

Covenant University

11th Convocation Ceremony and Award of First and Higher Degrees
and the Presentation of Prizes holding at Covenant University,
Ota, Nigeria, on Friday, June 24, 2016

CONVOCAATION KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Improving Graduate Employability and Global Competitiveness: A Review of Nigeria Higher Education Delivery

By

Professor Jerry Gana, CON, Ph.D, DD, FRGS, FNASS, FNIPR
Former Nigerian Minister of Information & Orientation,
Pro-Chancellor/Chairman of Governing Council,
University of Lagos.

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COVENANT UNIVERSITY ANTHEM

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| <p>We're a Covenant Generation Pursuing excellence Redeemed to reign Learning to lead We are bound by an oath Obeying rules to rule Making Kings of youth Flying high on covenant wings Wisdom's call for change Inspired on fire With courage Marching on in grace God's own arrow Shot for glory.</p> | <p>Covenant generation arise Light and knowledge to shine Glorious foundation stone Leadership skills to show Departing from knowledge To empowerment Legalism To realism Wisdom's call for change Inspired, on fire With Courage Marching on in grace God's own arrow Shot for glory.</p> |
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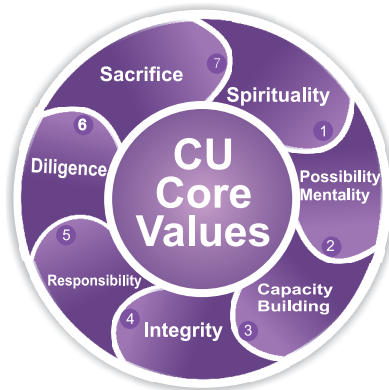
Our Vision

To be a leading World-Class University, committed to raising a new generation of leaders in all fields of Human endeavour

Our Mission

To create knowledge and restore the dignity of the black man via a Human Development Total Man Concept driven curriculum employing innovative, leading-edge teaching and learning methods, research and professional services that promote integrated, life-applicable, life-transforming education, relevant to the context of Science, Technology and Human Capacity Building

Covenant University's Core Values



Preamble

It is with joyful thanks to the Lord that I accepted the honour of your gracious invitation to be Keynote Speaker at the 11th Convocation Ceremony of Covenant University. I salute the wisdom of the Chancellor and Chairman, Board of Regents, Dr. David Oyedepo, in establishing this vibrant University as a Centre of Excellence for raising high quality leaders. Kindly join me to appreciate this leader with a great vision; a thinker of great ideas; a role model of noble character; a trustworthy shepherd with a caring heart; a wise teacher with an incredible depth of knowledge, discernment, discretion, foresight, insight, and sagacity.

Please join me to also appreciate Members of the Board of Regents, the Vice-Chancellor, Principal Officers, Deans, Professors, Faculty and Staff. Working together, you have built a powerful lighthouse of knowledge, with a huge capacity for achieving a world-class status soon. We urge you to continue the good work.

Now to the theme of my address

Honourable Chancellor, Distinguished Guests, may I invite your attention to the theme of the 11th Convocation Ceremony, namely: “Improving Graduate Employability and Global Competitiveness” In short, how do we make Nigerian graduates more employable? In order to improve any system, it is vital to identify

what the fundamental problems are. Of the numerous problems facing the University system in Nigeria, permit me to focus on three:

- (i) Poor access, because of low carrying capacity. Thus, you have too many students competing for too few admission places. After admission, the lucky ones get crammed into insufficient lecture theatres, classrooms, laboratories and hostels.
- (ii) Poor Staff-Student ratios and poor Quality Control,
- (iii) Poor linkages between academic programmes and essential needs of the national economy.

On Poor Access

As at April, 2016, Nigeria had a total of 142 Universities, comprising:

- 40 Federal Universities
- 42 State-owned Universities, and
- 61 Private and Faith-based Universities.

Whereas States like Ondo, Ogun, Oyo, Edo and Rivers have up to two State-owned Universities, Zamfara and Borno States have none. Fortunately, there is at least one Federal University in each State of the Federation.

Locational distribution and ownership of the 61 Private Universities are as shown in Table 1:

| S/N | Ownership Type | Number |
|-----|------------------------|-----------|
| 1. | Faith-Based | 40 |
| 2. | Wealthy Benefactors | 17 |
| 3. | Community- Based | 1 |
| 4. | International Agencies | 3 |
| | Total | 61 |

Table 2 shows the regional distribution of Private Universities in Nigeria:

| S/N | Geopolitical Zone | Number of Private Universities | States with None |
|-----------|----------------------|--------------------------------|--|
| 1. | South-West | 29 | 0 |
| 2. | South-South | 10 | Cross River |
| 3. | South- East | 9 | 0 |
| 4. | North-Central | 10 | (a) Plateau (b) Niger |
| 5. | North-East | 2 | (a) Bauchi (b) Borno (c) Gombe (d) Yobe |
| 6. | North-West | 1 (Katsina) | (a) Jigawa (b) Kaduna (c) Kano (d) Kebbi (e) Sokoto (f) Zamfara |

Thus, whereas the South-West has the highest number of Private Universities (29), followed by the South-South and North-Central with ten (10) each, the North-West with the largest population concentration has only one private University at Katsina. Please note that Ogun State has the highest number of Private Universities (about 10). The serious implications of these locational imbalances cannot be discussed in this brief Address, but they deserve urgent attention. It is significant to note that 13 States of the Federation have no Private Universities at all.

In 2014, about 1.7 million students applied for admission into Nigerian Universities, whereas the combined carrying capacity of all Nigerian Universities stood at only 1,250,000 students. Of this figure, the first generation Universities of Ibadan, Lagos, ABU and UNN accounted for up to 40%, while the 12 newly established Federal Universities accounted for less than 10%.

POOR FACILITIES, POOR STAFFING AND WEAK QUALITY CONTROL MECHANISMS.

Poor facilities and inadequate staffing constitute the second set of very serious problems. The Presidential Needs Assessment Report released in 2014, revealed the extremely poor infrastructure base of most Nigerian Universities. That Report revealed severe shortages of teaching staff, teaching facilities, research facilities, and hostel accommodation.

The Report clearly revealed the paucity of Academic Staff, with a mere total population of 37,504 teaching staff as at 2014. Of this number, 43% did not have Doctorate Degrees. Therefore, the majority of academic staff only had Masters

Degrees. In terms of teacher-student-ratio as approved by NUC, there was a 30% shortfall of teaching staff in the system. In fact, the Report clearly stated that Nigeria has the worst teacher-student-ratio in the world. This is a very serious problem which affects quality control. Taken together with the problems of poor facilities for teaching and research, Nigerian Universities have a huge quality control gap.

Since the release of the Needs Assessment Report, serious efforts have been made by Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) to improve the teaching and research facilities of some Nigerian Universities. But there is still a long way to go.

RELEVANCE OF ACADEMIC PROGRAMMES TO THE NEEDS OF THE NATIONAL ECONOMY

constitutes the third set of problems affecting the Nigerian University System. Research findings have revealed that most Nigerian Universities do not make serious efforts to relate academic programmes to the practical needs of the economy. Whereas knowledge for its own sake may be valuable, the question of relevance greatly affects the rate of employability. Many of our academic programmes are totally irrelevant to the developmental needs of the economy. I consider this to be the heart of problem.

DISTINCTIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF WORLD-CLASS UNIVERSITIES.

An intensive study of the facilities, programmes and learning conditions provided by the top-most 200 Universities in the World has revealed the following

distinctive features accounting for their world-class status, namely:

- (i) Provision of excellent infrastructure for teaching, learning and research, making for highly conducive teaching and learning environment;
- (ii) Provision of excellent library resources and research facilities;
- (iii) Employment of highly qualified and brilliant teaching or faculty staff, with doctoral degrees and proven research experience.
- (iv) Very good staff-student ratios in favour of high quality attention for students.

In most of the top-best 200 Universities, the Staff-student ratios are amazingly very good. In fact, for the 10 top-best Universities in the World, the staff-student ratios are as good as follows:

| | | |
|--|---|------|
| -California Institute of Technology, USA | = | 6:9 |
| -University of Oxford, UK | = | 11:6 |
| -Stanford University, USA | = | 7:8 |
| -University of Cambridge | = | 11:8 |
| -Massachusetts Institute of Technology | = | 9:9 |
| -Harvard University, USA | = | 8:9 |
| -Princeton University, USA | = | 8:4 |
| -Imperial College, London | = | 11.7 |
| -Swiss Federal Institute of Technology | = | 14:7 |
| -University of Chicago, USA | = | 6:9 |

These extremely good ratios of staff to student constitute the core of the high levels of academic

excellence. Comparatively, the staff-student ratio in many Nigerian Universities is as bad as 1:300. Simply outrageous;

- (v) Robust funding strategies with highly reliable and sustainable sources of revenue. Such good Funding is the key to the provision of good facilities;
- (vi) Good welfare services for students especially good accommodation in hostels;
- (vii) Effective linkages with industry and the productive centres of the economy;
- (viii) Effective quality control mechanisms and the high integrity of examination systems;
- (ix) Good governance procedures and effective administration;
- (x) Good reputation for innovative research findings and inventions;
- (xi) Excellent capacity for designing good academic programmes, with high relevance to the needs of society;
- (xii) Good reputation for global networking and international influence as world-class centres of excellence.

RESTORING ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES.

With reference to the foregoing factors and facilities which have produced the current world-class Universities, the task of restoring academic excellence in Nigerian Universities is, indeed, massive. In our sustained efforts to restore academic excellence, I believe we should consistently focus

on:

- (1) Robust and adequate funding for the University system on a regular basis;
- (2) Provision of high quality infrastructure of labs, lecture halls, classrooms, power supply facilities, teaching aids and equipment;
- (3) Employment and training of high quality academic staff. From the current level of a mere 40,000 we must increase the population of academic staff to 250,000 in the next five years, and to 500,000 within a decade. This massive programme of staff training is absolutely essential. For this purpose, we must harvest into the academia all First Class and top Upper Second Class graduates;
- (4) An intensive programme for a reverse brain-drain in which Nigerian experts abroad are positively attracted back home through highly attractive salaries and conditions of services;
- (5) Top-level design and accreditation of excellent academic programmes;
- (6) Provision of high quality teaching and research facilities;
- (7) Restoration of effective University autonomy so as to ensure high quality regulatory mechanisms and quality assurance procedures;
- (8) Good governance systems and effective administration;
- (9) Maintenance of sustainable industrial harmony on University campuses to ensure strike-free academic Sessions;

- (10) Provision of good hostel accommodation for students, and staff housing;
- (11) Extensive linkages with industry and other productive sectors of the national economy so as to ensure effective relevance of academic programmes;
- (12) Promotion of such core-values as honesty, integrity, transparency, accountability, self-discipline and trustworthiness, together with a noble Code of Ethics to guide staff-student relationships.

MAKING OUR GRADUATES EMPLOYABLE.

Honourable Chancellor and Special Guests, let me conclude this address with a particular focus on how to make Nigerian graduates more employable. The following proposed solutions derive mainly from a survey of world-class Universities and the results of a recent survey of employers of labour in Nigeria:

- (1) Emphasize skills development programmes to equip graduates with specific skills, thereby making our graduates more attractive to employers. It is vital to emphasize that skills acquisition by graduates is as high as 76% in Germany; 80% in Japan; and 92% in South Korea; but only 23% in India and less than 10% in Nigeria. Skills acquisition is, therefore, the most powerful key to making our graduates more employable by both the public and private sectors of the economy.

Therefore, we must place great emphasis on skills development. The driving force of the development process in the world today is 'know-how', not mere education with certificates.

Know-how is a product of skill acquisition. While talent may be a gift, skill must be sought after and acquired. Those with skills are most likely to be people of ideas and creativity, especially in their areas of expertise. Therefore, the way to go to make Nigerian graduates more employable is to soak them with high quality learning which emphasizes skills not mere certificates. Skill acquisition programmes should be offered in all Universities.

Over the years, we have overemphasized paper certificates instead of know-how and skills. There is a world of difference between reading to pass exams and studying to have knowledge and to acquire know-how.

- (2) Relate Academic Programmes to the needs of society.
- (3) Integrate entrepreneurship training programmes into our University degree programmes.
- (4) Modernize agricultural production systems with related agriculture-fed industries, so as to create millions of jobs.
- (5) Expand the existing Graduate Entrepreneurship Scheme to accommodate greater numbers of our graduates.
- (6) Consistently transform the national economy to create opportunities for employment and to generate prosperity.
- (7) Inculcate the core values of honesty, integrity, discipline, trustworthiness, and faith in all graduates.

Honourable Chancellor, Your Excellencies and Special

Guests, it is with great joy that I now congratulate our fresh Eagles, now ready to soar to even greater heights. Wherever you go, may you excel; as emerging leaders, may you be granted wisdom; wherever you are placed to serve, may you find favour; may you turn out to be great achievers. As you go through life, may you always remember that you have a great God, who is:

Awesome in Authority,
Almighty in Power,
Colossal in Strength,
Exalted in Wisdom,
Superlative in Vision,
Superior to all knowledge-Systems,
Sovereign in all Principalities,
Supreme in all Kingdoms, and
Glorious in Majesty. Amen!

