

**UNIVERSITY OF PORT HARCOURT**

**“REFLECTIONS ON UNIVERSITY  
CULTURE: THE EXISTENCE,  
CRITICISMS AND CAUTIOUSLY  
OPTIMISTIC SUSTAINABILITY”**

**VALEDICTORY LECTURE**

**BY**

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**VALEDICTORY LECTURE SERIES**

**NO. 18**

**September 9, 2020**

University of Port Harcourt Printing Press Ltd.  
University of Port Harcourt,  
Port Harcourt,  
Nigeria.  
E-mail: uniport.press@uniport.edu.ng

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ISSN: 1119-9849  
VALEDICTORY LECTURE SERIES NO.18  
DELIVERED: SEPTEMBER 9, 2020

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## **PROGRAMME**

- 1. GUESTS ARE SEATED**
- 2. INTRODUCTION**
- 3. THE VICE-CHANCELLOR'S OPENING REMARKS**
- 4. CITATION**  
The lecturer shall remain standing during the citation.

- 5. THE VALEDICTORY LECTURE**

He shall step on the rostrum, and deliver his Valedictory Lecture. After the lecture, he shall step towards the Vice-Chancellor, and deliver a copy of the Valedictory Lecture and return to his seat.

- 6. CLOSING REMARKS BY THE VICE-CHANCELLOR**
- 7. VOTE OF THANKS**
- 8. DEPARTURE**

## DEDICATION

This lecture is dedicated to my parents, Chief Efiuvwevwere Atoke Idivwrikesi and Mrs. Ubiamuko Efiuvwevwere Idivwrikesi (both of blessed memory) for their exceptional foresight in recognition of the importance of education despite their lack of formal education.

I also wish to dedicate the lecture to my darling, caring and understanding wife (fondly called '**Idi**' by me symbolizing a cocktail of well-blended wines).

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my immeasurable gratitude to God Almighty for **all my achievements** and also, for giving me good health even at 70 years.

I am particularly grateful to the University of Port Harcourt for the study leave with pay during my Ph.D programme and for my remarkable meritorious career that spanned almost 39 years. Additionally, I express my special gratitude to two of the former Vice-Chancellors, Professor Don M. Baridam and Professor Joseph A. Ajenka for giving me the opportunity to serve as the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic). Also, I am particularly grateful to the Acting Vice-Chancellor, Professor Stephen A. Okodudu, for his approval under the present unusual circumstance (Coronavirus pandemic) for me to deliver this valedictory lecture to both in-person and virtual audience.

I wish to express my gratitude to my former teachers at different levels of my academic pursuit for making my academic dream a reality. In addition, I acknowledge Professor Leon M. Gorris (a global citizen) and Professor M.E. Guerzoni (University of Bologna) for exposing me to several novel microbiological concepts and applications while on grants and fellowships.

My sponsorship at different levels by several organizations including; International Foundation for Science (IFS), Sweden, Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NOSR/NWO), The Hague, Tertiary Education Fund (Tetfund), Federal Ministry of Education and University of Port Harcourt made my academic dream a reality.

My sincere gratitude goes to my long-standing family friends; Professor and Barrister (Mrs.) A.I. Joe; Professor and Dr. (Mrs.) J.O. Enaohwo and Chief and Chief (Mrs.) G.U. Owarieta for their goodwill.

To my academic family, the Department of Microbiology, I wish to thank you for your support and co-operation at different points for sharing responsibilities and allowing me to provide wise counsel/mentorship.

To my colleagues in the Faculty of Science and the University Community (including outside University of Port Harcourt) as well as the University Administration, I am grateful for your support and co-operation. I also express my special gratitude to Professor Emeritus S.N. Okiwelu for his fatherly role.

With special appreciation, I thank my former students (both undergraduates and especially postgraduates) for the shared academic challenges and achievements. I am grateful to God that some of them have become Professors, Directors, Deputy Directors in various Universities, Ministries, Regulatory Agencies and Organizations.

I wish to express my gratitude to Associate Professor/Reader, Dr. C.J. Ogbue for proof-reading the manuscript and formatting same for the presentation.

I thank Professor and Dr. (Mrs.) G. Avwiri for their goodwill and support.

Finally, I acknowledge with special gratitude, the encouragement, unflinching support and commitment of my lovely wife for the past 38 years. I also wish to show

appreciation to my beloved children (now adults) for their understanding and co-operation. Similarly, my thanks go to my grand children for serving as sources of excitement and happiness. Additionally, I thank my larger family; siblings, in-laws and well wishers for their goodwill and support.

## 1.0 PREAMBLE

Vice-Chancellor Sir, it is a great honour and privilege that I have been given the opportunity to deliver the no. 18 valedictory lecture in the valedictory lecture series of this unique University.

My secondary school education served as a source of inspiration to my academic dream. As a student at St. Peter Claver's College (SPCC), Aghalokpe, (though situated in a village but national and international in character) exposed me to the world. This is because the staff comprised an Irish Principal, other Irish as teachers, British, Indians and American Peace Corps as well as Nigerians while the students were of diverse background from various parts of Nigeria including; Anambra, Bayelsa, Delta, Edo, Lagos, Rivers, and others. This environment invariably influenced my life and inspired me to pursue further studies in the United States of America to achieve my academic dream.

Valedictory lecture means a farewell lecture which gives the lecturer the opportunity to share some of his/her experiences. In this regard, I would like to share the experiences I gained over the last 38 years 11months and 21 days in the University system, both here and abroad. **It became very challenging to choose the topic that would capture the essence of the message I intend to deliver to this diverse and dignified audience.**

Whereas it is optional to deliver a valedictory lecture at one's retirement, I thought it most appropriate to share my experiences with this special audience. More importantly, my exposure in the United States, United Kingdom, Italy, Netherlands and here in University of Port Harcourt will serve as a guide to sharing my experiences on University culture and



its ramifications, rather than keep them to myself alone. It is therefore very important to share such experiences for the benefit of mentees, members of staff and students who are the future academics and mentors.

**For example, in University of Bologna, Italy (first modern University established in 1088), oral defense by Postgraduate students takes place in the public arena where all stakeholders (the student's assessors/examiners, the parents, the public and students) watch the performance of the student. Generally, this culture of public display is considered to be devoid of favouritism, victimization and bias hence the performance of the student speaks for itself.**

The importance of valedictory lecture has been underscored by some earlier valedictory Professors. In this regard, recognition must be given to our Professor Emeritus Emmanuel Okogbue Anosike of blessed memory who paved the way in 2006 for the delivery of valedictory lectures in this University.

It is pertinent to briefly indicate my rise to the present status. I started work here in the University of Port Harcourt in then School of Biological Sciences (Microbiology Unit) as an Assistant Lecturer in 1981 and rose through the ranks to the peak of my career as Professor of Microbiology in November 2000.

Globally, two very important lectures delivered by Academic Staff of Universities are (i) the inaugural and (ii) the valedictory lectures. **Interestingly, their delivery is optional.** The inaugural lecture is aimed at informing the University community and the public about the inaugural lecturer's research activities, contributions and academic achievements. For instance, my inaugural lecture entitled "**Microorganisms and quest for food preservation and microbial food safety:**

**prospects and challenges”** was delivered in 2014. In that lecture, among the areas of focus included; (i) scope of microbiology, (ii) sources and spread of microorganisms, (iii) national and global perspectives on food safety as well as (iv) **challenges such as absence of microbial culture collection centres for characterization and identification and (v) lack of the state-of-the-art facilities to facilitate research activities.** Such challenges highlighted then are still evident today in our efforts to diagnose the novel Coronavirus (SARS-Cov-2) infected patients. **In contrast, I am here today to bid you all farewell in an academic manner by sharing some of my experiences with you having attained maturity both in age and in academics.** It is therefore a special privilege to stand before you to present this valedictory lecture which is the first from the Department of Microbiology.

Having been given the opportunity to present this valedictory (in-person and virtual, new normal) lecture, the first question that came to my mind was which topic should be most relevant to this revered diverse audience? Secondly, what can each person take home from this lecture? These were my primary questions for the choice of this topic, *“Reflections on University culture: the existence, criticisms and cautiously optimistic sustainability”*.

Nevertheless, irrespective of your status and interests, the University culture in most cases is poorly understood. **I wish to remind ourselves that each of us has a culture which is most often taken for granted. Therefore, I deem it necessary to focus on University culture because it is the SOUL of the University system since virtually all activities revolve around it.**

Culture is exhibited by us in our daily activities yet, the peculiarities of respective cultures are not always distinguishable. For example, the University is a microcosm of

its given society yet, it has its peculiar culture that enables it to function adequately in a unique manner (ideally, it is **BRANDED**).

My dream of becoming an Academic started soon after my B.Sc. graduation. The urge was so strong that anything not working towards that goal was considered a **distraction**. For example, having been gainfully and handsomely employed after my B.Sc. graduation as a Microbial Quality Control Analyst in a renowned Pharmaceutical Company in Detroit, USA, the thought of my postgraduate studies kept reoccurring and this led to my resignation from the enviable job. In fact, my immediate supervisor had to sit me down to ask if truly it was my wish to resign (especially for a young man in his 20s to make that decision) in order to pursue M.Sc. programme. I answered him in the affirmative and he was pleasantly surprised.

Similarly, for my NYSC, I served with Guinness (Nig.) Ltd., Benin City, again the **distraction** to jettison my dream of academic career became evident having been offered appointments by a number of Breweries and Food Manufacturing Companies. The decision to assume duty with the University of Port Harcourt soon after my completion of the NYSC programme was a big surprise to my colleagues but a major source of joy and relief to me because I was now on the path to fulfilling my academic dream. However, the incentive of Staff Development Programme after one year of employment for which the University of Port Harcourt was known surprisingly became “suspended”. This became a very serious challenge to obtaining a Ph.D in order to achieve my dream of becoming an Academic. **Fortunately, my dream was still on track because I had a Federal Ministry of Education Postgraduate Overseas Scholarship which had**

to be “re-activated”. It was originally to be utilized in the United States but I requested for a change to the United Kingdom having obtained B.Sc. and M.Sc. degrees from the United States in order to have different academic and social experiences. At this juncture, I became optimistic that my dream of becoming an Academic was once again on track.

The essence of this narrative is to highlight the **challenges/distractions** which I encountered to remind us that achieving one’s dream is not as easy as some of us think. But it is possible with determination and God’s approval.

Having obtained a Ph.D in 1986, I returned to the University of Port Harcourt to continue to render my services. **My modest contributions even while I was at the lower rank of my career have enhanced the image and profile of the Department of Microbiology which till today has always earned the Department Full Accreditation status by the National Universities Commission (NUC).** I am pleased to state that the Department was ranked **number ONE** by the NUC in academic content under my leadership as Head of Department.

Vice-Chancellor Sir, I can proudly state that in general, the Department of Microbiology has both exceptional members of staff and students that should be emulated.

## **2.0 INTRODUCTION**

Vice-Chancellor Sir, as a result of the diversity of the participants (both in-person and virtual) and unique nature of this lecture, I thought it appropriate to define or explain some of the keywords used in this lecture for better understanding.

### **2.1 Definitions and Explanations of Keywords**

#### **2.1.1 University**

The word, “*University*” originated from Latin, “*Universitas*” which means “whole” or “entire” or “Universe”. This implies that a University is a type of a world of its own. It is an institution of higher learning created or established to offer degree (both undergraduate and postgraduate) and have research opportunities in many fields and disciplines. Similarly, University is from the Latin words “*Magistorum et scholarum*” which generally means “community of teachers and scholars”.

#### **2.1.2 Ivory Tower (Synonymous with University)**

This is a metaphorical setting or place where people are happily cut off (isolated) from the rest of the world in favour of their own pursuits, usually mental (educational) and esoteric (special) in nature.

#### **2.1.3 Valedictory Lecture**

This is a farewell address given by retiring Professors to share their experiences usually prior to officially bowing out of the University.

#### **2.1.4 Culture**

**It is the ideas, customs, values and social behaviour of a particular group of people or society encompassing languages, religion and artistic symbols that they accept generally without thinking about them and are passed on**

**by communication and initiation from one generation to the next.** Similarly, culture is the total way of life of particular groups of people. It includes everything that a group of people thinks, says, does and makes its systems, attitudes and feelings which are transmitted from generation to generation (Oxford Learner's Dictionary, 2014).

### **2.1.5 University Culture**

**University is likened to a living organism/system, hence, it matures over time and so does its culture (i.e., the older the University, the more matured its culture).** University culture is the combination of various cultures on campus created jointly by all the University persons (Staff and students) and accumulated in the long-term practice of school exposure. It consists of three major compounds namely; (i) material culture (ii) spiritual culture and (iii) institutional culture (Jean, 2016).

### **2.1.6 Criticisms**

The act of expressing disapproval and highlighting the problems or flaws of someone or something. It involves highlighting the good and bad qualities of the subject. About eighteen different types of criticism are known (Bhasin, 2019). However, the most common are (i) factual criticism, (ii) logical criticism (iii) positive criticism, (iv) negative criticism (v) aesthetic criticism (vi) constructive criticism (vii) destructive criticism and (viii) practical criticism.

### **2.1.7 Cautiously Optimistic**

This entails being hopeful about something but at the same time recognizing the likely problems or challenges involved. **In other words, it is a way to express one's belief in the sense that something good (positive) will probably occur but lacks total confidence that it will definitely occur.**

### **2.1.8 Sustainability**

**This concept focuses on meeting/fulfilling the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet or fulfill their needs.**

Having defined/explained the key words in this lecture, I would like to discuss some of them in detail.

## **3.0 THE UNIVERSITY CULTURE AND ITS RAMIFICATIONS**

### **3.1 Concept of University Culture**

Universities exist to educate people in a community of scholars seeking to pursue truth and knowledge in a cooperative environment free of interference from government officials, politicians and others. Universities are expected to be settings (institutions) where students are able to reflect and analyse and see what other people have earlier experienced. **Importantly, Universities do not exist to get students to regurgitate lectures or other materials learnt by heart. But sadly, today, this is the phenomenon. In other words, students are not meant to be passive empty vessels in which information is simply to be poured, thus, participatory/interactive teaching approach must be emphasized/practised.** However, this is not easily achievable because of the current abnormal high staff: student ratio. For example, see Table 1 for the change in the low to high academic staff: student ratio over the years in some Departments (this is a reflection of what obtains in many Nigerian Universities).

University culture with respect to academic and training depends essentially on goals that are not business goals since Universities are not business corporations or enterprises and are not (should not be) structured or measured using performance indicators such as “inputs”, “outputs” and “products”.

Table 1. Dramatic change in the low to high academic staff: student ratio over the years

<b>Department</b>	<b>Academic session</b>	<b>Academic Student Ratio</b>	<b>Staff:</b>
Computer Science	2019/2020	1:46	
Biochemistry	2019/2020	1:44	
Computer Science	2013/2014	1:24	
Microbiology	2019/2020	1:42	
Biochemistry	2013/2014	1:30	
Microbiology	2013/2014	1:33	
Microbiology	2005/2006	1:13	

Source: Compiled by the author from various sources

### **3.2 The Characteristics of University Culture**

The culture of a University is a collective culture jointly created and enjoyed by all the members of the community i.e., teachers, students and others. University culture is not influenced by their own inherent development rules such as the urban (cosmopolitan) culture and corporate culture but also by the regulation of social dominant culture such as nationalities or tribes, social classes and others. University culture is characterized by individuality, academic features, diversity and creativity/originality. The basic characteristics of University culture include: (i) Academic, (ii) Innovation and (iii) Timelines. These are briefly discussed as follows:

#### **(i) Academic**

The most obvious difference between Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) campus culture and other types of cultures is its academic nature. For example, the University is a strong social and cultural organization which is responsible for the transmission and creation of human cultural tradition. The culture of Universities is different from other social organizations because University cultural characteristic is



*invariant* (i.e., remains unchanged). In other words, without a cultural heritage, the University no longer has a true sense of the word “University” i.e., it has lost its meaning and value. **Therefore, by implication, if the University deviates from the cultural heritage, it is no longer a place for the continuation of learning and academic prosperity.** In this regard, the cultural heritage is **one of the universal major cultural characteristics of the University system** and is guided **jealously**. For example, at the Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand, one Dean simply informed his colleagues (through a memo) that “it has been decided that each Faculty shall be governed by a Faculty Management Team”. In addition, the team’s responsibilities were to include “allocation and duties to staff”, “promotions and leave”, “reviews and quality issues” and “encouragement of good teaching” (Gwynn, 2002). **This memo unanimously created shock and caused his colleagues to ask “what had happened to academic freedom and to collegial decision within a body corporate of scholars?”** (Gwynn, 2002).

It has been argued that University leadership is different from company’s board of directors rather, Universities need effective framework whereby the academic community can reach its own decisions, hence true representation by committed independent colleagues must be by election/appointment if given such opportunity. **Thus, the University culture will be destroyed if the “board of directors” model or structure is introduced or allowed to prevail.**

The University itself is responsible for personnel training, teaching, research, knowledge innovation, social functions and others. All these academic characteristics of a University determine the University culture which invariably affects the

unique academic characteristics of any University. For instance, I wish to give an example of University culture involving the fact that former Vice-Chancellors serve under substantive Heads and/or Acting Heads of Department (i.e., who are not Professors) thus, demonstrating clearly the university culture based on “**first among equals**” or in Latin “*Primus inter pares*”; an aberration outside the University system.

## **(ii) Innovation**

**The concept of innovation is based on “exhale the old and inhale the new”.** This is the University culture’s orientation. It emphasizes one of the basic functions of the University System which is research in addition to teaching and rendering community services (focus will be on these mandates shortly). However, innovation has become one of the main functions of the University culture. This is essential because it encourages critical and creative thinking and is interwoven with research and development (R & D); the key to entrepreneurship, national development and globalisation.

The “vitality” and essence” of HEIs especially the University is centred on innovation (Jean, 2016). The **realization of innovation in a University is achieved through the creation of new ideas, new concepts and new capacity resources, hence inbreeding should be discouraged.** (to be discussed shortly). Therefore, as an important place to create advanced culture, the University should not only absorb different cultures, draw lessons from different cultures, internalize the cultures but also make constructive criticisms, adequate judgement and even create a new culture (i.e., the essence of creativity from diversified concepts). As a result, teachers being a major part of University culture, should during their teaching/interaction and research work emphasize the potential

sense of innovation, stimulate students' innovation consciousness to create new ideas, new concepts, new theories, new research methods and others.

### **(iii) Timelines/Space and Development**

Every culture reflects the essential characteristics of its time in a certain manner. Therefore, the **University culture is not existing out of a determined space but it is formed and developed in a certain social space, environment and time.** Consequently, the University culture (being a microcosm of the society) cannot be free from the influence of the societal culture and tends to be restricted by some social factors such as the economy, politics, education, social structure and others. Therefore, University culture reflects often the ancient (sometimes referred to as “old school”) and modern, the domestic or national or foreign and the spirit of the time. Thus, the time characteristics of the University culture include: content, the dynamics (i.e., continuous innovation such as globalized world and internet era: mobile phone, WhatsApp, Facebook, etc.) which are currently available for information dissemination in the University system. Consequently, a University culture plays critical functions in transmitting and spreading knowledge, new cultures and new ideas to the young people. Thus, a good University culture can lead the whole society to prosperity which can be expressed in social dominant ideology, norms, values, concepts and beliefs resulting in enhanced academic status and competence. Overall, the goal is to ensure that students imbibe **the created correct University culture before graduation. It is important to remind ourselves that degrees are awarded based on “character and learning” and I hope this is sustained.**

### **3.3 The University Culture and the Connotation**

The University culture is a special cultural representation, a unique form of culture which often refers **to a particular spirit atmosphere and cultural environment** (Jean, 2016). The University campus culture also refers to the teachers, administrators, students, management and service activities to create all the material formation, spiritual wealth and processes in the University campus. Generally, the University culture is separated into three categories as follows:

(i) The material culture (also known as the carrier of culture).

This culture takes a particular form of facilities and environment. It materializes the external view, **the panorama (the comprehensive presentation) of the University.**

#### **(ii) The spiritual culture**

This focuses on the mind, ideas, beliefs, values, morals, emotions, psychological quality, aesthetic consciousness, interpersonal relationships, traditional habits and others. **The spiritual culture of the University is the SOUL of the culture, the core of campus culture.** The spiritual culture includes various other cultures such as mental culture, behavioural culture, written culture and others.

#### **(iii) The institutional culture**

This emphasizes the University regulations and rules, management and restriction mechanism as well as the concept of standardization. **Invariably, the University culture through the specific and peculiar environment has its unique characteristic and “law” of development (Jean, 2016).**

### 3.4 University Culture and Core Functional Mandates

Globally, Universities have tripartite core mandates, namely; (i) Teaching (ii) Research and (iii) community services (Hussain *et al.*, 2019; Giersch *et al.*, 2015).

#### 3.4.1 Teaching Culture

In the knowledge economy, teachers and teaching are the pillars of learning systems in the University. Therefore, without knowledgeable, skilled and competent teachers, knowledge dissemination would be difficult to achieve effectively and efficiently. However, the synergy between teaching and research is central to the transformation process (i.e., dissemination of acquired research findings). At the same time, the role of leadership at each level of University hierarchy is essential to re-evaluate institutional strategies, policies and action plans that promote a quality teaching culture. **Thus, a clear vision of the purpose of the University's existence, its mission, description of quality culture and the role of quality teaching are the imperatives that leadership must address.** In order to sustain a well-established teaching culture (or develop a good teaching culture), Universities should create and implement mechanisms that inculcate, promote and reward teaching quality culture/initiatives. However, such initiatives and feedbacks are often challenged and resisted because people are generally not amenable to changes.

#### 3.4.2 Research Culture

Producing effective and impactful research outputs require a strong interface between Universities and other organizations (industries) in the form of collaborations, co-operation and partnerships. Such research collaborations between academia and industry enhance research culture and make the process more productive and sustainable for engaged stakeholders.

However, such collaborations are rare for several reasons including (i) most industries prefer engaging their partners abroad due to lack of state-of-the art facilities here in the Universities (ii) most of our research outputs published by University researchers almost exclusively serve **academic interests only and are not oriented towards solutions to real social, economic and industrial problems** (Hussain *et al.*, 2019), and (iii) general lack of interest in research activities due to several environmental/operational challenges. However, Universities must address the issue of promoting a culture of problem-solving-based research emphasis. In addition, research activities should be a continuum even after attaining full Professorship or at the verge of one's retirement as exemplified through our most recent publications (Efiuvwevwere *et al.*, 2020a; Efiuvwevwere *et al.*, 2020b)

### **3.4.3 Community Engagements/Services**

The focus on community engagements or services is an extended and integrated version of a conventional University's academic domain/mandate and is one of the core responsibilities in addition to teaching and research. This demands a two-way flow of knowledge which involves (a) reciprocal knowledge transfer from the University to the community and (b) from the community to the University. The ability of a University to become an effective institution of knowledge transfer heavily relies on the infrastructure it possesses, capabilities it develops, supportive culture, effective systems, visionary leadership and strong connections with the community as well as the other stakeholders (Harwood *et al.*, 2005). Interestingly, in order to strengthen the process of the community engagements/services, **Universities have to act as both a supplier and recipient of knowledge**. The dynamics of the Universities entail playing the role of both a supplier and consumer of knowledge which can lead Universities to engage

the community and the other stakeholders effectively in pursuit of economic and social development. The reciprocal nature of community engagement can effectively deliver beneficial outcomes to Universities and communities through knowledge sharing (e.g. on security matters). Thus, Universities have to play the leading role in building community partnerships, collaborations and co-operations. This is as a result of the critical pre-requisite capabilities of Universities to bridge the relationship with communities on superior knowledge, competitiveness in skills and competencies beyond the needs and expectations of the given communities. Therefore, these require Universities to have exhaustive understanding of internal structure, norms, individuals'/groups' values, collective traditions/cultures and the language of the concerned community. In this regard, akin to globalization which is the transformation of the world into a village with residents of different cultures, religions, traditions and languages. Thus, survival within such a dynamic and diverse village/community requires understanding and acceptance of such differences and tolerance to live with different opinions (Hussain *et al.*, 2019). **Ideally, University-community engagements/services are platforms that can serve as incubators for new sets of ideas, norms, acceptance behaviour, “national” and global citizenship.**

These three University core mandates discussed above are summarized with appropriate descriptions as presented in Table 2.

**Table 2. Three University core mandates and the associated descriptions/highlights**

S/No	Core mandates	Description/details
1.	Teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prioritising teaching quality through institutional strategy.</li> <li>• Recruiting teachers on integrated teaching and research competence.</li> <li>• Involving the stakeholders' input in curriculum design (e.g. NUC/University/Faculty of Computing).</li> <li>• Implementing quality assurance plan for teaching assessment and feedback (<b>Note:</b> a noble idea but how functional is it in many Universities?)</li> </ul>
2.	Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensuring intellectual and economic capital availability to enhance research.</li> <li>• Promoting academic interdisciplinary collaborations (<b>Note:</b> ideal and good but staff pay more attention to promotion guidelines).</li> <li>• Building bridges between University researchers, industry and community collaborative work.</li> </ul>



- Assessing research for its human, social and economic impacts (as currently being experienced with Corona virus pandemic).
3. Community engagements/services
- Developing and publishing intellectually based capability to attract/improve community.
  - Ensuring public visibility by active participation in media on national and global issues (**Note:** should be encouraged but may be misconstrued in our environment).
  - Engaging faculty and students to interact with communities purposefully on regular basis (**Note:** good idea but frowned at due to mutual suspicion e.g. sex for grade (especially now because of the new legislature and condemnation by colleagues).
  - Bridging the gap between academic research and community issues (**Note:** should be encouraged but demand for cash or favours are most likely requests to facilitate accessibility).

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Compiled by the author from several sources including: Harwood *et al.*, 2005; Jean, 2016; Hussain *et al.*, 2019.

### **3.5 The Culture of Committees in the University System**

#### **3.5.1 The Concept of Committee System in the University**

The Longman Dictionary defines committee as a group of people chosen or elected to represent a larger group in order to carry out a particular job/duty and make decisions. **The University, being a complex higher education institution (HEI), requires a strong and virile committee system for effective administration in order to achieve its numerous objectives.**

It is recognized worldwide that in order for Universities to accomplish their functions and activities, there is need for the use of different committees since management alone cannot effectively handle them. **The participatory nature of committee system has given all categories of staff, both academic and non-academic (non-teaching), a clear sense of belonging as important stakeholders because the benefits and burden of decision-making are commonly shared in the Universities** (Bampo-Addo, 2018; Okotoni and Adegbam, 2013). As indicated earlier in this lecture, culture is critical in any organization including the University. Thus, everything revolves around the established culture of the given University. As a result, Universities have become well-known as institutions managed by “**culture of committees**” (Bampoh-Addo, 2018; Ogbomida *et al.*, 2013; Tella, 2015; Wermund, 2017). **However, in recent years, the committee system of University administration has come under scrutiny and has generated much discussion with respect to whether or not it leads to better performance in the core mandates of teaching, research and community services as well as its impact on institutional ranking and reputation** (Bampoh-Addo, 2018). Several Committees exist in the University System.

### **3.5.2 Some University Committees and their Functions**

These committees are designated as either standing/statutory, ad-hoc or temporary. Generally, the University committee structure is based on the Council (the governing body), Joint Council-Senate, Senate, Finance and General Purposes, Appointments and Promotions and Certificate Verification Committees and their functions are briefly discussed as follows:

#### **3.5.3 (i) The University Council**

This is the highest governing administrative body of the University and is the formal employer of all the University staff. It is charged with the responsibilities for general control and superintendent of the policies, finances and assets of the University. Thus, in practice, the council as a body concentrates on major issues and external matters, rather than day-to-day internal activities of the University.

#### **3.5.3(ii) The Joint Council-Senate Committee of the University**

This committee comprises both Council and Senate members. It is charged with the responsibility of matters that need the attention of the two bodies such as selection of a new Vice-Chancellor.

#### **3.5.3 (iii) The Senate of the University**

The senate is the highest academic body in the University system and it superintends all academic matters.

#### **3.5.3 (iv) Finance and General Purposes Committee**

This committee, subject to the directions of the Council, exercises control over the property and expenditure of the University and performs such other functions of the Council as the Council may delegate from time to time.

### **3.5.3 (v) Appointments and Promotions Committee**

This committee functions at three levels; namely; Departmental, Faculty and Central. The process is initiated at the Departmental level where the functions include (i) verification and assessment of all claims made in a candidate's curriculum vitae based on stipulated criteria (ii) consideration and recommendation to the Faculty Appointments and Promotions Committee, **Thereafter, as a "Clearing House" the Faculty makes her submission to the Central University A&PC.** It should be noted that at each of the committee levels, no member of the committee shall participate during the committee deliberations when his/her case for promotion is being considered.

### **3.5.3 (vi) Certificate Verification Committee**

This committee is responsible for verification and authentication of stipulated criteria for admission of students or employment of staff.

## **3.6 Some Criticisms of Use of Committees in the University System**

Irrespective of the justification for use of committees, certain drawbacks have been highlighted which include the following: (i) diffusion of responsibility (ii) ignoring the lone voice and (iii) stress

### **(i) Diffusion of Responsibility**

This entails a phenomenon where small committees tend to drift toward making "extreme" decisions as a group of individuals acting as a committee often makes a decision **that none of the individuals acting alone would make, given the same information.** Therefore, diffusion of responsibility is regarded as an individual's role in a group's decision weighing less heavily on him/her thereby making it appear as a collective decision, **hence the clear diffusion of responsibility.**

The implication is that, not as thorough an evaluation analysis of the issues is made when the decision is ascribed to the committee and this is a common place today because of fear. Thus, **the phenomenon of “passing the buck” is currently prevalent/reflecting the common expression (“not me,” “it is the committee”).**

**(ii) Ignoring the Lone Voice**

Generally, small committees do not properly take into account the most relevant expertise in the committee. For example, a solitary/lonely view is often ignored in the course of deliberation within the committee. Yet, management is usually looking for creative “out-of-the box” strategies/opinions that are not likely to be most appreciated in most committee’s members’ thinking.

It was once remarked by Raph J. Cordiner, the former Chairman of General Electric, that **“if you can name one important decision that was made by a committee, I will find you the one person who had the lonely/singular insight that solved the problem and was the basis for that decision”**. Nevertheless, as a practical matter, committee members need to be able to listen carefully to lone voices yet, not give in to the peer pressure of what others on the committee think. **It is a complex balancing act especially where *egocentrism and unnecessary tough stance against contrasting opinion referred to as “minority tyranny”* (i.e., a few members attempting to lord themselves over the committee) must be avoided.** At the same time, one of the important things that leadership can do is to make an extra effort to identify the person in the group/committee who has the greatest expertise relating to the issues at hand, whether it is science, technology or management but ensure that every opinion is heard.

### **(iii) Stress**

When there is a great deal of pressure, committees act very much like individuals under stress. They often procrastinate, calling for further/more information or become committed to wrong decisions to save face or take action primarily to protect themselves and each other against criticism.

**This type of pressure may account for the popular notion that committees tend to “split the baby”, resulting in a less controversial decision that does not serve the purpose for which the committee was constituted.**

The committee system believes that decisions taken reflect the interests and wishes of the University and the University system. Although, there is hardly any system in which some abuses are not found but the extent to which such abuses occur will affect the overall efficiency of the University which depends on the application of the internal checks and balances (internal mechanism) available (Bampoh-Addo, 2018). Thus, the membership of the committee is critical hence the characteristics of the optimal committee members should be well-articulated.

### **Characteristics of Optimal Committee Members**

- (i) Exhibit the character strengths of honesty and bravery with high emotional intelligence.
- (ii) Possession of adequate unique expertise and perspectives
- (iii) Willingness to speak out and promote committee viewpoints.
- (iv) Commitment to apply the same rigor to making good committee decisions as they would apply to making individual ones.
- (v) Collaborative conflict skills to wrangle over a highly charged issue without seriously undermining personal relationship with other committee members.

### **3.7 Merits and De-merits of Culture of Committees in the University System**

#### **3.7.1 Basic Practical Observations**

The University administration thrives on the committees for its effectiveness and efficiency with the core values of accountability, transparency and participation/involvement. However, it is also argued, that committee meetings deplete Universities' primary/core businesses of teaching, research and community services depending on how they are managed. Thus, the need to review the University culture of committees and probably reduce them while at the same time, striving to achieve their objectives. **Nevertheless, the performance of committees largely depends on several factors including: the composition, size, Chairmanship (leadership), commitment of members, secretariat capabilities/commitment, and availability of resources. For example, the Vice-Chancellor as the Chairman may be unable to attend meetings due to conflict of engagements within or outside the University or deliberate manipulation/unwillingness to discuss certain issues** (Bampo-Addo, 2018; Ogbomida *et al.*, 2013).

Irrespective of who chairs the meeting (whether the Chairman or his/her representative), he/she should demonstrate leadership competences in order to enhance quality, objectivity and timelines in decision-making and he/she must be firm and enjoy the respect of his/her colleagues recognizing the culture of **“first among equals” or in Latin “*Primus inter pares*”**. In addition, an experienced committee secretary tries to judge the mood of the committee and particularly that of the Chairman so as to be able to perceive when the time is ripe or appropriate to provide relevant facts/highlights for sound decision(s) to be made.

### **3.7.2 Merits of Culture of Committees in the University System**

In spite of some criticisms of the committee system in the University, a number of benefits/advantages for its use as a tool for adequate University administration have been reported. These include the following:

- (i) The knowledge, comprehension and awareness of the issues in the University community are enhanced.
- (ii) It allows for “spread” of authority and participation of members of the University in decision-making thereby fostering both horizontal and vertical communication in the University system.
- (iii) Committee decisions (in spite of the flaws) are generally more appreciable and acceptable to stakeholders.
- (iv) Committee system serves as a good co-ordinating/unifying mechanism, thus promoting the growth and development of the University System.
- (v) It helps to reduce incidents of crises and rumour-mongering especially if the committees communicate with their constituencies and are transparent.
- (vi) Promote security and tranquility on campus.

### **3.7.3 De-merits of Culture of Committees in the University System**

One of the most cited criticisms of objection to the University culture of committees as exemplified by its admonition is in connection with the title of the paper “**Mitch Daniels blasts culture of committees at Universities**” (Wermund, 2017). Mitch Daniels is the President (equivalent of Vice-Chancellor) of Purdue University, in Indiana, USA whose University was in the process of acquiring for profit another University (Kaplan University, also in USA) in a first-of-its kind



deal/agreement and he expressed his frustration by saying that Colleges/Universities are too often very, very slow to change “because of a culture of committees, a culture where everybody has to have a say”. His comments were a part of discussion about innovation in higher education at the Education Writers Association, USA where he was confronted by resistance from one of the Faculties of Purdue University about the plan and the way to acquire the Kaplan University.

**The criticism by the Faculty was that the President failed to adequately consult Faculty/Senate on the acquisition.** As a result, the Senate issued a resolution that called on the University leaders to rescind the deal (agreement) which the Senate said violated “common-sense educational practice and respect for the Purdue Senate”. Their dissatisfaction was based on lack of shared/equal governance at the University level, the model that some might consider the “culture of committees” which the President (Daniels) admonished or did not support. He also asserted that “**ironies abound in higher education institutions**”. For example, he said “**these are places that are supposed to be the havens of free inquiry but too often, are places where conformity of thought is enforced, places that teach creative disruption... can’t imagine that it would happen here (Purdue)**” (Wermund, 2017). This is the most often cited criticism of the University Culture of Committees.

It is common knowledge that everything that **glitters is not gold** hence it is not unexpected that some de-merits are associated with the **culture of committees** in the University System as follows:

- (i) Committee meetings and deliberations deplete the time meant for the primary or core mandates (teaching, research and community services) of the University.

- (ii) Refusal by University administration to implement some recommendations of Committees often results in demoralization of members and in turn, makes the committee system ineffective.
- (iii) Victimization (vendetta) by some committee members who go out of their way to satisfy their personal objectives against perceived accused offenders who are not in their good books.
- (iv) Non-committal of some committee members to the vision and mission of the University and therefore hardly attend meetings, resulting in non-compliance with time line for submission of committee reports.
- (v) **Appointment/election of personal friends (loyalists) by the authority erodes the genuineness and sincerity of activities of the committee system which adversely affects the hallmarks (objectivity, straight forwardness, dispassionateness) of the University system.**

Several publications on the committee system of Universities have highlighted a number of issues including the constraints and challenges encountered by committees in the University (Okotoni and Adegami, 2013). Table 3 shows the responses to constraints and challenges encountered by committees in the University system.

**Table 3: The constraints and challenges encountered by committees in the University system**

S/No	Responses to constraints and challenges	Frequency	Percentage
1	Inadequate funding	384	19.5
2	Increased workload by members	304	15.4
3	Delay in paper/soft copy circulation	301	15.3
4	Division(disharmony) among committee members	249	12.7
5	Time frame for committee to work	200	10.2
6	Delay in implementation of committee report and recommendations	167	8.5
7	Favoritism/Loyalty to constituency	156	7.9
8	Inability to form quorum	102	5.2
9	Inactive Leadership	65	3.3
10	Meeting disruptions by staff/students/protesters	40	2.0
		<b>1968*</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Okotoni and Adegami (2013).

\*The frequency exceeded 691 (actual respondents) because respondents identified more than one constraint and challenge encountered by the committee.

### **3.8 Evolving Questionable “New Cultures” in the University System**

Whereas the University culture has been well-established for centuries, recent “new cultures” in the University system are evolving. Many of these are at variance with the known and tested University cultures. Some of these “evolving new cultures” include:

- (i) Get rich quick culture
- (ii) Compromised mentorship culture
- (iii) Pidgin/adulterated English culture
- (iv) Academic/Intellectual inbreeding
- (v) Culture of course representative
- (vi) Culture of easy life
- (vii) E-learning/Remote learning culture

The above-indicated “evolving new cultures” are to be discussed briefly as follows:

**(i) Get rich quick culture**

As earlier indicated in this lecture that a University is a microcosm of its given society, **it has become well-known that the Nigerian society of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has lost its cherished culture of respect, propriety, honesty, accountability and righteousness which are being replaced by materialism, greed, avarice, selfishness and envy (Okunade and Shehu, 2015).**

Unfortunately, in spite of the University culture, many of these vices have crept into the University System through staff and students whose vision and mission and objectives are not in conformity with those of the University system. **For example, publication of books even as a Lecturer II is now common place (what then would be published by this member of staff when he becomes a Professor?).** However, this has been abolished in many Universities. Also, a number of members of staff demanding huge sums of money especially from post graduate students have been reported (Odiaka, 2020). Therefore, in order to sustain the serenity and the values Universities are known for, such erring members of staff and students should be appropriately brought to book and disciplined to avoid tarnishing the image of the University System/Ivory tower.

These practices are gaining ground and are becoming standard practices/norms. Therefore, the earlier stringent measures are taken to stop these sharp practices (“new evolving cultures”). The better for the University System and the sustainability of the University culture.

### **(ii) Compromised Mentorship Culture**

Mentorship involves adequately supervising and advising a less experienced colleague or supervisee to attain desirable/acceptable knowledge over time. This was taken for granted until about the year 2000 in this country. **Usually, the mentee shows humility and willingness to be mentored. However, in recent years, the trend has changed such that the mentees feel like, there is no need for mentorship because he/she assumes to have known it all.** Thus, if the culture of mentorship is compromised or destroyed, that implies the destruction of the University culture and its values.

### **(iii) Pidgin/Adulterated English Culture**

Nigeria has about 520 spoken languages or dialects but English language is the approved language of communication in official transactions and in higher education institutions (HEIs). But today, there is “evolving new culture” of use of pidgin or adulterated English in Universities which negates the spirit and University Culture. In fact, the course GES 100.1 “Communication skills in English” is aimed at developing the English skills of undergraduates. **However, this pidgin English culture has become more worrisome especially since it is being spoken between staff and students, even in staff offices and hall ways.** Ordinarily, one would not comment on this development but for the wide spread usage and the assumed unintentional usage in written communication. This makes the lecturers’ work far more difficult and discouraging.

#### **(iv) Academic/Intellectual inbreeding**

This phenomenon entails preference for admitting students from the University's secondary/post-secondary schools run by the University and subsequently, hiring some of the same students to Faculty positions if and when they obtain their PhDs. **This is a systemic problem in many Universities around the world (Altbach *et al.*, 2015).**

The major criticism of academic inbreeding is the preference for hiring home-trained candidates at the same Universities in preference to “outsiders” even when the latter are better qualified (Bushkar and Gupta, 2017).

It is note-worthy that in Indian Universities, faculty members with PhDs from a given Indian Institution who are hired after acquiring a few years of work experience else-where are not usually considered “inbreds” since they are said to have proven their worth elsewhere before returning “home”. In contrast, academic inbreeding refers specifically to cases where “inbred” PhDs are hired by their Alma mater for their very first faculty appointment.

Whereas several reasons have been advanced for adherence to such “practices and policies” (Pushkar and Gupta, 2017), **one of such reasons is that such Universities do not need to cast their net far and wide to catch qualified candidates who will also “fit in” with the institution's culture and outlook/mission.**

**This culture reinforces “monoculture” and lacks “diversity” of new concepts. In fact, expressions such as “that is not how we do it here” is common place by such inbreds to “outsiders”.** Inbreds are classified into two categories (i) silver-corded academics and (ii) mobile inbreds.

Silver-corded academics are those whose first employment is not at the University from which they graduated but who later returned to their Alma mater. In contrast, mobile inbreds are those who have either spent or researched or had teaching spell at another University during the doctoral degree or did a post-doc at another University or did both before taking the first academic appointment in their Alma mater.

Several findings have shown that Inbred faculty produce less research outputs than “Outsiders” and the impact of their research tends to be significantly lower (Pushkar and Gupta, 2017). **Generally, it is unanimous that inbreeding is a phenomenon that has a negative impact on the overall academic system but there are exceptions** (Gorelova and Yudkevich, 2015).

#### **(v) Culture of Course Representative**

Whereas the concept of course representative is desirable, it needs to be well-articulated for adequate application. It is important to note that in many Universities, **it is not yet formally approved but fully operational and serves some useful purposes. Nevertheless, it is subject to abuse by both staff and students. Therefore, its concept and application should be properly articulated, approved and incorporated into the statement of academic policies of the University system.**

#### **(vi) Culture of easy life**

The University culture world-wide emphasizes hard-work hence the degree is awarded based on “character and learning”. Invariably, both characteristics are fading away/disappearing since character is no longer a virtue in our University System (Odiaka, 2020) and learning i.e., synonymous with hard-work is considered “old school”. But it should be underscored but

hard-work always pays especially in academics. For example, in the 1990s to early 20<sup>th</sup> century, students and staff work very late sometimes till 10.00pm. However, today, by 4.00pm-5.00pm, staff and students are trooping out of campus for their various homes/residences. Perhaps, the insecurity of today and emphasis on social activities may partly account for such a change. **Again, in those days, students were ever ready to have announced and unannounced quizzes as continuous assessment but today, several excuses/justifications are advanced to either plead to jettison or postpone the quizzes.**

**(vii) E- Learning/Remote Learning Culture**

The concept of E-learning/Remote learning has long been introduced to the University system globally. But no serious attention has been given to it especially here in Nigeria. **For example, there is both grossly inadequate infrastructure and human input to effectively carry out E-learning as evidenced when attempts are being made to apply E-learning in Universities and other organizations during this period of Covid-19 pandemic.** Nevertheless, it has been emphasized that conventional learning is more worth-while (beneficial) than E-learning. **However, the “new culture” (new normal) should be highly encouraged by providing adequate E-learning infrastructure and competent personnel.**

**3.9 Cultures/Hallmarks of Highly Ranked Universities**

Ranking of Universities is a global phenomenon involving well-defined indicators including quality of education, quality of faculty, research outputs and per capita performance (Okebukola, 2019). **The three most outstanding global ranking bodies of Universities are (i) the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU), (ii) the Times**



**Higher Education (THE) Ranking and (iii) Webometrics Ranking.** The indicators that are commonly used by these ranking bodies are (i) research excellence, (ii) internationalization and (iii) quality of graduates. The implications of a University scoring “A” grade in research excellence is the ability to attract a good mix of international staff and students and capacity of its graduates to be well-regarded nationally, regionally and globally which enhances the chances of attaining the top of the ranking league table (Okebukola, 2019).

Generally, African (including Nigerian) Universities do not perform well in the ranking league Tables. It has been argued by Nigerian University administrators and stakeholders that the indicators used for ranking are skewed in favour of European and North American Universities (Okebukola, 2019). However, some of the magic bullets to improve the ranking of Nigerian Universities on global league tables are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Strategies/indicators to ensure improved ranking of Nigerian Universities on the global ranking schemes

S/No	Strategies/Indicators for ranking	Descriptions/Details
1	Tutelage under Nobel-Prize Winners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Since training/mentorship of graduates/colleagues by Nobel Prize winners enhances cultivation of research methodologies, attitudes and values to become a prize winner.</li> <li>❖ Therefore, bright and committed graduates (preferably first class degree holders) should be carefully selected to undertake postgraduate/post-doc programmes under such laureates.</li> </ul>
2	Admit the best from the secondary school system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Admission of the cream of the candidates from the secondary school will enhance the chances of potential quality graduates who in future will hopefully win the Nobel Prize.</li> <li>❖ This becomes a challenge to the selection process of candidates because it is a rich pool to select from but objectivity must be followed.</li> <li>❖ Sadly, potential laureates are distracted with ambitious administrative goals such as lobbying for position of Vice-Chancellor, Director-General, Minister, Commissioner and so on.</li> </ul>
3	Encourage scholars in Nigerian Universities to target global problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Many Nobel prizes are won based on solving global problems of human race rather than local or regional challenges of humanity.</li> </ul>

- ❖ Therefore, Vice-Chancellors should encourage well-focused research-oriented staff to think global (yet nationally relevant problem) while seeking research grants. For example, Coronavirus/Covid-19 vaccine/cure and discovery of several unknown microorganisms since (only about 0.11% is known today out of about one trillion species on Earth)
  
- 4 Encourage networking with researchers outside Nigeria

  - ❖ Vice-Chancellors/NUC should encourage staff who are focused and committed to research work to network with colleagues outside Nigeria because your staff cannot nominate themselves for a Nobel Prize hence their work must be made known to others (this is also why inbreeding should be discouraged).
  - ❖ Importantly, the more they make their work known, the better their chances of earning a nomination especially if their work receives the attention of a Nobel laureate.
  
- 5 Foster collaboration with American Universities

  - ❖ It is true that Noble award is not country-based but it has been shown that working in United States laboratories potentially enhances one's chances of winning the prize.
  - ❖ Over the years, almost 40% of individuals and organizations honoured by the Noble Foundation are Americans or

- have worked in the US.
- ❖ It is therefore advisable for Vice-Chancellors to be more selective with preference to US Universities in terms of academic and cultural linkages.
  - ❖ At the same time, well-established renowned Universities should be the first choice
- 6                      Research building capacity
- ❖ Apparently, Nigerian scholars/researchers have remarkable potentials to be highly rated and able to contribute significantly to **citable** indexed literature. However, their research skills and methodologies have to be continually up-graded.
  - ❖ Therefore, the need for regular research capacity building conducted at the University level preferably by senior academics to head capacity-building efforts. In addition, involvement of renowned and highly-cited researchers from other countries will be a beneficial and productive undertaking.
  - ❖ Generally, the better model of research-capacity building is programmed/faculty-based and University-based or nation-based.
- 7                      Intensive publicity for research conducted by Nigerian scholars
- ❖ Several Nobel laureates have emphasized the need for researchers to convince others that their research is significantly important and “ground-breaking” /remarkable through journal articles, conferences and

- popular media reports.
- ❖ In most cases, many Nobel winners are not recognized for decades or more after conducting the notable research for which they will ultimately be recognized.
  - ❖ This is why the Nigerian University community through the combined efforts of NUC and Association of Vice-Chancellors of Nigerian Universities (AVCNU) should always seek “ground-breaking” research findings by Nigerian scholars and continue to amplify their findings to local and international audiences.

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Source: Adapted by the author from Okebukola (2019)

#### **4.0 CAUTIOUSLY OPTIMISTIC SUSTAINABILITY OF THE UNIVERSITY CULTURE**

Based on the foregoing, it is evident that the University culture exists globally and is operational. However, divergent views for and against its existence, urge for overall modification and its sustainability have been expressed by various researchers, University Administrators and other stakeholders.

Nevertheless, **the pros and cons do not have clear-cut arguments/evidences** in support or against sustainability of the University culture. For example, it has been emphasized in this lecture that several components constitute University culture. **Among the most remarkable is the “culture of committees” as opposed to use of “board of directors” concept which is the operational tool in industrial organizations.**

As a result of the importance of use of committees in the University global system, the committee system is usually

entrenched in the Act/Laws establishing Nigerian Universities (Tella, 2015).

The University culture dates back to 1088 when the University of Bologna was established and the University culture has been sustained till date (approximately 932 years) in spite of some criticisms and agitations.

**Universities normally derive their culture/identity/brand over years but today, many are struggling to establish their identity as Universities due to conflicting and not well-articulated missions and objectives coupled with undisciplined uncommitted staff with student population of poor academic background/qualifications. Therefore, if academic staff of questionable character and lacking in University culture are those in-charge of the University system, it becomes worrisome and predictable that the system will ultimately collapse. Vice-Chancellor Sir, in corroboration of this assertion, please permit me to quote from Ekekwe (2019). “There have been instances of external assessors evaluating publications and wondering how internal assessors could have seen the quality of publications submitted and still recommended the authors for promotion”. He further stated that “It would appear that many of us have lost the courage of our conviction and can no longer call a spade by its name” (Ekekwe, 2019).**

In fact, it is now becoming more evident that the culture of courage and objectivity, the hallmarks of academic, appear not to be in existence these days and has been corroborated by Ekekwe (2019).

Additionally, it has been argued in many fora that standards of education are falling or deteriorating while others are of the view that the standards are improving. But these contrasting

arguments can be discussed further. **For example, standards may be argued to “improve” if devaluation of assessment grades is instituted or practised. In this regard, moderation of grades such that instead of 40% being the pass grade invariably is lowered to 30% by the addition of 10% across board.** This has become a common phenomenon in many Universities. **Unfortunately, grade inflation has become a global phenomenon being practised in both developing and developed countries (Harvey 2001; Pardoe, 2016; Gunn and Kapade, 2018). It is therefore not surprising that in recent years, many Nigerian Universities (private and public) produce first class degree graduates in unprecedented high numbers being more prevalent in the former (Daily Trust, 2020).** For example, Table 5 shows the number of first class degree graduates within the stated period of time in different Universities.

Table 5: Different Universities and numbers of first class graduates during different academic sessions

S/No	University	Academic Session	No of First Class Degree Graduates	%
1.	University of Calabar	2019/2020	51(7611)	0.67
2.	University of Abuja	2019/2020	26(3574)	0.73
3.	University of Benin	2013/2014	64(7098)	0.90
4.	University of Benin	2017/2018	134(8276)	1.62
5.	Federal University of Technology, Akure	2018/2019	153(1898)	8.06
6.	University of Ibadan	2017/2018	241(7340)	3.29
7.	Covenant University (Private)	2018/2019	215(1580)	13.61
8.	Afe Babalola University (Private)	2018/2019	99 (979)	10.11
9.	Babcock University (Private)	2018/2019	62(1926)	3.22
10.	University of Lagos	2018/2019	271(6992)	3.87
11.	Usmanu Danfodiyo University	2018/2019	113(10,994)	1.03
12.	University of Port Harcourt	2018/2019	106(4771)	2.22
13.	University of Ilorin	2011/2012	36(4656)	0.76
14.	University of Ilorin	2018/2019	130(12009)	1.08
15.	Obafemi Awolowo University	2018/2019	124(5292)	2.34
16.	University of Port Harcourt	2007/2008	9(3718)	0.24
17.	University of Port Harcourt	2011/2012	18(2470)	0.73
18.	University of Port Harcourt	2016/2017	78(9452)	0.83

Source: Compiled by the author from various sources



These suggest dramatic “improvement” compared with time past. These “improved” student performances imply that the quality of teaching is continuously improving as well as student understanding being commensurate with such improved teaching. However, there is no readily available appropriate correlation between overall student performance and quality teaching because of several variables.

Sustainable excellent University (i.e., having the expected/known cultural characteristics) is defined as **“a University that mobilises its human intellectual, financial and social capital to efficiently, effectively, ethically and routinely create and disseminate knowledge that advance the progress of individuals, organizations and societies towards sustainable future”**. Based on existing information, seven relevant University performance domains have been identified as follows (Hussain *et al.*,2019); (i) quality teaching, (ii) a research culture, (iii) technological capacity building, (iv) accessibility,(v) community engagements/services,(vi) internationalization and (vii) the natural serene environment. In order to achieve sustainable University culture/excellence, Universities have to devise strategies, policies and action plans for each of the aforementioned performance domains.

It is important to note that the relationship between University culture and sustainability is a critical but relatively unexplored domain. For example, the recently coined term **“knowledge economy”** or **“knowledge capitalism”** demands the re-shaping and re-defining of the role of Universities as change agents in national and global sustainable development.

Similarly, the conduct of research is an essential responsibility of contemporary Universities. Thus, the development of a research-oriented culture is an imperative for the University system. Therefore, Universities must respond to the twin

challenges of internationalization and globalization in ways that ensure the sustainability of their resources.

Academic or intellectual inbreeding is inimical to University culture of diversity. It is generally viewed as insular and unhealthy for academia and University culture because it is thought to reduce the possibility of new ideas coming in from outside sources (Altbach *et al.*, 2015). However, it is a complex global phenomenon with good, bad and inevitable considerations such as lack of faith in candidates from elsewhere with the belief that their graduates are most well prepared and find it difficult to employ outsiders with comparable expertise, qualifications and potentials. Interestingly, this phenomenon appears more common among high quality elite institutions than in the others (Altbach *et al.*, 2015).

Furthermore, inbreeding is also known as institutional **inbreeding** which is perceived to be damaging to academia (Horta, 2013). Obviously, various definitions have been given to “inbreeding”. However, in spite of the definitions, the unanimous principle entails “**institutional immobility**”. This phenomenon has also been identified as a “**four-line career structure**” where someone’s educational and academic path **is based in the same University from Bachelor, Masters, Ph.D and first academic appointment at the same University** (Horta, 2013). Several criticisms of inbreeding have been underscored by University Researchers and Stakeholders.

For example, many studies have shown that diverse groups produce better solutions than homogenous groups in any setting (Sharma, 2019).

Whereas certain criticisms and admonition have been expressed concerning the University culture, its sustainability is invariably in the overall growth and development of the University system globally. **Therefore, the perceived threat to its existence or destruction is considered unrealistic and unachievable.** Thus, sustenance of stringent key indicators for enhancement of University culture and improved ranking should be enforced by University key stakeholders such as Vice-Chancellors and regulatory agencies including NUC and Federal Ministry of Education. In this regard, the following recommendations as indicated in Table 6 should be adopted.

Table 6. Some recommendations for the sustainability of the University Culture

S/No	Indicators	Details/Explanations
i	Maintain adequate teacher/student ratio	❖ Enforcement of teacher/student ratio through accreditation exercises by NUC and other relevant professional societies.
ii	Enhanced efficiency of postgraduate schools	❖ Measures should be taken to enforce completion of programmes by postgraduate students within stipulated duration of time to avoid overstay of these future mentors.
iii	Strengthen University-industry partnership	❖ Universities should establish a strong partnership with industries to gain the confidence required/expected of industries for sustained University-industry collaboration.
iv	Stability of University calendar	❖ Serenity and stability are required for University atmosphere that provides good

- quality teaching, research and mentorship. Stable academic calendar enhances adequate planning and productivity including long vacation travel and research.
- v Improved salaries, conditions of service and work environment to attract international staff
- ❖ Attraction of international staff is enhanced by salaries that are internationally competitive.
  - ❖ Work environment including teaching and research facilities should be significantly improved since they are currently deplorable.
  - ❖ Accommodation facilities should be drastically improved upon with special attention to security and regular electricity and water supply.
  - ❖ These are needed for enhanced productivity and international recognition

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**Source:** Adapted by the author from Okebukola (2019)

Evidently, in addition to the core mandates that constitute University culture, the indicators shown in Table 6 clearly underscore the imperatives of sustainability of the University culture and the associated growth coupled with advancement of the University system.

However, the non-corresponding improvement in facilities and funding have resulted in the dismal state of the University system which is characterized by inadequate funding, inadequate manpower and state-of-the-art facilities. Thus, to sustain the University culture, criteria that must be met should include enhanced globalized mobility of intellectuals,

information dissemination, goods and services that must be part of the University system to promote international competitiveness and sustenance of quality assurance culture in the Nigerian University System (NUS). It is therefore imperative to introduce or develop the proactive approach/method of quality assurance culture which involves taking measures to prevent deviations, detection of flaws in order to ensure sustainability of the ideal University culture or system (Ibara, 2015). This contrasts with the quality control process which is retroactive in nature and inadequate for sustainability of University culture.

Having examined the differences between quality control and quality assurance, it is therefore evident that if the Nigerian Universities can *ab initio* get things right and every time, then the usual fire-brigade approach often adopted with respect to accreditation exercises would be avoided (Uche, 2011).

Therefore, the quality assurance culture of a University in conjunction with other well-articulated cultures earlier indicated lead to attainment of sustainability of ideal University culture and the University System.

**To achieve an enviable and sustainable University culture, adequate comprehensive quality assurance model/scheme must be put in place to monitor internal quality assurance mechanisms right from academic units/departments to the University level. For example, the Departmental Quality Assurance Committee (DQAC) should report to the Faculty Quality Assurance Committee (FQAC) which in turn reports to the Director, Quality Assurance Unit and who finally reports to the Vice-Chancellor who takes the necessary action such as recommendation or otherwise (including innovation, remedial actions and changes) to the Senate for deliberation.**

**In order to achieve desirable quality assurance goals, there must be attitudinal change with respect to quality assurance culture necessitating a paradigm shift in the prevailing circumstances such as non-chalance, widespread indiscipline, and lack of commitment to duties in the University system. It appears that the culture where internal mechanisms/practices “guaranteed” quality in the Nigerian University system (NUS) seem to have been compromised/”jettisoned” due to several reasons such as tribalism, nepotism, lack of courage to enforce policies or sanction erring staff.**

**In addition, students need attitudinal change as some of them are more interested in being intimate with lecturers to have undeserved scores/grades.** Similarly, national development, internationalization and globalization are closely related to quality education and sustainability of University culture being imperatives that must be given serious attention. Therefore, the following recommendations should be adopted.

- (i). The University regulatory agency i.e., the National Universities Commission (NUC) should take appropriate measures to adequately guide Universities on the standards of academic staff and students to employ and admit respectively (but this may be inimical to the University autonomy).
- (ii). Quality assurance culture should be emphasized and put in place at various levels (departmental, faculty and University) since it is an integral part of the University culture. As a result of economic competitiveness and globalization, more objective measures should be taken in the input/admission process of students since this affects the quality of the outputs/graduates (likened to GIGO, garbage in, garbage out).

- (iii). Universities and government agencies should focus more seriously on improving the ranking indicators employed by well-known ranking schemes such as Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) and Webometrics Ranking.
- (v) Staff and students should commit themselves to assuring quality education by eliminating examination misconduct, unethical/unprofessional practices which compromise quality education most needed for competitive postgraduate admission and/or employment.
- (vi) Provision of adequate leadership that is committed to development and innovative changes with focus on entrenching true and ideal University culture and its sustainability.

## CONCLUSION

Vice-Chancellor Sir, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, I wish to conclude that it has become apparent to state that the university culture and its components constitute the **SOUL** of the University system thereby dictating all its activities and functionalities. The University culture is characterized by individuality, academic features, diversity and creativity. Consequently, if the University deviates from its cultural heritage, it is no longer a place for the continuation of learning and academic prosperity, hence it must be vigorously defended. **In addition, the “board of directors” as established management tool for industrial organizations is at variance with that of the University culture that emphasizes the concept of “first among equals” (“*Primus inter pares*”).**

Innovation (as opposed to inbreeding), research, knowledge economy and teaching quality culture are the key imperatives

that the university leadership must address to achieve sustainability of the University culture.

As a result of the complexity of the University system, “**the culture of committees**” has become well-established for administration to effectively achieve the numerous desired objectives. However, this has generated certain criticisms such as the phenomenon of “passing the buck” and not taking direct responsibility for decisions, depletion of time meant to carry out University core mandates and very slow processes to decision-making.

Similarly, **evolution of “new cultures” is a threat to the well-tested University culture and possibly could lead to collapse of the University system.** The University culture enhances improved ranking but there are apparent gross inadequacies to meet the required indicators. Thus, it is not justifiable to ascribe the poor ranking performances of African (including Nigerian) Universities to skewness of the ranking indicators in favour of European and North American Universities.

The divergent views based on the *pros and cons of the sustainability of the University culture* do not show clear-cut arguments/evidences in favour or rejection of its sustainability. However, based on my critical evaluation of the University system, **it appears to me that if academic staff and regulatory agencies of the University system continue to engage/support those of questionable character not having respect for the University culture, it becomes most predictable that the University system will ultimately collapse. This is because the University heritage and the fabric (i.e., the culture) would have been destroyed;**



**consequently, nothing will be left to sustain the university system.**

**Nevertheless, I am optimistic that there is hope since the situation is not likely to degenerate to such abysmal level. Thus, sustainability of the University culture is most probably likely to be maintained or improved upon at the national and global scales.**

Thank you for listening.

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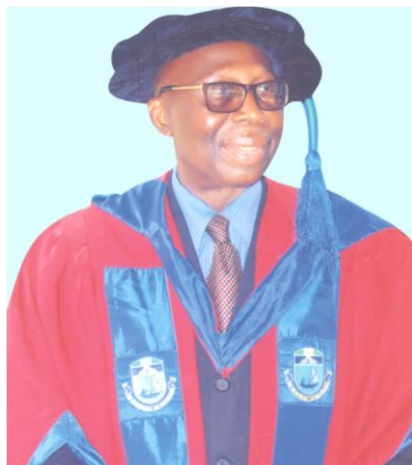
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**CITATION ON  
PROFESSOR BERNARD JOHNSON  
OKPAKO EFIUVWEVWERE  
B.Sc. (Detroit), M.Sc. (Penn. State), Ph.D (London), *FNSM*  
*Professor of Microbiology***



**BIRTH**

Professor Bernard Johnson Okpako Efiuvwevwere was born on the 21<sup>st</sup> of June, 1950 in Urhodo-Ovu, Ethiope-East, Local Government Area of Delta State to the family of Late Chief Efiuvwevwere Atoke Idivwrikesi and late Mrs. Ubiamuko Efiuvwevwere Idivwrikesi. At birth, he was named “Okpako” which means “Senior” in spite of the fact that he was the second child of the family.

**EDUCATION**

He began his academic journey at St. John the Baptist Primary School, Urhodo-Ovu. On completion of his primary education, he was admitted into the prestigious St. Peter Claver’s College

(SPCC), Aghalokpe-Sapele for his secondary education from 1964-1968.

Upon the completion of his secondary education in flying colours, he proceeded to the United States of America to pursue his academic dream.

In 1973, he was admitted into the Detroit Institute of Technology from where he graduated in 1976 with B.Sc. in Biology (Microbiology), Magna Cum Laude (equivalent of Second Class Upper Division).

As a result of his keen interest in academic career, he opted to pursue M.Sc. programme at the reputable Pennsylvania State University and graduated with M.Sc. in Food Microbiology/Food Processing in 1979.

To fully achieve his academic dream, Professor B.J.O. Efiuvwevwere then enrolled at the world-renowned University of London (King's College, London) and obtained his Ph.D in Food Microbiology/Biodeterioration in 1986.

In order to enhance his expertise in Food Safety and Hazard analysis, Professor Efiuvwevwere obtained certificates in Aseptic/Thermal Processing and Packaging Operations in acidified and low-acid foods from the United States Food and Drug Administration/Better Process Control School, University Park, Pennsylvania in 1979 as well as in Fundamentals of Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP), certified by the International HACCP Alliance, USA in 2013.

## **WORKING EXPERIENCE**

The work experience of Professor B.J.O. Efiuvwevwere spans Local, National and International spheres. He was a Teaching

Assistant/Demonstrator in Microbiology (a rare privilege) to Professor J. Ehrlich of the Detroit Institute of Technology from 1975–1976.

He acquired industrial experiences at the reputable Parke-Davis Pharmaceutical Division of the Warner-Lambert Corp., Detroit, USA where he worked as a Microbial Quality Control Analyst (1977) as well as in Guinness (Nigeria) Ltd., Benin City as Quality Control Manager Trainee (1980–1981) during his NYSC programme.

Immediately he completed his NYSC in June, 1981, the University of Port Harcourt quickly offered him an appointment as an Assistant Lecturer on July 1<sup>st</sup> 1981. Since then, he has shown exemplary commitment to his work and rose through the ranks to become Professor of Microbiology (specialization: Food/Industrial Microbiology) from November 7, 2000 till date.

Professor B.J.O. Efiuvwevwere over the years has provided a wide range of academic leadership and services at the Departmental, Faculty and University levels. Among these included mentorship of students and colleagues. His responsibilities over the years included:

- Departmental Coordinator, National Universities Commission (NUC) Minimum Academic Standards (1990).
- Departmental Examination Officer (1987-1988).
- Chairman, Examination Malpractice (now, misconduct) Panel, Faculty of Science (1992-1996).
- Senate Member, Ad-Hoc Committee on Review of Academic Policies and Programmes (1994).
- Chairman, Departmental Strategic Planning Committee (2002).



- Member, University of Port Harcourt Interview Panels for Promotion to Professorial Positions (2007-2019).
- Board Member, College of Continuing Education (2003-2005).

### **ADMINISTRATIVE POSITIONS HELD**

Apart from serving on numerous Ad-Hoc and Statutory Committees in the Department of Microbiology, the Faculty of Science and the University, it is worthy of note that:

- He served as the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic), University of Port Harcourt (2007-2012) with zeal and commitment throughout his tenure.
- He also served as Head of Department of Microbiology (1999-2001) with dedication and under his leadership, the Department was ranked number one in academic content by the National Universities Commission.

### **TEACHING, RESEARCH AND PUBLICATIONS/MENTORSHIP**

Professor B.J.O. Efiuvwevwere has taught several non-specialized and specialized aspects of Microbiology at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. He has supervised over 200 undergraduate research projects, 19 M.Sc. projects and 8 Ph.D projects and many of his former supervisees are now Professors, Directors, Administrators as well as Entrepreneurs. He has mentored many students and colleagues over the years. Professor Efiuvwevwere has 90 publications to his credit comprising 50 journal articles published in reputable and indexed National and International journals, one textbook, one monograph, three co-authored textbooks and 35 technical papers presented in National and International Conferences, Symposia and Workshops.

He continued with his committed research activities in spite of his eminent retirement resulting in two most recent

publications thereby enhancing the image and profile of this University.

### **PUBLIC/UNIVERSITY SERVICES**

**Among the most remarkable contributions to the University of Port Harcourt as Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) was his working closely with the then Vice-Chancellor, Professor Don M. Baridam to successfully put in place in 2010 “*the University of Port Harcourt Anthem*” after about 35 years of existence.**

Also, Professor B.J.O. Efiuvwevwere has served the nation and the university system in various capacities as follows:

- (i) Chairman, National Universities Commission (NUC) Accreditation Panels to various Universities (Private, State and Federal).
- (ii) Professorial External Assessor to several Universities in Nigeria.
- (iii) External Examiner for Undergraduate and Postgraduate Programmes to several Universities in the country.
- (iv) Consultant: Raw Material Development and Research Council, Federal Ministry of Science and Technology, Abuja.
- (v) Senate Member, University of Port Harcourt (2000-date).
- (vi) Editor-in-Chief; Nigerian Journal of Microbiology (2006-2008).

### **AWARDS/FELLOWSHIPS/GRANTS/RECOGNITION**

Professor Efiuvwevwere has been privileged to receive several notable national and international awards and fellowships which include the following:

- (i) University of Bologna (Professor M.E. Guerzoni Grant), Bologna, Italy.
- (ii) Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NOSR/NOW) Fellowship, The Hague.

- (iii) International Foundation for Science (IFS), Sweden.
- (iv) TetFund: Institution-Based Research (IBR) Grant.
- (v) Postgraduate Overseas Scholarship, Federal Ministry of Education.
- (vi) Professor Efiuvwevwere is recognized and listed in Marquis WHO's WHO in Science and Engineering (2000), New Jersey, USA.

### **PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS**

Professor B.J.O. Efiuvwevwere is a member of several professional societies including:

- (i) Fellow, Nigerian Society for Microbiology (*FNSM*).
- (ii) Member, American Society for Microbiology
- (iii) Member, International Association of Milk, Food and Environmental Sanitation, USA.
- (iv) Member, Science Association of Nigeria.
- (v) Member, New York Academy of Science.
- (vi) Member, American Association for the Advancement of Science, USA.

### **FAMILY AND SOCIAL LIFE**

Professor B.J.O. Efiuvwevwere is happily married to his loving and caring wife (his *Idi*, “well-blended cocktail of wines”), Mrs. Roselyn Asawa Efiuvwevwere and the marriage is blessed with lovely children (now adults) and grand children.

He is a member of the non-political organization, Urhobo Solidarity Club of Nigeria and he is currently, a Trustee of the club. He has served as the first National Vice-President of his *Alma mater*, SPCC Old Students Association. He is an active member of the Roman Catholic Faith.

## **CONCLUSION**

Distinguished Professors, respected ladies and gentlemen, unique Uniport students, it is my privilege and honour to present to you a dedicated Scientist of international repute, a well-exposed and meticulous researcher, a mentor who has devoted his life to the services of the University of Port Harcourt for about 39 years. He is an accomplished Scholar and an astute Administrator.

**Professor Stephen A. Okodudu**  
**Ag. Vice-Chancellor**