

SMALL STEPS, GIANT STRIDES: UNLEASHING THE POWER OF INCREMENTAL PROGRESS

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1.0 Prolegomena

It is an honour to be invited to the beautiful and scenic ambience of this fast rising Thomas Adewumi University for the 3rd Anniversary Lectures. I want to appreciate my Twinnee and Vice-Chancellor, the dynamic Amazon, Prof. Francisca Oladipo, for her invitation and for her commitment to shifting paradigms in university leadership.

The Vice-Chancellor and I refer to each other as Twinnee understandably because Ahman Pategi University that I started as a pioneer Vice-Chancellor and Thomas Adewumi University were approved by the Federal Executive Council the same day, along with 18 others, on February 3, 2021 and were granted the provisional license by the National Universities Commission same day on April 8, 2021. We are also twins because the two of us became Vice-Chancellor in our forties, which we reckon as a privilege as it is an honour to serve.

There is no gainsaying the fact of the 20 universities established together some three years ago, TAU has carved a niche for itself in terms of developmental strides and the University is fortunate with the quality of leadership it has enjoyed. The foundation laid by the pioneer Vice-Chancellor has been turned a magnificent edifice, a cynosure of all eyes in the Nigerian university ecosystem. The University was prepared right from the start as it hit the ground running by commencing operations barely a month after approval and preparing the grounds for its first matriculation three months. Today, just three years after, it is already one of the best universities in Nigeria, a feat that could have only been achieved without a keen vision, purposeful mission fired by passion – the passion for excellence epitomised by the Vice-Chancellor, who hard work and diligence are not difficult to discern.

I want to congratulate the Chancellor and visioner, the Asiwaju of Oko-Erese, Dr Johnson B. O. Adewumi, FSNE, on this third anniversary. I also felicitate the Board of Trustees, the Governing Council and indeed the management under the leadership of Vice-Chancellor on their efforts and doggedness in steering the soaring university path of progress and excellence.

Without mincing words, the achievements recorded in the past three years are worthy of recognition by the Guinness Book of Records because within that short time, this university has emerged one of the best 50 universities out of the 284 universities in Nigeria according to the Webometric Ranking of Universities! This is a remarkable feat that would take administrative savviness and managerial shrewdness to achieve. What is certain is that the remarkable trajectory of this great University could not have been achieved without the support and cooperation of the stakeholders, from the Chancellor, to the Board of Trustees and the Governing Council to the Management, Senate, staff and students of the University.

Those small steps of support and cooperation have metamorphosed to the giant strides the University is making all over the world. I say, happy third anniversary!

2.0 Introduction

When the American astronaut, Neil Armstrong, first stepped on the Moon on July 20, 1969, he made a statement that was deep and profound, “That’s one small step by for a man, one giant leap for mankind.” What Armstrong meant was that his first step on the moon was a small one by an individual, but it marked a giant stride for humanity in space exploration. After him, there have been several successful explorations to the moon which have engendered development of space technology.

Like the small step of Armstrong, one reality of life is that greatness is achieved through a chain of little efforts. It is actually small and steady steps that translate to massive and giant strides. Whether it is personal, social, institutional or national development, the significance of small steps cannot be over-emphasised. It is the combination of persistence, insistence and consistence on small efforts that translate to significant impacts with time.

For instance, a small drop of water falling on a rock every day will create a deep hole over time; a grain of sand thrown into a still pond will cause a ripple effect and bigger results; a small seed grown by a farmer grows into a tree providing shade and fruit for many people over time; a student’s consistent habit of devoting hours per day to study eventually results in expertise and excellence in the subject area over time; an athlete’s training daily ultimately results in winning a gold medal and gaining fame. Even Thomas Edison’s small experiments with the light bulb led his historic receipt of the patent embodying the principles of his incandescent lamp on January 27, 1880, the groundbreaking invention that has changed the world through the universal domestic use of electric light.

We can actually identify many instances on how little efforts have produced great impacts over time and it can be surmised that these scenarios also characterise the growth and development of Thomas Adewumi University. Here is a university that started just three years ago with three Faculties, 15 Departments and 60 students now emerging as one of the fastest growing universities in Nigeria with seven Faculties, 27 academic programmes with hundreds of students from 100 to 400 level and a rich complement of dedicated staff.

3.0 The Making of a University

The university is the epitome of scholarship, the pinnacle of research and the cornerstone of development. It is a place where civilisations are shaped, where the youth are prepared and the future of a country is determined. The university is the academics; the university comprises undergraduate and graduate students all united by the pursuit of knowledge, the quest for education and skills for the betterment of our world and the advancement of humanity. The university is the confluence of ideas that shape the destiny of humanity. The success of civilisation lies in the output of universities.

The naming of the university, the root of which is universe, is not coincidental because there is *the universe in the university* (Oloyede, 2009). This means that as wide and vast the universe is, the understanding of what it is all about lies within the university. Our understanding of the

universe will be parochial, if not outright zero, without the enlightenment provided by the university. In essence, a university is established for the advancement of humanity. For a university to serve its purpose to be illuminate the world and the humanity in general, it should be or aspire to be world class.

In his book, *The Challenge of Establishing World Class Universities* (2009), the Coordinator of Tertiary Education Programme of the World Bank, Dr Jamil Salmi, discussed three factors that make a university to be world-class and the ideas are critical to success. These are *concentration of talents* (students, teaching staff and researchers), *abundant resources* (funding, tuition fees, endowments and revenues) and *favourable governance* (supportive regulatory framework, autonomy, academic freedom, leadership team, strategic vision and culture of excellence).

If these factors are borne in mine and all hands are put on deck actualise the tripartite factors, a university will soar like an eagle and gain prominence within a short time and this is what is evident in this university. Based on my understanding of the ecology of the Nigerian university system and the experience within the private university sub-sector, I can see how the combination of ten P's has propelled TAU to stardom such that it has been rightly described as one of the fastest growing universities in Nigeria just within three years of operation. These ten P's are steps that ultimately translate to giant leaps.

3.1 Publicity

Given the competitive nature of the market, publicity and marketing blitz are crucial to instilling a university in the consciousness of Nigerians. At the airport in Ilorin and some other strategic places, there is abundant evidence of TAU presence. This visibility has engendered the growth of the university just as the use traditional and social media, websites also help to project its activities and programmes.

3.2 Personnel

The success of a university is directly proportional to the quality of personnel it is able to attract. Given that the Vice-Chancellor is a self-driven and dynamic academic leader, making other staff members to follow suit is natural. With the dedication and commitment of the staff to the vision and mission to the university, making progress will come naturally. No business, movement or institution can succeed beyond the quality of those who are involved in it, the quality of leadership and staff has shaped the academic character of the University with.

3.3 Policies

Policies are developed on a number of activities so that the university is well guided. By adhering to set regulations by the National Universities Commission (NUC) and professional bodies on academic standards, faculty qualifications, and admission requirements, the foundation is laid for the success of the university in terms of accreditation and credibility. Policy documents on academics, staff, students, research, environment, funding, etc. have engendered a system and created a sense of order with everyone knowing what is expected from them.

3.4 Proper Funding

As running a private university requires significant and continuous investments for capital and recurrent expenditure, proper funding has to be secured right from the beginning. Dedicated funding from the founder, grants, donors and friends of the University will keep the university in shape to support the operations of the system so that appropriate networking will be forged to boost the image and profile of the university. Since funding is at the heart of university excellence, sources through which funding can be sourced are as follows:

- a) **Tuition Fees:** Tuition fees are a primary source of revenue for private universities, as students pay fees to enroll in academic programs and access education services. Setting competitive tuition rates that reflect the quality of education and services provided by the university is critical to generating revenue.
- b) **Donations and Endowments:** Donations, endowments, and philanthropic support from individuals, corporations, associations, friends, foundations and other donors are crucial to fund scholarships, research projects, infrastructure development, and other initiatives of the university. The university has to build strong relationships with donors and cultivate a culture of service to secure and sustain funding for the university.
- c) **Research Grants and Sponsorships:** By attracting vibrant scholars, the university can secure research grants, sponsorships, and funding from international and national agencies, industry partners, research organizations, and international institutions to support research projects, innovation, and knowledge creation. Engaging in interdisciplinary research collaborations and pursuing competitive funding opportunities can drive research excellence and generate additional revenue for the university.
- d) **Stakeholders (and Alumni) Engagement:** Though TAU does not have alumni yet but there are other stakeholders like the parents of prospective students, the immediate community, and partners who can support fundraising campaigns, networking events, mentorship programmes for staff and students are being galvanised to boost the financial profile of the university.
- e) **Corporate Sponsorship and Industry Partnerships:** As most companies have their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programmes, interfacing with industry leaders and providing industry-relevant education and services will help to attract funding and support from corporate sponsors.
- f) **Special Programmes and Services:** Revenue can also be generated through organizing conferences, workshops and symposia where experts will invited and participants will pay for their training.

3.5 Power and Technology

Both power and technology are connected because it requires power to operate technology and technology itself derives relevance from energy and power. The 21st century university environment requires a 24-7 power supply and relevant technology. While alternative power supply such as solar and thermal energies are now explored to make the university self-sufficient, Information and Communication Technology is crucial to drive the operations of the university and even reduce cost ultimately.

3.6 Partnerships

Universities are universal in scope and partnerships bring about strength in promoting the university and supporting its activities. The institutional friends that a university is associated with go a long way in boosting its public image. For instance, within the short time of its operations, TAU is a member of the Association of Vice-Chancellors and Registrars of Private Universities in Nigeria (AVCRPUN), Association of Vice-Chancellors of Nigerian Universities (AVCNU), Association of West Africa Universities (AWAU), Association of African Universities (AAU), Consortium of Universities for Global Health (CUGH), International Council for Open and Distance Education (ICDE) and KU8 consortium among others. The university has also signed various Memoranda of Understanding with Nigerian and international institutions and agencies such as the University of India, India; University of Ilorin Teaching Hospital, Lovely Professional University, India, Agile Towers Hybrid Partners Ltd, ZANDK Energy Inc and Associates, Envirofly Consulting UK Limited, Saylor Academy, among others.

3.7 Programmes

The academic programmes a university offers in Nigeria go a long way in attracting students and promoting excellence. From the initial small steps of three Faculties, the University now has five Faculties and 27 academic programmes:

Faculty of Arts and Humanities:

Languages

Faculty of Basic Medical and Health Sciences:

Anatomy

Environmental Health Science

Medical Laboratory Science

Physiology

Physiotherapy

Public Health

Faculty of Computing and Applied Sciences (FCAS):

Biochemistry

Microbiology

Chemistry

Computer Science,

Software Engineering

Mathematics

Physics with Electronics

Faculty of Engineering:

Civil Engineering

Communications Engineering

Computer Engineering

Electrical and Electronics Engineering

Mechanical Engineering

Faculty of Law:

International Law and Jurisprudence

Private and Commercial Law

Faculty of Management and Social Sciences (FMSS)

Accounting

Business Administration

Economics

Criminology and Security Studies

Mass Communication

Faculty of Nursing:

Anatomy

Environmental Health Science

Medical Laboratory Science

Physiology

Physiotherapy

Public Health

The more robust the academic programmes are, the more successful the university becomes in discharging its mandate.

3.8 Publications

Universities are promoted and respected by the quality and quantity of their publications. Staff and stakeholders are encouraged right from the start to publish in quality journals and other

outlets. Books bearing the name of the university are also published to project the image of the University as a forerunner in the knowledge industry.

3.9 Physical Infrastructure

Developing physical infrastructure is a continuous process. Nevertheless, infrastructural facilities that support learning, networking and recreation are usually attractive to students and their parents. These are abundant in the University. Upgrading and expanding campus infrastructure, including classrooms, laboratories, libraries, student accommodations, and recreational facilities will not only improve the learning environment but also attract students and faculty, thereby enhancing the overall campus experience. Investing in modern facilities will go a long way in driving university development and competitiveness of the university.

3.10 Planning

This is a comprehensive term that covers the totality of the university activities as proper planning prevents poor performance. There should be planning on the following, including those that had been highlighted earlier:

- a) *Academic Excellence*: Maintaining high academic standards is crucial for the success of the university. This includes hiring qualified faculty members, developing rigorous academic programmes, providing quality teaching and learning resources, and regularly assessing and improving the quality of education.
- b) *Student Recruitment and Retention*: Attracting and retaining students is essential for the financial sustainability. There should be planning and implementation frameworks for effective student recruitment and retention which include offering competitive tuition fees and scholarships, providing student support services and creating a conducive learning environment to enhance student satisfaction. For a typical Nigerian university, the best promoters are the students who would assert that their university is the best.
- c) *Financial Management*: Operating a private university requires careful financial planning and management. Planning a sustainable financial model that includes revenue sources and monitoring expenses and budget effectively to ensure transparency in financial transactions is important.
- d) *Facilities*: Investing in modern and well-equipped facilities is essential in order to provide a conducive learning environment and enhance the overall campus experience. Provision should be made for maintaining infrastructure, including classrooms, laboratories, libraries, student accommodation, recreational facilities and technology resources.
- e) *Governance and Administration*: There should be well-defined roles for each organ of the university leadership in order to ensure transparent governance structure and efficient administrative processes which ultimately engender effective decision-making, accountability, and compliance with regulatory requirements. Plans are to be made regarding policies and procedures that promote ethical practices, academic integrity and student welfare.
- f) *Accreditation and Quality Assurance*: As universities in Nigeria must seek accreditation from the National Universities Commission (NUC) to ensure the

quality and credibility of their academic programmes, adequate planning should be made for resource verification and programme accreditation exercises. A great university has a plan for establishing and implementing quality assurance mechanisms, conducting regular internal and external reviews, and engaging in continuous improvement to achieve high academic standards and ranking.

- g) *Strategic Planning*: There is a need to develop comprehensive a strategic plan that aligns with the vision, mission, philosophy, goals and objectives of the university. These plans identify priorities, allocate resources effectively, and guide decision-making to drive institutional development and growth. TAU already has its strategic plan.
- h) *Internationalisation*: By planning to foster international partnerships through promoting student and faculty exchange programmes, and participating in global research networks, the global reputation and competitiveness of the university will be secured right from the start.
- i) *Faculty Development*: Adequate plans have to be made for faculty training, development, and support which will ultimately improve teaching quality, research productivity, and institutional reputation. Opportunities for professional growth, mentorship and collaboration which will drive faculty excellence and contribute to overall university development should be a cornerstone of the university agenda.
- j) *Student Success*: Student-centered projects and programmes that promote academic success, personal development, and well-being should be put in place. Adequate provision should be made for student support services, mentoring programs, career guidance, and hands-on learning opportunities can drive student success.

Thomas Adewumi University has displayed a remarkable capacity for covering and harnessing these areas and by taking on step at time, one seminar or cohort at a time, the university has become a complete whole where excellence is incubated.

4.0 TAU's Incremental Progress to the World Class Status

On the basis of its commitment to revolutionising the Nigerian university landscape through high quality education on the basis of persistence, insistence and consistence, Thomas Adewumi University is ranked:

- ▶ 1st among the 20 private universities licensed in 2021
- ▶ 4th among the Kwara State Universities in Nigeria
- ▶ 6th among the 147th private universities in Nigeria
- ▶ 49th among the 284 universities in Nigeria
- ▶ 163 among the 1426 universities in Sub-Saharan Africa
- ▶ 305 among the 2089 universities in Africa
- ▶ 5804 among the 31000 Universities in the world

Under the able leadership of its dynamic Vice-Chancellor, a judicious admixture of three b's, the University has established four new faculties (Engineering, Arts, Law, and Nursing Science), inaugurated the Centre of Digital Systems for Technological Advancement, increased research

publications and innovations by faculty members, hosted the inaugural distinguished Public Lecture on "Decolonizing African Education", organised TEDxTAU on "Unleashing Renaissance" which showcased TAU's thought leadership, attained membership of national and international consortia, embarked on educational tours to local schools, hosted IndabaX Nigeria 2023 to demonstrate commitment to technological advancement, established the University Endowment Fund to ensure a steady stream of revenue for academic programs, research, and capital development. It takes a servant leader to serve the system to this height (Adedimeji, 2024).

With this pace, the University is on the course emerging as a world class institution, which Okebulola (2010) describes as "an institution with teaching, learning and research delivery system meeting global standards." The characteristics of a world-class university with which a university can benchmark itself according to scholars like Alden and Lin (2004), Okebukola (2008), Salmi (2009) are that such a university:

- has an international reputation for its research;
- has an international reputation for its teaching;
- has a number of research stars and world leaders in their fields;
- is recognized not only by world-class universities but also outside the world of higher education;
- has a number of world-class departments (that is, not necessarily all);
- identifies and builds on its research strengths and has a distinctive reputation and focus (that is, its "lead" subjects);
- generates innovative ideas and produces basic and applied research in abundance;
- produces ground-breaking research output recognised by peers and prizes (for example, Nobel Prize winners);
- attracts the most able students and produces the best graduates;
- runs an efficient governance and management system;
- can attract and retain the best staff;
- can recruit staff and students from an international market;
- attracts a high proportion of postgraduate students, both taught and research;
- attracts a high proportion of students from overseas;
- operates within a global market and is international in many activities (for example, research links, students and staff exchanges, and throughput of visitors of international standing);
- has a very good financial base;
- receives large endowment capital and income;
- has diversified sources of income (for example, government, private companies sector, research income and overseas student fees);
- provides a high quality supportive research and educational environment for both its staff and its students (for example, high-quality buildings and facilities/high-quality campus);
- has a first-class management team with strategic vision and implementation plans;
- produces graduates who end up in positions of influence and/power (that is, movers and shakers such as prime ministers and presidents);
- often has a long history of superior achievements;
- makes a big contribution to society and our times;

- continually benchmarks with top universities and departments worldwide; and
- has the confidence to set its own agenda.

It is on the basis of the foregoing that Oloyede (2010) conceives WORLD CLASS as an acronym that comprises World view, Opportunity, Research, Learning, Drive, Cohesiveness, Lead Scholars, Aspiration, Scholasticism and Strategic Planning all of which have coalesced to give the university its distinctive character.

5.0 Japanese Secrets for Excellence

As education is universal in scope and not limited by geography, I want to encourage the staff and students to embrace secrets from the Japanese, a people that are known for their technology, art, traditions and crafts. They have some eye-opening concepts and principles that can change one's life and make one attain giant strides if one simply sticks to them in one's daily activities. An excellent university is propelled by excellent staff and students. Ten of these concepts which may be regarded as anniversary gift are *Ikigai*, *Shikita ga nai*, *Wabi-sabi*, *Gaman*, *Oubaitori*, *Kaizen*, *Shirin-Yoku*, *Hara Hachi Bu*, *Shoshin* and *Takeibo* some of which are contained in Adedimeji (2023):

- Ikigai***: This states that you must discover your purpose in life. It means you should determine the reason you wake up each morning. Therefore, choose something that aligns with your strengths, passions, and the needs of the world. It is by discovering your purpose that your life has meaning. Everyone has a purpose but not everyone knows it. Ask yourself: what is your purpose in this University and how do you achieve it? Know your purpose.
- Shikita ga nai***: This means you should let go what you cannot change. You don't have to bother yourselves about things that are beyond you. Recognise the fact that there are some things that are just out of our control as individuals and there is nothing wrong with that. It is called life. Let go what is beyond you and focus on what you can do or change.
- Wabi-sabi***: This tells you to find peace in (im)perfection. It is a fact that nothing in life is perfect, including yourself and any other person in your life. Instead of striving for flawlessness and absolute perfection in people and situations, find joy in the imperfections that make life what it is. The world is full of imperfect people and scenarios as perfection is the exclusive preserve of the Almighty Allah. What is important is that you must *always do your best*.
- Gaman***: This suggests that you should preserve your dignity during tough times. You should be disciplined. Show emotional maturity and self-control, even when faced with challenges. Remember to be patient, resilient and understanding. Always try to be of good character and be a good ambassador of your parents and your institution.
- Oubaitori***: This means that you should not compare yourself to others; we all grow and bloom at our own pace. Everyone has a different timeline and unique path. Comparison breeds anxiety and envy. Know that no one has it all. It is important to focus on your own progress, rather than trying to measure yourself against others in an unhealthy fashion.

You cannot be running a race and be looking at those behind or beside you without losing your focus. Run your race and be contented with your face, your space and your place. Albert Einstein was credited to have said, “Everyone is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid.” So, there is no need comparing fish with a monkey and you don’t have to be someone else to make your impacts!

- f) ***Kaizen***: This indicates that you should always seek to improve in all areas of your life. Even small changes can add up and make a big impact over a period of time. You can always be a better version of yourself if you take measured steps on a daily basis and you are consistent in what you do.
- g) ***Shinrin-Yoku***: This means forest bathing or immersion in a forest environment as a method of ecotherapy. This offers many advantages such as lowered stress, enhanced mood and strengthened immune system. It is about spending time in the parks or other green areas of the city or community as a way of developing a sense of peace and kinship with nature.
- h) ***Hara Hachi Bu***: This is a Confucian theory that advises eating 80% full. This is to avoid overeating as well as the hazards associated with it filled stomach. No one has to unbutton one’s shirt after lunch and the worst tank to fill up is one’s stomach. It is unhealthy.
- i) ***Shoshin***: This entails that you approach tasks with a beginner’s mindset. Don’t worry about being perfect or having all the answers. Just be open to learning and trying new things. Be open to learn on the job. When you have a rejection, learn from the reviewers’ comments and try again. TAU’s philosophy this year, which is New Beginnings, aligns with this philosophy. Every new day is an opportunity to make fresh plans and take decisive steps and make new beginnings.
- j) ***Takeibo***: This means that you should make a budget and stick to it. When you have your finances in order, you will feel less stressed and more motivated to tackle your other goals. Salary is never enough but you can plan your life and live within your means. I learn that there are five levels of finance and these are financial crisis, financial instability, financial stability, financial independence and financial freedom. Without planning, someone who should be financially stable would find himself in financial instability or even crisis.

6.0 Conclusion

The galaxy is magnificent because it combines stars of several kinds. A rainbow is marvelous because it is composed of many colours: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet. An ocean is stupendous because it embraces the grace and wisdom of many rivers, lakes and rivulets. A university is remarkable because of its diversity and commitment to teaching, learning, research, innovation and service for the advancement of humanity.

Dear students, just like this university, the beauty of small steps and giant strides lies in its accessibility. Anyone can take small steps towards their goals, regardless of their background or circumstances. It is not about being a genius or a superhero; it is about being consistent and persistent. As TAU marks the third anniversary, you can also start by identifying your goals and breaking them down into smaller, manageable tasks. Then, take one small step towards each goal every day. It might be as simple as writing a single sentence, making a phone call, or taking a short walk. Before you know it, those small steps will add up, and you'll be making giant strides towards your dreams. The key is to be patient, stay focused, and celebrate your small wins along the way.

In conclusion, I have elected to speak on small steps, giant strides because it is more than just a phrase, it is a powerful mindset that we all need that can everyone achieve greatness - like this university. So, at the individual level, this occasion provides an opportunity for us to begin to take first small steps today, and watch over time how they lead to giant strides. Some examples of small steps leading to giant strides include: a small daily habit of reading leads to a giant stride in knowledge and personal growth; a small investment in a savings account leads to a giant stride in financial security; and small acts of kindness lead to giant strides in building a stronger community. Remember, every small step counts, and they can all lead to giant strides in achieving your dreams and making a meaningful impact.

I once again congratulate the Vice-Chancellor and the entire Thomas Adewumi University on this auspicious occasion of the third anniversary and I wish the university many years of increasing impacts and giant strides! I want to end with reference to the *The World is Flat*, an important book by another Thomas - Thomas I. Friedman. The author quotes an African proverb, translated into Mandarin, which he saw posted on the wall of a company named ASIMCO Technology in Beijing, China (Friedman, 2005 p 114) and it goes thus:

Every morning in Africa, a gazelle wakes up

It knows it must run faster than the fastest lion or it will be killed

Every morning a lion wakes up

It knows it must outrun the slowest gazelle or it will starve to death

It doesn't matter whether you are a lion or a gazelle

When the sun comes up, you better start running

Thank you.

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