

Chapter 64

Working–Walking Alone and With Others: Working–Walking Fast and Far

Olutoyin Mejiuni
Obafemi Awolowo University, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

In this chapter, the author shall argue, with materials sourced through desk work, that although formal educational institutions, business and industries, multi-lateral agencies, religious institutions, and a handful of educational non-profits provide and support education and training for the workforce of the future in Nigeria, the tension created by the conflicting frameworks that undergird the provision of, and support for, education by the parties depresses funding for tertiary education, especially in times of economic crises. Inadequate funding of public education in general, and tertiary education in particular, is not, therefore, just a fall out of economic crises; it is also a result of the tension between stakeholders who hold the view that education is a social service, those who hold the view that education is an investment in human capital, and those who believe that education straddles the two frameworks. The author makes the point that the problems associated with inadequate funding of university education are aggravated by the overbearing influence of the National Universities Commission (NUC) in the administration of universities, resulting in low synergy of the output of the formal education system with the needs of business and industries and the requirements of community transformation.

INTRODUCTION

Sometime in July 2010, in a hotel lobby in Nairobi, Kenya in East Africa, 6 African academics and members of civil society organizations, discussed animatedly as we waited for the vehicle that will convey us to the venue of our workshop. The workshop was the reason we were in Nairobi. A participant from Botswana, in Southern Africa, shared a Botswana proverb with us. It is: if you want to walk fast, walk alone, if you want to walk far, walk with others. This proverb has since etched into my consciousness as I have reflected on it often in relation to my community development/social change work, and my

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work as a teacher and researcher. For me, the proverb is profound. However, I have been thinking that it should be possible to walk with others, and yet walk fast, with a guarantee of walking far.

The oil boom that fetched Nigeria petro-dollars in the 1970s and early 1980s ended about the mid-80s, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank encouraged the military government to adopt Structural Adjustment Programmes (Fashina, 2001; Olukoju, 2002). The military government yielded to the prodding by these institutions, and Structural Adjustment Programmes were being executed by the end of the 1980s. Beginning from this period, and in the decade between 1990 and the year 2000, at the height of military dictatorship in Nigeria, business and industry appeared to be walking far ahead, and faster than the formal education system, especially the university system.

Towards the end of the 1980s, and in the decade between 1990 and the year 2000, at the height of military dictatorship, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank inspired Structural Adjustment Programmes, which were introduced after the oil boom that fetched Nigeria petro-dollars in the 1970s and early 1980s (Fashina, 2001; Olukoju, 2002), business and industry appeared to be walking far ahead, and faster than the formal education system, especially the university system. Business and industry felt that universities were not producing graduates required for the manpower needs of the sector (Industrial Training Fund, 2011). This was despite the fact that students in the management sciences, technology and other applied sciences undertook between 9 and 12 months industrial attachment in different workplaces in the course of their training, and some professional associations certified graduates in certain professions through examinations conducted by the professional bodies; Council of Registered Engineers, Institution of Surveyors, Institution of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria, to mention a few.

The response of the federal government of Nigeria to the issues raised by employers who were concerned about their competitiveness in a global context, could, at best, be described as ambiguous. This was not surprising. Among the academia, the thinking had been that the federal government of Nigeria contributed, and is still contributing to the issues and concerns that got some individuals and groups thinking that the universities were, in qualitative terms, performing below expectations in their supply of upper level manpower for business and industries, and also for the public service. These are the issues that we will explore in this chapter.

The objectives of this chapter are therefore to: provide an overview of the different educational provisions designed to prepare the workforce of the future in Nigeria; explore the issues and concerns that are associated with the formal educational provisions and the frameworks that undergird the educational provisions; and then draw out the implications of preparing the future workforce on the basis of the frameworks earlier discussed.

EXISTING EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMES/ACTIVITIES: THERE SHOULD BE NO SHORTAGE OF WORKFORCE OF THE FUTURE

Some of the formal, non-formal and adult education programmes that are in place for preparing the future workforce in Nigeria include job shadowing by high school students. Some of the privately owned high schools are insisting on specified number of weeks of job shadowing in years 11 and 12, before graduation. They insist that the experience will help young persons to experience the environment of different jobs and professions first hand, have a fair understanding of the job description through experience, and so they can make up their minds about career choices. In order to have young people take interest in certain professions and be less fearful of certain core subjects, competitions are organized by

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