**UNIVERSITY CULTURE AND ITS SUSTAINABILITY: THE ROLE OF THE REGISTRY IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY SYSTEM**

**BY**

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INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, Universities are established to perform three key functions, teaching, research and community service. However, all these functions are tied to promoting development at the community, national and global levels. In essence, activities of the universities are expected to reflect on all the sectors of a nation. Indeed, Universities in Nigeria vary in capacities in terms of population, quality and quantity of staff, funding, outreach, model or enterprise formation and so on. It is important however to note that university is a community where people live and also earn a living. It’s a place where many people of different walks of life come together, meet and interact on daily basis for many years. It’s a melting pot and a reflection of a nation. These people who walk and live in the community have causes to interact, have a way of life, beliefs and norms. Thus, we talk of a university culture, tradition and the need to sustain acceptable values in the system and the roles expected of all the constituents.

In addressing our topic, it is important to make some conceptual clarifications as follows:

**University**

The word "university" is derived from the Latin phrase *universitas magistrorum et scholarium* meaning "community of teachers and scholars. The word *universitas* (i.e. "a whole") refers in general to "a number of persons associated into one body, a society, company, community, guild, corporation, etc. (Colish, 1997). The Dictionary.com defines University (ies) as “Institutions of learning of the highest level, having a college of liberal arts and a programme of graduate studies together with several professional schools as of theology, law, medicine and engineering and authorized to confer both undergraduate and graduate degrees”. Ben-David, (1968) also defines Universities as “organizations engaged in the advancement of knowledge; they teach, train and examine students in a variety of scholarly, scientific and professional fields. Intellectual pursuits define the highest prevailing levels of competence in these fields. The Universities confer degrees and provide opportunities both for members of their teaching staff and some of their students to do original research”.

Oyeyemi (2013) posited that “Universities are multi-purpose complex organizations devoted to knowledge generation (research), knowledge transmission (teaching), and knowledge application and public service.” In her words, Universities worldwide, are established to meet certain ends of critical importance to the survival of a society or a part thereof.

From the foregoing, University can be described based on its structure or organogram, its people and its physical environment. When structure is considered, a university is an educational institution structured in prescribed format according to its founding statuses such that there is a Governing Council to oversee its finances and control resources; the Senate to develop academic programmes, generate knowledge through research, disseminate knowledge by teaching; the Convocation, the Congregation, faculty boards, several committees, unions, associations, religion groupings, directorate and students body. It is peopled by young and old, male and female, learned and unlettered living together, working together for the often stated tripartite mandate.

However, a university, first and foremost, is a place of learning that supports students to achieve professional knowledge, skills and understanding. A fundamental requisite to make this a reality for students is for a strong and positive relationship to be built between learners and faculty members who facilitate learning. Behind the scenes, faculties (colleges/schools) are backed-up by various central administrative support units to ensure, for example, that student time table’s work, exams are properly scheduled and student results are released on time.

**Culture**

Culture as a concept can be explained in many ways. Li and Karakowski (2001) defined culture as the cumulative deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, notions of time, roles, spatial relations, concepts of the universe, and material objects and possessions acquired by a group of people in the course of generations, individual and group striving. It is in its broadest sense the cultivated behaviour through social learning of the beliefs, values and symbols that are accepted by them and that are passed along by communication and imitation from one generation to another.. Culture is the aggregate belief system, norms, values, mores and customs of a society, by which the society is known by those inside and outside of it. The shortest way to define culture is to agree that it’s the way of life of the people. This includes their language, the food they eat, the clothes they wear, the acceptable behaviours, norms and traditions and their set of beliefs.

**Registry**

The Cambridge Advanced Learners Dictionary describes a registry as a place where official records are kept. By an extension of this definition, within the university context, the registry could then be defined as the department in charge of the custody and management of official records. The University Registry can also be defined as that arm of the University that is responsible for the general administration of the university and it is headed by the Registrar (Oyebade 2011). The registry is a child of circumstance as it owes its establishment as a unit in the University system to the need to have some other personnel to perform some other functions in the system that do not fall squarely to the core function of teaching, research and community service. These functions traditionally include student registration, keeping academic records of students, issues of welfare of staff and students, management of municipal facilities, and facilitation of the planning strategies of the institution. Thus, while academics are expected to concentrate on the core mandate of the university, the supporting staff assist with other matters which are equally strategic to the overall actualization of the institutional mandates. (Ogunruku, 2012)

The Registry of any University in Nigeria is expected to perform the following:

* Facilitate the attainment of institutional mandates, goals and objectives;
* Facilitate Registry service delivery as contained in the Law establishing the University and other relevant documents outlining the responsibilities and schedules of duty of the department;
* Create a harmonious and conducive working and learning environment for staff and students of the University Community;
* Is efficiently and effectively run and can satisfy the needs of all members of the University Community in respect of its official functions;
* Is adequately funded and staffed;
* Facilitate the attainment and sustainment of a stable university calendar;
* Foster excellent industrial relations between stakeholders within the University Community; and
* Facilitate the inculcation of a quality assurance culture in the University Community, to

enhance and complement external quality assurance mechanisms as implemented by the NUC and strengthen internal quality assurance mechanisms.

The Registry consists mainly of staff of different skills and qualifications which include Professional Administrators, Executive Officers, Secretarial staff, Information professionals etc. it is headed by the Registrar who is a Principal Officer and Secretary to the Governing Council, Senate, Congregation and Convocation.

**UNIVERSITY CULTURE**

Based on the earlier definition, University Culture, simply speaking, refers to the ways of life within the university community in terms of what they belief in, the acceptable behaviours, norms and tradition based on their history. Thus, while there may be some culture that cut across the University system in general, there are some set of beliefs and practices that are peculiar to individual universities based on their own history and tradition.

It has been confirmed however that university culture can be divided into two sectors. Shen and Tian (2012) identified two main dimensions of university culture namely academic culture and campus culture. The academic culture, according to the scholars, consists of academic outlook, academic spirit, academic ethics and academic environment. The driving force of the university is the search for truth by extending the frontiers of knowledge. Basically, a University is set up to produce knowledge through research, propagate knowledge through teaching and cause development of the society through application of knowledge. According to Shen and Tian (2012), the components of Academic Culture includes academic outlook (which involves academic activities), academic spirits (the thoughts and spiritual power acquired through long term academic practice and activities), academic ethics (norms, regulations, laws and guidelines upon which academic activities are based); and academic environments (which refers to the spatiotemporal and sociological environments of the university).

Conversely, the campus culture according to the scholars consists of the distinctive nature of a university. This is made up of the Athenian individuality, which refers to an artificial person with its own set of systems, service to the society, impartation of knowledge, leading (creation of culture), cultural progress, transmission of cultures across nations, and acceptance of new trends in place of the obsolete.

Some specific areas that depict the culture of a university however are as follows:

**University Buildings**

By design, it is in the culture of the Universities to have unique building designs that give room for functionality but yet making a loud statement of what that university stands for. Most buildings of each university is annotated by unique architectural design with ample space and serenity. The Central administrative blocks are usually built to exude aristocracy and exhibits architectural master pieces which reflect the historical antecedent or the peak of splendor of its immediate environment. Oxford, Cambridge and their colleges are housed in castle-like buildings, replica of the cathedral and royal castles prevalent at the time of their establishment. Same with many of the buildings of the first generation of universities in Nigeria. Aside a physical geography that pronounces serenity, space and colours, universities have the culture of erecting imposing and iconic structures with ample space, aesthetics and serenity. Its customary for Universities to have imposing structures that promotes unique identity and command attention of visitors and members of the University Community.

Universities, as a matter of tradition, also give unique names to their major buildings and centres and or any state-of-the-earth facility. Through naming and labelling, these buildings are used to tell stories of the institutions. This explains why we have Kashim Ibrahim Library in ABU, Hezekiah Oluwasanmi Library in OAU, Kenneth Dike Library in Ibadan and Nimbe Adedipe Library in FUNAAB. Same can be said of Lecture Halls, Hostels and Halls of Residence. We have Awolowo Hall in Ife, Kuti Hall in Ibadan and Julius Okojie Lecture Theater in FUNAAB.

**Pursuits of truths and Knowledge**

It is the defined purpose and function of every university to pursue the truth by engaging in researches and other pursuits that will improve the knowledge of humanity in all frontiers noting that knowledge is never enough because of its changing nature. What constitutes the best of knowledge today may be declared invalid tomorrow in the face of a new research which would render the earlier knowledge as untrue. To ensure that truth is sustained and encouraged, it is the norm in the system that academic ‘liars’ are given heavy sanctions. Researches are conducted in an open manner that whatever procedure used by anyone to get a particular result to define a new truth or expand the scope of knowledge must be verifiable and can be replicated by any other person using the same procedure. Academic fraud is highly unacceptable in the system

To sustain this tradition, universities guard jealously the twin concepts of academic freedom and University autonomy. The two define the general assumption and orientation within the academic setting.

Academic freedom is the freedom of the academics to determine the nature and course of the research they intend to pursue. It also enables university teachers to comment on issues of national or international currency for which their views can, sometimes, run contrary to those of the political class. On the other hand, University autonomy refers to the latitude which a university must have to run its own operations without undue interference from the agencies of the State. There is even internal autonomy or independence of organs of governance within the university enclave. For example, the Senate of a university is the final authority on academic matters such as admission, examinations, award of degrees etc. On these issues, Council cannot intervene or overrule.

**Objects, Symbols and Memorials**

The University culture is manifest exteriorly in its usage of varieties of symbols and objects. The use of logo, motto, slogans, emblems and mace are items of distinction with which a citadel of learning is depicted. Most Nigerian universities have a unique mace which are usually carved of gold, silver or bronze with the university crest and logo. The mace which is regarded as a symbol of authority are given pride of place which a mace bearer displays on every academic ceremony. Universities also have a tradition of having a unique motto which gives the ethos of their institutions. Starting with University of Ibadan, with the motto is “Recte Sapere Fons” (For Knowledge and Sound Judgment), FUNAAB, Knowledge for Development, to the new ones such as Redeemer’s University’ s ‘Running with a Vision’. It is also now a way of life for every University to have its own anthem with unique wordings. These anthems are usually sung during university events. The use of slogans particularly by students and alumni is a feature of the university culture. For Obafemi Awolowo University, it is ‘Great Ife’. For University of Nigeria, Nsukka, it is ‘Great Lions’. For UNILAG, it is ‘Great Akokite’ and the alumni of University of Benin shout ‘Great Unibest’. For OOU, its Great OOUITES while FUNAAB answers to ‘Great FUNNABITES’. The fun in this is carried to many years after leaving the Universities especially when old friends meet and they shout the slogan of their alma mater to showcase their pride of attending their institution.

**Academic and special Ceremonies**

One known culture of the university system is the celebration of Academic Ceremonies which are organized to celebrate unique occasions of academic achievements or historical days such as Matriculation (Commencement), Convocation (Graduation) foundation days, Academic Lectures such as Inaugural, and Valedictory lectures. University of Ibadan’s Foundation Day is November 17 and the institution has religiously maintained it as Convocation Day annually. Traditions and rites are characteristics of the university system. Academic Ceremonies by university culture are solemn occasions which are regulated by traditional programmes, sequence of events along known patterns. Universities ceremonies follow the pattern of the medieval church rites which they imitate religiously if not conservatively till today

Universities are known for relishing in the stories about their origin, their growth and their legends. These they do on special occasions such as the convocation ceremonies and sundry public lectures. The academic procession at convocation is arranged to reflect the professoriate aristocracy which is an intellectual representation of the episcopal procession of the Roman Catholic Church or the Church of England where your placement on the line is a reflection of your rank in the hierarchy.

The use of academic robes for University ceremonies is a feature of the culture of the university. In terms of the quality of fabric, variety of embroidery and sewing patterns, the academic robes separate the university from schools. As noted by Awosusi (2018), there are rigid rules guiding the use of academic robes and academic processions. For example, the tassel is worn to the right by undergraduates at matriculation ceremony and to the left after graduates have been admitted to their degrees at convocation. Also, some universities use different garbs for different occasions. Length, breadth and depth of academic procession depend on the tradition of each university. The use of colours at Convocation ceremonies is a mark of university culture. The house colour of Obafemi Awolowo University is navy blue. University of Lagos dresses its officers in scarlet red and uses the traditional Yoruba cap instead of the continental mortal board popular with universities worldwide. There is no question as to which is the best tradition in all of these. The culture is that each university must keep its own tradition.

**Collegiality as a Culture**

Collegiality refers to effective and efficient relationship which exists among the various persons and group of persons within the university system and which stands out as a major dimension of the university culture.

The staffing positions of the University system will reveal a mixture of professors and professionals; scholars and students; technologists and technicians; artists and artisans; and much more. These different cadres of staff are however joined together as a community of humans who are united in a network of activities through which the institution of learning derives a synergy for achieving its vision. It is a kind of unity in diversity. A University is expected to give opportunities to its constituents such that staff and students would know that they belong to a citadel where respect and co-operation are extended to everyone who is a citizen. It is a Community that recognized the importance of every member and provided opportunities for each and every one to grow and develop at his or her own pace

**Committee system**

One basic culture of the University is the use of committee system which allows nearly everyone to participate in decision making either directly as a member or through representation. This is in recognition of the availability of wide pool of various shades of opinions based on the availability of highly skills and knowledgeable people. With the pool of Professors and leading professionals, there is almost no alternative to committee system as a way of maintaining a participatory approach to decision making as a culture. The Committees are however classified into Council, Senate, and Management/Administrative Committees. Each of the Committee can also be categorized into statutory, standing or Adhoc types.

The committee system has been criticized for reasons such as delay in decision making, high cost of process and difficulty of knowing who should take responsibility for wrong decision. Yet, alternative system will not be in the interest of the organic arrangement of a university system which in unity recognizes individuality, specialization, differences and diversity of the citizens of the institution.

**Culture of Excellence**

One distinct culture of the University system is the penchant to maintain excellence in every sphere of its operations even as it wishes to compete favourably with its counterparts all over the world. Being a proud organization that is carries the aura of being the highest citadel of learning, universities aims at being the best and therefore look for the best. Therefore, in its recruitment processes for staff and students, universities strive to look for the best. In taking decisions, universities believe that it’s a place of ideas and therefore encourage the marketing of all shades of opinions before a final decision is taking. Universities goes out for the best of staff in quality for every cadre be it drivers, gardeners, administrators, accountants or professors. It therefore uses the best mechanism to choose the best sometimes having to organize tests and multiple layer interviews to ensure merit especially in the Non-Teaching cadres. For Academic staff, only top performers who finished top of their classes were retained as Graduate assistants or Assistant Lecturers after ben encouraged to pursue a postgraduate Degree. They are then mentored to follow the path of knowledge that are needed in the various Departments to ensure varied specializations and disciplines in each of the branch of learning and are encouraged to conduct researches and findings along identified areas of research focus of the Departments and Faculties. Administrative staff and other professionals are made to go through the ranks learning under the wings of senior colleagues with impeccable characters and vast knowledge of the system of operations of the university system to ensure that the culture of essence is sustained.

Universities strives to recruit the best of students to ensure graduating the best of graduates that will fly the flag of the university in the labour market to showcase the university as the best by employers rating. Admission requirements are made stringent and sacrosanct to ensure merits and excellence while transparency of the admission process is never compromised in any form as everyone in the system including the students know the admission requirements. Universities strive to build the best libraries, laboratories and buildings. Universities ensure that graduates are trained with the best of facilities and ensure quality assurances such as external examinations, peer review mechanism in the processes of graduation and promotions. To ensure this, universities thrives on insistence on merits in their appointments and promotions and even in the admissions and graduation of students

**ABUSES OF UNIVERSITY CULTURE**

What we have described above were the ethos of the University Culture as known worldwide and the Nigerian University system enjoyed its own big share of the culture at inception. There is no doubt however that the university culture in Nigeria has been abused and bastardized overtime. The areas of abuse which has made the system to lose its original culture include:

**Environmental abuse**

Many of the buildings been erected today in many universities are not located in the right places earmarked for them in the Master plan of the Universities. Either out of ignorance, for personal ego or a clear lack of sense for aesthetics, many buildings are erected without recourse to the master plans. For lack of adequate funding too, many buildings no longer have the required distinctive features known with universities and they even lack the aesthetics and the ambience required as architects are instructed to draw simple and functional buildings. Many of the building especially Lecture Halls, Hostels and College Buildings are no longer different from those found in secondary schools.

**Employment abuse**

Just like what obtains at the Nigerian society, the University system has substantially lost its culture of merits in recruitment of staff which was the hallmark of sustaining excellence in the system by ensuring that only the best is recruited. The system now has a lot of misfits in every cadre of its staff due to wrong recruitment methods. Most of the employees who come in in the past ten years for instance especially in the Non-Teaching sphere came in through Temporary appointments which is a euphemism for “back door approach” meaning there was no standardized approach in the appointments. Thus the quality of staff to maintain excellence can no longer be guaranteed. Same was extended to the admission of students where the use of discretionary admission policy always put better students at disadvantage. With the various criteria as dictated by the Joint admission and Matriculation Board for admission, merits can no longer be upheld. With the continued increment on the other criteria than merit, universities in the country can no longer boast of excellence in their admission requirement and placement of students.

**ABUSE OF ACADEMIC CEREMONIES**

The well-known tradition in academic ceremonies as a solemn occasion usually conducted as briskly as possible overtime got abused in many Nigerian universities. the abuses first crept in through bastardization of the awards of too many Honorary Doctoral Degrees. Honorary Degrees by tradition all over the world are reserved for great achievers and people with great accomplishments in the society. But it became such a regular feature of Convocation ceremonies of nearly all Universities and were awarded to so many people of questionable characters because of extraneous consideration such as how deep the pocket of the awarded is or of what political influence the person. In some extreme cases, some universities awarded 8 doctorate Degrees in just one convocation ceremony. In many situations, the real Graduands at convocation ceremonies were made to seat for several hours while waiting for their Degrees to be conferred because multiple Doctorate Degrees were being awarded first and were made to take priority over the real students who laboured and toiled and had looked forward to a solemn convocation ceremony. In other circumstances, some extraneous inclusion of cultural dances and shows were slotted into convocation ceremonies in the name of entertainment and interlude because of the long duration of the programmes. These are clear cases of cultural abuse to the tradition of academic ceremonies in the University Community. One other form of abuse is the penchant for some cadres to prevent other staff (especially Non-Teaching Staff) from being part of processions. Another observable abuse is for some others to be part of procession without the wearing of the Academic robes.

**Ethical abuse**

Universities are known to uphold their ethical standards in issues of appointments, promotions, peer reviews, research findings, publications Assessments etc. But it is now an open secret that this is no longer so in many ramifications. In many instances, assessment of Publications for promotion to Professorial positions has now been bastardized. Publications that are supposed to be assessed without any knowledge of the person been reviewed are now sent to Assessors chosen by the Dean in conjunction with the Candidates to ensure positive assessments. There is currently a lot of doubts on research findings published by Nigerian Academics from reasons ranging from low quality to outright research fraud because in many instances, the researches especially those supported with grants were never carried out or done so shoddily that the results can never be dependable. There are so many predatory journals floated by Academics just to serve as outlets to publish sub-standard works just to gain promotions. There has been constant abuse of employment process and even peer review mechanism put in place to sustain quality assurance in the system even in the award of Degrees. Issues relating to Postgraduate supervision has been bastardized in most Universities. Many Supervisors have thrown caution to the winds and never abide with the duration of the PG programme as advertised and now left the completion of PG studies by students at the whims and caprices of the Supervisors. Ph. D supervision has become goldmine for oppression of the Supervisee as against the old culture of timelines and constant oversight by respective Heads of Department to ensure timely completion of students.

There has also been issue of abuse of the culture of respect and decorum that pervaded the Non-Teaching in terms of hierarchy in words and deeds. The collapse of the mentorship system and lack of regular induction for new employees to understand the norms of the community has robbed it of the usual extension of courtesies to seniors that was prevalent in offices.

**Sustaining the tradition**

The Registry of every university is known to be the hub of operations of the university as it is structured to manage students’ academic records, students’ welfare, staff matters, administer Council activities, and other issues relating to planning and corporate services. The registry staff are placed in the central position to service all university committees and as such on the spot and involve in all activities of the University. Moreover, registry is known to be the custodian of the rules and regulation and therefore should be involved in sustaining and maintaining the culture and the tradition of the universities. as such, Registry staff must be involved in sustaining the culture of the Universities as follow:

1. Read, digest and understand the provisions and applications of the laws, the rules and regulations of the university with a view to ensure that the culture and traditions of the university is maintained and sustained at all times.
2. Ensure that academic standards are maintained by ensuring that timelines as set in the academic calendar are maintained and complied with by all assundry to put a stop to issues of limitless postgraduate studies for instance as against the time bound duration in the past.
3. Ensure that adequate advice and information are given to guide relevant committees involved in citing, approving and supervising the construction of buildings in the university to ensure that the master plan and building concepts of the university is not distorted at all times.
4. In realization of the hierarchical nature of university operation, discipline must be maintained at all times to ensure that infractions are adequately punished to serve as deterrents against willful disobedience to rules and regulations
5. Mentorship must be willfully restored into the system to ensure that new, young and upcoming registry staff to ensure that they grow and matured into good professional administrators that can sustain the traditions of the university. Same must be restored among academic staff to ensure that the old system of academic guidance that ensure that various specialists learned under the wings of academic giants. The tutorial system for undergraduate students must be restored to bring back the tradition of making students to learn at the feet of their masters at the slow pace that can engage them to better understanding and assimilation.
6. Registry staff must re-inculcate the culture of respect and courtesies to their seniors at all levels to restore the dignity of the Administrative cadres.
7. Registrars and Registry staff must assist the university system to restore the culture of quality recruitment of staff by competitive process to ensure to restore the culture of excellence in the system. Same must be done to restore merits in the admission process of students into the system by put a stop to all the extraneous factors that have been introduced to promote mediocrity in the name of federal character and geographical spread.
8. Quality assurance must be maintained by ensuring that all parameters put in place to ensure standards are deliberately sustained.
9. Responsibilities must be well defined as enunciated in the university laws, rules and regulations. The culture of the university which recognizes the different roles of academic and Non-teaching staff should be respected and sustained. The present penchant of academic staff dabbling into administrative jobs should stop. But registry staff must also up their game and deliver on their mandates to ensure that the system can trust their competence.
10. Registry staff must assist the universities to restore culture of solemn academic ceremonies must be restored and sustained. This can be done by ensuring that the provisions of the KEFFI Declarations as made by the Association of Vice-Chancellors of Nigerian Universities in conjunction with the National Universities Commission are well implemented. Thus, all Registry staff must get acquainted with this document for proper guidance to relevant committees such as Ceremonial and Honorary Degree Committees.
11. Registry staff must encourage the continued use of the Committee system in the running of Universities by providing the best of secretarial services that serve the purpose of the Committees they are appointed to serve.
12. Registry must assist the Vice Chancellor in maintaining the ethics guiding the assessment of publications of academics being considered for professorial ranks or any other positions. Secrecy and confidentiality is one of the hallmark of the required skills for the job of professional administrators. This must be brought to bear on this particular assignment. It’s a tasking job to keep the secret and to avoid the pressures, yet professional administrators must know that their integrity is at stake when names of assessors are leaked through them to academics who will in turn pile pressures on such assessors to return positive remarks on their papers. By doing so, registry will be contributing to the appointment and elevation of mediocre to the position of professors in the system

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