

Hurdles to cross by Nigerian Universities on the tortuous road to world class status.

By

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The concept of university

Let us begin this intellectual discourse by defining the word university. Many dictionaries define the university as “an institution of higher education”. There are various other meanings from different cultures, all of which point to the fact that a university, simply put, is a citadel of learning. In Yoruba *Ifa corpus* for example, I am told that university is spelt as ‘*ifafiti*’ meaning ‘the place where the *Ifa* divinity recognises as the seat of knowledge.

The word *university* is derived from the Latin phrase: *universitas magistrorum et scholarium*, whose English meaning is "community of teachers and scholars". The first university in the world, going by “an educational institution that satisfied the definition of a university at the time of its founding”, is the University of Bologna in Italy with a traditional founding date of 1088.

There are altogether 117 universities in Nigeria. A summary of the objectives of these universities in Nigeria as stated in the Statutes of many of the universities which I have read are to:

- provide facilities for learning
- give instruction and training in a variety of branches of knowledge
- promote by research and other means the advancement of knowledge and its practical application to social, cultural, economic, scientific and technological problems
- stimulate, through teaching and research, interest in and appreciation of African culture and heritage;
- enable students obtain the advantage of a liberal education
- undertake any other activities appropriate for a university.

This last item of my summary (i.e. to undertake any other activities appropriate for a university) has been elusive in many Nigerian universities today due to its vagueness and potential to encourage complacency.

Universal assessment of university status

The history of the so-called “webometrics” rankings dates back to 2001. This is recent history when compared with the age of universities in the world.

Events of the recent past, in respect of the poor rankings of Nigerian universities in the comity of global universities, have shown that the interpretation of the objectives of our 117 universities in Nigeria must take a global dimension. The current definitions of the visions and missions of the proprietor of each university, whether private or public should be succinctly rendered within a global perspective.

The time has come for universities all over the country to identify a clear vision which should redefine the goals of the University not just in content but in context to include an aggressive pursuit of teaching, learning, research, development and public service at a level that will meet global standards. The core values of Nigerian universities, irrespective of proprietorship, should be to seek excellence in all activities; ensure intellectual freedom; respect and value diversity of opinion and freedom of expression; operate on a high level of integrity and make truth and honesty the watchword.

A former Executive Secretary of the Nigerian Universities Commission (NUC), Prof. Peter Okebukola, recently threw a lot of light on global ranking schemes of universities all over the world in a Lecture he delivered at the Annual Conference of Vice-Chancellors of Nigerian Universities (AVNCU) hosted by Covenant University in Ota. According to Okebukola, the lay public is unaware of the differences in the rigour of the global ranking schemes of which there are three. The most prestigious is the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) published by Shanghai Jiatong University in China. Next is the Times Higher Education World University Ranking, while the third, which is probably the most popular is the Webometrics ranking. In his submission, Okebukola listed 36 recommendations and optimistically opined that if they enjoy a favourable climate of implementation by government and the universities within the next ten years, at least two Nigerian universities will be among the top 1000 in the ARWU global ranking, the top 500 in the Times ranking and the top 100 in the webometrics ranking. The mission of this discourse is not to regurgitate Prof. Okebukola's recommendations not only because of the grandiose lacing with optimism that is based on expected synergy between the efforts of government on the one hand and the universities on the other hand, but because it elicited in me, elements of pessimism which must be known to the public so that those lofty recommendations could achieve more than the desired results.

Nigerian universities in world ranking

It is indeed a matter of concern for me as a university administrator to be faced with the reality that all we can achieve in the next ten years is two Nigerian universities in the top 1000 of the world's best ranking scheme. More disturbing is the fact that many aspiring Vice-Chancellors in recent times promise in their vision statements to make their universities one of the best five or ten in Africa during their five-year tenure. The best university in Nigeria in 2010 came 55th in Africa and 5,484th in the whole world. This university will have to beat more than 5,000 universities in the world to be among the first ten in Africa!

Unfortunately, it is not common around here for a University's Governing Council to give a Vice-Chancellor a red card of poor performance or inability to keep promises before the end

of his tenure. In cases where such premature exit exists, the reasons are more political than poor performance. I stand to be corrected. All I am saying is that I identify with Okebukola's optimism on two world class Nigerian universities in the next 10 years with a tone of pessimism. Instead of believing *in toto* that two universities will be among the top 1000 in the next ten years, I had rather suggest ways by which university administrators and proprietors can make efforts to place their universities on the path towards world class status in the next ten years. My target audience is not my colleagues who have one or two more years in office, but the potential university administrators who are currently gathering experience and waiting to take over from my generation.

Table 1. Webometrics Rankings of Selected Top 100 Universities in Africa (and the whole world) from 2007-2011. Source: (www.webometrics.info)

University	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
OAU	44 (6,102) (1 st)*	68 (7,703) (2 nd)	78 (7,942) (3 rd)	61 (5,756) (2 nd)	44 (3,879) (4 th)
UI	65 (6,944) (2 nd)	85 (8,619) (4 th)	81 (8,034) (4 TH)	79 (6,425) (6 TH)	41 (3,499) (1 st)
Uniben	79 (7,335) (3 rd)	42 (5,994) (1 ST)	61 (6,602) (1 st)	77 (6,324) (5 TH)	55 (4,554) (6 th)
Unilag	90 (8,012) (4 TH)	83 (8;160) (3 RD)	95 (8,871) (5 TH)	68 (5,936) (4 TH)	46 (3,942) (5 th)
Unilorin	-	-	77 (7,902) (2 ND)	55 (5484) (1 st)	42 (3,753) (2 nd)
Unijos	-	-	-	66 (5882) (3 RD)	67 (5,376) (8 th)
UNAAB					60 (4,833) (7 th)
Nsukka					68 (5,396) (9 th)
Covenant					93 (7,169) (10 th)

*Rank in Nigeria; - not among Top 100 in Africa.

The rankings of the best universities in Nigeria since 2007 are presented in Table 1. A more than cursory look at this table would reveal a progressive decrease in ranking for some universities on the one hand and an increase in ranking of some universities on the other hand. It is certain that fluctuations in rankings are closely linked with or determined by the political situation in each of these universities.

It is in light of the above that I identify four major hurdles to cross by the Nigerian university system to be lifted up to global standards.

First Hurdle: Improving on our webometrics rankings.

Improving on Webometrics rankings is nothing but sustenance of the academic culture handed over to us by the British in Ibadan in the 1940s and later by successive Nigerian governments after our independence in 1960. There are new generation universities in Nigeria which were established after the so called academic culture had been eroded due to political instability and inadequate funding. Improving on Webometrics rankings is therefore a Herculean task because inherently, we are disadvantaged in respect of ranking criteria. The Table below reveals it all.

Table 2. A select few of webometrics ranking criteria that do not favour Nigeria

Criteria	World Indicators	Queries/Comments
Quality of Education	Alumni of an institution winning Nobel Prizes and Fields Medals	How many Nigerian universities satisfy these?
Quality of Faculty	Staff of an institution winning Nobel Prizes and Fields Medals	How many Nigerian universities satisfy these?
Research Output	Articles published in Nature and Science (Highly cited researchers in 21 broad subject categories)	How many Nigerian Professors have published in Nature? Why Nature?
	Articles in Science Citation Index-expanded and Social Science Citation Index	How many Nigerian researchers patronise on-line Journals?
Size of Institution	Academic performance with respect to the size of an institution – The total scores of the above five indicators divided by the number of full-time equivalent academic staff.	Only first generation universities and maybe a few private universities (Less than 10%) can satisfy these.

Modified from Oluwole (2007).

The consequences of the limitations presented in Table 2 are revealed in Table 3 where it is shown that the highest ranking university in Nigeria in 2010 was number 5,484 in world rank. The second in rank in Nigeria does not have only the first in rank to beat; it has to beat 272 universities in the world before it can beat the first in Nigeria!

In 2010, seven out of the top 10 universities in Africa were all from South Africa, while three were from Egypt. In 2011, two of the top ten are from Egypt while the rest are from South Africa. University of Ilorin is still leading in Nigeria in the 30th position (in Africa) while UI, Unilag and OAU follow closely in the 33rd, 34th and 35th positions respectively (Table 4).

Table 3. Top 16 universities in Nigeria in 2010.

	WORLD RANK	UNIVERSITY	SIZE	VISIBILITY	RICH FILES	SCHOLAR
1.	5484	University of Ilorin	6,312	10,550	3,620	1,045
2.	5756	Obafemi Awolowo University	5,455	7,028	5,486	4,704
3.	5882	University of Jos	7,260	9,184	5,743	1,588
4.	5936	University of Lagos	5,138	9,158	6,677	2,294
5.	6324	University of Benin	5,266	4,279	15,378	9,063
6.	6425	University of Ibadan	6,259	4,977	8,495	10,216
7.	7170	University of Nigeria Nsukka	4,055	10,766	5,781	4,305
8.	8721	Ahmadu Bello University	6,681	10,458	11,028	5,016
9.	8833	National Open University of Nigeria	9,143	11,440	7,558	3,548
10.	9320	Covenant University	7,839	11,257	6,735	6,561
11.	9542	Pan-African University	8,726	8,616	13,097	10,216
12.	9666	University of Agriculture Abeokuta	5,776	11,193	10,465	8,258
13.	9868	University of Port Harcourt	7,851	10,319	12,187	7,977
14.	11699	Babcock University	10,380	13,052	9,480	6,988
15.	11879	Federal University of Technology Akure	10,971	11,660	12,474	10,216
16.	11879	Lagos State University	10,519	12,333	9,537	10,216

Source: Webometrics (2010)

Not among top 100 in Africa in 2007 & 2008	Private Universities
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Table 4. Top 10 universities in Nigeria in 2011.

	UNIVERSITY
1.	University of Ilorin
2.	University of Ibadan
3.	University of Lagos
4.	Obafemi Awolowo University
5.	University of Benin
6.	Federal University of Technology Akure
7.	Ahmadu Bello University
8.	University of Port Harcourt
9.	Lagos State University
10.	University of Nigeria Nsukka
	Dropped from 2010's Top 10
	University of Jos
	National Open University of Nigeria
	Covenant University

Source: www.nairaland .com

Maintained same rank	Moved up	Moved down
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South Africa and Egypt are two countries where the government invests more money in education than many other countries in the continent. This clearly suggests that the limitations of universities who do not rank high could be traced to the extent of funding of these universities.

In many South African universities, incentives are given for publishing in reputable journals. How many universities in this country do this? This should be ‘Food for thought’ for the Appointments and Promotions Committee of every university in this country.

Table 5. The top 10 universities in Africa in 2010

1.	University of Cape Town	South Africa
2.	University of Pretoria	South Africa
3.	Universiteit Stellenbosch	South Africa
4.	University of the Witwatersrand	South Africa
5.	The American University in Cairo	Egypt
6.	University of KwaZulu-Natal	South Africa
7.	Rhodes University	South Africa
8.	Cairo University	Egypt
9.	University of South Africa	South Africa
10	Mansoura University	Egypt

Table 6. TOP 10 UNIVERSITIES IN AFRICA IN 2011.

1.	University of Cape Town	South Africa
2.	University of Pretoria	South Africa
3.	Universiteit Stellenbosch	South Africa
4.	The American University in Cairo	Egypt
5.	University of the Witwatersrand	South Africa
6.	University of KwaZulu-Natal	South Africa
7.	Rhodes University	South Africa
8.	University of South Africa	South Africa
9.	Cairo University	Egypt
10	University of Western Cape	South Africa

As a matter of urgency, proprietors of Nigerian universities whether public or private should speed up their rate of growth through increased funding and infrastructural development. This is in addition to the immediate solution of increasing the size of information available on each university’s website. For example, academic staff should be encouraged to publish in Journals that can be accessed on line and not local roadside journals that are not known internationally. Every university management committee should also be encouraged to increase the ICT content of their operations. e.g. On-line registration; on-line payment of tuition fees/sundry charges; Cashless Bursary; Paperless Administration, etc.

Second Hurdle: Lowering of Population to Students’ ratio.

In Nigeria, records show that less than 10 percent of candidates eligible for higher education are enrolled in the tertiary institutions. This is very low when compared with the UK and US where 60 percent and 70 percent of eligible candidates respectively have access to higher

education. In Nigeria, the Open University is trying in spreading university education to Nigerians but two pertinent questions to ask are: i) how effective is their programme? and ii) how many students are enrolled?

Table 7. The ratio of population to students` enrolment in Nigeria and a few countries.

COUNTRY	POPULATION (approx)	NO. OF UNIVERSITIES	TOTAL STUDENTS ENROLMENT	POP/ ENROLMENT
Nigeria	120m	73 (117)	727,765	165
India	1bn	8,407	6,060,418	165
Indonesia	242m	1,236	1,889,408	128
South Africa	44m	19	800,000	55
Japan	127.5m	1,223	3,917,09	32.5
USA	296m	5,758	14,261,778	20.7

Modified from: NUC/UVAH (2006)

Each university can tackle the national issue of population to student ratio with support from the proprietors. As aforesaid, e-learning, is a way out.

This brings to mind the prospects of e-learning which many universities are now toying with. In more advanced countries, e-learning has given a large percentage of the population access to higher education. It has provided delivery modes that take learning to learners wherever they are and not necessarily within the confines of university campuses.

It is not sheer coincidence that Japan and USA have a lower population to students' ratio than Nigeria. The more a country spends on university education, the less is this ratio.

Third Hurdle: Lowering Staff to Student Ratio (TSR) to the optimum

High Staff to Student ratio is one fundamental problem that should be solved in Nigerian universities. In 2005, the Staff to Student ratio (TSR) in Nigerian university system was 1:28 (Uvah, 2006). This is rather high. Education experts have warned that a high value of this index suggests over-extension of staff leading to ineffectiveness of the individual staff members. This paved the way for the so-called "excess load allowance" which should be regarded as an aberration in our university system. It is also not desirable for the index to be too low because this indicates inefficiency in resource utilization. According to Oluwole (2005), the TSR in Nigerian Universities is about double what it is in standard universities and twice what it was in 1990.

Facts are there to show that the phenomenal increase in student enrolment (nationwide) between 1990 and 2004 (from 200,774 to 727,765) was not matched by corresponding increase in staff strength (13,645 to 26,291). From the statistics presented in Table 7, the population to student enrolment ratio is 165 for Nigeria while it is 20.7 for USA and 32.5 for Japan. US/Nigeria ratio is 12.5%, which incidentally is the same ratio (13%) of students who secured admission to universities to the total number that applied." This is a problem that must be addressed at the level of the Committee of Vice-Chancellors.

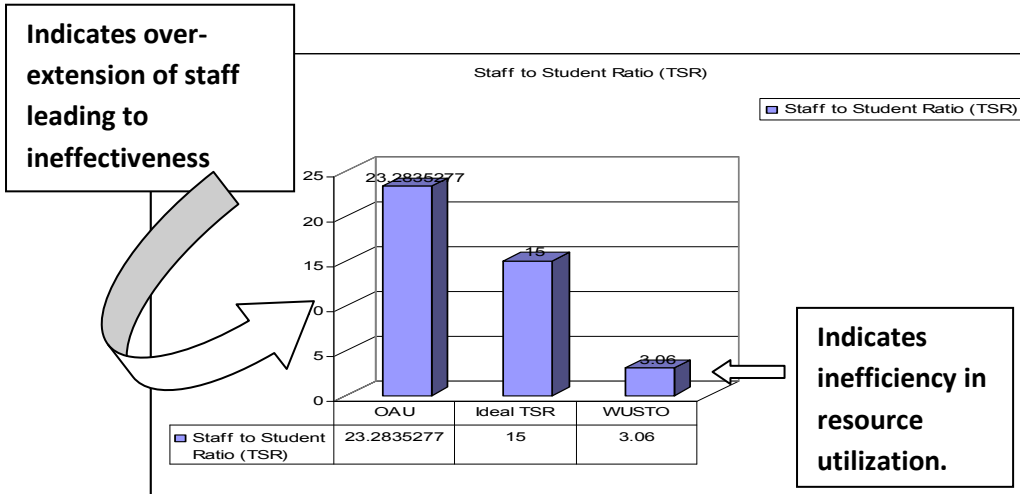


Fig.1. Staff to Student Ratio: the ideal and extreme situations.

The staffing situation and Staff Student Ratio in WUSTO and OAU are compared in the figures below. One could see clearly the ideal situation in WUSTO a brand new fledgling university.

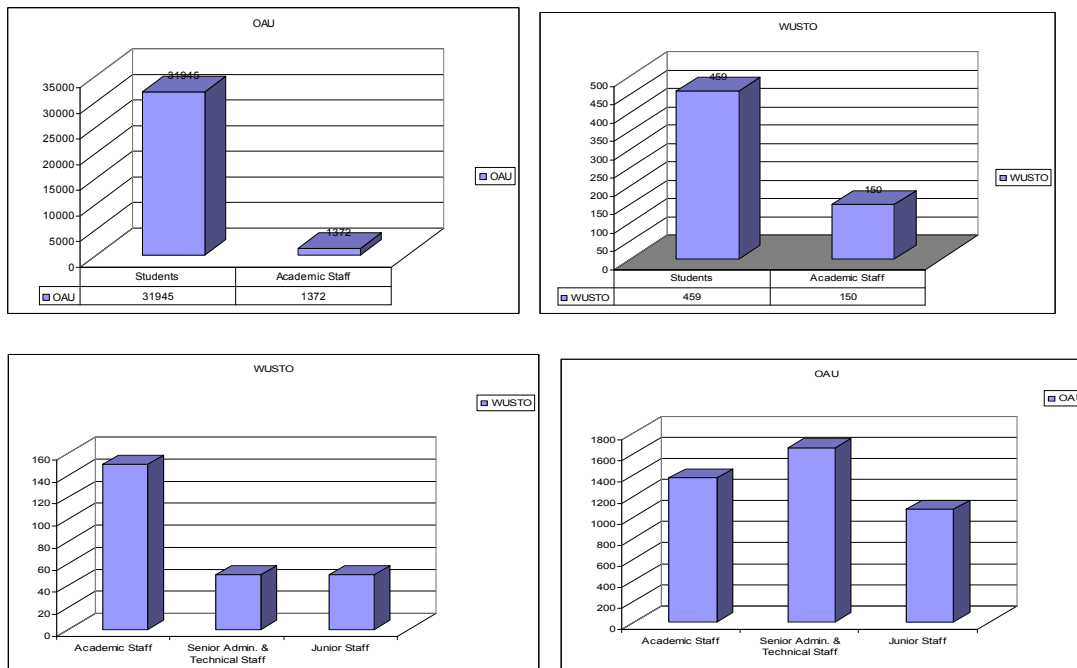
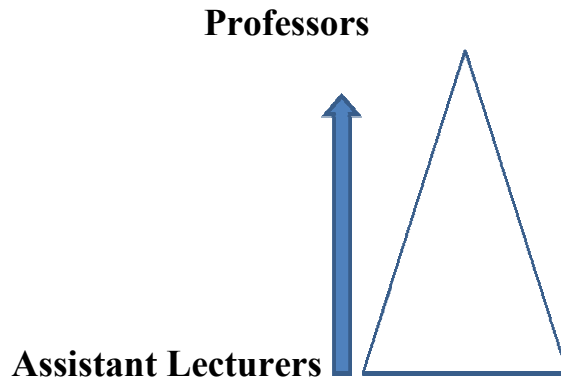


Fig. 2: Comparison of staffing situations in a first generation and a new university.

In Obafemi Awolowo University where I started my career as an academic staff 30 years ago for example, the number of Academic staff declined from 1259 in 1999/2000 to 1029 in 2003/2004. The academic staff strength now stands at 1,372 which indicates a 33% increase. Total staff strength also declined from 4,673 in 1986 to 3,960 in 2000. As at December 2005, staff strength stood at 3,676. Today, it is 4,106 which suggests 11.7% increase. The overall implication of this is that increase in staff strength has been in favour of academic staff. This is commendable but still far from the required standard.

Fourth Hurdle: Return to Staff Pyramidal Structure



Another problem in Nigerian Universities is that staff hierarchy does not follow the desirable pyramidal structure. In the year 2000, OAU had 212 Professors, 237 Senior Lecturers, 284 Lecturers and 240 Assistant Lecturers. In 2005, the reverse of the pyramidal structure remained with 277 Professors, 203 Senior Lecturers, 282 Lecturers, 119 Assistant Lecturers and 78 Graduate Assistants. This is also true for Administrative staff. New universities that do not consciously nip this problem in the bud right from the onset will not only find it difficult to achieve the pyramidal structure but will also end up with a situation where non-teaching staff will be more than double academic staff as shown in Fig. 2.

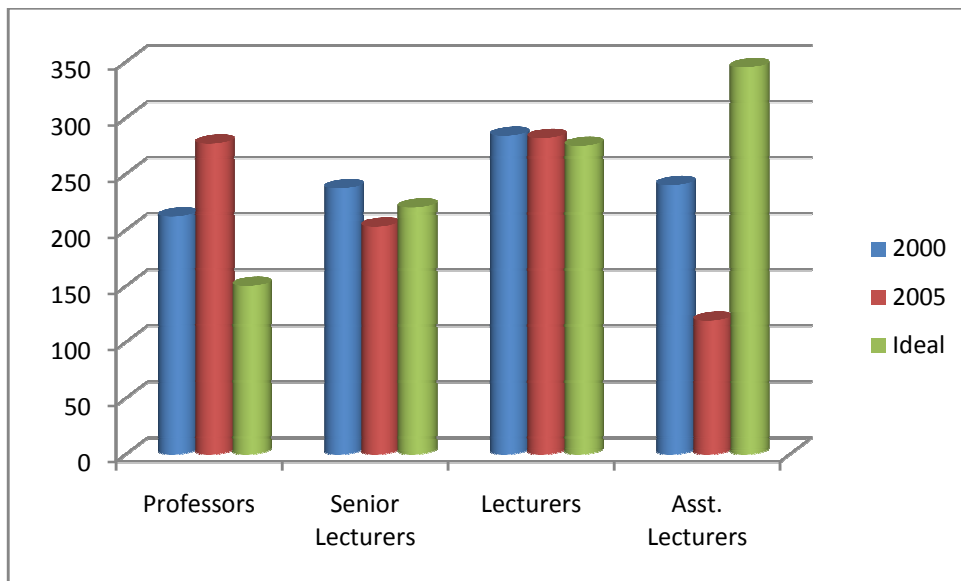


Fig. 3. Academic Staff by category in a First Generation University in 2000 and 2005.

Conclusion

I hereby conclude by stressing that the time is now

- that the Association of Vice-Chancellors of Nigerian Universities (AVCNU) should set up committees that will look into Educational Policies in SA, Europe and USA

with a view to advising our government on improving on and implementation of our policies here in Nigeria.

- that the proprietors of Nigerian universities should increase meritocracy in the selection of membership of Governing Councils and Management Committees so that square pegs do not end up in round holes.
- to redefine the goals of each university not just in content but in context to include an aggressive pursuit of teaching, learning, research, development and public service at a level that will meet global standards.
- for each Nigerian university to be compelled to embark on a conscious process by which an institution assesses its current state and the likely future condition of its environment, identifies possible future states for itself, and then develops organised strategies, policies, and procedures for selecting and getting to one or more of them. This simply is known as “Strategic Planning”.

In a lighter mood, I would like to advise university administrators not to allow their inner ego to misjudge any person they interact with in the course of their official duties. This brings to mind the true story of how Stanford University was established. The story goes thus.

“A lady in a faded grey dress and her husband, dressed in a homespun suit walked in timidly without an appointment into the Harvard University President's outer office. The secretary could tell in a moment that such backwoods, country hicks had no business at Harvard and probably didn't even deserve to be in Harvard.

"We want to see the President " the man said softly.

"He'll be busy all day “the secretary snapped.

"We'll wait" the lady replied.

For hours the secretary ignored them, hoping that the couple would finally become discouraged and go away. They didn't and the secretary grew frustrated and finally decided to disturb the president.

"Maybe if you see them for a few minutes, they'll leave" she said to him. The President, stern faced and with dignity, strutted toward the couple.

The lady told him "We had a son who attended Harvard for one year. He loved Harvard. He was happy here. But about a year ago, he was accidentally killed. My husband and I would like to erect a memorial to him, somewhere on campus."

The president wasn't touched....He was shocked. "Madam " he said, gruffly, " we can't put up a statue for every person who attended Harvard and died. If we did, this place would look like a cemetery."

"Oh, no," the lady explained quickly "We don't want to erect a statue. We thought we would like to give a building to Harvard."

The president rolled his eyes. He glanced at the gingham dress and homespun suit, and then exclaimed, "A building ! Do you have any earthly idea how much a building costs? We have over seven and a half million dollars in the physical buildings here at Harvard."

For a moment the lady was silent. The president was pleased. Maybe he could get rid of them now. The lady turned to her husband and said quietly, "Is that all it costs to start a university? Why don't we just start our own?" Her husband nodded. The president's face wilted in confusion and bewilderment. Mr. and Mrs. Leland Stanford got up and walked away, traveling to Palo Alto, California where they established the University that bears their name. Stanford University, a memorial to a son that Harvard no longer cared about."

My experience in WUSTO is along the same line but not with a similar ending. In 2009 one Ondo Prince in Diaspora came to my office to complain that WUSTO, before inception awarded a contract to his friend who borrowed money from him to implement the contract, but the contract was stopped abruptly, a situation which led to loss of committed funds borrowed from him. This was during the formative stages of the university when the proprietors were fully in control. I advised him to talk to my proprietors and leave me out of it. Two years later, this man came back to Nigeria and called on phone to book appointment with me. I granted him audience reluctantly thinking that he had not dropped the idea of WUSTO owing his friend. Alas, this man handed over a cash of N600,000 he collected from *Ondos in Diaspora* as first installmental donation to WUSTO. That money was the foundation of my own "Stanford University" within WUSTO!

Every prospective university administrator must grow to a stage in life that he/she sees every obstacle as an opportunity and every wall as a door. The road to the top is tortuous just as in the illustration presented below. Very few will get to the top only to discover that there is enough room at the top.

Finally, I would like to sound a note of warning that we as a collective should all be on our guards against aspiring Vice-Chancellors in Nigeria who promise to raise their universities into world class status within five years. It is nothing but a PNP syndrome where a **Psychotic** builds his castle in the air, the **Neurotic** lives in this castle and the **Psychiatrist** collects the rent.

Thank you for your attention.

Signed

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