# Knowledge Diplomacy and the Digital World: The Role of International Tertiary Education towards Equitable Access to Education

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*Abstract:-*The digital world every second continues to transform our tertiary education through technology and platforms. International tertiary education as a global knowledge producer and developer of high skills needs to change its role towards knowledge diplomacy. The very nature of Higher Education, how it is delivered and the role of universities in society and the economy is changing, and will continue to change significantly in the next decade. Universities are competing globally for students, academics and funding, and only those that stay relevant and leverage new digital capabilities will benefit in this digital age. Many universities are developing specific digital strategies in reaction to the massive shift towards using new technology, yet lack the vision, capability or commitment to implement them effectively. New technologies and platforms are revolutionizing the way that knowledge is produced, accessed and used globally. Solutions to many of the world's greatest challenges are increasingly within reach. The speed and scale of change is also disrupting labour markets and business models, radically changing the nature of jobs and the skills required. While technologies are creating huge opportunities, International Tertiary Education (ITE) has a unique and indispensable role to play in preventing and countering polarization in the society. In a rapidly globalizing world, many are concerned about climate change, the economy and technological developments. Against this background, social polarization is challenging democracies and terrorism, and spreading violence and terror. Society at large (including the pillars and institutions of democracy) need to step up to these challenges.This paper explored the role of international tertiary education towards ensuring equitable access to education with examples of Higher Education practice geared towards contributing to addressing inequalities in access to HE in Nigeria.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The process of knowledge diplomacy has improved the interdependence of institutions, information, and people globally by providing numerous benefits that will strengthen relations between countries as well as facilitate dialogue and exchange ideas among people from diverse culture, religious backgrounds and providing access to knowledge and opportunities through information communication technologies.

Strengthening the role of knowledge diplomacy is vital for individual countries to thrive in a rapidly changing world and for societies to progress without leaving anyone behind. Against a context in which we all have much to gain from growing openness and connectivity, and much to lose from rising inequalities and radicalism, countries need not only the skills to be competitive and ready for a new digital world, but they also need to build up the international tertiary education to analyze and understand global and intercultural issues.

One major challenge needing solution is inequitable access to educational opportunities particularly in developing nations which risks locking in social exclusion across generations. A key question this paper attempt to answer is: what is the role of policy makers in international tertiary institutions in bridging the inequality gap in access to tertiary education? This paper attempts to explicate the role of policy makers and the contribution of tertiary institutions in effectively tackling social exclusion and promoting social inclusion and mobility by conceptualizing knowledge diplomacy. Also, A key question this paper attempt to answer is: what is the role of policy makers in international tertiary institutions in bridging the inequality gap in access to tertiary education? This paper attempts to explicate the role of policy makers and the contribution of tertiary institutions in effectively tackling social exclusion and promoting social inclusion and mobility. The relevance of my proposal to world leaders of international education is to present strategies that could spur the reduction of social exclusion in tertiary education. The paper presents this from the standpoint of Nigeria with inequitable access to higher education.

## II. CONCEPTUALIZATION OF TERMS

*Knowledge Diplomacy*

Since diplomacy refers to how relations between and among countries are been managed or intensified, knowledge diplomacy can be understood to be the role that international tertiary education, research and innovation play in the management or strengthening of relations between and among countries (Knight, 2018). Knowledge diplomacy is an idea progressively discussed by leaders in training workshops programmes at tertiary institution. Leaders link education abroad with more extensive connections among nations and

regions. Knowledge diplomacy incorporates student portability, discipline and cooperative research across boarder. Experts recommended that learning should add to a nation's choice of foreign policy objectives, and that knowledge diplomacy offers the chance to work at all educational levels in a scope of fields to create basic ways to deal with shared worldwide challenges, one of which is social exclusion occasion by inequalities in access to tertiary education.

*Digital World*

Nowadays, you may take long vacation, nearly two months in Dubai or Zambia. You can rent a car, make hotel reservation, bought train tickets, Lodge in the middle of nowhere, all entirely through the websites. You can use Google street viewer through online maps to snoop around neighborhoods and attracted areas before finalizing your lodgings. While you are away, you can used mobile phones to navigate unfamiliar places, kept in touch with family and friends by email, whatsapp and Skype, you can send frequent pictures and watch occasional movies, and can even work for few hours almost every day on your book from your tablet, and also partake in one of your training class through the e-learning systems. You can check for your mail once or twice a day while you were in the middle of the ship in an Atlantic, and you can graciously deal with financial transaction through the internet banking. This is the standard operating procedure in today's world (Clarke, 1972).

It is relatively supernatural how simple and helpful it is to make plans without mediators and to stay in contact notwithstanding when far from home. These technological platforms are commonplace to the point that we tend not to consider them, despite the fact that they have changed our lives surprisingly rapidly. Peoples and physical systems are connected and mirrored through the virtual space; the world is continuously becoming more automated and data-driven, thanks to the digital revolution. It is in view of these that knowledge diplomacy has the key to surmount challenges in all areas of the globe.

### III. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN KNOWLEDGE DIPLOMACY AND DIGITAL WORLD

There is no doubt that we currently live in the digital world. Digitization is a complex and multi-layered trend, and it continues to be the subject of intense scrutiny, we may all agree that there is no place unconnected in the world. Whether this is desirable or not is still being debated. Nevertheless, internet platforms such as emails, skype, e-learning, internet banking, media, cyber acts and cyber security – know no borders. Internet connectivity is now global opportunity and vice versa. Not only that changing; interactions between public and social services and business and clients are also relying increasingly on digital, mobile or social-media tools (OECD, 2009, 2011; cited in OECD, 2016).

On the other hand, diplomacy interpreted to mean the "building and management of international relations" (Knight,

2018), which also evolved at a rapid pace. Moreover, the primary functions of diplomacy have long been identified as communication, negotiation, mediation and representation. Technology advances has improved connectivity and the digitalization of implementation, representation and collaboration. Sensor technology helps provides owners access to more data, which can be analyzed, presented and shared with other stakeholders globally. The digital revolution enables nations combine data streams from multiple sources, total volume of information available enable the stakeholders to make more informed decisions, faster, leading to more efficient and responsive world.

The network of connected physical objects able to collect and exchange data, known as the Internet of Things (IoT), is growing, encompassing buildings, products, even educational services (Manno, n.d.). Technology is an effective tool linking international higher education, innovation and research with international relations. Thus, knowledge diplomacy is directly related to the digital world.

### IV. ACCESS TO INTERNATIONAL TERTIARY EDUCATION

The concept of 'access to education', according to Chikoko (2016), is not as straightforward as it may seem, given that it has preoccupied governments worldwide for years if not centuries (Keith, 2012; Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2012). Ireland's 2008–2013 National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education and Germany's practice of free higher education have been among the key points of reference for those who argue that access to education can be significantly improved. In its National Plan, Ireland expresses a determination to address the socio-economic and educational factors that have blocked or reduced the opportunities of some young people to benefit fully from education (see Chikoko, 2016: 72). Germany's free higher education policy also reflects a similar drive to tackle inequalities in access to education. However, globally, and particularly in developing countries, there is a gradual reduction in the public funding of higher education and an increasing dependence on private sector finance, a trend that has led to an increase in the number of private institutions of learning (Devarajana et al., 2012). Thus, it appears that the two rationales for public intervention in higher education – efficiency and equity – are either weak or have been undermined by government failure (Devarajana et al., 2012). In light of this situation, many public universities have resorted to the establishment of part-time courses in addition to their regular programmes as a means of revenue generation. While this may have helped to an extent in the struggle to increase access, there remains an issue of quality with regard to the preparation and readiness of students for the knowledge market.

The historical background of tertiary institution is different from other types of education, with very few universities among the oldest institutions around the world. The development of tertiary institutions for the most part of the

world through the last millennium is firmly attached to religion. Generally, higher institutions were set up as organizations free from direct control from religious body, a privilege usually granted to the king or a state. This university will then be allowed for academic opportunities, research and advance learning. However, religious studies remained an imperative concentration in most early medieval colleges. While the contemporary world universities have two purposes: furnish students with cutting edge abilities valuable in the working environment and to facilitate human

knowledge and understanding of the world Roser and Ortiz-Ospina (2018).

Figure 1 presents is a graphical representation of the early rise of universities in Western Europe. There were only 9 universities in the Iberian countries (Portugal, Spain, ...) and 17 in Italy, and only one new higher institution in France. However, the rise of universities intensified especially in Germany and Central Europe, more universities were founded as time went on Roser (2018).
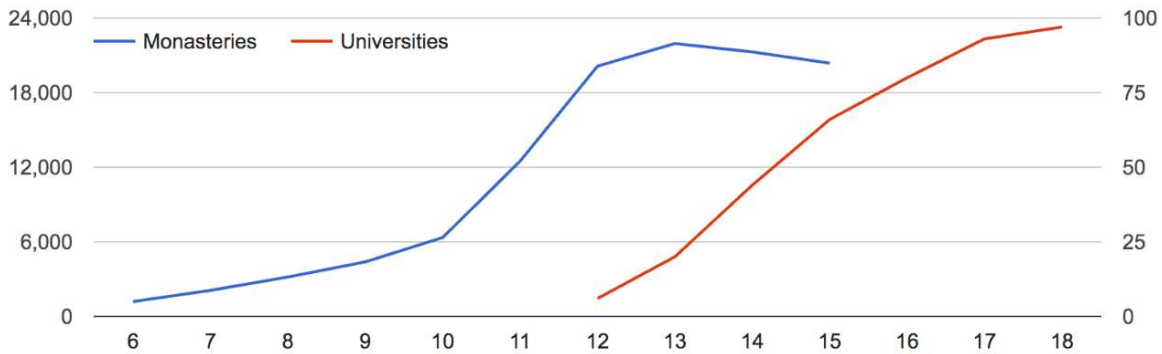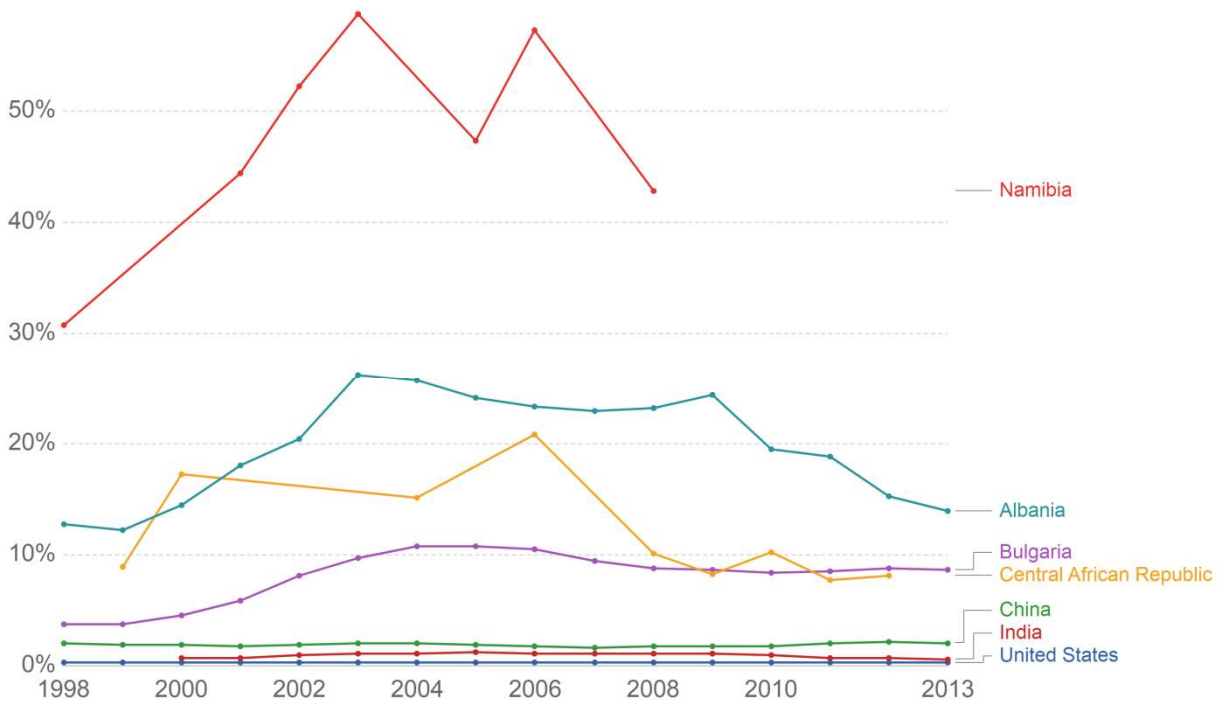


Figure 1: Early rise of universities in Western Europe

Figure 2 also shows the share of students studying abroad. The figure shows the mobility of students from a given

country studying abroad as a percentage of the total tertiary enrollment in that country.



Figure 2: International mobility of students

The figure 3 shows estimations and projections of higher education by country from 1970 to 2050, it represents the projections of the population aged 15 and above educated to degree level. The numbers completing degrees is expected to increase around the world as advanced skills become more important in both developing and developed economies Roser and Nagdy (2018).
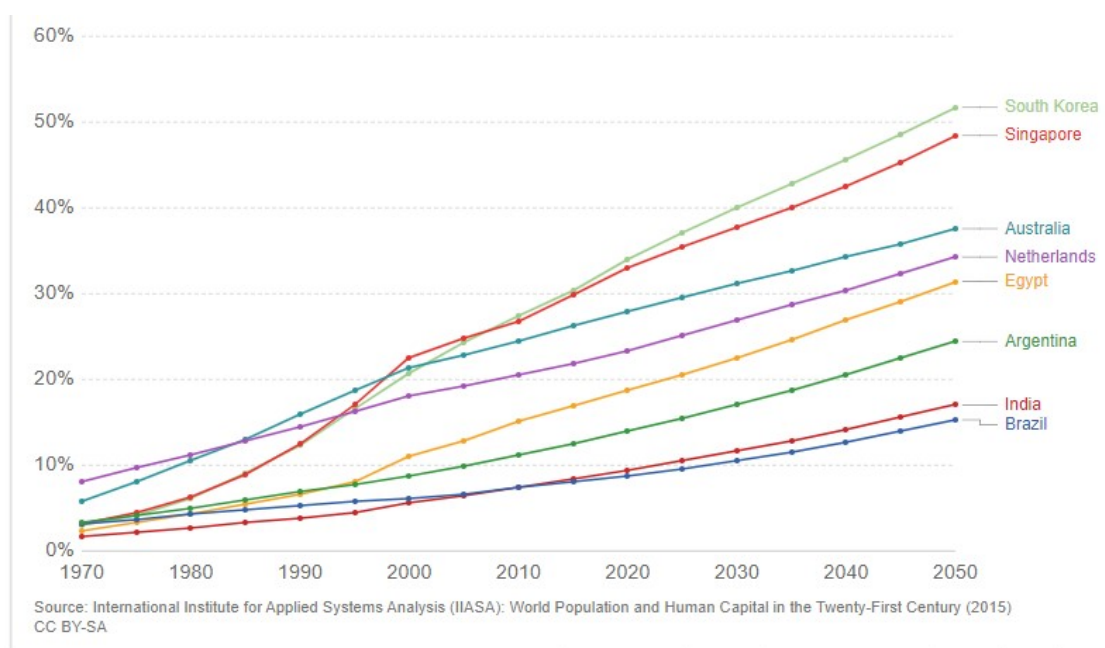


Figure 3: Higher Education Today and into the Future

The university branch campuses in foreign countries have noticed a remarkable growth, from 24 in 2002 to about 245 in 2016. In 2004, there were 4 bi-national universities; often describes as universities that demonstrate mutual understanding between institutions and countries. These universities were increased to 22 in 2018, with more under development. The bi-national universities, also refers to 'international joint universities' are collaborative efforts between two or more countries or institutions. These concepts is as a results of interest of country's to increase mutual relations among them, which will creates reputed centers for knowledge production and higher institutions. National, regional and international students, government agencies, knowledge industries, research centers, as well colleges/ institutions are major factors in the establishment and operation of any educational institutions, and serve as key players in management of international relations. The case of Nigeria is peculiar in terms of access to tertiary education.

## V. ACCESS TO TERTIARY EDUCATION: THE NIGERIAN SITUATION

Almost one in four Sub-Saharan people reside in Nigeria, making it Africa's most populous country. It is also the seventh most populous country in the world, one with ongoing growth. From an estimated 42.5 million people at the time of independence in 1960, Nigeria's population has more than quadrupled to 186,988 million people in 2016 according to the United Nations projection. The United Nations anticipates that Nigeria will become the third largest country in the world by 2050 with 399 million people. The country is of growing economic importance as well. In mid-2016, it overtook South Africa as the largest economy on the African continent, and was, until recently, viewed as having the potential to emerge as a major global economy. However, a substantial dependency on oil revenues has radically undercut this prospect.

A sharp decline in crude oil prices from 2014 to early 2016 catapulted Nigeria into a recession that added to the country's already long list of problems: the violent Boko Haram insurgency, endemic corruption, and challenges common to many Sub-Saharan countries: low life expectancy, inadequacies in public health systems, income inequalities, and high illiteracy rates.

Severe cuts in public spending following the recession have affected government services nationwide. In the education sector, the situation has exacerbated existing problems. Ongoing student protests and strikes have rocked Nigerian universities for years, and are a symptom of a severely underfunded higher education system. Austerity measures adopted by the Nigerian government in the wake of the current crisis further slashed education budgets. Students at many public universities between the year 2013 and 2018 experienced tuition increases and a deterioration of basic infrastructure, including shortages in electricity and water supplies. The crisis also dried up scholarship funds for foreign
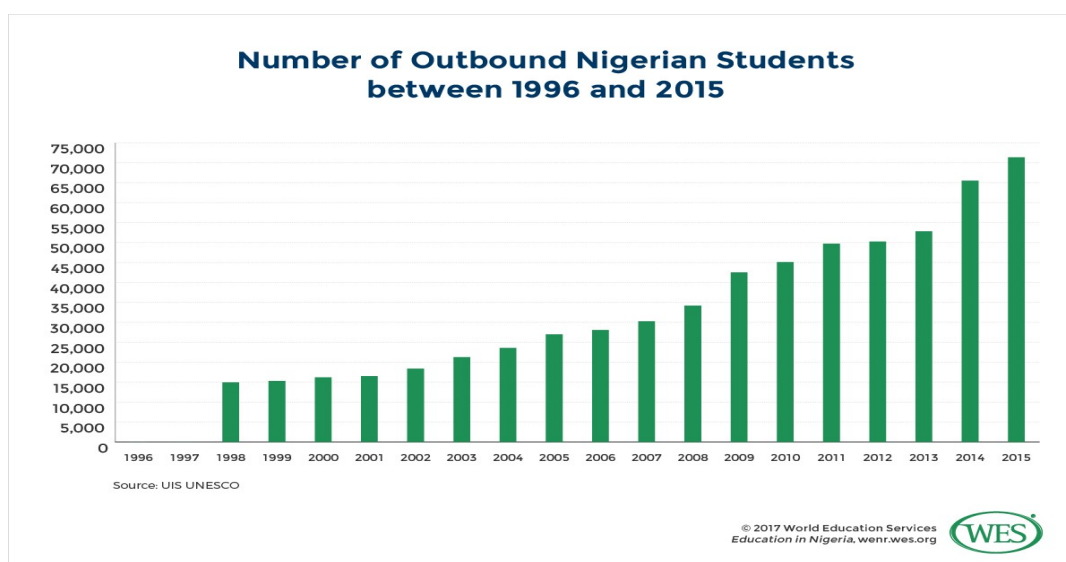
study, placing constraints on international student flows from Nigeria.

Despite these constraints, the country remained a dynamic evolution market for international students. This is largely because of the overwhelming and unmet demand among college-age Nigerians. Nigeria's higher education sector has also been exploited by strong population growth and a significant 'youth bulge.' (More than 60 percent of the country's population is under the age of 24.) And rapid expansion of the nation's higher education sector in recent decades has failed to deliver the resources or seats to accommodate demand: A substantial number of would-be college and university students are turned away from the system. About two thirds of applicants who sat for the country's national entrance exam in 2015 could not find a spot at a Nigerian university. This situation has not impeded mobility of students for foreign tertiary institutions.

## VI. INTERNATIONAL MOBILITY TRENDS: THE POSITION OF NIGERIA

Nigeria is the number one country of origin for international students from Africa: It sends the most students overseas of any country on the African continent, and outbound mobility numbers are growing at a rapid pace. According to data from the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS), the number of Nigerian students abroad increased by 164 percent in the decade between 2005 and 2015 alone– from 26,997 to 71,351. The figure today seems to have risen beyond 200,000.



Number of Outbound Nigerian Students between 1996 and 2015
Source: UIS UNESCO
© 2017 World Education Services
Education in Nigeria, wenr.wes.org

The United Nation and Universal declaration of human rights put forward the idea of the education attainment that reflects and emphasize on the humans right to gain education (Burke 2013). According to Meyer & Bradley (2013), freedom of education attainment and its full access refers to the unbiased and robust educational opportunities at every stage, polishing of knowledge, skills, and abilities to participate in the improvement of the society. Therefore, lack of the accessing to the education institutes refers to various reasons such as, failure of enrolment, no opportunities to attend school usually, incompletion of programme of study, lack of opportunities of attaining desire objectives and also for the transitioning to the next level of the education (Ebisine, 2014). These barriers to access university education in Nigeria could be summed up to include:

Administrative Issues such as Quota system is a challenge. The Nigerian government introduced the quota system in the universities. It allotted 45% merit for the student's enrolment, 20% for less developed educated, 25% for catchment areas and 10% for prudence of vice-chancellors. Carrying Capacity of universities is another administrative issue. University education demands are enhancing with the growth of the population and as such, universities ratio increased with the increase in the demands. The desire of expansion for universities became imperative and is known as "carrying capacity". Lack of funding is also the major reason of reducing the access of many students to the universities in Nigeria. A social issue responsible for access of many students to the universities in Nigeria is poverty. High socio economic class with the privilege background can afford private universities that are relatively expensive. Sex discrimination, structural problems such as poor insufficient and outdated infrastructure and equipment, poor library and laboratory facilities have become the major threat to tertiary education in Nigeria. Economic Constraints and Labour Market Failure (Low Absorptive Capacity of the Economy) are also barriers and have influenced inequality in access to tertiary education. International tertiary institutions through knowledge creation and exchange of scholars around the world have shown great impact towards bridging the inequality gap in access to tertiary education among nations.

## VII. INEQUITABLE ACCESS TO EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES: SOCIAL EXCLUSION IN NIGERIA

In a knowledge market, the knowledge, skills and expertise needed for the economic and socio-political transformation of a nation and its citizens are transacted at different prices. Inequitable access to this market poses a serious threat to the economic welfare of the country and its citizens. More than 70% of the total population lives on between US$3.70 and US$7.39 per day. In addition, the lowest fees charged at the public and private universities are Nigeria Naira N75,000 (US$477.71) and N400,000 (US$2547.77), respectively. Thus, there is not only a substantial difference in the prices charged, but university fees are also beyond the means of the majority of Nigerians. Reports show that:

Four out of ten Nigerian school-age children are not in school (UNESCO Report 2013). Even more unsettling is how this statistic is drastically different for girl children, the poor, and the North East and North West regions of Nigeria. A study of the trends in inequality in access to schooling between 2003 and 2013 was carried out by Cora Mezger, which analyses successive rounds of the Nigerian Demographic and Health Survey datasets, for 2003, 2008 and 2013. The study finds the following:

Unequal access to education by income group,

- The gap in predicted probabilities of being out of school between the poorest and richest quantiles is about 41 percentage points in 2018.
- The average predicted probability of being out of school has increased from 2003 to 2018, rather than decreased for the poorest quantile of the population.

Unequal access to education by gender

- Female children are more likely to be out of school compared to male children.
- While a gender gap still persists, it has been closing over the past decade.

Unequal access to education by geographical region

- There is a strong North-South divide in access to education. The North East and North West regions have the highest predicted probability of being out of school. The North Central region comes second. On the other hand the Southern regions have the lowest predicted probability of being out of school.

This is not peculiar to Nigeria alone but predominant in most developing countries. Meanwhile, it has been documented that across the globe, there are inequalities in educational access and achievement as well as high levels of absolute educational deprivation of both children and adults. In order to confront these educational inequalities, rightful approaches, strategies and measures need to be adopted by the international Higher Education in order to surmount failure of governments to establish effective policies/ineffective implementation of policies concerning different segments of education and,

current practice of lack of active/non-collaboration between learning institutions and industries and communities.

## VIII. OVERCOMING POLARIZATION THROUGH OPEN DISTANCE EDUCATION: THE NIGERIAN SITUATION

Nigeria, the most populous country in Africa is largely characterized by diverse ethnic groups, high level of inequality, poverty and prone to social tension and conflicts. Nigeria is a country of high ethnic and linguistic diversity, threatened by internal fissures and persistent levels of violence. It is argued that, ethnically polarized societies are prone to competitive rent-seeking activities by different groups and will have difficulty agreeing on public goods such as infrastructure, education, and good policies. This in part explains high level of inequity in income distribution and poverty in the country. High potential for large regional differences in economic and social conditions makes Nigeria susceptible to disintegration if the regional differences in standards of living continue to grow. Inequitable access to education could lead to polarization. It is not surprising to find large regional differences in its economic and social conditions. Although, there are about 374 identifiable ethnic groups, the country's independent history has been marked by the rivalry between the "big three" ethno-regional clusters that, combined, represent roughly 72.7 per cent of the population: the Hausa-Fulani in the north (39.1 per cent), the Igbo in the south east (11.7 per cent) and the Yoruba in the south west (21.4 per cent) (Awoyemi Taiwo T. & Araar Abdelkrim, 2009)

For the Developing World, Open and Distance Learning (ODL) is a promising and practical strategy to address the challenges of widening access thus increasing participation in higher education. It is increasingly being seen as an educational delivery model which is cost-effective without sacrificing quality. In Africa, where resources are scarce and tertiary education provision is poor, Open and Distance Learning Education has been considered as a worthwhile and cost effective means of increasing provision without costly expenditure in infrastructure. Holding the promise of economies of scale and expanded geographical reach, it is not surprising that many African governments (Nigeria inclusive) are cashing in on this potential to increase the access to higher education for her teeming population in order to reduce polarization.

As the largest black population in the world and with literacy level of less than 60 per cent, Nigeria has adopted the Open and Distance education mode as a veritable tool for achieving its developmental goals and objectives. The National policy on Education in Nigeria provides for lifelong learning through distance education. The National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) is an Open and Distance Learning (ODL) institute established by the Federal Government to provide improved access to many eligible candidates who are constrained by the limited spaces in the conventional universities. Given that the conventional universities can only admit about 400,000 of the

more than 1,500,000 candidates that seek university education in Nigeria, yearly. The 180,000-student enrolment of NOUN accounts for 10 per cent of the total student enrolment in the Nigerian University System. This has gone a long way to reduce inequitable access to tertiary education.

**Without doubt, Open and Distance Education plays an essential role in personal, community, and national development. The increasing growth in Nigeria's population, the accelerating demand for education at all levels and the challenge associated with accessibility, call for a more viable and robust means of educating Nigerian citizens, which Open and Distance Learning (ODL) institutes are presently doing.**

There are 43 Federal universities in Nigeria, 48 State universities and 79 private universities in Nigeria as approved and released by the Nigerian Universities Commission (NUC) With the combined carrying capacity of all of them they can only admit 500,000 out of 1.7 million applicants seeking higher education in Nigeria in 2018 leaving more than 1million applicants to wait for another year to apply with no guarantee.

The admission gap created by the existing conventional universities can only be filled by a university like National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) with no limiting carrying capacity as demonstrated in the last ten years. This has brought about improved access to Higher Education thereby significantly reducing polarization in the Nigerian society. As rightly pointed out when I was Vice-chancellor of the university: I maintained that the NOUN is limitless, that is why she is called "open" and her capacity is at infinity. Open Universities today can accommodate 5 million, 10 million students. As many as are interested in acquiring education, NOUN have room for them. She is opened as wide as the capacity of this country. Comparatively, the Open University of India has a student population of about 3.8 million. At the moment NOUN is already at the capacity of 132,000 students. It is expected that in the next five years, the Open University should have at least 1.5 million students. So there is no carrying capacity. This is the only university in Nigeria that has the mandate to admit as many students as possible because it has the technology to accommodate the academic needs of these students. Open University is a peculiar and special university, designed to do this without undermining quality (Tenebe, 2013).

### IX. INTERNATIONAL TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS

Some countries refers to higher education as tertiary education, define as all post-secondary education, including both public and private universities, colleges, technical training institutes, and vocational schools. Higher education is seen as an instrument for growth, poverty reduction, prosperity boost, prerequisite for innovation and economic dependability. The World Bank (2018) estimated that, there are around 200 million higher education students in the world, up from 89 million in 1998. The growing importance of knowledge in the world today and the ever greater numbers of people being trained at the higher level has increased higher education's responsibility to and its influence within society. In order fully to assume this responsibility and this role, higher education needs to change.

Never has the expansion of education in general and higher education in particular been so necessary to society for its normal functioning, its development and its economic, social, cultural, moral and political well-being as it is at present. Yet society seems reluctant to give education, especially higher education, the resources that would enable it to fulfill its mission satisfactorily in the service of that society. If this contradiction is not overcome, its negative consequences will, in the twenty-first century, seriously affect the different sectors and diverse aspects of social life.

From the standpoint of the mission and objective of HE, it has a twofold mission: (a) participating actively in the solving of major global, regional and local problems, such as poverty, hunger, illiteracy, social exclusion, the exacerbation of inequalities at international and national levels, the widening of the gap between industrialized and developing countries, and protection of the environment, and (b) working tirelessly, in particular by drawing up alternative proposals and recommendations, to promote: sustainable human development; the sharing of knowledge; universal respect for human rights; equal rights for women and men; justice and the application of democratic principles within its own institutions and in society; understanding among nations, and among ethnic, religious, cultural and other groups; a culture of peace and non-violence; and 'intellectual and moral solidarity'

Thus, innovation should also be poured into making digital education more interactive and robust. Limitation in teaching numerical analytics and empirical subjects like Mathematics can be overcome by appropriate classification of content and tutors trained and specialized in responding to dynamic and spontaneous queries of students. In developing countries like India, digital education comes with a premonition of "Digital Divide" and therefore government should make efforts to include all stakeholders in this initiative to make it "inclusive & sustainable" for all.

Access to appropriate education is key to breaking these cycles of marginalization, and therefore to social justice, and universities are integral parts of national education systems, whether they are public or private institutions. However, providing access to education is a challenge to the leadership of organizations, including the leadership of universities. While national education policies may direct attention to inclusive and transformative priorities, these are notoriously difficult to achieve in the face of the collective reluctance of a university to change. Similarly, the sticks and carrots of policy levers can be overwhelmed by the complex mechanics of admission requirements, student finance arrangements and assessment systems; given the long cycle of student progression through a higher education system, it can take the

life of several parliaments to know whether policies have succeeded or failed. And while vice-chancellors may talk the language of equality of opportunity, institutional priorities can be railroaded by reluctant deans and recalcitrant heads of department. Unless the imperatives of remediating the poverty traps that unfairly exclude categories of potential students are shared across the distributed leadership of a university, it is probable that little substantial progress will be made. Obviously, social exclusion can be triggered by inequalities in access to tertiary education just as digital inclusion can offer some remedy.

## X. ROLE OF TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN COUNTERING POLARIZATION IN SOCIETY

Universities and Higher Education (HE) are the paramount organizations for producing knowledge and in doing so they can be expected to produce knowledge about themselves. They should therefore be "learning organizations" which are reflexive and self-critical. They should be prepared to understand themselves as "cognitive subjects" who can criticize and explain and evaluate the origins of their own beliefs and Knowledge. In so far as they claim to do this, universities can lay claim to do this, universities can lay claim to being the source and repository of critical thinking. For me, the role of tertiary institutions in countering polarization is hinged on two themes: community engagement and a conceptual mapping that stands the test of "criticality" itself. Community as a concept and as a felt and experience reality is germane. Arguments about belonging, culture, nationhood and identity are everywhere – because people are uncertain about who they are and where they belong. Hyper-capitalism and its sweeping changes including unprecedented levels of migration are making rootlessness the norm. Higher education must be valid in defining the kind of learning and epistemology that can be used to counter polarization in society. It must be transformative and facilitate an agenda for change. To enable HE to approach critical thinking as a set of intellectual skills which can help to understand, engage and change the problems we encounter as teachers and learners. Critical thinking should allow us the opportunity to develop a critical curriculum best suited to counter exclusion and polarization.

However, if our concern is critical thinking then we can have an exploit context and this might be thought to involve what has been called the "wicked problem" (Firth, 2017) of the globalizing world with poverty, deprivation, social exclusion, health, climate change, war and conflict find a place in this category. HE needs to engage as critical thinkers and needs to acknowledge the need for a social impact framework which has its central concern the idea of social justice and which seeks to address the crippling and debilitating impact of inequalities, no matter what their origin and causes. Critical thinking should of course address the proximate and ultimate causes of our state of affairs as a key objective in its own right. HEs are lacking in such frameworks, though some have made significant attempts in this direction. Some of these frameworks stress that engagement focuses on equity groups, on personal and social responsibility, on the need to support staff working in such areas and on the need for a critical voice of advocacy for the disenfranchised.

Higher education institutions (HEIs) are under increasing pressure to show their societal relevance (Perry, 2012). This is partly a function of the impetus brought about by the rise of the knowledge-based economy and, concurrently, the premium put on the manipulation and transfer of knowledge assets (Varga, 2009), in addition to high-level skills embodied in the human capital of nations and regions. External pressures manifest themselves in a variety of forms, among them, shifts in the economy and the nature of the labour market, demographic trends and the demands and expectations of interest groups, and are, to a large degree, associated with the notion of higher education (HE) as an instrument for reaching certain societal agendas (Maassen & Olsen, 2007) like democratization, social mobility, economic development and innovation. As a result of these (and other) external pressures, governments across the world should enact several bold reforms aimed at modernizing HE with the aim of responding better to the aforementioned pressures and to increase efficiency, quality and accountability.

The very structure of society is changing; the proportions of the different social groups making up the population are perceptibly evolving. New needs and new aspirations are coming to light. Changes in economic activity are transforming the conception and conditions of employment. The development of education service ultimately has major social consequences.

The roles of the different social agents are also changing. Expansion of the sphere of action of the diverse sectors and groups constituting what is known as civil society is a tendency apparent in an increasing number of countries and one that is extending to new fields. At the same time, the role of the State is evolving, its scope for direct intervention shrinking and the nature of its intervention changing in many cases.

On the threshold of a new century, higher education must come to terms in its teaching, research and scholarship with the effects and consequences of the globalization (of communications and, as yet only partially, of trade) and internationalization of the life of societies, the development of information technologies, the rapidly evolving structure of employment needs and the steady increase in the demand for highly qualified personnel. At the same time, the need for refresher courses and further education to broaden general knowledge and occupational skills, and for career-change retraining, is becoming increasingly urgent, so that higher education has to be more responsive to this task and make it an integral part of its activities. 'Coming to terms with' means not just adjusting, but, anticipating, influencing, and guiding. Higher education must strengthen and target more effectively its contribution to sustainable and mutually supportive human

development - in particular through sustained efforts to promote the sharing of knowledge, to the reduction of inequalities at the international and the national levels, to combating exclusion and unemployment, and to the eradication of poverty and the various forms of exploitation and discrimination.

Four Changes in Higher Education which must be addressed to reduce inequitable access and polarization in society are:

1. Change in the Student Demographic

The typical student is no longer 18 years old and fresh out of high school. Rather, adult student enrolment has increased substantially in recent years, and is projected to climb faster than traditional-age (18 to 22 years) enrolments over the next decade and beyond.

2. Change in Market Size and Competitiveness

For many years, colleges and universities faced very little competition. However, recently, the number of institutions has swelled, both in rank and diversity. There are now numerous ways for individuals to take classes and gain knowledge outside of the traditional college or university, ranging from free Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) to independently run corporate universities. Further compounding this new level of competition, many programs can now be completed online. This means that rather than competing with a few local schools, institutions must now compete on a global scale. Institutions must not only attract students, they must also be able to differentiate themselves from the large pool of competitors in order to gain enrolments.

3. Change in Student Expectations

Non-traditional students view themselves as customers and have high expectations for the service they receive before, during and after enrolment. In fact, today's students have the same service expectations when selecting a higher education institution as they do when making any other major purchase. Service expectations go far beyond enrolment and have an acute impact on retention, especially when it comes to non-traditional students. Further, non-traditional students want education for employability and career advancement. They are looking for specific outcomes and expect colleges and universities to align themselves with industry requirements.

4. Change in the Operational Approach of Higher Education

It is critical for higher education institutions to provide individualized service to each current and prospective non-traditional student; however, it must be done in an efficient (and effective) manner.

The implication of all these is that students are demanding more from their institutions than ever before and some institutions are meeting these expectations despite the constraints of the current economy. Higher institutions need to create systems that embrace and engage their non-traditional students, providing them with the tools and

information they need at every point. However, engaging students with the service and information they demand cannot be accomplished with one-off processes and staff determination alone. Instead, savvy administrators are seeking to make their institutions more operationally efficient—and in so doing, adopting more business-minded approach to higher education management—so that they can meet the changes in the higher education industry and turn challenges into opportunities.

I present here in this conference that the following key approaches are necessary to enhance inequitable access to Higher Education:

i. Technology: Higher Education institutions should leverage digital content, technologies, and practices to engage and interact with education customers (primarily students and their families).
ii. Improvement in the state of content management practices in higher education, and how they underpin customer engagement and experience.
iii. Steps should be taken to expand institutions platforms and practices beyond web publishing to experience management.
iv. Higher Education should gauge their own progress towards meeting the expectations of the types of students that they want to attract – particularly, polarized individuals in the society.
v. Obstacles preventing Higher Education institutions from improving their current content management practices, and from preparing for more engagement and less publishing.
vi. Higher Education institutions should step more firmly onto the path of digital transformation or advance their progress if they have already begun.
vii. Collaboration
viii. National education policies should direct attention to inclusive and transformative priorities

## XI. CONCLUSION

There are various roles that international higher educations and research initiatives play in and around the world, for examples, the institutions strengthen international engagement and mutual relations. These includes not limited to larger political gathering known as higher-education summit, language training, policy networks, global gatherings of indigenous communities, intercultural training and exchange programmes, international sport, scholarly events, cultural, and international development project, and worldwide scientific and research initiatives.

In addition, higher institutions change individuals' lives through education and through the more extensive impact of their research. It enables students to build up skills set and knowledge require. The institutions help in providing the ideas and innovations on which future prosperity will be established. The research conducted in tertiary institutions benefits everybody – making organizations and employments,

advancing society and empowering culture. Moreover, higher institutions help to guarantee that the student's stays focused in the nationwide and worldwide market by supporting greater business advancement, learning serious and intensive growth and development. Universities are anchor institution in their regions – they are basic for dynamic local economies and are drivers of innovations and business improvement, they are major contributor of the economy, generating revue within and outside its activities, also support in the management and strengthening relations among nations.

Higher education in Nigeria has a lot to gain if the development of digital technologies and libraries are supported by the stakeholders. The challenges may seem overwhelming but strong and conscious commitment on the part of policy makers and executors is indispensable. Tertiary institutions in Nigeria cannot afford to remain on the other side of the digital divide. To ensure the digital inclusion of tertiary institutions in Nigeria, concerted action geared towards the acquisition and management of ICT infrastructure is imperative. Digital technologies are critical and essential for effective teaching, research and learning in all tertiary institutions in the 21st century for equitable opportunities for tertiary education therefore it should be a priority. At this juncture, it is pertinent to point out that the digitalization of tertiary institutions should not be conceived as a panacea for all the challenges of higher education in Nigeria but it is a technology that promises to address some of these challenges. Thus, tertiary institutions could prevent social exclusion through digital inclusion, integration and adaptation of digital technology in international tertiary institutions.

## XII. RECOMMENDATIONS

Stakeholders must put into account that the social change of any society lies at the radical end of originating a higher education to embrace social change. It infers at the very least some fundamental changes in the public arena's center institutions, the country and the economy, with real ramifications for connections between social gatherings or classes, and for the methods for the creation and circulation of knowledge, wealth, influence and status, and for the strengthening of relationships among countries. This will help to reduce exclusion. Other measures proposed include:

- Usage of collaboration and communication platforms between different groups of members at the university and within the university lifecycle is germane.
- Institutions should leverage digital content, technologies, and practices to engage and interact with education customers (primarily students and tertiary institutions).
- Content management practices in higher education and customer engagement and experience should be stepped up in tertiary institution using digital technologies.

- Institutions should take steps to expand their platforms and practices beyond web publishing to experience management.
- Tertiary institutions should gauge their own digital progress towards meeting the expectations of the types of students that they want to attract.
- Check obstacles that prevent institutions from improving their current digital content management practices, and from preparing for more engagement.
- Holding more firmly onto the path of digital transformation or advance their progress if they have already begun.

The availability of proven technologies for content and experience management is not a key challenge. The technology landscape is mature and populated with choices that meet most institutional needs for content management, with some categories offering digital capabilities.

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