

Leadership, Higher Education and Social Transformation in Africa: a Case Study of Nigeria

By

Nengi Jessy JAMAICA, Ph.D
Department of Educational Management
Faculty of Education
Rivers State University
jessy.jamaica@ust.edu.ng
08097278098
<https://orcid.org/0009-0004-6504-1900>

Abstract

This paper explores leadership, higher education and social transformation in Africa: A case study of Nigeria. The study identifies the concepts of leadership as the process that involves an individual's capacity to exert influence over a group of individuals in order to achieve organizational goals. Leadership in the context of higher education refers to the capacity to anticipate future events in the present moment. Different leadership styles were outlined, qualities of a good Leader in Nigeria higher education were enumerated. The importance of effective leadership in higher education in Nigeria such as shared governance, protecting academic freedom and focus on student experience, support for fund raising and grants, promoting multicultural awareness, diversity and inclusion, balancing tradition and innovation, and creating a positive and collaborative campus culture and addressing societal issues were highlighted in the study. Higher education fulfils conventional roles such as research, instruction, and community service in order to cultivate personnel and distribute critical knowledge required by various industries and sectors'. Social transformation is a radical form of social change which is a more abrupt change of a society and or state, usually transformation in social relation that cause drastic change in the society of its social structure. Inclusive are factors of social transformation and the issues in Nigeria. In conclusion, the drastic change experienced in Nigeria appears in a multi-dimensional pattern deviating from a linear process of transformation which cut across different sectors of the economy and society especially considering the leadership in higher education institutions. Most importantly, the study suggested that Nigerian government and citizens should embrace social transformation especially with the positive changes in our higher education institutions, and leadership of higher education should include both academic and non-academic staff in decision making and consider relevant ideas and opinion and not be autocratic in leadership style.

Keywords: Leadership, Education, Higher Education, Social Transformation, Nigeria

Introduction

Leadership is a necessary component of formal organizations since it provides guidance and ensure's adherence to organizational principles. Through encouragement and inspiration, leaders drive the organization towards achieving its predetermined goals. Effective leadership is crucial for attaining set objectives, whether it is guiding a team of individuals or

managing a whole organization. Leadership in the context of higher education refers to the capacity to anticipate future events in the present moment (Ololube, 2013). Leaders may influence the higher education system by effective communication and by setting a positive example. Leadership does not always correlate with hierarchical positions inside an organization. However, these individuals are renowned for their convictions and strong work principles. Sociology enables us to comprehend and provide explanations for the intricate array of transformations that societies undergo throughout human history. Amey (2006), stated that leaders possess a strong love for their job and effectively transmit their enthusiasm to their colleagues, hence facilitating the accomplishment of shared objectives. Recently, there has been an increasing focus on the role of leaders in Higher Education institutions in Africa. This interest is motivated by the impact these institutions have on developing learners who go on to become leaders in society, as well as the need to adapt leadership in response to global challenges in the sector. In recent decades, the Higher Education sector has undergone various significant changes. These include the globalization of the market and internationalization of institutions, the emergence of for-profit private institutions, reductions in public funding, and an increase in academic mobility across borders (Altbach, 2011). The leadership approach in Higher Education institutions during the 1990s has faced growing scrutiny due to the need to accommodate a significant increase in student enrollment and the emergence of a fee-paying culture. These changes have led to a shift in expectations towards a more student-focused approach that emphasizes outward engagement, which contrasts with the traditional inward-focused collegial approach (Davies, Hides, & Casey, 2001). Since the 1980s, there has been a shift in institutions from an "administration" focus to a more widespread "management culture" (Clegg & McAuley, 2005). This trend has also been noted in the management functions of other African higher education institutions. Ololube (2013) informed that having a clear vision and maintaining consistency of purpose are crucial for improving leadership performance in the educational sector. Leaders in institutions must critically evaluate ways to enhance the leadership of their organizations and choose the most optimal technique that aligns with the specific environment for maximum effectiveness. Efficient leadership in higher education fosters a favorable learning atmosphere and helps to the progress of society. It encompasses proficiency, compassion, and a dedication to constructive transformation. In his work, Kaufman (2016) defined social transformation as the sudden revolution of a society's social order, including changes in social institutions, social behaviors, and social interactions. Social transformation is a kind of transition that happens suddenly and drastically due to many factors such as climate,

weather, or the existence of certain social groups. The second aspect is the systematic component, which encompasses a stable government, abundant and freely accessible resources, and a socially varied organization of society.

Nigeria, being among the African nations globally, is a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, and multi-faith nation. This indicates that a multitude of ethnic groups with distinct religious and philosophical beliefs coexist within a single nation. This has the potential to foster a society that is culturally diverse, enabling individuals to exchange information and ideas. However, it also contributes to discord and division. Nigeria has undergone numerous transformations and advancements since attaining independence in 1960. As Udoh and Nda (2016) elucidated, Nigeria has experienced a series of social transformations that have permeated its various states. A transition has occurred from regions to states, agricultural to petroleum, military to civilian government (democratic government), analogue to digital (modern technology), and now political power is being transferred from the north to the south. The transition has not significantly benefited the average citizen of society. Huntington (2003) stated that social scientists face a challenge in the form of social transformation. It is an enduring characteristic of social reality that has been extensively utilized to describe the progression of human societies, including the metamorphosis of their fundamental elements, from traditional to contemporary times. Indeed, social values, institutions, norms, relationships, and stratification have undergone continuous evolution in human societies due to both internal and external forces of social transformation. Therefore, this study examined leadership, higher education and social transformation in Africa.

Conceptual Clarification

Leadership

Beals and Jamaica (2023), opined that leadership is the fundamental operation of an organization. Beals and Jamaica (2023) elaborated that the leadership process involves an individual's capacity to exert influence over a group of individuals in order to achieve organizational goals. Leadership, according to Northouse (2021), is also a communication process that radically redirects and influences individuals to voluntarily commit their ideas to achieving a common goal in a given situation. To achieve a common objective, Amey (2006) defined leadership as a social process in which an individual or group influences the behavior of others. Notably, leaders act in pursuit of innovation rather than as a result of a sense of obligation. In Ololube (2013), success is assessed through the evaluation of the team's accomplishments and knowledge gained.

Leadership Styles

Styles of leadership found in higher education outlined by Jamaica (2021) are;

1. Autocratic leadership: A leader who has complete control over his team is called an autocratic leader. They never bend their beliefs and rules for anyone. Additionally, their team has no say in the business decisions. Moreover, the team is expected to follow the path directed by the leader.
2. Laissez-Faire leadership: Laissez-Faire is the practice of non-interference in the affairs of others, especially with reference to individual conduct or freedom of action. In this type of leadership, team members have the freedom to perform their job according to their will and bring in their perspective and intelligence in performing their functions.
3. Democratic leadership: The team members and leaders equally contribute to actualizing set goals and work together, motivate each other to achieve their personal goals to a positive working environment.
4. Bureaucratic leadership: Leaders strictly adhere to organizational rules and policies and ensure that their team members do the same. Bureaucratic leaders are often organized and self-motivated and there is no right or wrong leadership style.

Qualities of a Good Leader in Nigeria Higher Education

Some qualities of a good leader stated by Beals and Jamaica (2023) are as follows;

1. Honesty and Integrity: Leaders value virtuousness and honesty. They have people who believe in them and their uncompromising, strong moral and ethical principle and values.
2. Inspiration and Patient: Leaders are self-motivating, and this makes them great influencers. They are a good inspiration to their followers because they understand that organizational strategy takes time to develop. They help others to understand their roles in a bigger context and believes that continuous improvement and patient leads to success.
3. Communication skills and Active Listening: Leaders possess great communication skills. They are transparent with their team and share failures and successes with them. As a leader, respect is shown through listening to someone and it conveys that you appreciate and open to hearing followers' opinions.
4. Vision, Purpose and Empathy: Leaders are visionaries and they have a clear idea of what they want and how to achieve it. Leaders can share their vision with the team successfully. Leaders should be emotional and empathetic fellow because it will help them in developing a strong bond with their team and these qualities will help in addressing the problems, complaints, and aspirations of their team members.

5. **Objective and Self Confidence:** Although empathy is an important quality a leader must imbibe, getting clouded by emotions while making an important business decision is not advisable. A good leader should be self-confidence which is essential for leadership because it allows them the ability to take calculated risk and achieve their objectives.
6. **Creativity and Innovative:** A good leader is someone who is open to new ideas, possibilities, and perspectives. Being a good leader means understanding that there is no right way to do things. Therefore, a good leader is always ready to listen, observe, and be willing to change. They are also out-of-the-box thinkers and encourage their teams to do so.

Importance of effective leadership in higher education in Nigeria

Some of the tasks required of higher education leaders as stated by Jamaica (2020) include:

1. **Shared Governance:** Decision-making in higher education often involves collaboration across various faculty, administrators, staff, and sometimes students. Effective leaders must navigate this system and foster open stakeholder communication and cooperation.
2. **Protecting Academic Freedom and focus on student experience:** Leaders must support faculty autonomy to pursue their research and teaching interests without fear of reprisal. Black (2015) stated that leaders must address the institution's needs while prioritizing students' success, well-being, and access to resources and support services, as well as ensuring the curriculum and teaching methods are up-to-date and achieving desired goals.
3. **Support for Fundraising and Grants:** Supporting grants and government relations to managing donors, leaders in academic institutions need to be great managers of resources and relationships to ensure there are sufficient funds to achieve the academic mission.
4. **Promoting Multicultural Awareness, Diversity, and Inclusion:** Leaders must support their institutions in taking culturally responsive approaches to teaching and to faculty and student experience that support all community members.
5. **Balancing Tradition and Innovation:** Embracing rich institutional history and tradition while supporting innovation to adapt to changing educational, research, and technological trends. This includes reviewing and managing internal processes to ensure they are fair and transparent, supporting innovative, creative, and outstanding research and scholarly activities (Joubert, 2020).
6. **Creating a Positive and Collaborative Campus Culture and addressing societal issues:** From a faculty and staff perspective, this includes fostering a collaborative culture that encourages working together, sharing ideas, and supporting each other's professional

growth. This also includes developing students and student leaders who support each other, work toward common goals, and contribute to a thriving learning, research environment, and proactive generation ready to tackle complex problems. The world's most pressing challenges, such as climate change, poverty, and inequality require effective leadership to advance research and develop solutions.

Higher Education

Higher education is described by the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2013) as education in universities, Colleges of education, Mono-technics, Polytechnics and institutes of technology, Professional and specialized institutions which are above secondary school level. Higher education, according to Jamaica (2020), comprises of tertiary educational institutions and postsecondary training that are not universities. Jones (2013), opined that higher education fulfils conventional roles such as research, instruction, and community service in order to cultivate personnel and distribute critical knowledge required by various industries and sectors. National economies rely heavily on higher education, not only as an industry but also as a provider of educated and trained personnel for the remainder of the economic system (Boyce, 2003). Acquiring the knowledge and skills necessary for success in an ever-evolving, challenging, and dynamic society is of the utmost importance for higher education institutions in order to accommodate the varied needs of their students' population.

Faculty members are required to consistently educate themselves on the most recent teaching methodologies and technological advancements to foster more meaningful student engagement. Additionally, they will be required to employ a variety of teaching styles, recognizing that students have diverse learning preferences. Leaders in higher education, according to Jamaica (2021), must ensure that their faculty are coached and mentored in order to empower academic staff and faculty to develop leadership abilities. Faculty members must now prioritize ongoing professional development in order to ensure their survival and success.

Social Transformation

Brown, Valerie, and John (2014) in their studies identified social transformation as a relatively new term that has gained some popularity in the recent decades in the course of the social sciences. Hajare (2020) opined that social transformation is a radical form of social change. It is a more abrupt change of a society and or state, usually with a large scale through agents such as revolution. Luvalo (2014) noted that the concept social transformation connotes the idea of a particular deep and far-reaching changes that improve the way of life of the people within a limited span of time and also implies a fundamental change in society.

Nwurah (2005) defined social transformation as any transformation in social relation that cause drastic change in the society of its social structure. He further explained that social transformation can evolve from a number of different sources, which include contact with other societies (diffusion), changes in the ecosystem (which can cause the loss of natural resources/disasters or widespread disease), technological change (epitomized by the industrial revolution, which created a new social group, the urban proletariat), and other demographic variables. It can also be spurred by ideological, economic, and political movements.

Factors of social transformation

Kaufman (2016) outlined some factors of social transformation as follows;

1. **Physical Environment:** The climate, storms, social erosion, earthquakes, floods, and droughts, among other elements of the physical environment, unquestionably influence social life and spark social transformation. The earth's geographical conditions have a profound impact on human existence. There are numerous instances in human history where prosperous civilizations perished at the hands of natural disasters. In general, substantial population migration is compelled by alterations in the physical environment, and this results in profound transformations of cultural values and social life. Migration itself induces change by immersing a group in a new setting, where they are confronted with different challenges and introduced to their new social circles. Although the physical environment has a significant impact on social transformation, it cannot be considered the sole determinant of human society's development. This radical viewpoint was established by a geographical determinist (Huntington, 2003), who argued that social transformation is ultimately determined by the geographical setting, which governs the structure of society (family, marriage, economy, religion, and government). Today, however, this is not the case. Human beings are presently capable of influencing the transformation of their physical surroundings. Although humans naturally adjust to their surroundings, they also possess the ability to modify their physical surroundings to suit their specific needs and demands.
2. **Demographic (biological) Factor:** This pertains to the characteristics and magnitude of the human populace. Variations in the population's magnitude, makeup, and distribution are intricately linked to the social structure of a given society. Population size is primarily determined by three variables: birth rate, death rate, and migration (including emigration and immigration). Mortality rate fluctuations may contribute to alterations in the demographic composition. This alteration may possess ramifications for the framework of familial, kinship, political, and other institutions that sustain population

magnitude, thereby exerting a profound personal influence on each of us. Population analysis reveals that economic, social, and cultural variables such as poverty, illiteracy, illness, family's structure, forms' of marriage, employment, and so forth are interconnected with population changes. Population expansion is the primary determinant of poverty. There is a correlation between poverty and both health status and family size. Population-dense African nations (such as China, India, and Nigeria) are more impoverished than those with smaller populations. The adoption of two artificial methods of population growth, namely birth control and abortion, has had an impact on the structure and quantity of populations in the modern era. A decrease in both the birth and death rates results in significant societal changes.

3. **Cultural Aspect:** It is widely acknowledged that our values and social relationships are intricately linked to social institutions, as are our beliefs. Institutions, values, beliefs, and concepts constitute the foundation of a culture. All cultural changes, according to Arowolo (2010), precipitate social change. Cultural and social dimensions are intricately intertwined. Thus, any shift in culture (including beliefs, values, and concepts) results in an equivalent transformation of the entire social structure. Social institutions that are composed of extinct life forms cannot survive. Indirectly or directly, cultural values influence the formation of social systems. The historical record provides numerous indications that substantiate the significance of culture. A religious doctrine that has influenced the trajectory of society has endured in various forms for centuries.
4. **Conceptual Aspect:** The advancement of science and the secularization of thought have significantly contributed to the formation of the modern perspective's critical and innovative nature (Arowolo, 2010). Many traditions and customs that have been passed down through the ages are no longer adhered to. Contrarily, our daily lives have become progressively more reliant on rationality. Ideologies and concepts when combined constitute formidable forces of motivation for change. As an illustration, since achieving independence, the fundamental tenets of our constitution which are equality, fraternity, liberty, and justice have not only brought about a societal revolution but have also had a profound impact on familial relationships. Not only has the manner in which we think evolved during the modern era, but so have the contents of our ideas. Self-improvement, freedom, equality, and democratic engagement are concepts that have emerged mainly within the last two to three centuries. Such ideals have historically spur social and political transformations, such as revolutions and reformation movements.

5. **Economic Factor:** Industrialization is most significantly influenced by economic factors. It has fundamentally transformed communities, institutions, and organisations, as well as ways of life. Due to the fact that traditional production systems catered to recurring, customary requirements, output levels were comparatively stable. Contemporary industrial capitalism advocates for the perpetual modification of production technology, a progression that science is progressively entangled in. The influence of industrialization, encompassing science and technology, is readily apparent in the structure of the Nigerian joint family unit.
6. **Political Factor:** The state, being the preeminent institution that governs social interactions, exerts the most influence. It has the authority to enact new legislation and repeal outdated ones in order to effect social change. Laws pertaining to succession and child marriage, maltreatment and remarriage of widows, divorce, inheritance, and so forth. Additionally, the direction and pace of social transformation are impacted by the type of political leadership and those in authority. Economic control is exerted by the political leadership in numerous societies, including Nigeria. Non-technological and scientific-technological change are likewise influenced by political progress, which has an indirect impact on social transformation. Transformation and the nature of political organization are inextricably linked.

Social transformation issues in Nigeria

Any society's transformation is contingent on the upcoming generation, which is only feasible if the youth are adequately educated. A school undergoes transformation when an environment conducive to better teaching and learning is established, with the intention of achieving the stated educational goals and objectives (Boyce, 2003). Social transformation in education, according to this study, entails a gradual but fundamental shift in the educational landscape brought about by the effective implementation of educational policies, the allocation of adequate financial resources to education, and parental engagement. Brown, Valerie, & John (2014) assert that social transformation can alter behavior patterns, values, skills, and attitudes in order to achieve educational objectives and address the challenges facing the educational system. In 2013, the National Policy on Education implemented the 9-3-4 system of education, which superseded its predecessor, the 6-3-3-4 system. The objective of this new framework was to accurately represent the Nigerian educational system, which comprises four years of tertiary education, three years of senior secondary school, and nine years of basic school. A policy is a predetermined course of action that embodies the overarching objectives and processes aimed at attaining a specific desired result. Typically,

policies are articulated in the form of written statements that specify guiding principles and intended actions in order to achieve specific objectives. The National Policy on Education (2013), described educational policy as the government's declaration of intention regarding the utilization of education as a means to accomplishing national goals. The principal aim of the 9-3-4 educational system is to enhance the diversity of instruction by emphasizing technical and vocational knowledge in primary education, while the curriculum for senior secondary school is primarily focused on academic subjects. Nigeria's National Policy on Education is grounded in its five primary national objectives, which are fostering a free and democratic society, establishing a just and egalitarian society, uniting and strengthening the nation, developing a robust and dynamic economy; and creating an environment that offers abundant opportunities for all citizens (FRN, 2013).

Conclusion

The leadership (governance) of higher education institution is of utmost important in course of social transformation in Nigeria. It has witnessed a sequential progression from the traditional society it used to know to a modern society with a certain level of advancement in the institution that make up the social system. The evidence of social transformation issues in Nigeria brought about the evolution faced in the society is an inevitable, natural and irreversible phenomenon. Therefore, the modern Nigeria social setting is not different from other African countries. The drastic change experienced in Nigeria appears in a multi-dimensional pattern deviating from a linear process of transformation which cut across different sectors of the economy and society especially considering the leadership in higher education institutions.

Suggestions

The following suggestions, provide guidance for the study.

1. Nigerian government and citizens should embrace social transformation especially with the positive changes in our higher education institutions.
2. Leadership of higher education should focus more on the new methodology of teaching and learning for better advancement of the institutions.
3. The need to creating a learning institution that can react more quickly to changes both in its external and internal environment to improve students' outcomes is essential.
4. Leaders should exhibit good communication skills for effective and efficient management of higher education institution

5. Leadership of higher education should include both academic and non-academic staff in decision making and consider relevant ideas and opinion and not be autocratic in leadership style.

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