettes are being thrown out of the windows.

### **CONCLUSION**

**Shock-therapy effect.** The academic cosmopolis in Nigeria are endangered. Incontrovertibly, if the present-state universities are indeed 'endangered,' it is the government and the functionaries of the system that have made it so. It is our intention to project the scathing realities in our universities for corrective purpose. In the first place, government policies on education have not been encouraging. Government has shown in unmistakable terms that it is not interested in fashioning a virile educational foundation for the country. On the other hand, the universities have not been able to perform to expectation especially, as regards its mandate of research and community service. Teaching continues to remain checkered as a result of incessant strike by the staff unions and students. Government signs agreements with unions and backslides. The synchrony and diachrony of University administration in Nigeria is worthy of study primarily because of the urgent need to address issues raised by the paper and use these to redress a dysfunctional state in our university system. Our findings have tended towards declaring an

emergency in the knowledge factories basically because knowledge generation and knowledge applications are becoming stifled as a result of the untoward involvement of academics in irrelevant callings. The administrative space is also becoming effete, rigid and short-sighted as a result of involvement in un-administrative practices. In this situation, it is no wonder that our universities have found it difficult to into top 100 in world ranking. This is a clear indication of endangerment. Our paper draws attention to the corrosive features which should be redressed as a matter of urgency. The universities are endangered as a result of the actions and inactions of the government, students, teachers and administrators. We are all culpable of certain misdemeanors that have robbed them of their primordial shine. With proper mentoring programmes, synergy and sincerity of purpose from all the stakeholders, and the necessary ethical re-orientation, Nigerian universities will find a foothold and re-claim their pride of place in Africa and among the comity of nations.

## POSTSCRIPT

The university system in Nigeria is tied to the apron of the Government of the day. In recent times, there was a loud outcry for university autonomy which at a point became a legislative lull. Financial autonomy in Nigeria universities has been a sham, as government continues to pay the piper and dictate the tunes. The University Autonomy Bill which was promulgated to replace the University Miscellaneous Act of 1993 has raised complaints from stakeholders, bordering on incongruities in its recommendations.<sup>19</sup>The Senate of some Nigerian universities considered the bill and submitted that it was full of ambiguities capable of undermining the powers of Council and Senate and the existing laws, statutes and regulations of the universities.

Perhaps, what we should be considering at this point in time is to ascertain how feasible and achievable the university autonomy is in this terrain, given the socio-political and economic realities of our world.

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