The Establishment of an ICT enabled University in Northern Nigeria

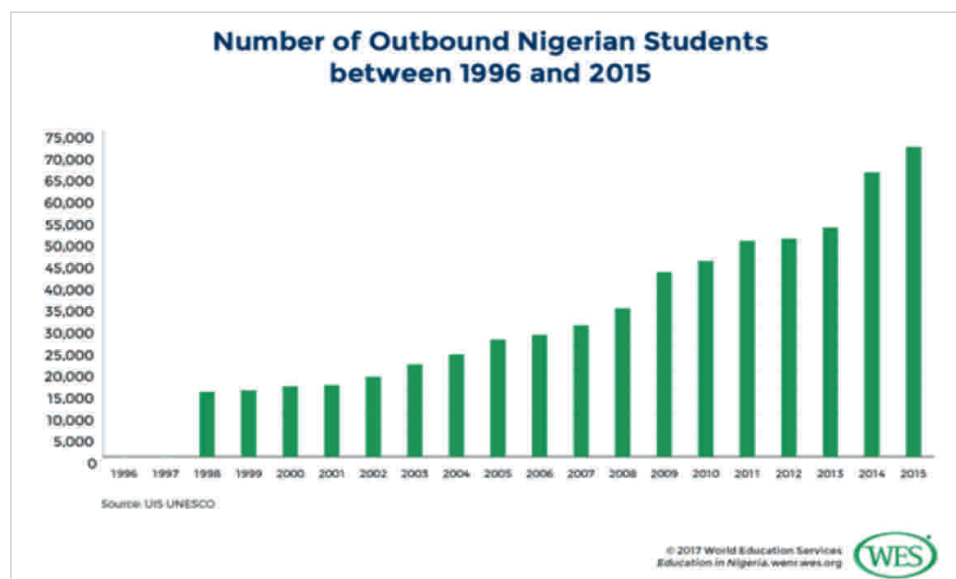*By Dr. Satya Vir Singh and Dr. Sanjoy Kumar Pal*

From a global perspective, economic and social developments are increasingly driven by the advancement and application of knowledge. Education in general and higher education in particular, are fundamental to the construction of a knowledge economy and society in all nations [1]. However, the major challenges of higher education systems in developing countries to fulfill this responsibility is frequently thwarted by long-standing problems of finance, infrastructure, efficiency, equity, quality and governance [2]. Now a new challenge that had augmented to the existing problems and in economic development has the role of Information and Communications Technology (ICT), and the globalization of trade and labor markets [3].The changes are more evident in Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, where investments in the intangibles that make up the knowledge base of a country (e.g., research and development, higher education, computer software and patents) are equalling or even exceeding investments in physical equipment (OECD 2001). Developing economies, while affected by these transformations, are not yet reaping their benefits.

The field of education has certainly been affected by the penetrating influence of ICT worldwide and in particular developed countries; the ICT has made a very profound and remarkable impact on the quality and quantity of teaching, learning research in the educational institutions. Information and community technology has the potentials to accelerate, enrich, and deepen skill; to motivate and engage students in learning to help relate school experiences to work practices; to help create economic viability for tomorrow's workers, contribute to radical changes in school; to strengthen teaching and to provide opportunities for connection between the school and the world [5].

Almost one in four Sub-Saharan people reside in Nigeria, making it Africa's most populous country. Currently it is the seventh most populous country in the world. The United Nations anticipates that Nigeria will become the third largest country in terms of population in the world by 2050. Nigeria is the number one country of origin for international students from Africa. It sends the most students overseas of any country on the African continent, and outbound mobility numbers are growing at a rapid pace. According to data from the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS), the number of Nigerian students abroad increased by 164 percent (figure 1) in the decade between 2005 and 2015 alone - from 26,997 to 71,351. [6].

Nigeria has a federal system of government with 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory of Abuja. Within the states, there are 744 local governments in total. In Nigeria, the education is under the supervision of Ministry of Education. The higher education sector is administered by National Universities Commission (NUC). Nigeria's education system encompasses three different sectors: basic education (nine years), post-basic/senior secondary education (three years), and tertiary education (four to six years, depending on the program of study) [7]. Before a candidate can be considered for screening for University program, he/she must have cleared the JAMB (Joint Admission and Matriculation Board) examination. The JAMB score is crucial in deciding the stream of higher study by the students. Students who are successful in their Senior Secondary School Examinations conducted by West African Examinations Council (WAEC) or National Examinations Council (NECO), can take the JAMB examination, where English is a compulsory subject. There are about 43 Federal, 47 State, and 75 Private Universities in Nigeria, respectively. Out of which 2 Federal universities, 2 State universities and 1 private university now exist in Kano, an important industrial township situated in norther Nigeria.

Number of Outbound Nigerian Students between 1996 and 2015

Source: UIS UNESCO

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It is unfortunate that five decades after Nigeria's independence, the northern part of the country is still lagging behind educationally in comparative with what is happening in the southern part of Nigeria. The insurgency in the north-eastern part of the country has seriously undermined the educational progress of Northern Nigeria. Tremendous efforts are thus required to tackle this education emergency.

Keeping all these challenges in view a new international university full equipped with modern technologies has now started to function in Kano. The Skyline University Nigeria (SUN), a privately managed university is a new initiative in the norther Nigeria. The chief difference of this new initiative is the use of ICT incorporated pedagogical tool. The Learning Management Systems (LMS), also known as Course Management Systems (CMS), Personal learning Environment (PLE), e-learning courseware and Virtual learning Environments (VLE) is integrated with the course curriculum. The LMS provides interactive features to the students. As such, threaded discussions, video conferencing, and forums for discussion which are the main features that makes it different from traditional universities. The university is fully automated and managed by Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP). With a help of high speed broadband connectivity the SUN is altogether a new experience for many students in norther Nigeria. Many students who were migrating to foreign land in search of quality education can now find the same at their door steps. The university have also employed many foreign professionals to manage the university and to ensure that the education delivered is of international standards. The SUN is also taking professional inputs from industry to orienting the students with qualitative theoretical knowledge that will enables them to use in practical situations.

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Skyline University Nigeria has a vision to be an internationally recognized institution of excellence in higher education, by providing technologically enabled platform for innovative research and education with a focus on creativity and entrepreneurship. For more information you may visit: www.sun.edu.ng

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