Empowering   the Students' Affairs Divisions in Nigerian Universities and other Tertiary Institutions for Personality and Character Molding

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Introduction

Tertiary education produces middle and high level manpower to effectively utilize a country's human and natural resources. Nigeria is not only interested in revitalizing her tertiary education system, she is also committed to excellence, especially at the university and other tertiary institution level. This was again demonstrated in the Federal government- led and financed national accreditation exercise by Nigerian teams of experts in the various disciplines to all the universities in Nigeria.

It need be added here that the Nigerian university system, like in the other nations of the world, is committed to the training of Nigerian citizens for occupation of the nation's highest level manpower offices and needs, in terms of men of tested learning and character, and possessing acclaimed professional skills and social intelligence (Mellanby 1958&Adelowo 2004).To whatever aspect of knowledge and skills acquisition an individual is called to receive training and education on   at the tertiary(especially the university) level, his/her mental health/character would constantly and at all circumstances be challenged (vanJaarsveld 2003).Professional skills and character training (social intelligence) are expected mix for a valuable university or tertiary institution graduates. That as it may be, the graduates of the ivory tower are expected to be found worthy in character as in the ability to remain stoic and resilient as in conducting respectable personal life style by maintaining high values, morals, social rules and regulations(Abiri 1981 & Fafunwa,1987). This had made the first generation world universities, like Oxford and Cambridge appoint proctors who serve to monitor and ensure that the students understand, internalize and personalize the virtues of observing and obeying social rules. But in addition to the infrastructural problems facing the tertiary institutions in Nigeria of recent, the problem of anti social behaviors, a decline in ethical and moral values and many other vices had come to the fore and are at alarming pointing among the students. According to Whitla(1975) and Ipaye (1979) this makes the services as well as the offices of mental health and allied experts very essential and complimentary to the running of such a system .

Further, and in recent times, the assessment and evaluation reports of the academics, the administrative workers and observers on the functionality of the Nigerian university system products leaves much to be desired in terms of their relevance to the immediate needs of the nation. This fact seems to be corroborated by a recent world rating of universities that had none of Nigeria's among the first five thousand (Association of Commonwealth University, ACU Bulletin, 2006). Of note and that make regular media reports are the inability of the products of these institutions to display relevant   professional skills and social intelligence, leaving some leaders of thought to ask if we ever again are in need of these universities (Alonge 2005; Levy 2000; Okebukola, 1998; Yoloye,1998; Akpofure and N'dupu 1998) . The reasons for these were given by Alonge (2005) as: poorly equipped classrooms and laboratories, academically ill equipped teachers to meet the challenges of the teaching-learning process, un-readiness of the students to take active part in the learning tasks and process, poor and inaccurate assessment of the products from the system and inadequately monitored procedures of imparting knowledge in the system. Further along the line of possible reasons for the less than expected functioning of the system, Adelola (1999) offered the operation of the Nigerian university system as being under the siege and yoke of cults and occultist practices by the students and most times their teachers as accomplices. He emphasized that the dimension knows no bound, so much that most campuses have been taken over by cults, dictating the tune to drum to the students'   body, to lecturers and the university at large. To Adelola (1999), there is now in the Nigerian university system the upturning of the normal course of events, pattern of relationships, the universal goals and values of the university with a larger percentage of the products being of a new generation of gangsters, outcasts and social misfits (Adelola1999; Adegoroye and Adetoye, 1999; Adelowo1995).

The foregoing seems to underscore the advocacy of the institution and effective management of mental health, character building and guidance and counseling services and objectively testing and affirming their impact on the students at the tertiary level of schooling and training especially in a developing nation like Nigeria. There also is the need to measure and objectively assess the character content of the personality of these would- be graduates (Smith1973; Chenny 1990;Bandele, 2006). As Oana (1981) argued, university counseling programs that primarily focus personality development along high caliber performance in public and private entrepreneurial activities and services are not only for students in trouble, students who misbehave or

students who have difficulty conforming to the norms of other students of his/her age but students who need to develop, grow and mature.

Giving an explanation of the reason why Nigerian universities came up for consideration only after the first five thousand in the global ratings of institutions of same status, Okebukola (2005), highlighted lack of special provisions for students' personality growth and development outside expected academic drills and providing 'objective paper and pencil means' of assessing psychological and social wellness among them as obtained in for example, Harvard, that is first in the global rating and the other institutions that made the first one hundred rating. Some of the universities that made the envious rating of the first one hundred in the world include, Oxford, Cambridge, Paris and Bologna. In these universities, when students are found to be one or two deviations below the mean, they are referred for remediation and in the extreme cases of irredeemability, denied the opportunity to possess the institution's certificate. They consider each and every of the graduates of their institution as not only representing the institution, but the ideal of humanity. These activities that stood them out are offered   in their faculties/ departments of students' affairs (Redmond, 2005).

In the Nigerian context of University students today, Oana 's (1981) views succinctly describe the pressure and the needs of virtually the population, that which calls for a rescue mission that would best be approached from an institutionalized help program suited to the traditional demands of the system. Along this line of argument, Adelola (1999) described the Nigerian university system as having undergone some phenomenal negative changes, in which every member of the community daily lives in fear. The fear is brought about by the fact that without prior warning, some of the menacing cults and their blood letting members may come in their war- like charges on the community and leave as much dead and maimed amongst the members of the community as they often later report as having offended them. It is only of recent that the spate of violent protests and subsequent closure of the institutions for one reason of agitations or the other   subsided. Salient in the issues of the protests among Nigerian university students and staff are lack of provisions for housing, transportation, feeding and relaxation opportunities that needed to have prevented / doused the protests and make for better management of the negative psychological and social reactions being experienced. The foregoing apparently informed the recommendation of Adelola (1995) and its urgency that now is the time to seriously revisit the building of character content of the Nigerian university products, that they become less militant, more tolerant, be accessible for dialogue and being productive rather than

destructive. In other words, their mental health and social maturity status need be viewed more seriously.

Constituents of university mental health/ counseling services.
As against the visible and palpable rigorous classroom attitude of structured, quiet and orderly behavior as a means or aid to memorization of factual materials and extensive testing to determine how much information could be played back to the professor of the past, the universities nowadays are viewed more and more from the stand point of personal development and success where students go a long way to demand for freedom to do what they wished with themselves (Withal 1981;Oana 1981: Wrenn 1985; Adesina 1987; Abiri 1981).As a result of this change in philosophy brought about by liberality of the system and provisions for the fundamental rights of all citizens of the world , a system of organized helping services were made to come into being:-Physical and mental health services, -Psychometrics (aptitude and attitude testing,-Financial aids,-Student employment,-Extra-curricula activities,-Housing,-Assistance to people with   physical handicaps,-Crisis intervention (rape, suicide threats, drugs, abortions, sexuality, legal aids) (Smith1973).

These services come in line and are embedded in the ones that are highlighted and focused in the training of counselors and professional helpers in training, viz, counseling, consultations, coordination, psychometrics, placement, information, (Ipaye1983).
These services had to be because the greater percentage of the student population in the modern days and dispensation are youths in their teens and early adulthood   and have needs relating to:

- Security (feeling of fitting into the university frame work),
- Experiencing normal social, emotional and intellectual relationship with members of the opposite sex,
- Feeling self-reliant and becoming independent of family and parents and a feeling of achievement with sound practical goal for the future.

University counseling from this stand point is helping student learn and mature through a relationship with a mature therapist who is desirous of helping in these directions (Whitla 1981;Wrenn, 1981; Adelowo 2005).
In the major advanced nations of the world, France, Britain and especially United States of America, where liberality of the university education is much more pronounced, there often is a whole faculty or division headed by a Dean, (usually an academic Professor) usually answerable to the university senate, and is directly responsible for all the services that are essentially for the well-being and development of appreciable personality traits of the

student as earlier highlighted as the services of the guidance program (Smith,1973;Whitla, 1981).

Management and Administration of the Character Molding/Mental Health Monitoring and Assessment, Guidance and Counseling Program in the Universities of the Advanced World

According to Whitla (1981) and Idowu (1985) the underlining and guiding principle of guidance and its workers in the universities of the developed nation are that students bring varying degrees of,(from no readiness to fairly ready) for meeting and resolving successfully the brutal demands of the 'independence' which their admission into the system thrusts upon them. Hence the first rule is to provide as much as possible assistance and help on the most trivial of the requests and needs that the students may present or come up with. Students who did not accept a value system encompassing excellence and achievement, as many Nigerian adolescents and young adults in the typical Nigerian university of today are apt to be described, may not feel so acutely the pressures and the demands of the institutions. To possess enough course credits that qualify one to be called a graduate in a particular field of academic pursuit does not translate automatically to being able to meet the challenges that the status and the demands the status places on such individuals. Such individuals need to be equally schooled in meeting such demands. It need not be taken as ludicrous that a group of youth that are to be graduated be gathered together to receive tutoring on how to respond in social situations that they would soon be finding themselves. Having not done that in the past and making it part of what counts towards eventual graduation reflects in many of the less than expected responses of many of the young graduates from Nigerian tertiary institutions. For these reasons, the Guidance and Counselling units had been so developed to include and transverse every aspect of the university administration and management, through the office of the Dean of Student Affairs to the Hall Wardens in the students' hostels. This is with the aim of achieving satisfactory acclimatization into the system by the admitted students. By all standards, it is of the status of an academic faculty in these nations as the Psychometrics unit serves to examine the psychological wellness through some pen and paper examination as well as documented anecdotes of observations of the students in relevant situations that indicate their measure and level of comportment and self-control. When students are found not measuring up to par they are referred to experts for intervention. The report of the experts go a long way to determine the graduating status of the so identified student no matter how high they may be on their grade point average in their academic pursuit (Oana 1981; Withla

981; Idowu 1985). This clearly affairms that at graduation, the student would have been objectively tested and found worthy both in learning and character.

The Nigerian Situation
The exact situation like the above does not obtain in Nigeria, as many of the universities do have the Dean of the Student Affairs, Deputy Registrar Student Affairs Academics and a string of the other administrative officers serving purely administrative functions, with   their Guidance and Counseling unit seldom serving as an outreach center to the students. Most times the Guidance and Counselling units serve the purpose of the Academic departments that train professional counselors for their degree certification. Data from a random sample of the thin staff that manage   such centers in virtually all the tertiary institutions in Nigeria and that served as the key informants in the interviews held in the process of base line data for the paper at hand revealed that students concerns outside academic matters are treated confidentially though, but are never expected to interfere with the clients functioning in their daily lecture hours or other academic endeavors. Such concerns are outside the purview of the university administration.

      Also of note is the fact that the report from experts in these units (concerning the worth of the character traits of the students) as they exist in Nigerian universities of today amount to little with people in authority and who are in charge of students' qualification for graduation. Further, neither the universities nor their counseling / students affairs unit (where they exist), have any of their staff with the mandate to monitor and report on the daily activities of the students' involvement in unethical and amoral behaviors as part of their assessments for graduation. For this gap, is one made to associate today's daily report of high level of poor character and personality traits among the students to the ' powerlessness' of their behavior watchers to influence their graduation? Many live in the euphoria of the saying that the university or tertiary institutions is a heaven of freedom, away from the restrictions that the lower level of education places on students' choices and realm of activities that can be engaged in. Psychologists are apt to forecast a set of people who are hustlers and unruly from such less caring environment (Wylie, 1962;Wells and Marwell 1976; Zimbardo, 1992).
How ineffective and a need for a drastic change these arrangement had been requires no much detailed empirical study as the impression of the recipients of instructions in these institutions as being half baked appears so common among many employers of Nigerian graduates   and many foreign universities where many who had managed to graduate and desired higher degrees go to. Some of the determined response of some state and federal universities to

correct the anomaly and rise to defending the integrity of the personality of their products include the introduction of the Post University Matriculation Examinations (UME) and an interview with prospective students.

Some suggestions for the running of the empowered students' affairs division.
The question remains that though the Student Affairs Office is directly responsible for all other issues relating to students well being and survival but do they or could they vouch for the character and personality of the students they present for university degree award?

Putting the anecdotes on each of the students as such come to their office(by the advantage of being with them on daily basis) remain a strong point in requesting them to evaluate , assess and judge the character of the students. May be this is where their own portion of testing and continuous assessment of the students lie. It is conjectured that when and if this aspect of their operation is known to the students, maybe the students would be more cautious of their uncomely behaviors and actions and thereby not only scale down on them but imbibe the acceptable culture as being advocated in the acceptable dress code being prescribed for especially ladies in these institutions.

Many a Nigerian university students in the present days need behavior proctors as paraded by Oxford and Cambridge. These proctors may have the designation of the sub-Dean student affairs in each of the faculties in the university and they would be to monitor and report to the Dean of student affairs on the grade point average on the yet to be determined Expected Behaviors and Conduct Scale (EBCS) of would be Nigerian graduates. The development of such scale's content cannot be difficult given the array of efforts to wake Nigerians up to living a publicly tested and proven righteous life through the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) as an example. There is a need to have along with the national GST curriculum, the set of believes, character traits and basic behavior patterns of the Nigerian graduates. May be a vision of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) need be re-ignited .In the tertiary institutions, they would be made to carry course credits and teachers of tested integrity made to handle such courses. Students found low on this scale may have to be referred for psychological experts intervention and in the extreme of irredeemability be excused the university degree. This would not be out of place as the universities and these other tertiary institutions has as a statutory law to step down the graduation of students with celebrated disciplinary problem It need be emphasized however that the course content of these character reformation courses and objective

means of acquiring the expected competencies need be the focus rather than the personality of the lecturer.

The argument here is that the university environment and climate need to be made to make a large measure of demand on the individuals capacity for discipline, self denial, hard work as well as maintaining integrity and high moral standing (Chenny,1990; Adelowo1995; Adegoroye, Aboloma and Osakinle2000; Alonge, 2005:).

It should therefore not be considered ludicrous that young adults that these university students are be gathered together for tutoring on managing their daily lives and style of living it and be paper and pencil tested on them! In fact, if the objectives of the university education in Nigeria, that is to make them be nationally conscious, have proper value orientation, have the intellectual capacities and demonstrate the skills to appreciate and influence the environment (Mellanby 1958;Federal Republic of Nigeria 1994 Section 5 p34) are to be realized and indeed help the grandaunts meet the unflagged millennium developmental goal of developing a model of the world citizen among them, visible and palpable efforts as being suggested in empowering the students affairs division to test and ascertain their character content would be viewed with the intentions of immediate actions (Munroe1998).

Conclusion

For the central importance that character content and ability to be self directing in pro-social behaviours and activities has to play in the lives of people with university degrees in the globalize world, a need to empower the already existing students' affairs units in the universities and other tertiary institutions charged with high level man power as to possess and use a standard and objective measure to ascertain the status of each grandaunt on the traits is imperative. When graduating students are found not measuring up they may be referred for character molding and personality management .

This suggestion would not be out of place as the National Policy on Education, Section5 Paragraph 34:4 states in part that :

> As part of a general programme of all –round improvement in university education, students will be made to take a course in history of ideas and the philosophy of knowledge on some other such suitable course as may be determined (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1994).

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