

**UNIVERSITY OF PORT HARCOURT**

**“UNIVERSITY OF PORT HARCOURT  
THEN, NOW AND IN THE FUTURE”**

**A Valedictory Lecture**

**By**

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## **DEDICATION**

To all staff and students who, in defiance of prevalent and persistent demagoguery, have remained committed to restoring and sustaining the sanctity of the Nigerian University System

## **PROGRAMME**

- 1. GUESTS ARE SEATED**
- 2. INTRODUCTION**
- 3. THE VICE-CHANCELLOR'S OPENING  
REMARKS**
- 4. CITATION**
- 5. THE VALEDICTORY LECTURE**

The lecturer shall remain standing during the citation. 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. The Vice-Chancellor shall present the document to the Registrar.

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

## **PROTOCOL**

Vice Chancellor Sir

Chairman and Members of the Governing Council

Deputy Vice Chancellor (Administration).

Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic).

Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research and Development).

The Registrar and other Principal Officers of the University

Provost, College of Health Sciences

Dean, School of Graduate Studies

Dean, Faculty of Agriculture

Deans of other Faculties

Distinguished Professors and Scholars

Heads of Departments and Directors of Institutes

Staff and Students of the University of Port Harcourt

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

## **Preamble**

It would be most uncharitable of me to retire and leave without depositing my thoughts on the state of our University and what the future portends for its existence, not just as one of the choice destinations for the teeming populations of Nigerian youths seeking tertiary education locally, but also as one striving to become a world-class university. I founded the Faculty of Agriculture as its pioneer Dean, superintended over it for slightly over six years and placed it visibly on the institution's map of frontline faculties within that short period. I served as the 8th Vice-Chancellor of University of Port Harcourt (UniPort) for five years; and served on many standing and ad hoc committees during my entire service of forty-three and a half years in the Nigerian University System (NUS) of which thirty-two and a half were spent in the service of UniPort. Before then, I served on the Council of Rivers State University of Science and Technology (as it then was) for almost four years and at the University of Maiduguri for eleven years. This long period of service provided me with the opportunities to learn, first hand, how the laws, procedures and processes enacted and or approved by statutory organs of the universities were applied, ought to be applied and should be applied, for the smooth administration of every unit, department, division and centre for the attainment of the broad vision and mission of public tertiary institutions and, by so doing, I acquired considerable experience. I was loyal to and cooperated with successive heads and deans of my department and faculty, respectively. It is part of the knowledge I garnered in the course of my service in these different roles and positions that I have shared in the subsequent sections of this valedictory lecture.

A professional colleague and dear friend, Professor Thomas Inomisan Ofuya, who retired recently from the Federal University of Technology Akure, once told a grim truth that has stuck with me ever since: “once you attain the age of 60, you’re nearer where you’re going than where you’re coming from.” At 70, I’m much nearer where am going than where I’m coming from, and wisdom tells me I should be drawing much nearer to God than ever before. It is now that that truth should be told without vacillation of any sort; truth abides forever (2 John 1:2). Knowing the truth, we are told, will set all men free. If truth be told, truth can only be distorted or suppressed for a limited time; it cannot be destroyed. These are the compelling reasons for choosing the title, **“University of Port Harcourt: Then, Now and in the Future”** from amongst several competing titles as the theme for this valedictory lecture. It would be extreme naivety on my part to imagine that every listener would embrace every aspect of the truth presented in this lecture, at least, not immediately. As it is characteristic of truth, greater buy-in always happens with the passage of time and usually long after the lecture would have been delivered.



## **Introduction**

Higher education – the education and training at colleges, universities, polytechnics and monotechnics – is critical to human development and there has been and will continue to be several global conventions to underpin and shore up this apex level of knowledge. For instance, in 2000, the World Bank and UNESCO accelerated the efforts of the international community for the expansion of higher education for development, with focus on the countries of sub-Saharan Africa. Based on research and intensive discussions and hearings conducted during a two-year period, it was concluded that, without more and better higher education, developing countries will find it increasingly difficult to benefit from the global knowledge-based economy (World Bank, 2000). The power of higher education in Africa has undoubtedly, not only been underestimated for decades by African governments; it has also been regarded as a luxury meant for a few and Africa has thus neglected tertiary education as a veritable means of driving economic growth and mitigating poverty (Kuhn, 2011).

Perceptions are changing for the better for African higher education. Today, out of 264 million students worldwide, 6.9 million are studying abroad. More than half of the 6.9 million which includes students from sub-Saharan Africa, are studying outside their region (UNESCO, 2025). In November 2019, the *Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education* was adopted by the 40th session of the UNESCO General Conference, and thus became the first United Nations treaty on higher education with a global scope. The Global Convention establishes universal principles for fair, transparent and non-discriminatory recognition of higher education qualifications and qualifications giving access to higher education and offering avenues for further study and employment. Further to the introduction of non-traditional

learning modes, the Global Convention also facilitates the recognition of qualifications, prior learning and study periods earned remotely. Finally, it promotes the recognition of refugees' qualifications, even in cases where documentary evidence is not available.

It is now common knowledge that education, science, technology, innovation and research are essential for a country's social and economic development. As Knoop (2011) noted, besides human resources, knowledge is the key factor for development. Because of globalisation, knowledge is increasingly becoming the major locational advantage in international competition. Consequently, only countries that have adequately trained human resources and effective academic systems can benefit from globalisation. It is higher education institutions, especially universities that are invested, by design, with the capacity to provide to trainees the required level of knowledge and skill. An efficient higher education institution (HEI) performs a variety of functions that are essential for a country's development. The universities and colleges train the specialists and managers (including HE managers) who will initiate development and change processes in their countries. Research, one of the cardinal obligations of HEIs, can provide relevant knowledge and develop appropriate technologies that fit local needs. Besides the traditional roles of teaching, research and community development, universities play broader roles that lead to sustainable human development. For instance, in addition to the tripartite mission of universities, a fourth mission, entrepreneurial education – aimed at reaping the benefits of applied research, has been included in the mix by university managers. This new concept known as entrepreneurial self-efficacy (ESE), developed by Newman (Newman 2008, [homepages.uc.edu/www.newmanreader.org](http://homepages.uc.edu/www.newmanreader.org)), requires

conceptual knowledge to co-exist side-by-side with hands-on education to serve the needs of modern society while preserving the original idea of the university; with this fourth mission, university graduates are increasingly expected to be industry-ready from day one, without requiring additional training, to fit into defined service roles.

Janetzke and Scheidtweiler (2011) quoted the inspiring words of late Kofi Annan, former Secretary-General of the United Nations thus:

“I believe that the university must become a primary tool for Africa’s development in the new century. Universities can help develop African expertise; they can enhance the analysis of African problems; strengthen domestic institutions; serve as a model environment for the practice of good governance, conflict resolution and respect for human rights; and enable African academics to play an active part in the global community of scholars.”

Higher education has remained the most virile vehicle for the transmission of ideas, skills, history and culture from one generation to another all over the world for the perpetuation of socio-economic development, human survival and self-improvement as well as man’s ability to conquer his more or less hostile environment and thus improve living standards and life expectancy. The value of our knowledge in the areas of medical science, agriculture, engineering, technology, law, political economy, for instance, and its impact on human welfare, orderly living and overall development, can hardly be overstated. Life in any of the global climes would be

inconceivable without the advancement that man has made in the science of food production, health care, information dissemination, communication, good governance and in the other areas of learning especially in the last two centuries. Life in the 21st century is becoming increasingly complex and it will require a well-adapted and efficient system of HE to overcome the challenges being posed to our environment, health, food security, security of lives and property and good governance (Lale, 2012a).

It is in recognition of this that increased demand for spaces or access has become one of the key factors shaping the dynamics of HE globally. Access to HE has been defined as availability of sufficient number of institutions across the serviced region to adequately and equitably fulfil the demand from that region. Equity means equal opportunity to all sections of the society to participate in higher education. Early in the 2000s, Escrigas and Lobera (2009) reported that the factor that has had the greatest influence on the evolution of HE in recent decades has been the sharp increase in demand worldwide. Overall, world enrolment increased from 92 million in 1999 with 44.2 million female students to 143.9 million in 2006 with 71.9 million female students. The factors responsible have been demographic growth, better salaries and improved quality of life for those who acquire HE qualifications, the social value of higher education and changes in access conditions. These are probably the same factors that are responsible for the meteoric rise in the number of universities in Nigeria from the six it had in 1970 to the current 274 as at February 2025 according to the report from [allAfrica.com](http://allAfrica.com). With new universities being approved every now and again by the National Universities Commission (NUC), the exact number of universities remains in a state of flux. In his own investigation, for example, Abatta (2025), reported that up to 297 universities have been

established and or licenced by NUC and are currently operating in Nigeria.

### **The History of Universities in Nigeria**

The first university in Nigeria was the University College, Ibadan (UCI) established in 1948. Initially an affiliate of University of London, it later became a full-fledged university and called University of Ibadan in 1963. University of Nigeria Nsukka, the first indigenous university, began operation in 1960; it was designed in line with the American educational system. In 1962, University of Lagos and University of Ife (renamed in 1987 as Obafemi Awolowo University) and Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria were established. These older universities established between 1960 – 1970 which include University of Benin form the first-generation universities in Nigeria. In 1975, the Federal Government established a group of six universities comprising Calabar, Ilorin, Jos, Maiduguri, Port Harcourt, Sokoto (now Usmanu Danfodio University, Sokoto) and Kano (now Bayero University, Kano) and these formed the second-generation universities. The third-generation universities were specialised institutions which included universities of technology and agriculture established between the 1980s and the 1990s. Ever since, universities with different mandates are being established on a continual and need-driven basis by the federal and state governments as well as by the private sector.

### **University of Port Harcourt and the Dream of the Founding Fathers**

Established initially as University College, Port Harcourt in 1975, it gained full university status in 1977. Professor Donald E. U. Ekong served as its first Vice-Chancellor (VC) from 1977 to 1982 and he was succeeded by Professor S.J.S. Cookey, the institution's second VC. From then, the University

has been superintended over by successive substantive VCs in the order Professor Kelsey Harrison, Professor Theo Vincent, Professor Nimi D. Briggs, Professor Don M. Baridam, Professor Joseph A. Ajienka and Professor Ndowa E.S. Lale. Professor Owunari A. Georgewill is the institution's current and 9th VC.

In the early days, Professor Ekong and Professor Cookey pursued the dream to make University of Port Harcourt one of the finest and most reputable tertiary institutions in Africa; they implemented this dream through their recruitment and promotion strategy. The headhunt ensured that they employed the most competent staff, academic and non-academic, from around the world; they attracted established academics from older institutions. They assembled some of the best brains who graduated in first class and second-class upper and placed them on the elaborate staff development programme that took most of the Assistant Lecturers and Graduate Assistants to the ends of the earth to acquire the best university education available. Although a few stayed back in their countries of training upon graduation, most returned and, together with the established lecturers, administrators, accountants and technical staff employed from other institutions and organisations, they provided a high standard of education to students and earned an enviable reputation for the institution in the process. Every branch of learning had celebrated, world-class academics on its faculty.

At that time, attaining the rank of senior lecturer was no mean feat and those who did enjoyed widespread national and international visibility and respect. The professors were virtual lords and their opinions on any matter in their departments and in their schools that eventually became faculties, were sacrosanct. The promotion guidelines were strict and this brought a great sense of accomplishment to academic staff

who were promoted to the professoriate; the university community and those outside and around the world held them in high esteem. They may not have had so much material wealth, but the attendant sense of fulfilment was invaluable. At that time also, Principal Assistant Registrars (PARs) and Deputy Registrars (DRs) were repositories/virtual mobile encyclopedia of the statutes, rules and policies put in place for the administration of the institution. These academics and non-academic staff served as mentors to many. Most of these have left the world and those alive have long retired; their mentees have either retired, are retiring or are nearing retirement.

These values were handed down to succeeding generations of managers and whenever there were threats to the standards of quality assurance instituted, steps were taken to return them to their original wholesome states. For example, when Senate sensed a worrisome development in the procedure for promotion to the professoriate, members engineered the adoption of the professorial interview as the final lap in the process as a remedy to the emergent problem. The professorial interview which was in operation for decades until recently and which had been the envy of many universities, helped to stem possible abuse of the process and to maintain its sanctity. The professors that emerged from this system were, on average, top-notch and this is why the inaugural lecturers had no need to be taught how to write their lectures or how to present them; they did not desecrate the hallowed global university tradition that served as a public announcement of their formal admittance to the prestigious professoriate academy by dusting up expired seminar/workshop papers and christening them inaugural lectures as a smokescreen for the bogus title some carry rather unjustifiably today; the experts in the previous generations, instead, presented their inaugural lectures in their chosen fields in which they were promoted professors, not in strange fields in a desperate attempt to evade

the rigour which the discourse of one's specialty entails. Today, many inaugural lectures have been converted to mere crowd-funding projects that only benefit the lecturers, but decimate the University's reputation. Although the practice of professorial interview may not have been adopted in many universities, it should be noted that the processes for quality-assuring promotions in any organisation always evolve from local circumstances and dynamics; any clamour for its abandonment because it lacks widespread adoption and universal application is, therefore, ill-informed. It should be abundantly clear that reputation is a fragile attribute; reputation built over decades easily crashes over just one wrong decision. Is the removal of professorial interview as an important component of the process for promotion to the professoriate and the abandonment of promotion examination as a necessary step for promotion to the ranks of PAR and DR in UniPort impacting positively on the quality of our staff at these levels?

Keeping the University on the leadership trajectory handed down by previous managers earned the institution the first position amongst Nigerian universities from 2015 to 2017 as ranked by *Times Higher Education* (THE), a world-class university ranking body whose outcomes are accepted and used as a major part of higher education metrics globally. In the 2025 ranking by the same body (THE), University of Port Harcourt suffered a considerable downward slide to the 20th position. In the JAMB Policy Meeting for 2025/2026 academic session, the statistics showed that the University of Port Harcourt did not make the list of the top 10 most sought-after universities in the country with application numbers that ranged from 79,000 to 42,000. The top 10 universities in decreasing order of preference by candidates included Lagos State University, University of Lagos, University of Ilorin, Federal University, Oye-Ekiti and Nnamdi Azikiwe

University; others were University of Ibadan, University of Nigeria Nsukka, University of Benin, Obafemi Awolowo University and Federal University Lafia (allschool.ng).

### **Rethinking the Reward System using the Pareto Principle**

One of the most damaging influences of our current system of recognising and rewarding contributions of faculty in Nigerian public universities is the system of uniform promotion and other forms of motivation applied across HEIs around the country. At the moment, academic staff with markedly differing levels of competence, productivity and output are promoted to the same rank using identical criteria and paid identical salaries. This is why today there is a worrisome disparity between professors in the performance of their duties (teaching and research) not just between different parts of the country but also between individual professors in the same university. The obvious negative effect of this is that those competent, highly productive and performing professors and academics are de-motivated and discouraged (Lale, 2012b). The import is that the few competent professors do most of the work and the rest collect salaries they have not truly earned.

Vilfredo Pareto (1848 – 1923), the Italian economist and sociologist, developed the concept of the 80/20 rule also known as the Pareto Principle, the law of the significant few and the principle of the factor sparsity. The 80/20 rule suggests that in various scenarios, 80% of results come from 20% of the effort or causes (<http://wikipedia.org>). The Pareto Principle has been widely adopted in business, time management, and other fields for identifying priorities and optimising performance. In understanding team performance, for example, it can reveal that a small percentage of employees are responsible for a larger proportion of the output, prompting reflection on team dynamics and resource allocation.

In the workplace, roughly 80% of results come from 20% of effort, meaning that a small proportion of activities, decisions, or employees contribute significantly to the overall success of an organisation. Is there any iota of justice in rewarding this small proportion of employees that generates 80% of the organisation's productivity at the same rate with the 80% that doesn't? This rhetorical question is at the heart of how our public universities ought to be rejigged in respect of its reward system. One area in which individual organisations can apply this principle is in the appointment of staff into units of administration and management: the leaders and managers of institutions should be dispassionate about this and appoint competent and skilled staff with proven integrity into critical units without pandering to people's baser sentiments or bowing to pressure from people with shared interests, whether political or such other considerations. Doing otherwise only builds strong individuals, not strong institutions. Staff who are preoccupied with jobbery or whose disposition is irredeemably transactional and mercantile, for instance, add no value to any system. In the final analysis, it is only competent and skilled staff who espouse visible ethical values that can contribute to sustainable growth of the institution.

How do the developed climes approach this phenomenon? They do so through policymaking and the consistent implementation of such policies across board. Frankly, our professors need not earn uniform salary; they can be categorised and paid accordingly as it currently operates in the United States of America and Germany. In Germany, for example, professors are rated on a scale of 4, that is, C<sub>1</sub> – C<sub>4</sub>, with C<sub>1</sub> professors as the lowest and C<sub>4</sub> as the highest. If we must be honest with ourselves, some of our professors are not as good as they ought to be and this is why the venerate status

that the public invested professors with in the past is fast being eroded. The very eclectic Vanguard columnist, Ugoji Egbujo, in his September 20, 2025 article, had this to say about the Nigerian universities and the PhDs they award and the professors they create: “More than half of the university degrees we mint in this country are fake; ninety-percent of the PhDs are rewards for the meticulous copy-and-paste. Nothing to do with expanding the frontiers of knowledge. But that should be expected. Many of the professors are fake. The country is full of Temu professors who have never written a proper peer-reviewed paper of any scholarly value in their entire academic lives. It’s evident when they are hired for INEC duties. They regularly show a shocking lack of mental and moral fibre.” This is why the proposition to categorise professors which, I agree, will be a major paradigm shift, is not what individual universities can handle; it is a matter for NUC. It requires the leaders of this supervisory agency to have the will, buy-in, and commence discussions with the government and leaders of universities; this process should culminate in the development of a new, radical instrument for the recognition and rewarding of academic staff especially for promotion to the rank of professor. A corollary instrument could also be developed for the non-academic staff.

### **The State of Nigeria’s Public Universities**

From as far back as 1948 when University College Ibadan (UCI) was established, the Nigerian public university has continued to suffer a multiplicity of problems that threatens its smooth and efficient operation. UCI suffered a number of problems in its early years, not the least of which were staffing, low enrolment, high dropout rate, and inadequate funding ([infoguidenigeria.com](http://infoguidenigeria.com)). Some of these problems are still plaguing the Nigerian public university system (NUS) and have assumed the status of major decelerators of institutional development; requiring the attention of the President, the only

Visitor to all federal universities or state Governors, the Visitors to state universities, the supervising MDAs and the managers of the individual universities.

Because of the country's burgeoning population with its structure characterised by a large young population, a relatively small elderly population, and a near-equal distribution of males and females, limited access to HE has become one of the most endemic problems. Public universities, for instance, have limited carrying capacities on account of limited investment in infrastructure – lecture halls and classrooms, laboratories, workshops, libraries, studios, hostels, ICT hubs, sporting and other critical facilities. Of the nearly two million that seek admission annually, the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB), is only able to admit and matriculate no more than fifty-percent of the applicants. Compare the situation with the University of Bologna in Italy which in 2023 had a student population of over 90,000 ([//www.unibo.it](http://www.unibo.it)); this student population will require a number of universities in Nigeria to be able to accommodate. This makes it incontrovertible that increasing the carrying capacity of individual universities rather than the proliferation of universities holds the key to improving access. The new policy made public from the meeting of the Federal Executive Council held on 13th August 2025 which has placed a seven-year ban on the creation of more universities may be the first step in finding solution to this problem. The fact that it is a mere policy and not an enactment under our law, casts serious doubt on the sustained implementation and the practicability of this policy; a new government can dismantle it for political expediency.

The second nagging perennial problem is poor remuneration of staff. In the early 1980s, it was more prestigious and profitable to be a Graduate Assistant in a university than to work in the

Shell Petroleum Development Company or any oil company for that matter. At that time, graduates took up jobs as lecturers in the university (and there were comparatively few public universities at the time) not as a last resort having failed to secure jobs elsewhere, but because of the passion they had for the academia as a profession. It is therefore most concerning that the situation took a downturn so that the salaries of lecturers and other workers in the university are a mere pittance today.

From the early days of university education in Nigeria, funding and funding system have remained two of the major factors stifling the sustained development of the Nigerian public university system. University systems all over the world are capital-intensive; countries in the developed parts of the world prioritise investment in tertiary education because of its dominant influence in human resource and national development. The following statistics on funding of Harvard University make the point poignantly. For the 2019 fiscal year, the aggregate revenue from federal and non-federal sources increased by three-percent to \$937 million. Federal funding, which accounted for sixty-seven percent of total sponsored revenue in that fiscal year increased by one-percent to \$631 million ([finance.harvard.edu](http://finance.harvard.edu)). While I am not advocating for similar funding rates, the example makes the point that the federal and state governments must realise that tertiary education is a capital-intensive social investment and that universities should not be established until their funding sustainability is adequately thought-out well ahead.

A related problem of funding is the epileptic or “hit-and-run” manner by which public universities are provided with capital and recurrent funds. For proper and smooth management and governance of the university, funding must be planned,

systematic and regular. It is a common tale to hear that staff are owed salaries, allowances and other emoluments; that service providers that include security companies are owed their agreed contract sums for months, and sometimes, years on-end. This state of affairs accounts, in large part, for the poor service delivery and rumblings that frequently occur in public universities that culminate in nationwide strikes by staff unions. If it had not been for the regular intervention by the Education Trust Fund (ETF) that eventually transformed into Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund), a brainchild of the Academic Staff Union of Universities as a fall-out of its 1992 strike, the infrastructural decay in our tertiary institutions would have attained the status of a national disgrace by now.

Ironically, the greatest threat to the continuous outflow of well-trained graduates with adequate knowledge and skill from public universities to the pool of the country's human capital are the activities of the four staff unions and the single students union – Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU); Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities (SSANU); National Association of Academic Technologists (NAAT); Non-Academic Staff Union of Universities (NASU); and Students Union which students arrogantly call Students Union Government (SUG). The singular objective here is to clearly show how the no-love-lost relationship that exists between these unions and the proprietors of public universities is affecting the *raison d'être* for the establishment of tertiary institutions. In my over four decades of service as a lecturer, there has been a number of total and indefinite strikes by unions, with ASUU usually in the lead, in their effort to press home their demands for the improvement of the NUS. It is now generally agreed that the best days of ASUU ended with the leadership of Dr Attahiru Jega (as he then was) due largely to the successful prosecution of the 1991/1992 strike

principally for improved salaries, academic allowances and the general welfare of members of ASUU. That strike succeeded mainly because the President and members of his National Executive Council focused the Union's demands more on matters that related directly to the welfare of members. It was in the post-1992 strike period that public university workers began to earn near-living wage after decades of living on the shoestring. With the run-away inflation and the free-fall of the naira following the success of the Attahiru Jega-led ASUU, salaries have again reverted to their pre-1992 value because of the low purchasing power of the naira. This was the situation that prevailed prior to the 1992 strike that led to massive emigration of seasoned academics from local universities to universities abroad; a phenomenon known more appropriately as "brain drain." One would have thought that governments – federal and state – would undertake salary adjustments in response to emerging economic realities on autopilot, but this has not happened decades into the 21st century. The aloofness and sheer lack of interest of governments regarding the deliberate improvement of the living conditions of public university workers create the scenarios that serve as the tinder for the almost annual or biennial "ritual" with monumental consequences on all stakeholders – university staff, students, parents/guardians, the public and the government. The wobbling stability and peace experienced on campuses in public universities following the end of the 2022 nationwide strike are, without a doubt, due mainly to the restraint being exercised by the unions and this, certainly, is not interminable; they are not the outcome of the unions' demands being fulfilled by the proprietors.

It is now well-known that poor salaries are at the top of the demand of ASUU and other public university unions and the genuine cause of anger and the frequent, persistent strikes (Ekuobase, 2022). It has been reported recently that lecturers

in Nigerian public universities are now the poorest paid in Africa and it is obvious that such a system can never retain the best academics (Ogunbodede, 2022). More recently, Palladan (2025), a Nigerian and a member of the British Academy of Management residing in the UK reported how lecturers in Nigerian universities are struggling under the poor wage: in one university, some trek no less than 8 kilometres in both directions in order to get to work and return home afterwards; others have abandoned their cars, sleep in their offices and return home only at the end of the work week; and majority can no longer afford critical medications for health challenges such as diabetes and hypertension. Will ASUU strikes be less frequent and less prolonged if its demands are wrapped around the matters of welfare for its members? While the appropriate answer to this question can only be a conjecture, Ohiambe (2022) opined that ASUU will have greater success if it concentrates its energy on issues that pertain to its members' welfare; this should lessen both the frequency and duration of strikes when they become inevitable. Why has the leadership of ASUU in successive tenures continued to overreach its circle of influence beyond what is statutory to trade unions? Could the addition of matters that are not directly related to members' welfare on its list of demands be the real reason why its rate of success is waning progressively since the post-1992 Attahiru Jega-led strike? Whatever the answers may be, what is incontrovertible is that strikes create serious distortions in the academic calendar, sometimes, entire academic sessions are washed off. The situation is often worse in federal than in state universities; this is why many parents now prefer state universities to federal ones as their children or wards are guaranteed completion of their studies within the scheduled duration. During the strike of 2022 that hit harder on federal university students and their parents, most state universities were in session; many prospective students who were still

within time on the JAMB portal transferred their admission from federal to state universities even in the full knowledge that tuition fees are paid in the state universities (Lale, 2023). It is a worrisome irony that some of those students were children or wards of staff of federal universities who were on total and indefinite strike. It is also for this reason that there has been an upsurge in selecting state universities as first choice institutions by students (Lale, 2023).

A major argument put forward by ASUU in defence of strikes is that whenever it calls off strike, its members will pick up from where they left off to complete the syllabus for each course. But how does this compensate for the huge time lost by students and their parents/guardians, the extra cost, the poor learning outcomes as the items in the syllabus are crammed in the limited time for teaching within a compressed semester, the pain suffered by its members who experience extreme destitution, the loss of lives of members occasioned by the strike, the loss of property of the institution through decay and theft? The federal universities are the major battle grounds with a small number of state universities experiencing collateral damage as their academic staff adhere to the union's slogan of "injury to one is injury to all" even when the issues in contention have no direct bearing on their own institutions. In 2022, for instance, ASUU embarked on strike to press home its demands that were, for the most part, only applicable to federal universities; the demands included:

- i. The renegotiation of the ASUU-FGN 2009 agreement;
- ii. Deployment of University Transparency and Accountability Solutions (UTAS);
- iii. Replacement of the Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System (IPPIS);
- iv. Release of the reports of the Presidential Visitation Panels to federal universities;

- v. Funding for revitalisation of public universities, earned academic allowances;
- vi. Promotion arrears; and
- vii. Poor funding of state universities.

In that strike that lasted for eight and four months for members of ASUU and the members of other unions, respectively, the Federal Government invoked the no-work-no-pay rule and members lost the salaries for those months and, despite threats of bringing down “armageddon” on the NUS, only fifty-percent or so of the withheld salaries, to date, have been paid in two tranches for each union. The unpaid balance would, perhaps, form the basis for yet another strike in future. This is the well-worn path that the unions have trodden for several decades.

Two further issues – NUC accreditation and payment of tuition fees – remain major ironies in the philosophical underpinning of ASUU. The resource verification and the regular accreditation instruments and implementation procedures are critical quality assurance resources which the NUC engages academic staff (members of ASUU) across Nigerian universities to produce. Secondly, the actual accreditation exercise in universities based on the instruments and procedures prepared *a priori*, is also undertaken by the academic staff who in many cases, return verdicts of availability of excellent teaching and learning facilities and resources for which NUC invests such universities with a clean bill of health and so grants full or interim accreditation to existing programmes or grants verified status to new programmes. Shortly after, ASUU embarks on strike partly on the grounds that the same facilities, infrastructure and resources have totally collapsed (Ekuobase, 2022). The other worrisome issue is the idea that all Nigerian adolescents of university age must acquire university education and must do

so free of charge; ASUU has never supported the idea of students paying tuition fees especially in federal universities. Tuition fees, as a custom, form a major component of the Internally Generated Revenue of universities globally. There is nowhere else in the world where every adolescent receives university education and where those who do, attend free of charge. Kperogi (2022) stated in a paper at his twitter (now X) handle that ASUU as a union takes pride in letting the world know that it opposes tuition fees in federal universities. The idea of free tuition in federal universities was opposed vehemently by Col Ahmadu Ali, the then Federal Commissioner of Education, in the late 1970s when the policy was first proposed, on the basis that the policy was unsustainable. His stance led to a nationwide strike by the National Union of Nigerian Students (NUNS) under the leadership of Segun Okeowo asking for the removal of Col Ahmadu Ali as Federal Commissioner of Education in what was popularly known in pidgin English as “Ali mongo,” meaning Ali must go. The inability of the Federal Government to adequately fund federal universities even in the 21st century has proved Col Ali (now General Ali) right decades down the line.

An oft-quoted example of a country where university education is free is Finland. However, according to the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) figures, on average as at 2023, the personal income taxes are 42.7% in Finland, compared to 24.3% in the USA. This is in addition to municipal taxes with rates varying between 4.36% and 10.86% depending on the municipality ([taxsummaries.pwc.com](http://taxsummaries.pwc.com)). Finland is reported as one of the top countries for highest income taxation, together with countries like Sweden ([herfinland.com](http://herfinland.com)). It has managed to keep university education entirely state-funded, even for international students. The equivalent rate for personal income

tax in Nigeria ranges between 10% and 15%. If the Federal Government of Nigeria were to introduce similar types and rates of tax for workers in Nigeria, it might lead to an unending strike by the Nigerian Labour Congress, the Trade Union Congress and all the affiliate unions including the staff unions in universities.

### **The Students' Union**

The Students' Union deserves a brief discourse as a platform for training the leaders of tomorrow. A students' union is a student-led organisation often found in universities and colleges, that represents the interests and concerns of the student body. It acts as a bridge between students and the institution's administration, advocating for student rights and providing a platform for student participation in university affairs. A senior academic staff, normally a professor, is appointed as dean into a unit of administration, Students Affairs, to oversee, direct and supervise the affairs of the body. Its governance is made of a structure with elected student leaders who manage the body.

One of the key functions of the body is leadership/governance. As late Kofi Annan posited, as a training ground, it is in universities and colleges that students ought to receive training to become prospective models for the practice of good governance (Janetzke and Schweidtweiler, 2011). Are students receiving the necessary training to enable them to provide such model governance upon graduation? The leadership styles of the executives of students' unions across Nigerian universities seem to belie Kofi Annan's expectation. Every students' union ought to be a democratic body where the students learn the rudiments of democracy. Once the institutions collect the dues on behalf of the body, the executives distance themselves from the rest of the students: spend their money in any manner they think fit without accountability of any sort; make serious

decisions including those to embark on protests without holding any congress meeting; flaunt their wealth without looking over their shoulders. These are acts of impunity; yet it is from the executive councils of students that most politicians cut their political tooth. This is a dangerous trend that only hurts our political landscape. While it is quite commendable to expose the executives of students' unions to parliamentary sessions around the world, the actual dividend derivable from their activities can only come from the implementation of democratic tenets – free and fair election, accountability, unfettered liberty to express one's views on matters that affect the generality of students, holding congresses to canvass acceptable opinions of members on all union matters, disciplining erring officials/members, and so on. The processes and procedures are clearly defined in the Students' Handbook and every institution ought to implement these and enforce sanctions against officials who violate them. If institutions fail to do this, it should be clear that we are surreptitiously transforming student bodies into breeding grounds for lawless politicians of tomorrow.

In our days as undergraduate students, Students' Union, known as National Union of Nigerian Students (NUNS) and led nationally in the late 1970s by its President, Mr Segun Okeowo, was made up purely of bona fide students who were duly registered. Its name changed when it was proscribed by government following the protest against the Federal Commissioner's insistence on the payment of tuition and sundry fees, to National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS). Today, NANS' election has almost become more political than national elections that involve registered political parties and the so-called national leaders are adults in their late forties or fifties, some grandparents, who may or may not be students; the branch and national Presidents appoint a retinue of Personal Assistants (PAs), Chiefs of Staff (CoS) and other

“political appointees” of various descriptions; they drive posh cars, often in a convoy, on our campuses even to the envy of staff who earn salaries. They belong to and are supported and funded by different political parties. These mostly non-academic, unregistered student leaders wilfully instigate problems on our campuses with the sole aim of making money from their pretentious brinksmanship efforts in HEIs as their stock in trade; some own tasteful duplexes in choice locations in various Nigerian cities. This way, they become useful tools in the hands of maverick politicians around the country. It is only the managers of our tertiary institutions that can stem this ugly tide. Their continued existence spells doom for our political development.

Students’ Unions generate humongous amounts of money from annual dues collected from students and other sources. All this money should not be wasted on Students Week and other frivolous escapades; the body can do reasonable projects that serve as a legacy in the institution. In the University of Ibadan, the student body makes investments in enterprises that generate further revenue for their union; from June 2025, University of Newcastle Students Association (UNSA) began to assist financially-challenged students with dissertation grants. The 1.2 km long *Walkway* from the Delta gate end to Donald Ekong Library, now in a puzzling and sorry state of disrepair, was constructed with funds from the students’ special projects account during my tenure as VC after reaching an agreement with the student leaders. Are there further visible projects being executed in the University with funds from the Students’ Union accounts?

### **Alumni and Alumnae as Critical Stakeholders**

Leveille (2006) provided an operational definition of stakeholders that is all-inclusive in terms of who they are and their niche:

“Simply put, stakeholders are people who have a stake, or interest in what occurs in any particular area. Ultimately, this includes us all, depending on where they live, work, or play. The key difference between a stakeholder and the average citizen is that stakeholders take an active role in what goes on in their communities, be they local, state, national, or international.”

Technically, the word “stakeholder” evolved into a term with a particular meaning in the field of business management and has been utilised increasingly in HE to refer to those individuals or groups that have an interest or involvement in its affairs. Within the context of HE, the concept has been broadened to include everyone with an interest (or “stake”) in what HE does. In that context, “stakeholder” includes not only policymakers and governing board members, but also all persons who in any way fund or make an investment in HE and beneficiaries of HE, including graduates and employers. In identifying the full spectrum of who stakeholders are, Fife and Janosik (1999) as quoted by Leveille (2006) included faculties who are the creators of the knowledge base, students who are not customers in the traditional sense but major stakeholders nonetheless, alumni (in the broad sense including male and female graduates of an institution), parents, employers, elected representatives, donors, and the general public.

Students and graduates as the most directly affected individuals constitute the primary stakeholder groups especially with regard to academic achievement and employability. The needs of graduates to have acquired as students, a range of relevant knowledge, skills and related attributes which enable them not only to compete for jobs but also to become entrepreneurs and to contribute in many other

ways to society is the key issue here and one which most policy and practice should emphasise.

These are also the issues that enable graduates to develop a sense of nostalgia and pride in the quality of higher education they have received as well as the impetus and motivation for the alumni to make financial and other donations to their alma mater. The alumni are also represented on the governing board which is the body that makes policies on behalf of HEIs. In this regard, I want to pay special tributes to two alumni, Chief (Barr) Nyesom Ezenwo Wike, CON, GSSR, PoS (Africa), Life Bencher, DSc (*honoris causa*) and Dr Stanley Lawson, amongst others, for giving back to their alma mater. His Excellency, the Hon Minister of the Federal Capital Territory, a very Distinguished Alumnus, has more than anyone else, done so much in the various positions he has held, to pace up the infrastructural development of the institution and to beautify its skyline. As the eighth Vice-Chancellor of the University, I'm deeply grateful to him for approving, upon my request, to build a befitting Convocation Arena, one of the most iconic in African universities; commissioned and justifiably named after him during the 35th Convocation and the 50th Anniversary of this great institution. He also ensured I flagged off its construction by laying its foundation in a colourful ceremony held on 6th July 2021, almost one year after I left office.

Dr Stanley Lawson who was in the first set of graduates from UniPort in 1981 also played a significant role in the upbuilding of his alma mater. Requests for transcripts from graduates have been a daunting problem for the University because of reliance on manual documentation of degree results; the requests require almost immediate response to meet up with deadlines imposed by requesting organisations. The trouble of

assembling and thumbing through hard copies of students' records scattered in different sections of the institution and the concomitant delays have been a major cause of the frustration faced by former students making the requests and also a major source of stress for staff whose responsibility it is to produce and dispatch these transcripts. This was the scenario that compelled Dr Lawson, after his alma mater approached him, to come to the rescue by offering to digitise and pay for the digitisation of the backlog of degree results and to make the transmission of transcripts seamless. These contributions that are not visible on the mountaintop for the public optics, are not the most attractive but are certainly some of the most impactful. The project was nearing completion when I left office. May I use this medium to thank Dr Lawson immensely for this great act of giving back to the institution that contributed to his visibility in the highly competitive world of entrepreneurs. I implore other alumni in the private sector to emulate Dr Lawson and contribute to the growth of their alma mater; after all, isn't this what it means to be a critical stakeholder?

### **The Mission of the Nigerian University System**

The traditional mission of universities all over the world – teaching, research and community service – has been expanded to include a fourth, entrepreneurial education thus imposing greater responsibilities on the managers of universities, the councils that make policies for the governance of individual universities and the agencies that exercise oversight functions over them. Three of these missions – teaching, research and entrepreneurial education - are reviewed in this section.

### **TEACHING**

Developments in technology especially Artificial Intelligence (AI) have altered the approach to teaching; the changes are intended to improve not only learning outcomes, but also other

areas of one's studentship. In the 21st century, the purpose of education extends beyond basic knowledge and skills to encompass developing individuals who are adaptable, creative, and critical thinkers, able to thrive in a rapidly changing world. This kind of education should equip students with the tools to navigate complex national, regional and global issues, foster lifelong learning and contribute positively to society. The key components include:

### **Preparing for a changing world:**

- a. *Adaptability and resilience* – The rapid pace of change requires individuals to be adaptable and resilient, capable of adjusting to new situations and challenges in reasonable time.
- b. *Critical thinking and Problem-solving* – Students need to be able to analyse information, evaluate arguments, and develop solutions to complex problems.
- c. *Lifelong learning* – The ability to learn continuously and adapt to new information is crucial for staying relevant in a rapidly evolving world.

### **Developing Essential Skills:**

- a. *Creativity and Innovation* – Encouraging creativity and innovation is essential for driving progress and finding new solutions to problems plaguing society.
- b. *Communication and Collaboration* – Students need strong communication skills, both written and verbal, and the ability to collaborate effectively with others. Not much can be achieved in our today's world without the capability to fit into work teams.
- c. *Digital Literacy* – Familiarity with technology and its tools is now a *sine qua non* to be able to navigate the modern world and participate in the digital economy.
- d.

### **Cultivating Character and Values:**

- a. *Responsibility and Ethics* – Education should instil a sense of responsibility and ethical awareness, preparing students to contribute positively to society.
- b. *Global Citizenship* – Understanding global issues and developing a sense of interconnectedness are important for addressing challenges such as climate change, terrorism, the changing market landscape, neocolonialism and so on, that transcend national boundaries.
- c. *Social-Emotional Intelligence* – Developing emotional intelligence and social skills is crucial for building strong relationships and navigating intricate social situations.

### **Addressing Global Challenges:**

- a. *Sustainability* – Education should promote understanding of environmental issues and empower students to contribute to a sustainable future.
- b. *Equity and Social Justice* – Addressing inequalities and promoting social justice are essential for creating a more equitable world.
- c. *Intercultural Understanding* – Understanding, respecting and embracing cultural diversity is crucial for fostering global cooperation in a globalised world.

As yet, there is no unanimity on AI and its influence on the future of education. While it is true that AI can revolutionise education, offer personalised learning, efficient administrative tasks and innovative teaching, there are still a few concerns to consider before its full deployment in education can be assured. Only limited examples are provided for the appreciation of both educators and students.

- a. *Overreliance on technology* - Students may become overly reliant on AI tools and lose opportunities to

develop critical thinking and problem-solving capabilities and collaborative skills.

- b. *Ethical Considerations* – Concerns about data privacy, the potential for misuse of AI, and the need for human oversight are important to address.
- c. *Human-Centred Approach* – Balancing AI-driven learning with traditional, human-centred teaching methods is essential to ensure a holistic education.
- d. *Risk of Cheating* – AI in education also raises the risk of cheating. Advanced AI can be exploited by students to find ways to bypass integrity academic measures. Cases of students in Nigerian universities using AI-driven technologies to write up entire undergraduate projects and postgraduate theses without the students' intellectual input are already rampant.
- e. *Teacher Job Displacement* – The rise of AI in education brings the concern of teacher job displacement, leading to job losses which will only aggravate the unemployment situation ([www.ucanwest.ca](http://www.ucanwest.ca), 2025).

## **Hybrid Learning**

The other aspect of technology-assisted teaching and learning is the hybrid approach; it became more common in universities in sub-Saharan Africa during the Covid-19 pandemic when educational institutions were shut down globally. Hybrid or blended learning combines online and in-person learning methods to create a more flexible and adaptable education and experience. Students may attend some classes in person and others online, or they may complete some classwork online and some in the classroom. This approach allows educators to tailor the learning environment to meet the diverse needs of students. Hybrid learning has a number of benefits which are summarised as follows:

- a. *Increased flexibility* – It allows students to learn at their own pace and schedule, making it more accessible for students with diverse needs.
- b. It prepares students for today's work environment and schedules that encompass being physically present in the office and working from home on different days.
- c. *Access to a wider range of resources* – Online learning provides access to a wider range of educational resources and multimedia materials.
- d. *Personalised learning* – hybrid learning allows educators to tailor the learning experience to meet the specific needs and learning styles of individual students.
- e. *Improved student engagement* – The combination of online and in-person learning can create a more engaging and interactive learning environment.

Despite its attractiveness for improved learning outcomes, hybrid learning is associated with a few drawbacks which includes:

- a. *Technical difficulties* – Students may experience technical issues with online platforms or devices; may experience serious and frequent challenges with availability of electricity especially in rural areas.
- b. *Unequal access to technology* – Some students may not have access to reliable internet or devices, which can create a digital divide.
- c. *Lack of social interaction* – Online learning may limit opportunities for social interaction and collaboration.
- d. *Teacher training* – Teachers may need additional and continuing training to effectively integrate online and in-person learning (<http://resources.owlabs.com>, 2025).

## RESEARCH

In most, if not all, universities in sub-Saharan African countries Nigeria inclusive, faculties carry out teaching and research and, because of the challenges of funding and infrastructure specifically for research, a disproportionate amount of time is devoted to teaching. For these reasons, parents, guardians and the government, being important stakeholders, now view universities as places for the training of their children, wards and citizens purely in terms of instruction that satisfies only the mission of teaching (Lale, 2012b). This is why, as Meek and Davies (2009) observed, the analysis of the teaching/research nexus is not only a complex technical task, but also one fraught with many political undertones and vested interest. Should every university pursue a research as well as a teaching mandate or should a few universities amongst the existing ones be designated research-intensive universities? Or should a few be established *ab initio* purely for research?

There are both strengths and weaknesses of each side of the divide depending on whether it is viewed from the perspective of the undergraduate or postgraduate training. At the undergraduate level, it is easier to identify the negative aspects of a heavy emphasis on the teaching/research nexus than the positive ones. The main dysfunctions are: devaluing teaching and directing staff time from teaching, and many staff on their upward climb on the academic ladder do this; forcing staff who have little interest and or skill in research to get involved in research; and diluting scarce resources. At the post-graduate level, however, training must be supported by a strong research culture. It is a well-established fact that in all higher education institutions (HEIs), about 80 percent of the research output is produced by 20 percent of the academic staff; by implication, this leaves 80 percent of the staff who can devote more time to

teaching. This is certainly not the practice currently in Nigerian universities where staff are expected to spread their time between teaching and research and yet promotions are based more on one's research output that comprises publications, research grants won, patents and so on. In the developed countries, this challenge is being overcome through the establishment of research universities. It is cheering news that the setting up of one such university, the newly established National University of Science and Technology, Abuja, a purely postgraduate HEI is currently underway. While the establishment of a few more will be necessary to create greater access for many of the graduates desiring post-graduate studies, this is certainly a good start.

The immediate solution to this problem can be obtained in the Nigerian context with a proposal which is by no means completely new. One of the existing universities in each of the six geopolitical zones can be designated as a research university devoted entirely to postgraduate training so that greater chunks of time can be invested in research (Lale, 2012b). These institutions can then be abundantly funded to meet society's expectations for solution to the challenges posed in our national political economy. The establishment and maintenance of such a high rate research university is a major undertaking requiring, besides adequate funding, visionary administrative and intellectual leadership, and devolution of power to the faculties, institutes, departments and other units of administration within the institution; these units of administration should be headed by academics who are not only competent, but who are also of proven integrity. The other aspect of the proposal stems from what Guillard (2008) described as professional crisis and changing nature of scientific work which began to emerge early in the 2000s. The changes in the roles and activities of senior academics

especially impact strongly on the production capacity of R & D data in the higher education sector. A typical example of this is the increase in the number of part-time professors, known in the NUS as adjunct lecturers, with new types of contracts, who teach or conduct research at more than one university, mainly to broaden their revenue generation base. This practice further eats into the time that academics can possibly devote to research in their home universities. One major way to calculate the number of researchers in Full-Time Equivalents (FTE) especially in developing countries is to establish research coefficients (Ellis *et al.*, 2009), that is, to estimate the percentage of time an average researcher devotes to R & D as opposed to teaching, administration or other tasks. The establishment of such research coefficients in fuzzy situations as described is especially difficult, and might lead to the need for developing institution-specific coefficients reflecting each university's characteristics. Research coefficients of more general application across universities can be developed as benchmarks and their application coordinated by the NUC.

## **ENTREPRENEURIAL EDUCATION**

Entrepreneurial education was introduced into the tertiary education curriculum in response to the depressing high rate of unemployment and underemployment of graduates from higher education institutions. Since its introduction, however, it has remained merely as a foray in artisanship – tie and dye, hairdressing, fashion designing, cake making, backyard gardening and similar vocations with limited effort in imparting students with skills in startups. The focus of a startup is to determine if there is a demand for a new and innovative product or service; the primary goal of a business, on the other hand, is to create an efficient operation that can last far into the future. Amazon, Netflix, Uber and Airbnb are global powerhouses that began as startups.

Although Joel Mier (<https://theconversation.com/what>, 2023), has indicated that hard industry data suggests that the success of growing a startup into a company is extremely low with about 90% failure, students can be trained to acquire skills in business communication, networking, IT, teamwork and collaboration, business incubation and global value chain that exposes them to the dynamics of demand and supply; proper training by experts will reduce the rate of failure of startups. Entrepreneurial education should go beyond just being a requirement for graduation and become a game changer for the graduates we churn out annually from our universities and other tertiary institutions. There is an array of less capital-intensive investment opportunities in agribusiness, e-commerce, and many service areas. When this catches on, our graduates will not only be self-employed CEOs, they will also become employers of labour and thus change the unemployment statistics for the better.

### **Will University of Port Harcourt Coast Successfully through the 21st Century?**

Some of the issues keeping Nigerian public universities behind their counterparts in the developed climes and the possible strategies for dealing with them have already been discussed in the preceding sections. A number of the approaches being proposed in this section to put University of Port Harcourt on the path of fulfilling its mission are in no way specific; they also apply to public universities in general.

1. For any university, whether in Nigeria or elsewhere, to function smoothly and achieve its mission, the managers must administer it by the book; that is, all decisions must be based on the express provisions in the statute, and all actions must flow from the policies made by the Council and Senate and similar statutory bodies. Administering any organisation by the whims of the managers can create

serious unintended consequences and thus stymie the possibilities of sustainable leadership and governance; frustrate the achievement of the mission and vision of the institution or any organisation for that matter. Running universities by the book ensures that decisions and actions of managers, particularly if they are based on the solid foundation of altruism and love for the institution they govern, will protect and secure both the managers and those they lead. This is how successive managers of some of our federal universities are running their institutions to bring about the commendable achievements being recorded. For instance, despite the enormous challenges being faced by the 297 universities (Abatta, 2025) – federal, state and private - operating in Nigeria, only three federal universities – University of Ibadan, University of Lagos and Ahmadu Bello University, made it to the list of the recent world ranking of universities by Quacquarelli Symonds (QS), one of the most authentic and famous ranking bodies in the world. Although none of the three was in the top 1000 universities in the world, the result is an assurance that these institutions are on the path to attaining global recognition (Abatta, 2025). They achieved this, not only because they are in the elite group of tertiary education institutions (other universities of similar age did not make it there); they got there through altruistic, purpose-driven, transparent, accountable and focused leadership. Successive leaders of these institutions have committed themselves to the common goals of putting their universities amongst the top-notch in Africa and making them globally recognised.

2. The institution must do all that is necessary to extricate itself from the stranglehold of politicians for the appointment of its managers. The first obvious problem

with appointments of its principal officers based on political patronage is that the loyalty of the managers is transferred to politicians located at the seat of power who are not members of the university community and who, therefore, will not be affected in any direct way by the consequences of whatever the installed managers do in the system. If we are honest with ourselves, managers appointed through political patronage have a greater tendency to ride roughshod over those they are supposed to lead and govern knowing that the “big boys and girls” in Abuja have their back.

3. Governing councils make policies for and regulate the affairs of universities; they superintend over their resources and the overall governance of these institutions; but they ought not to get involved in the day-to-day administration of the university. Sadly, the appointment of the chairmen and external members of council, is well-entrenched as a reward for the role they played and will continue to play in the birthing and the consolidation of the government in power. There have been cases in some universities, at least, where these external members provide their oversight function in ways that are not consistent with the Act that established such institutions; neither are they consistent with the convention and culture of universities globally. This, in large part, is what has been responsible for some of the needless crises that have engulfed our universities at different times. Some chairmen take over the duties of the Vice-Chancellor and other principal officers; this approach culminates in the no-love-lost relationships that eventually develop into full-scale crises. Given their peculiarities, councils of universities are not suitable places to reward politicians for their roles and loyalty. The Federal Ministry of

Education (FME) and NUC, the agencies that have oversight functions over universities, should interface with government and reengineer this aspect of their role.

4. It has also become apparent that subjecting universities to a multitude of supervisory agencies is a drain on the scarce resources of universities. For example, the stress of each university defending budgets and many other matters before committees of the House of Representatives and the Senate should be ceded to NUC to do on behalf of the universities; individual universities can then make their presentations to NUC.
5. It is quite clear that the federal government's capacity (or is it interest?) to adequately fund its universities is dwindling increasingly by the year. The introduction of **nelfund**, Nigerian Education Loan Fund, a loan scheme for students, is a clear indication of government's intention that universities must begin to charge appropriate tuition fees for the different programmes offered in each institution. No university in the world can afford to offer good quality education to its citizens free of charge; by tradition, universities charge tuition and other fees to be able to keep the institutions open to students for learning. The call for the payment of fees has become more urgent in the face of our current realities.
6. If University of Port Harcourt hopes to remain competitive in the comity of global higher education institutions, its managers must resuscitate it from deep slumber and reinstate discipline. No manager enjoys sanctioning erring staff, but it has to be done to protect the institution for the common good. Even at the level of families, it is well-known that families where parents abdicate their responsibility to discipline their children

only live a life of regret in their adult age. This is what gave birth to the proverb “spare the rod and spoil the child” which takes its root in Proverbs 13.24. The lecturers who brainwash students in lecture halls and classrooms and preach that managers who sanction staff found guilty of various misconducts have poor employee relations are enemies of the University. Managers who adopt a laissez-faire style of leadership and abdicate the responsibility to discipline erring staff or who abandon discipline as an integral part of total quality management must know that this is the fastest route to institutional or organisational ruin. They must realise that leadership is not a popularity contest; it is serious business. Abubakar (2025) posited on this more pungently thus: “Leadership is not popularity or beauty contests; it is about justice, trust, and results. As political wisdom reminds us, people do not care whether the cat is black or white – as long as it catches mice.” In his keynote address at the 25th Anniversary of Arewa Consultative Forum held in Kaduna on 22nd November 2025, Jibrin Ibrahim, a Senior Fellow at the Centre for Democracy and Development, Abuja had this to say on leadership: “...The reality however is leadership is hard work. It requires loads of self-discipline and sacrifice to achieve set objectives. The leader gets insults and attacks and their egos get bruised often.” Without discipline, every staff will work and act in ways that s/he thinks fit without regard to what the Act and clear policies of Council and Senate specify for both staff and students. It is application of sanctions against miscreant staff who are determined to pursue self-centred goals that safeguards the organisation and motivates loyal staff with demonstrable organisational citizenship to commit more to responsible and accountable work ethic. When sanction is treated as an anathema or a taboo, the

managers unwittingly encourage wrongdoing that quickly spreads through the organisation like cells of a malignant tumour and ruin the system. Consequently, chaos that eventually metamorphoses into anarchy, becomes deeply entrenched as an institutional culture and obstructs the attainment of the organisation's mission and vision.

## **Conclusion**

In this brief discourse, I have reviewed the role universities and indeed other tertiary institutions play in fostering and empowering national development; the state of the Nigerian public universities; the required paradigm shift necessitated by developments in technology particularly AI and how they affect learning outcomes in the 21st century; new ways of teaching and conducting research in order to achieve the goals for establishing universities. I have also proposed what in my view, are a critical part of the changes that are required to keep the University of Port Harcourt nationally and globally competitive. I am quite aware that, as in the days of Prophet Amos, those who tell the truth are despised and honest judges are hated (Amos 5.10), but I have taken the risk in the hope that the institution having attained the milestone of 50 years in July 2025, successive managers would approach the administration of the institution in a manner that protects and sustains the ideals of its founding fathers. All potential institutional managers especially alumni and alumnae who get the rare privilege to lead the institution in any capacity from time to time, must ensure that this is so in order to keep the University, not only alive, but also sufficiently vibrant and thus secure it as a destination of choice for the pursuit of higher education.

## **Appreciation**

I am humbled by this distinguished audience, composed of an array of personalities - royal fathers, eminent academics and politicians, Vice-Chancellors and Pro-Chancellors (serving and retired) and other managers of institutions, captains of industry, the clergy, astute bureaucrats, CEOs of companies, leaders of the private sector, journalists, men and women in diverse vocations and careers, colleagues, friends, the university community and our adorable students. It is, therefore, impossible to address each of you by name; I truly appreciate your support, sacrifice and love, nonetheless.

Professors emeriti Samuel Nwabufo Okiwelu and Nimi Dimkpa Briggs (both of blessed memory) played a pivotal role that made it possible for me to deliver my valedictory lecture in this particular institution: Professor Okiwelu (my boss) played an active role on the interview panel that gave me the job and got me on my first missionary journey to UniPort (1982 – 1992); he also facilitated my return to UniPort for the second missionary journey (2003 – 2026). Professor Briggs, the 5th Vice-Chancellor of the institution, approved my re-engagement for the second leg of my mission at UniPort. I remain eternally grateful to the two celebrated professors. Professor Sylvanus J.S. Cookey, the very personable and highly revered nonagenarian, worked hard and coordinated the group of elders made up of some former Vice-Chancellors, one former Deputy Vice-Chancellor, and one professor emeritus in their effort to right the wrong done in the poorly thought-out and hurriedly executed suspension of the eighth Vice-Chancellor. His post-service lifestyle, in maintaining a respectable distance, truly exemplifies how former Vice-Chancellors ought to relate with the University they once served. As I retire today, I'll continue to look up to you, Sir, as

an excellent example of a quondam VC to emulate. I doff my hat for you, Sir!

Professor Don M. Baridam, the 6th Vice-Chancellor, appointed me pioneer Dean of Agriculture, a position that improved my visibility in the University. He remains a trusted friend and indeed a trusted elder brother. The counsel of the 7th Vice-Chancellor, Professor Joseph Atubokiki Ajienka, made it possible for me to move to a campus accommodation at a time I was vacillating to do so for personal reasons. His counsel healed a lot of wounds just as he had opined. I'm truly grateful to these former VCs.

I thank the current managers of the University for permitting me to deliver this lecture that has formally announced my disengagement from an institution I served for thirty-two and a half years; the balance of eleven years of the entire duration of my career having been spent at the University of Maiduguri.

My wife, children and more recently my granddaughter, have been strong pillars of support and or a source of inspiration that contributed significantly to the modest achievements I made in the forty-three and a half years of my journey in the academia; they also provided the broad shoulders on which I took the needed solace and received renewed strength whenever the vicissitudes of life unleashed a downturn. I appreciate and love you all!

In our growing-up years, my dad always told us his children that, if God keeps us alive long enough, we will see many things, hear many things, taste many things, smell many things, feel many things and know many things as a result. By his amazing grace, God has not only kept me alive long enough; he has also kept me alert enough and so I've seen

many things, heard many things, tasted many things, smelt many things, felt many things and as a consequence, I've known many things. To him alone be power, majesty, adoration and praise forever and ever, Amen!

*Thank you for your kind attention and God bless.*



## **PROFESSOR NDOWA E. S. LALE**

*B.Sc. (Maiduguri); Ph.D. (Newcastle upon Tyne), FESN, FAvH*

### **A Brief Citation on Professor Ndowa Ekoate Sunday Lale: A Life of Scholarship and Service**

This brief citation on Professor Ndowa Ekoate Sunday Lale, a distinguished Nigerian academic, entomologist, and university administrator, whose career exemplifies scholarly rigor, pioneering spirit, and resolute leadership is a fair summary of Professor Lale's contributions in the spheres of agricultural research, academic governance, and institutional development, particularly at the University of Port Harcourt (UNIPORT), where he served with distinction as the Pioneer Dean of the Faculty of Agriculture and, later, as the eighth substantive Vice-Chancellor.

His pursuit of higher education began at the University of Maiduguri, where he studied Crop Science and graduated in 1981 with a First Class Honours degree in Agriculture. This

exceptional performance immediately set him on a path of specialized research. He proceeded to the United Kingdom, where he earned his Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) degree in Agricultural Entomology from the prestigious University of Newcastle upon Tyne in 1987. His specialization lies in the critical area of Agricultural and Stored Product Entomology.

Professor Lale's research career, spanning several decades, has focused on addressing the devastating impact of pests on stored agricultural products—a vital field for food security in the tropics. His work has appeared in numerous high-impact national and international peer-reviewed journals, positioning him as a world-class scholar in his field.

His academic commitment was crystallized in his Inaugural Lecture, the 68th in the UNIPORT series, delivered on February 25, 2010, titled "Stealthy Thieves in Homes and Foodstores." In this seminal lecture, he provided authoritative insights into the biological mechanisms and economic losses caused by arthropod pests, establishing a framework for effective post-harvest management strategies in Nigeria and the wider African continent. Beyond his scholarly outputs, he also served the broader academic community as the Editor-in-Chief of the Nigerian Journal of Entomology from 2011 to 2012.

Before his rise to the highest administrative office, Professor Lale demonstrated his immense capacity for institution-building. He is recognized as the Pioneer Dean of the Faculty of Agriculture at the University of Port Harcourt, a role he undertook from 2005 to 2011. Taking on the faculty literally "with bare hands," Professor Lale was mandated to establish the necessary infrastructure, curriculum, and staffing. Through his strategic vision and administrative diligence, he successfully laid a solid academic and administrative footing

for the nascent faculty, culminating in the accreditation of all its programmes—a profound and lasting legacy that affirmed the quality and rigor of the institution he created.

In July 2015, Professor Lale was appointed the 8th substantive Vice-Chancellor of the University of Port Harcourt for a five-year tenure. His leadership was marked by a commitment to restoring academic culture, promoting discipline, and executing high-impact developmental projects under his vision, which he encapsulated in his inaugural address: “A Wholesome and Prosperous University of Port Harcourt is Possible.”

Professor Lale’s influence extends beyond UNIPORT. He has held significant positions contributing to national development and academic governance, including serving as a Member of the Governing Council and Chairman of the Disciplinary Committee at the Rivers State University of Science and Technology (RSUST). He has also served on the TETFUND Screening and Monitoring Committee under the National Research Fund Intervention, contributing his expertise to the strategic funding and promotion of scientific research in Nigeria.

Professor Ndowa Ekoate Sunday Lale, through his distinguished career as a scholar, pioneer, and consummate administrator, has left an indelible mark on Nigerian higher education. His intellectual legacy is secured in his scholarly contributions, while his administrative impact resonates in the physical and ethical structures he painstakingly built at the University of Port Harcourt and beyond.

**Professor Owunari Abraham Georgewill  
Vice-Chancellor**

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