



Text of address of Vice Chancellor Joshua Olalekan Ogunwole at his inauguration Service as VC Bowen University on 7th September, 2018

A new moment of Promise: charting the future of Bowen University

“...Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that reads it.” (Hab. 2:2, KJV)

My fellow colleagues, esteemed men and brethren,

Appreciation

I am here today delighted and feel very privileged to have been selected as the fourth Vice Chancellor of Bowen University (hereafter, referred to as Bowen). I am pleased to succeed Matthews A. Ojo, a respected Professor, God fearing man and a very principled person, who cares deeply about Bowen and has provided the University with dynamic and farsighted leadership during the past five years. I am sure his heart will also very much follow Bowen and its works in the years ahead.

As delighted as I am, I feel equally humbled by the enormous task before us. I am grateful to the Governing Council and other stakeholders for the trust bestowed on me to take the mantle of stewardship as Vice Chancellor of this noble and great University at this auspicious phase of her growth; just as I am equally mindful of the sacrificial labours borne by my predecessors in office.

I thank the erstwhile Vice Chancellor for his service to the University, as well as the generosity and cooperation he has demonstrated to ensure I succeed since securing my appointment letter. I wish to note on record, the pioneering works of Professor Okedara of blessed memory and doff my hat for Timothy Olagbemiro, a Professor of Chemistry, astute administrator, Rothamsted Fellow and scholar par excellence; for his stewardship at early transformation of Bowen. I am convinced in my heart that HE who called these men to these labours is faithful to reward them for their diligent services.

Confronting the future: Continuity and Change

Over the past few months, I have really been very much in a listening and learning mode. I have consulted with a great number of stakeholders, I have met with several members of staff and students. I have visited few department and units, and hope that by the end of this month, I will have visited them all.

I have seen the works of few graduates of Bowen and that is what left the biggest impression on me personally: the interphase of character, excellence and ethics. And I have been impressed by the competence and dedication of academics and other support staff.

I have also had excellent meetings with the Pro-Chancellor (PC), Deacon Wole Abegunde and, Principal Officers of Bowen, at which I learned a great deal about their hopes and concerns. My fellow Fulbright and Humboldt colleagues, along with my professional colleagues of the Soil Science Society of Nigeria, have also expressed good will and hope that my coming to Bowen will further promote the advancement of Bowen. I have had to read some University documents and books supplied by the PC and Chairman of the Governing Council and just recently, I had an interactive session with the Governing Council-in-session. There, too, I listened and I learned.



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Throughout my sounding, I have encountered enthusiasm, and if there is one thing that I have never seen before, it is the level of enthusiasm among people here at Bowen for the goals, objectives and advancement of the University. It really is extraordinarily impressive how much people care about Bowen and as long as we have that, we have so much going for us.

I sensed at the same time that there was a recognition that change was needed, and more importantly and more positively, that change would be welcome.

A structured set of discussions and interviews has taken place since the beginning of the year, as a prelude to change. Consultations among stakeholders have been participatory, transparent, and rich in substance. All these activities have required intensive effort, a strong sense of dedication and an indication of commitment to change. And I want to thank all of those who have been involved in these planning exercises, because they have given much of their time and effort, and they have helped us sharpen and shape our focus.

Bowen University in the Global Context

Bowen started as a unique effort to produce first rate graduates that combines Godliness, excellence and strong sense of ethical responsibility towards society and its development. Godly character, academic excellence and ethical conduct are mobilized to the frontlines of battle against ignorance, illusions and poverty. Its founding aims were to provide high quality, morally sound and socially-relevant education to all students irrespective of gender, race, colour, ethnicity or religion.

Though the concept of 'University' has been around for centuries and since the beginning of this century, the Higher education sector has been through extensive change over a relatively short period of time and this is likely to continue in the future. More so, for privately funded universities as ours.

The global environment particularly unemployment, corporate collaborations, regional partnerships and reduced funding concerns are also at the forefront of our thoughts in securing assistance for University work at Bowen.

It is my belief that if we remain faithful to the original vision while setting it in a contemporary context, we will be well on the way to efficient, effective and productive change.

So let me reflect for a few moments on the nature of the contemporary context of which I have mentioned, within which the future course of Bowen will be charted.

I think first and foremost, we must be very clear about who we are and what we want to be known for. Recent happenings in the Nigerian University landscape have shown that integrity, professionalism, ethical values and godly conducts are fast eroding out of the system. The immediate consequence is the production of graduates devoid of character that hardly know their 'onions' in their chosen discipline.

Both the government and Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) agree that the quality of Higher Education in Nigeria is fast experiencing downward spiral in the last two decades. We are losing quality education grounds at historic rates, with potential catastrophic but as yet uncertain dimension of its consequences. Nigeria's Higher



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Education seems to have lost out in the global knowledge economy during my lifetime. It is tragic!

Next, is on an issue that is very close to my heart having worked in four universities in Nigeria and associated with others around the world before I came to this position and, that is the development of interdisciplinary spirit in teaching, research and technological exploration, with emphasis on hands-on problem solving. To make Bowen a site for extraordinary academic interactions, a place where people and ideas converge, where the dignity of thought and learning is ever upheld, we must ensure a pedagogic-shift from the traditional delivery of lectures and tutorials to contemporary learning outcome approach that places emphasis on studio/laboratory-based learning, self-learning, group work and assignment; analytical skill acquisition, 'hands-on' entrepreneurship skills development with ICT and e-learning based modes. This will guide how we will henceforth educate other students on campus and how we help them to be citizens and leaders of worth to make a better world.

With the growing unemployment rate in the country, it is not uncommon to find graduates populating the unskilled service sector. They no longer contribute meaningfully to national discourse anymore!

Our work at Bowen will acquire added significance as the country grapples with these problems. Bowen must contribute to the solutions we seek in order to salvage the country's Higher Education system. Our research and education areas will focus on current national, regional and global issues that include amongst others; renewable and sustainable energy, climate adaptation, space science and satellite technology; cloud computing, cyber-security, artificial intelligence; human health, Nano-science, water and food security, poverty alleviation; emission and pollution chemistry, and innovation and entrepreneurship.

Bowen will actively and closely collaborate with her teeming alumni spread all over, to conjure ideas and inspire solutions in service to Nigeria, sub-Saharan Africa and the rest of the world, in that order. This, we will achieve through the mind-blowing new products -our graduates- that will do extraordinary things. Our products will help restore hope, trust and confidence in the country's higher education landscape. For they will take bold public positions on global and national topical issues and on the need for a sustainable positive change.

Our research will create technologies to serve as long term stewards of our natural resources on which we all depend.

Bowen's teaching delivery system will help to better understand policy choices that underpin social and economic sustainable development for society.

Indeed, I would submit that our programmes, structures and resources will be re-designed and wholesomely mobilized to support these broad goals.

Moving on into the future: Five Challenges



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Let me commence with setting our sights for the future at Bowen. The realities around us demand that we gear up for change. It is incumbent upon us to come to grips with Bowen's achievements of more than one and half decades and take decisions and move the Bowen agenda forward. If we don't, we will be working ourselves to obscurity, oblivion and consequently, extinction. Our duty is to steer the ship of Bowen in the opposite direction, from the negative narratives.

I would like to suggest the following five challenges.

The first challenge, I believe, is to maintain education, research and innovation at Bowen at the highest level ever. Bowen's curriculums will need rejigging and broadening to keep pace with geo-political, technological and educational changes globally. We are entering a new phase in which Bowen, with the collaboration of friends, should take a leading role in the Nigerian education landscape through promotion of high quality graduates and celebrating excellence. To confront this challenge, Bowen will announce a new strategic plan at the next convocation ceremony to guide the University's activities over the next few years. Bowen's mission remains as important, if not more, than it was at inception. We must develop improved internet-based techniques and new e-learning methods to further supplement and replace the traditional classroom.

In all these efforts, improved staff and students' welfare must underpin our response to the challenges ahead.

The second challenge is to ensure that Bowen captures and is fully characterized by all the assets of a new-age University: lightness, agility, responsiveness, and cost-efficiency. Indeed, Bowen must be a knowledge-based network that use information technology as an instrument of teaching, research as well as knowledge-sharing. And in some instances, we must begin to function in a virtual capacity. These are attributes talked about in organizational theory when describing a new-age institution.

One area in which I would like to submit to you where Bowen is far from being a new-age university is in our diversity goals and probably, gender. Over the next few years, we have to achieve a far better balance, I believe, in terms of our management and in terms of our academic staff. The balance is still out of line in many respects with the new international philosophy, and what is patently right and fair.

We must have simple, clear rules for decision making, whether it be on strategy, policy or on administration and rapid response to infrastructure maintenance and repairs. Our meetings and deliberations, whether in agenda-setting or strategy, as well as in executive decisions must be more effective and result-oriented rather than rhetoric. Bowen, under my watch and stewardship will be nimble and business-like, yet maintaining high academic, moral and ethical standard of operations. We must strive to keep our overhead costs to a minimum and that meetings and interdisciplinary works are efficient and effective.

Bowen has many stakeholders and we have a responsibility to ensure accountability to them. We must find a transparent and effective way of dealing with all the stakeholders.



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This, I think, is an important element of Bowen. It has both internal and externally based stakeholders.

I now move on to the third challenge: to ensure effective security of all staff, students, fixed and movable properties of Bowen. Our mode of operation will focus more on intelligence gathering and proactive measures rather than reactionary. We must ensure effective policing of all perimeter of the campus both during the day and night. Our security personnel should be able to account for all visitors entering and exiting the campus in real time. Further, we will review the security measures to effectively monitor students' activities including, exit from campus.

This brings me to the fourth challenge which is funding. Funding must be kept stable and secure. Given the complex nature of the task ahead of us, our current funding level cannot be said to be adequate. To shore up our current funding level, we need to vigorously take a diversified approach that involve all stakeholders. Grants, donations and gift plus opportunity for consultancy work, all forms of remedial and top-up programmes that can improve current funding level will be brought on board. New initiatives that will secure funding will be explored.

The fifth challenge is to devise most effective means of capacity building and nurturing for staff through strategic partnership and, alignment with programs of key universities and global renowned institutions in the South and West such that students and staff exchanges can be facilitated. Cutting-edge science will be pursued with the strategic partnership created.

The research emanating from Bowen must be focused and not diffused and; should be supported by a robust research direction and a well-coordinated interdisciplinary research hub. Research priority will be placed on competitive research proposal development.

All of these five challenges are interconnected. The required level and quality of funding to meet them will not be easily forth coming unless we can demonstrate beyond doubt that we are really functioning to chart a course of world renowned centre of learning for Bowen.

We must show we have done everything possible to keep our overhead cost low, for with low overheads, more money can be directed to research and entrepreneurship programs.

We must ensure our relevance by drawing partners and stakeholders into our operational arrangement from planning to teaching and research and development of our students.



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Finally, let me simply say on a personal note that I really do feel honoured to be part of this phase in Bowen's history. As I said earlier, it is truly impressive. I am so impressed by the commitment of all staff, many of whom started with Bowen some 17 years ago.

My commitment is to try and serve Bowen as best as I can. I will do the utmost to sustain the great Baptist tradition and achievements, and I am convinced that, working together, we can achieve our set goals and at the end truly make a difference.

Thank you very much.