

Title: When the Gates Are Half-Open: Engaging Stakeholders to Make Nigerian Higher Education Worth the Struggle

If you've ever walked into a lecture hall with a leaking roof, carrying your own marker in case the lecturer forgets theirs—or the school never provided it—you know that access to higher education in Nigeria is not the same as equality in education. You may be inside the gates, yes, but that gate is only half open.

We, the students in this part of the world, do not suffer for lack of ambition or intelligence. What we suffer from is a system that confuses survival with learning, one that calls any cracked building a “lecture theatre” so long as someone speaks inside it. In a society where opportunity is rationed and mediocrity is often institutionalized, the challenge is not merely getting into school—it is getting out alive, educated, and still believing that education was worth the cost.

And so when the question is asked: How might my university engage more effectively with stakeholders to both improve access to higher education and enhance the learning experience? — I do not reach for polite abstractions. I reach for what I have seen.

I. Who Are the Stakeholders? Ask the Students First

The first mistake universities make is to define “stakeholders” as external donors, employers, or retired professors in air-conditioned boardrooms. But the primary stakeholders of any university are its students. Yet we're often the last to be heard and the first to be blamed when the system fails.

In my school where I study pharmacy, students attend classes without updated software or basic reagents. When grants arrive or labs are built, no one tells us who paid, what was spent, or what will happen next. This breeds suspicion, waste, and sometimes outright decay.

Universities must make student inclusion in decision-making routine, not ceremonial. A quarterly open forum where alumni, employers, and professional bodies sit with real students—not proxies—would go further than a hundred reports.

II. Access Is Not an Exam Score—It Is a Survival Equation

Let me show you what “access” to education really looks like. It is a girl from Akwa Ibom who gains admission but spends more time hawking recharge cards than reading. It is a boy from the North who fails a year because there’s no power to study and no money to buy kerosene for his own lamp.

Yes, admission scores are fair on paper. But when success depends on laptops, Wi-Fi, and private tutoring, access becomes an illusion wrapped in bureaucracy.

If my school or any university wishes to make education more equitable, it must partner with local transport bodies, hostel owners, and tech firms to subsidize basic costs. Employers and NGOs should co-fund bursaries—not as charity but as investment in future professionals.

Even alumni, many of whom are abroad, would give more if donations were transparent and accountable. But too often, giving to your alma mater feels like sending money into a void.

III. Teaching As Performance vs. Teaching As Partnership

In my school, a common scene plays out: a lecturer walks in, dictates for 90 minutes, then leaves. No questions. No discussion. No application. We pretend learning has occurred. It hasn’t.

When we meet patients in hospitals, real lives are at stake—and memorised definitions won’t save them.

Universities must open their gates wider to real-world, community-based learning. Pharmacy students should work with rural clinics under joint schemes with NGOs. Engineering students should help local councils build boreholes. Literature students should help translate health messages into local languages.

This isn’t idealism—it’s how learning becomes service.

Stakeholders like employers, artisans, and policymakers must be involved not just as guest speakers, but as co-shapers of curriculum. Students would then graduate not only with degrees, but with practical experience.

IV. Freedom to Study Should Not Be a Privilege

In Nigeria, the freedom to study is under constant threat—from ASUU strikes, power cuts, lack of mental health care, and insecurity. For every student in class, several are at home due to cancelled sessions, unpaid fees, or trauma unspoken.

Universities must work with stakeholders—telecom firms, health NGOs, security agencies—to build safe, stable environments. Subsidised academic data bundles, campus mental health clinics with trained staff, and student safety patrols should not be luxuries.

There should be anonymous, responsive feedback channels that lead to real consequences when lecturers are abusive, corrupt, or absent. Freedom to study must include freedom to be heard.

V. Students Are Not Just Consumers—We Are Builders Too

Students must stop seeing themselves as helpless consumers. We have a duty to shape the system that shapes us.

In my school, the rare moments when we collaborated—during health drives or community projects—we saw glimpses of what a truly student-driven university could be.

Imagine a student-led “Access Committee” gathering data on barriers to success—digital poverty, disability access—and working with NGOs for targeted solutions. Imagine if student unions acted not just as political platforms, but as active watchdogs with veto power in Senate meetings.

Change will not come from the top. It will come from students who stop begging and start building.

Conclusion

A university is not just a cluster of buildings—it is a promise: that merit matters, that knowledge will be shared, and that dignity will not be optional. In Nigeria, that promise is flickering.

To restore it, universities must stop treating stakeholders as cheque books and start treating them as partners in purpose. They must open their gates—not only to those who qualify on paper, but to the communities whose futures depend on what we teach, how we teach it, and why.

And we students must stop seeing ourselves as passengers. We are the engine. It is not enough to survive university. We must shape it—until it becomes not a struggle, but a service.