

Development of a World Class Polytechnic : The Current Strides in the Delta State Polytechnic, Ozoro

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Delta State Polytechnic Ozoro was established by Law enacted by the Delta State Government on November 12th 2002 during the administration of the then visionary Governor of Delta State; Chief James Onanefe Ibori. The polytechnic was one of the four tertiary institutions established at the same time under the control and management of the Delta State. Higher Education Project (DSHEP) in partnership with the University of Westminster as technical partners to meet the yearning of Deltans for the acquisition of qualitative education which was hitherto not being satisfied by institutions owned by the Federal and State Government (Oboreh, 2015). The stated vision of the polytechnic is to become a world class technological institution, a "centre of excellence" where teaching, learning and research are directed towards meeting the new challenges of economic, social and technological developments of Nigeria". The mission of the polytechnic "is to offer technologically driven programmes and provide a conducive learning environments suitable for training and equipping students with hands on-skills which will generate enterprises for their self-employment and employment of others through snugly packaged National Diploma (ND) and Higher National Diploma (HND) and certificate programmes. The mission and vision statements set the stage for the development of a world class polytechnic to which all acting and substantive Rectors of the polytechnic since inception to date have made giant strides.

The relevance of developing a world class polytechnic cannot be over-emphasized as it has the capability to make the institution the best amongst the best, enhance continuous improvement and addition of world class facilities, enhance relentless focus on best practices in learning, research and service, focus on innovation, provide outstanding leadership, enhance operational excellence and increase students gross enrolment ratio amongst others.

Developing world class academic institutions has become a global obsession as governments the world over have put the development of competitive higher institutions and research systems at the heart of national economic strategies. In this regard, Russian President Vladimir Putin made it a policy to move five Russian

Universities into top 100 by 2020. Japanese President Shinzo Abe also noted that there should be ten top Japanese Universities in the world ranking 100 by 2023. The Delta State Polytechnic Ozoro should therefore by no means be left out of the scheme of things in attaining world top-rated standards through the adoption of innovative efforts. This article in this regard examines;

- (i) Perspectives of world class organizations/institutions;
- (ii) Strategies at development of world class institutions and;
- (iii) Exceptions and efforts at building a world class Polytechnic by Dr. Jacob Snapp Oboreh's current administration.

Perspectives Of World Class Organizations/Institutions

According to Business Dictionary (2010), anything world class is one that is ranked by customers and industry experts to be among the best of the best. This designates standard setting excellence in term of design, performance, quality, customer satisfaction and value when compared with similar items anywhere in the world. Khan (1996) enumerated a world class organization as one that has acquired the position of the best of bests in the world in its given business and continuously strides for beating its own standards so as to retain that position. Vaishner (2014) from another perspective regard a world class organization as one recognized as a benchmark by its industry sector and for some aspects by some other industry sectors as well. Applying the foregoing definitions to defining a world class polytechnic implies that it should be an institution ranked by students, those in the educational sector and other stakeholders as the best amongst similar polytechnics. It should be an educational institution that displays excellence in its structure, teaching, learning and research and continuously adopts innovations to surpass its already attained standards over time which other similar organizations will consider as a baseline for comparison. A very difficult question which this paper would seek to provide answers to is "Can the Delta State Polytechnic Ozoro be regarded as a world class?" Several defined indicators will be examined to provide answers to this at the end of the paper.

Times Higher Education (1990) identified some of the characteristics of world class universities which can be applied to assessing world class polytechnics or tertiary institutions as follows;

- (i) Generates total annual income of \$751,139 per academic session compared to \$606,345 for top 400 universities;
- (ii) Has a student to staff ratio of 11.6 : 1 compared to 12.5:1 for top 400 universities;
- (iii) Hires 20% of staff from abroad compared to 18% for top 400 universities;

- (iv) Generates a total research income of \$229,109 per academic session compared to \$165,739 for top 400 universities;
- (v) Publishes 43% of its research papers with at least one international co-author compared to 42% for top 400 universities and
- (vi) Has a student body made up of 19% international students compared to 16% for top 400 universities.

Although universities and polytechnics are distinct in line with their set out curriculum by the governing bodies in Nigeria; National Universities Commission and National Board to Technical Education respectively, their mission and vision is to promote academic excellence. Thus, standards for excellence in universities should also constitute standards for excellence in polytechnics.

Vaishnar (2014) observed that world class organizations has nothing to do with size. In this light, the size of land area, student enrolment, facilities acquired, number of lecturers/instructors and income generated should not be used in classifying an organization as world class organizations IOWA State University (1995) in an attempt to provide more insight into world class organizations noted that world class organizations have three facets (attitude, process and tools). It noted that the attitude to developing a world class culture requires acquisition of knowledge, sharing of knowledge, collaboration, provision of improved services, flexibility, innovation, change of orientation and keeping the proper balance. In terms of processes, world class organizations should seek methodologies to adopt to meet changes to speed up delivery of services to meet future challenges as well as conduct international benchmarking in order to transfer skills and knowledge to people. With regards to tools, it noted that world class organizations within available budget and time should seek low and high-tech solutions in order to embrace latest technologies and adapt new skills through training and continuous improvement.

Based on the foregoing, it could be noted as postulated by Vaishner (2014) that becoming a world class organization is not easy as it takes a lot of commitment, pain and ability to go against the flow. Although it has the capability to incorporate different nationals, languages, cultures and varied thoughts into a "whole of best amongst the best". It entails huge costs which is usually not within reach and encounters a lot of resistance especially to those who believe their interests will be threatened by the envisaged change.

Developing World Class Organizations

Several strategies have been postulated in building/developing world class organizations. Adalat (1996) opined that in developing world class organizations there should be in place a good knowledge of the global economy, obsession with quality, developing the most professional employees, continuous innovation and re-innovation and display of world class leadership. Skyme

(2011) observed that knowledge of the global economy will assist institutions to supplement traditional measures for new measures, focus on infrastructures for economic development rather than jobs created and generate ideas for new forms of collaboration. Quality is vague (Marcus, 2013). The best quality is sought to solve problems and in pursuant of this, the best quality such as in teaching, learning, research and service may be attained to become the best amongst the best. Professional employees adopt the right attitude, process and tools in the delivery of services in world class organizations. IOWA State University, 1995). They are also expected to embrace ethical principles in the course of their activities.

Economic Times (2008) outlined four factors that could make a university world class that can also be adopted in any polytechnic or organization that seeks world class status. It noted that;

- (i) an organization must show commitment to breath and excellence in all fields of human inquiry. This is not simply in a particular niche, but display uniform excellence in all fields
- (ii) it must engage in cutting edge research, while at the same time teaching the next generation - their students.
- (iii) it must allow their researchers freedom to experiment succeed and sometimes fail. In this light, they should be allowed to make grand mistakes and grand discoveries.
- (iv) they should encourage inter-disciplinary research and teaching. This entail working with private sector and fostering partnership with industry and encouraging international collaboration. The foregoing stipulates that developing world class polytechnic should entail achieving excellence in all disciplines technologically. Unique researches should be conducted with researchers supported from commencement to completion. Failures should not be considered a set-back, but an affront for continuous research whereas successes should be applauded with further encouragement to greater successes. There should be inter-disciplinary linkages such that a researcher conducting a study should incorporate specialists from other disciplines to be part of the research to enhance focus and better output.

Vaughan (2014) outlined two strategies for any polytechnic aiming to be world class. This was noted as (i) raising funds to build facilities and buy new technology and equipment and (ii) setting up of an endowment fund to support staff and students to engage in the world stage and bring top quality expertise. He further postulated that funds could be raised through the organization of sporting tournament, collation of Alumni data and sending quarterly emails to them for support as well as the establishment of an alumni wall of fame. In Nigeria, individual polytechnics rarely organize sporting tournaments. Even where they do, it is solely in-house

amongst the various departments that are sponsored by the institutions constituting a "drain" to available funds that would have been channeled towards infrastructural development and other viable initiatives for attaining "best of the bests". On the other hand, the prevailing economic situation in Nigeria where there is recession has left several polytechnic graduates unemployed and or under-employed with the result that most of them do not identify with their alma, mater. even where they do, the funds are lacking to contribute to the development of the institution. An alumni wall of fame is not a common occurrence in Nigeria, but it is a viable alternative than could be instituted to changing things. Relatedly, Enoghalase (2016) noted that developing a polytechnic to world standards entails; changing things. He particularly emphasized prompt payment of salaries to staff. This has the capacity to boosting the morale of staff to putting in their best to working assiduously to meeting world standards. Thus, prompt payment of salaries and other allowances could make employees to be dedicated to work and imbibe professional ethics in the conduct of their duties. Hence, Maasik (2016) noted that creating world class organizations requires good people and an ability to lead well.

Efforts and Perceptions at Developing a World Class Polytechnic by Dr. Jacob Snapp Oboreh

Dr Jacob Snapp Oboreh, a Lecturer and former Head of Department in the Department of Business Administration of the Delta State University Abraka was appointed Rector of the Delta State Polytechnic Ozoro after a hot contest and subsequent selection by the Delta State Government in 2012. He assumed duties on the 17th of March 2012 and was expected to "mount the saddle" for a five year period ending March 17th 2017.

As aptly captured by Ibe-enwo (2014), the Rector of a Polytechnic is "expected to be an educator, to have been at sometime a scholar, to have judgment about finance, to know something about construction, maintenance and labour policy, to speak virtually continuously in words that charm and never offend, to take bold positions with which no one will disagree, to consult everyone and follow all proffered advice and do everything through committees, but with great speed and without error". How Dr. Jacob Snapp Oboreh has performed his expected roles and perceptions in building a world class polytechnic is a subject of discussion in this article.

Recognizing the enormous task of building a world class technological institution, Dr. Jacob Snapp Oboreh set out to identify priority areas based on my observation as infrastructural development, staff recruitment, expansion of the polytechnic programmes and streams and increased opportunities for students enrolment. Funds were secured from internally generated revenue, Tertiary Education Trust Fund (Tertfund) and other were"

- ❖ Ultra-modern lecture theatres
- ❖ Ultra-modern central Administration block
- ❖ Construction of pedestrian walkway
- ❖ Building of a mini-stadium (15,000 person capacity)
 - ❖ Construction of link roads within the polytechnic
 - ❖ Building of state-of-the-art entrepreneurial education centre and mechanical workshop
 - ❖ Fire fighting equipments

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In line with the millennium Development Goal of Education for all by 2015, the efforts at expanding the polytechnic programmes saw the establishment of new departments such as Mass Communication, Marketing, Computer Engineering and Mechanical Engineering. To allow for an increase in enrolment to accommodate more students in achieving the MDG goals approval for streams were sought and given approval for by the National Board for Technical Education.

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