

LET'S SHUTTLE TO THE SPACE

Address Delivered by the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Ilorin, Prof. Wahab O. Egbewole, SAN, at the 291st Senate Meeting of the University held at the Senate Chamber, University of Ilorin, on Friday, October 21, 2022

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Assumption of Office

Distinguished Members of the University of Ilorin Senate, I salute you! Thank God it is Friday and I humbly welcome you to this important meeting, my first inaugural one as the Chairman of this body.

On Monday, October 17, 2022, I formally assumed office as the 11th substantive Vice Chancellor of this great citadel of learning by the grace of God and with your support. Permit me to begin on a note of gratitude to you for the honour accorded me and my family. I also appreciate the outpouring of goodwill, support, messages and visits I have received as a show of solidarity to one of your own. I appreciate you all; may the Almighty Allah appreciate you more.

My assumption of office coincided with the resumption of work after the suspension of the strike declared by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) on February 14, 2022. It was a long strike, the longest in the history of strikes in Nigeria. To say that it was an agonising period for many of our colleagues is to state the obvious and for our students, it was a huge loss, especially those who were just to conclude their final examinations. I empathise with you and all of us on the current difficulties. We must be hopeful that the sacrifice shall not be in vain. You are welcome back.

I want to appeal to us that as two wrongs do not make a right, we should cooperate with the University towards the successful conclusion of the truncated 2020/2021 academic session. The challenges we are facing are enormous, but we owe it a historical responsibility to humanity to quickly put the past behind us and face the present and the future with renewed vitality and vigour. May God help us.

Being Vice Chancellor

As nothing happens without the Divine Decree, I consider being a Vice Chancellor today in this great University an act of God. In that regard, I know that the office comes with opportunities and responsibilities, though the former outweighs the latter. Part of these responsibilities is being committed to and passionate about the system so that it can be greater. It is this commitment that informed our meeting today and my appeal that we should go for a space shuttle as we hit the ground running in propelling the university to new heights.

As an alumnus of this great University, I am passionate about its development as I am of another Nigerian university too. It is this passion that has driven my vision that I had shared while delivering my inaugural address to strive, with your support, to make the University the best again by any ranking in Nigeria and one of the best in Africa. In fact,

I plan to actualise a Vision 1:10:500 by which our university will be the industry leader in Nigeria, the best or one of the topmost 10 in Africa and one of the best 500 in the world.

Being a Vice Chancellor is just being first among equals and I believe all of us have fantastic ideas on how to revamp the system and make it better. Proceeding from the current Strategic Plan for 2019-2023, “Beyond the Frontiers”, a new five-year strategic plan, “Shuttling to the Space”, will be immediately developed next year to propel my vision within the long-term vision of the University.

Actualising Vision

My vision is anchored on the following:

• *Resuscitating Stable Academic Calendar*

Having a stable academic calendar is crucial to the attainment of a competitive international ranking for the University. My plan here is to work harmoniously with stakeholders so that as much as possible, we shall not have disruption.

Student Enrolment across the globe improves the ranking of universities and further attracts foreign students. That UNILORIN was academically stable for 20 years until recently is an irrefragable truth. I was privileged to play an active part in the efforts towards stabilising the academic calendar during the period that I was Secretary and later Chairman of ASUU, UNILORIN Branch then. While acknowledging the fact that no man is an island, as I emphasised recently, I strongly believe that we shall have academic stability without jeopardising our welfare so that UNILORIN can sustain its status as the University of First Choice for Nigerian and foreign candidates.

• *Competent and Highly Motivated Workforce*

No establishment can rise above the competence and dedication of its staff. Therefore, a 21st century university can only be achieved with a dedicated workforce with 21st century skills. The University under my watch will institutionalise training and retraining programmes to re-skill and re-tool its workforce as well as invest in gadgets and devices that will keep workers abreast of developments in their fields. A new organisational culture that places premium on innovation, diligence and excellence will be developed. An incentive scheme that encourages those whose excellence makes the University achieve giant strides will be established under a new workplace mantra: “*Striving Always To Better Our Best*”.

Leveraging Technology in University Life

Technology is well known as a game changer in human life. However, recent developments warranted by Covid-19 pandemic have shown that its role in transforming

human life is still underestimated. Today's imperative is that technology should drive all aspects of life, a niche area for UNILORIN to set the pace for others.

Therefore, we shall mobilise resources for the massive deployment of state-of-the-art technology in all facets of university life: teaching, learning, research, service, and leisure. The emphasis will be on making the University contribute to technological development, not merely a consumer of foreign technology. This is critical to our emergence as a true 21st century university.

Achieving Sustainable Funding

It is apposite to state that funding is a challenge for the Nigerian university system. If revenue is constant, funding rapidly becomes inadequate due to inflation and the need for new projects. This challenge will be addressed by professionally studying how existing revenue sources in the University can be sustained and how new revenue sources can be sustainably explored. Cost management will be a major plank of this strategy and focal areas will include:

- students' fees,
- re-engineering revenue generating units for optimal efficiency,
- research grantsmanship,
- blocking leakages, and
- leveraging goodwill to attract needed infrastructures.

Internationalising Curriculum and Engagements

The present curriculum is hardly adequate for a globally competitive university. Research has proved that many courses taught in our universities will be obsolete later in this century while new courses that cater for present and future needs will emerge. Therefore, the University will develop a robust curriculum that includes emerging courses.

Curriculum development across board will factor in inputs from employers, policymakers, and beneficiaries. It will be a curriculum that enhances employability and value addition, a curriculum that prepares graduates for skills acquisition. In this regard, courseware and apps, soft skills, digital literacy, culture, and values in line with the University motto, ***Character and Learning*** will be strengthened and mainstreamed.

Students must be able to find **happiness, purpose, value, and knowledge** in the University. They must also be responsible, accountable, and adaptable to challenges. We will ingrain these values in our pedagogy to produce socially responsible and globally competitive graduates. Definitely, you as leaders and mentors will play a decisive role in this regard.

Doing Research for Knowledge Economy

Given that we are living in a knowledge economy, my Administration will drive cutting-edge and solution-providing researches where town and gown will pragmatically relate. Less emphasis will be on research for research's sake. As we know that growing the knowledge economy can only be successful if our research is problem-solving, not mere academic drudgery, we shall:

- increase research funding;
- motivate researchers and inventors who practically solve societal problems;
- partner with the industry to identify societal needs and fund such projects for collective benefit;
- create Faculty Research Grants (FRG) and Departmental Research Grants (DRG) in addition to the present Senate Research Grants; and
- organise regular grantsmanship training and workshops.

Providing Adequate Infrastructure

As the core mandate of the University is teaching, research and community development, delivering this mandate requires appropriate and adequate infrastructure. An audit of infrastructure will be conducted within the first month of assuming office to determine needs analysis. We shall strive to remedy deficiencies, provide opportunities for shared facilities, and create sustainable models to make the facilities enduring.

Certainly, a 21st century university anchored on a SMART Campus paradigm is achievable. I am convinced that based on consensus building, you as stakeholders will appreciate the need for rapid progress in our university. I believe that with your cooperation, we shall lead UNILORIN to breathtaking heights. More will be said about the SMART mantra at our next engagement today in which your distinguished selves are also members.

The Mandate

My esteemed colleagues, all over the world, the mandate of the University is the same though it is approached differently. Universities are established to engage in teaching, research and community service or development. The University of Ilorin is not an exception. It is by discharging this mandate in the best possible way that we can shuttle to the space and compete with the global stars in higher education.

As your Vice Chancellor, I shall be keenly interested in addressing factors that facilitate or inhibit our effective teaching. While we shall maximise the facilitators, we shall eliminate or drastically reduce the inhibitors. I am also very interested in our peculiar research challenges so that obstacles can be removed from our way. We should not allow obstacles to limit our potential, we should rather sail above the storms and succeed.

I also want to urge you to be available for community service because that is where the impact of our teaching and research will be felt by others beyond our students. In due course, I will have to disturb some of you with assignments and tasks that border on community development. Let us be available for service and let us be ready to make sacrifices.

Lastly, it is my fervent belief that no one has a monopoly of wisdom. I implore you, right from today, to share your thoughts and bring up ideas that can help in delivering the goods of the University. Egbewole is just an individual. It is all of you that make him an 'egbe' or group. Let us strengthen the system together for our collective glory.

May the Almighty Allah help us.

I thank you all for your rapt attention.