

The Performance and Challenges of Private Universities in Ghana and Nigeria

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Abstract

The role of private universities in Ghana and Nigeria in the last two decades cannot be overemphasised. The aim of this study was to determine the performance of private universities in Ghana and Nigeria, what has aided their development so far and what are their challenges. The study made use of questionnaire for primary data collection method. Forty Nigerians and Ghanaians studying at the postgraduate level in Babcock University (BU), Nigeria, were sampled. Data obtained were analyzed by descriptive statistics, hierarchical factor analysis and deductive inferences. The study revealed that the private universities were outstanding for their ability to provide uninterrupted academic calendar through the years; for production of the best quality graduates, as well as graduating highly ethical and well disciplined students. The study further showed that the major problem facing private universities in the two countries is largely financial - high cost of training and development of faculty and staff; lack of well-resourced libraries; inability to retain top quality faculty and staff; inadequate teaching and learning equipment and infrastructure. This study will be of immense benefit to higher education planners and managers.

Key words: performance, private university, development, finance, challenges, infrastructure.

1. Introduction

The emergence of private higher educational institutions in Africa dates back to the colonial days. The institutions were established basically by Christian missionaries for religious and educational reasons among others. In the past two decades, there has been an improved endeavour to augment higher educational accessibility in essentially every country on the globe. Educational transformations over the years and the increasing demand for quality employable graduates in all sectors of the economy have greatly influenced the emergence and direction of private universities and education as a whole (Sawyer, 2004; Effah, 2003). One important segment of higher educational institutions is private universities which is the focus of this paper. It has been observed that the emergence of private universities in recent years has been phenomenal and widely accepted. As such, it is pertinent to find out the reasons why these institutions are established and to assess whether or not those reasons are being realised. This study probes further into some of the challenges private universities face, with special reference to Ghana and Nigeria, and prescribe some measures to mitigate them.

1.1 Background of the Study

In the view of James (1991), the definition of *private universities* is in no way straightforward in situations where lots of 'private' educational institutions are heavily funded and regulated by the nation. Actually, we do have a range of public and private financing and control. Kitaev (1999) agrees and even takes the issue farther. He argues that a general definition of private university is not a simple grouping to determine owing to its various types and countries' specifics. In a larger context, private university refers to any type of university which is outside the public university education system (non-public, non-government, quasi-public, etc).

In any case, the definition of a private university ought to be considered in the light of funding, control and mission, as Reisz (2003) cites Levy (1979, 1986). He identifies three variables as indicated in Table 1 as core dimensions associated with the definition of a private university (p. 8):

Table 1: Dimension in Defining Private Universities

<i>Source of Funding</i>	<i>Control</i>	<i>Mission</i>
- Ratio of private-public income (most important) - Profit vs. non-profit - Tuition vs. subsidies - Indirect subsidies vs. government subsidies	- Admissions - Personnel - Curriculum - Resource allocation, etc.	- Functions for public or private sector - Simply, noticeably different missions

Source: Reisz (2003)

That is, the skewness of the three variables shall determine whether or not a particular university could be considered a private one or otherwise. One important variable that is missing from Table 1 is ownership which is addressed by Varghese (2004). He observes that classification of such institutions depends on the level or degree of ownership relationship that exists. He further identifies the following core patterns as the distinguishing ownership patterns characteristic of private universities evident in Africa. The patterns explored are private universities:

- a. operating in collaboration with foreign institutions
- b. established through government or public universities with foreign collaboration
- c. owned by religious organizations, and
- d. operated as private firms within the country and are owned by nationals.

This last variable of ownership, in the opinion of this paper, ought to be the most important factor in deciding whether the nature or type of a university is public or private. It is expected that governments would establish enough higher institutions to meet the ever increasing demand for higher education, but this has not been the case. Even governments have not been able to provide adequate and required funds to finance existing institutions talk less of opening new ones as there should. There are myriad other problems with public universities and as a result, there has been a rise in the number of private higher institutions.

Commenting on this ascendancy, Lugg, et al. (2007) conclude that there has been a steady rise in the number of nationally-recognised private universities since 1999. Students in private universities ten years down the line made up 10% of all university students in Ghana. At the time, it was observed that “Over 84,078 undergraduates are now enrolled in secular degree-granting programs in seventeen public and private universities” (<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2860.htm>). The picture is made clearer when these statistics are compared with what Sawyer (2004) says. He states that the total enrolment in universities in the only three public universities in Ghana then was just under 10,000 with no private universities. However, by the year 2000/2001, the numbers had risen to 40,673 in the public, and about 2,500 in the private universities (<http://www.rci.rutgers.edu/~callasa/Challenges Facing African Universities.pdf>).

In Nigeria, accredited private universities grew from 3 in 1999 to 34 by August 2009 (www.nuc.edu.ng Bulletin Vol. 4 No. 35 24th August, 2009), a ten-year growth of over 1133%. Ghana’s accredited private universities moved from 3 in 1999 to 52 by December 2009 (www.nab.gov.gh). The percentage increase for the decade was 1733%. These two scenarios alone are enough to portray the alarming rate at which private universities are springing up. The same could be said about their enrolment over the years. Although, private university education is rather new, it has contributed to the ever-increasing amount of enrolment in higher education in these countries.

1.2 Reasons for Establishing Private Universities

Ahemba (2006) attributes the emergence of private universities to the failure of Africa’s once glorious public universities. He tersely describes the state of public higher institutions thus:

From Nigeria and Cote d'Ivoire to Kenya and Uganda, crumbling facilities and campuses, overcrowded lecture halls and hostels and depleted libraries and laboratories bear sad witness to chronic shortages of funding and investment. And the prospect of better salaries abroad is luring away talented teaching staff and dragging down the academic standards of the continent's once renowned alma maters.

But it must be emphasised that these problems are not limited to only the above mentioned countries; it appears to be an African problem generally. An outline of reasons gleaned from answers some African Presidents gave on why they encourage the establishment of private higher institutions testifies to this truth. As summarized by Owusu-Dankwa (2009), the reasons, according to them, are to help:

- i. Address the problem of who pays for higher education in the new millennium.
- ii. African governments in offering environments that are conducive for teaching and learning needs in the higher education endeavour.
- iii. Bridge the gap between the small number of educated Africans and the millions who need university education.
- iv. Governments to act in response to the pressure on entrance into the university by providing diversity, innovation and autonomy in the higher education sector.
- v. Offer quality education to enable individuals achieves their potentials through the introduction of current teaching systems and the effective use of information technology.
- vi. Provide new and specialised educational programmes aimed at self-employment.
- vii. Respond to the universal call for privatisation, free market economy and individual ownership of establishments.

Varghese (2004, p. 11) also identified some key reasons that have contributed to the increasing participation of private universities in higher education as follows:

- a. The inability of the public sector to satisfy the growing social demand for access into higher education.
- b. The shifting political view of extensive public subvention to social sectors to lessen investment possibilities in the 'productive sectors' and thus the growth potentials of the economy in general.
- c. Public universities' inability to respond to the demand for changes in courses and subjects of study that have occurred in many countries.
- d. In some countries, the public sector is being criticized for inefficiency and as such the private sector is increasingly being promoted for its efficiency in operation.
- e. In many centrally planned economies, the transition from state to market forces was also associated with the expansion of the private sector in higher education which formed an integral part of the reform measures. In fact, the privatization of higher education was, at times, part of the conditionality for receiving external funding support during the period of transition.

It is generally believed that one of the principal roles of private universities is that of being a partner with the government in the financing of education. Altbach (1999) attributes the appearance of private universities to "the logic of today's market economies and an ideology of privatization" (pp. 1, 2).

Another source puts it that different problems faced by public universities, such as financial crises, overcrowding of students and ineffective leadership have also contributed to the establishment of private universities on the continent (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/3558445.stm>). Saint (1992) identifies that the increasing rates of enrolments in public universities are often faster than the capacity to plan for and accommodate the growth which results in over-crowding of students, shortage of teaching/learning materials and laboratories, worsening conditions of physical facilities, tension on administrative systems, and reduced staff performance. Blair and Jordan (1994) add the lack of retention of academic staff, increase in enrolments as well as the creation of more institutions as major contributing factors.

In sum, the objectives of private universities could be summarized as (1) spiritual, (2) educational, and (3) profit maximization (Owusu-Dankwa, 2009).

1.3 Merits, demerits and relevance

A study on the performance of private universities would not be complete without looking at some of the advantages relative to public universities. Kitaev (1999) outlines the following in this respect as follows:

- a. *Demand for Education*: Private universities, in serving the needs of students as consumers of education, may be more convenient for households in terms of provision (location, school hours, and use of pedagogical methods).
- b. *Management and Administration*: Private universities usually use less bureaucracy and administrative regulations as well as more flexible arrangements for teaching and learning conditions.
- c. *Teachers*: Private universities typically use more flexible procedures for teacher management and tend to recruit part-time teachers from public schools in order to save on teacher wages and benefits.
- d. *Achievements and Assessments*: Performance of private universities should correspond to parents' expectations.
- e. *Funding and Finance*: Private universities have their own funding sources, which are usually independent from government funding in cash and in kind.
- f. *Cost-effectiveness*: Private universities may be more cost-effective than similar public schools due to various economies and savings in teacher remuneration and teaching/learning conditions.

On the contrary, critiques of private involvement in university education have the following arguments against:

- a. *Demand for Education*: Private universities can be profit-oriented and for that matter the true welfare of their "customers" might be relegated to the background.
- b. *Management and Administration*: Although there are regulatory bodies, the quality of instruction and conformity with formal curriculum in private universities may not be guaranteed. Standard reporting and accountability as well as appropriate conditions are not guaranteed.
- c. *Teachers*: These may not be civil servants, may be unqualified or under-qualified or untrained, and may be paid less than in public schools.
- d. *Achievements and Assessments*: Some private universities may not be formally licensed, accredited or recognized by authorities.
- e. *Funding and Finance*: These depend on parents and community finance which may create inequity and inequality in access and provision of education subject to income of households and their contributions of tuition/user fees and in kind.
- f. *Cost-effectiveness*: This may not be consistent and durable or may become counter-productive when same variables such as teacher remuneration and teaching/learning conditions change (Kitaev, 1999).

2. Methodology

This paper considers the performance of private universities with special reference to Ghana and Nigeria. Review of relevant published literature on private universities provided partial data for the study. It was also very pertinent to administer a questionnaire to gather current perceptions and firsthand data in order to have a true assessment.

The questionnaire, informed by the literature reviewed, was built around two important areas to help achieve the set objectives of the study. The areas were (1) 10 items that sought to find out the extent to which private universities have achieved or are achieving certain objectives in the study areas, and (2) 10 items to determine the seriousness of certain challenges that hamper private universities' achievement of their objectives in the areas of study.

Validity and reliability require that the items on a questionnaire are understood by respondents in the way intended by the researcher on one hand, and the answers given by the respondents are also understood by the researcher in the way intended by the respondents, on another hand (Saunders et al., 2007). Validity was achieved by building the questions around the literature reviewed with a prior discussion with colleagues to assess how essentially the component questions meet the purpose of the research. Reliability was assessed and achieved through test re-test and alternative form approaches. In both instances of validity and reliability, correlation analysis was employed (Saunders et al., 2007).

The study population comprised postgraduate students on different programmes in Babcock University during the summer of 2011. In all, 40 people answered the questionnaire. To strike a balance, twenty Nigerians and 20 Ghanaians were randomly sampled. Descriptive statistical tools (frequencies and percentages) and hierarchical factor analysis were used to analyse the data collected. Inferences were also made from the literature reviewed to complement the contributions of published materials on private universities. The results are presented in the tables that follow with their respective discussion.

3. Findings and Discussion of the Findings

In this section, the entire results from the questionnaire are presented in only two pivot tables for simplicity and easier comparison. Table 2 shows the results on the achievements of private universities per respondents' views.

3.1 Achievements of Private Universities

Table 2: Achievements of Private Universities

<i>a</i> Statements	<i>b</i>		<i>c</i>		<i>d</i>		<i>e</i>		<i>f</i>	
	Below average		Average		Above average		Excellent		d + e	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Help to provide uninterrupted educational calendar throughout the year	0	0.0	1	2.5	8	20.0	31	77.5	39	97.5
Help to provide improved management for efficiency in tertiary education	2	5.0	5	12.5	26	65.0	7	17.5	33	82.5
Contributions to research	0	0.0	9	22.5	20	50.0	11	27.5	31	77.5
Help to provide better quality graduates	0	0.0	10	25.0	12	30.0	18	45.0	30	75.0
Production of more ethical and disciplined graduates	1	2.5	9	22.5	16	40.0	14	35.0	30	75.0
Increase in access for qualified people into universities	1	2.5	9	22.5	19	47.5	11	27.5	30	75.0
Provision of employment	4	10.0	9	22.5	17	42.5	10	25.0	27	67.5
Help reduce brain drain and help the continent to retain its educated citizens to propel its development	5	12.5	10	25.0	13	32.5	12	30.0	25	62.5
Help to make tertiary education more cost-effective in the long run*	4	10.0	11	27.5	20	50.0	4	10.0	24	60.0
Help governments to reduce expenditure on higher education and make enough savings to be channelled to other sectors of the economy	7	17.5	16	40.0	13	32.5	4	10.0	17	42.5

Source: Researcher's data, 2011 (* 1 missing)

Respondents were asked to rank the 10 statements in Table 2 from *Poor* to *Excellent*. As could be seen from the table, none of them was adjudged poor. The analysis is done in two ways; first, the statements in Table 2 are considered by combining columns d (Above average) and f (Excellent). In this way, the perceptions of the majority of the respondents could be ascertained. The order of merit of the variables per respondents' views appears as in the table. It could be seen from the table that all the achievements studied, with the exception of the last, were acknowledged by the respondents as being realized *above average* and *excellent*. The most outstanding ones are provision of uninterrupted educational calendar throughout the year (97.5%) and provision of improved management for efficiency in tertiary education (82.5%). The very high percentages (from 97.5% to 60%) indicate that the contributions of private universities in Nigeria and Ghana are conspicuous.

From the second perspective of analysis, the areas that private universities are doing well according to the respondents in their order of excellence only are provision of uninterrupted educational calendar throughout the year (77.5%), provision of better quality graduates (45%), provision of more ethical graduates (35%), reducing brain drain and helping the continent to retain its educated citizens to propel its development (30%), and contributions to research (27.5%).

The others are increase in access for qualified people into universities (27.5%), provision of employment (25%), provision of improved management for efficiency in tertiary education (17.5%), making tertiary education more cost-effective in the long run (10%), and helping governments to reduce expenditure on higher education and make enough savings to be channelled to other sectors of the economy (10%).

The overwhelming percentage reckoned provision of uninterrupted educational calendar throughout the year as the greatest achievement of private universities. The same variable emerged the best in the earlier analysis. This can be attributed to the following: (1) the small size of the number of workers in private universities likely makes it easier in managing the workforce, thereby preventing them from embarking on strikes, (2) the relatively small size of the universities usually would promote easier identification of problems that could distort the academic calendar, (3) instigators could easily be spotted to avert certain troubles, (4) the profit motive of some private universities would possibly let the proprietors do all in their power to have a continuous academic calendar, and (5) the quest to take advantage of the weaknesses of public counterparts or prove that private universities are better than public ones. It is worthy to point out that the highest ranked private universities' provision of uninterrupted calendar is now adulterated since a few universities are not living up to expectation nowadays.

The next two achievements respondents indicated are *provision of better quality graduates* (45%) and *provision of more ethical graduates* (35%). The two variables appear to be in order by following expressly because there would be no use of a better quality graduate if he is not more ethical. It is also important to note that respondents pointed out these two variables as some of the most excellent achievements of private universities.

3.2 Challenges Facing Private Universities

Let us now consider some challenges that hinder the achievements of private university goals.

Table 3: Challenges of Private Universities

Variables	b		c		d		e	
	Not serious		Serious		Very serious		c + d	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
High cost of faculty and staff development and training*	3	7.5	21	52.5	15	37.5	36	90.0
Inadequate infrastructure (lecture halls, residence halls, offices, etc.)	7	17.5	23	57.5	10	25.5	33	83.0
Lack of adequate finances needed for growth	7	17.5	20	50.0	13	32.5	33	82.5
Lack of well-resourced libraries	8	20.0	19	47.5	13	32.5	32	80.0
Lack of adequate teaching and learning equipment (projectors, computers, textbooks, etc.)	10	25.0	18	45.0	12	30.0	30	75.0
Inability to retain top quality faculty and staff	11	27.5	13	32.5	16	40.0	29	72.5
Problems with accrediting bodies	11	27.5	17	42.5	12	30.0	29	72.5
Lack of adequate human resource (understaffing)	12	30.0	21	52.5	7	17.5	28	70.5
Low students intake	15	37.5	19	47.5	6	15.0	25	62.5
Low remuneration and welfare packages for employees*	18	45.0	18	45.0	3	7.5	21	52.5

Source: Researcher's data, 2011 (* 1 missing)

In Table 3, columns *c* (Serious) and *d* (Very serious) are combined in *e*. This is because when a problem is serious, it is very grave or bad enough to require thought and attention. Consequently, the challenges facing private universities studied are presented in their order of seriousness in Table 3. These include high cost on faculty and staff development and training (90%); inadequate infrastructure (lecture halls, residence halls, offices, etc.) (83%); lack of adequate finances needed for growth (82.5%), lack of well-resourced libraries (80%); lack of adequate teaching and learning equipment (projectors, computers, textbooks, etc.) (75%); inability to retain top quality faculty and staff (72.5%); problems with accrediting bodies (72.5%); lack of adequate human resource (understaffing) (70.5%); low students intake (62.5%); and low remuneration and welfare packages for employees (52.5%). The results show that all the challenges received very high percentages, with the lowest ranked at above 50%. This emphasizes the level of seriousness of each of the problems.

Again, it could also be observed that all the challenges have to do with funds; it appears each of them could be solved or at least minimized if private universities were to have adequate financing sources. Another way to analyze the results is by considering only the very serious variables. This approach would enable private universities in Ghana and Nigeria to know which of the challenges need close and prompt attention. In this respect, the variables appear from the most very serious to the least very serious in the following order: inability to retain top quality faculty and staff (40%), high cost of faculty and staff development and training (37.5%), lack of adequate finances needed for growth (32.5%), lack of well-resourced libraries (32.5%), lack of adequate teaching and learning equipment (projectors, computers, textbooks, etc.) (30%), and problems with accrediting bodies (30%). The others are inadequate infrastructure (lecture halls, residence halls, offices, etc.) (25.5%), lack of adequate human resource (understaffing) (17.5%), low students intake (15%), and low remuneration and welfare packages for employees (7.5%).

The study has revealed that low remuneration and welfare packages for employees are the least serious problems facing private universities. It, therefore, follows that this is not a major factor in private universities' inability to retain top quality faculty and staff and their inability to meet high cost of faculty and staff development and training, the two very serious challenges facing them. Nonetheless, one would have expected the reverse to be the case. This area is recommended for future research.

3.3 Summary

The phenomenon of private universities in Ghana and Nigeria has become widely and favourably accepted. There is today a private university in nearly every major city in the two countries. There was, therefore, the need to look at the reasons why such private universities are established and assess their ability to live up to those reasons. In so doing, there was also the need to consider some of the challenges that have prevented the universities from achieving fully their noble objectives. The study used literature from peer-reviewed publications and data collected by administering a questionnaire. The latter were analysed in two different ways either by combining scales or doing them in isolation. The eventual results from the two approaches combined revealed that the main achievements of private universities in the countries of study, in their order of excellence as (1) Provision of uninterrupted educational calendar throughout the year, (2) Production of better quality graduates, (3) Production of more ethical and disciplined graduates, (4) Contributions to research, (5) Provision of improved management for efficiency in tertiary education, (6) Increase in access for qualified people into universities, (7) Help reduce brain drain and help the continent to retain its educated citizens to propel its development, (8) Provision of employment, (9) Helping to make tertiary education more cost-effective in the long run, and (10) Helping governments to reduce expenditure on higher education and make enough savings to be channelled to other sectors of the economy.

The study also revealed the following challenges faced by private universities in the order of seriousness from the two approaches of analysis as (1) High cost of faculty and staff development and training, (2) Lack of adequate finances needed for growth, (3) Lack of well-resourced libraries, (4) Inability to retain top quality faculty and staff, (5) Lack of adequate teaching and learning equipment (projectors, computers, textbooks, etc.), (6) Inadequate infrastructure (lecture halls, residence halls, offices, etc.), (7) Problems with accrediting bodies, (8) Lack of adequate human resource (understaffing), (9) Low students intake, and (10) Low remuneration and welfare packages for employees.

4. Conclusion

This study has assessed the performance of private universities in Ghana and Nigeria. The study also uncovered some of the major challenges that hamper these universities to realize their objectives as they would want it. It was observed that private universities are creditable in the provision of uninterrupted educational calendar throughout the year, of better quality graduates, and of more ethical and disciplined graduates, among others, as compared to their public counterparts. It was also observed that the problems public universities face are equally faced by private universities and the problems generally have to do with lack of adequate financing, quality and ethics of graduates, and accreditation problems. These challenges are faced by both types of universities but better and efficient management of private universities, the study revealed, help them live up to the tests better than their public counterparts. Finally, however, it is strongly believed that the problems identified in relation to private universities in Ghana and Nigeria is within solution. The private universities' leaderships should be able to deal with the problems on practicable and sustainable bases by engaging in intentional ways.

5. Recommendations

The following recommendations are made to address the findings of the study.

- a. The private universities' should intensify their drive for best practices and ensure they keep up the uninterrupted academic calendar fame.
- b. The universities could approach the financing question through multiple solutions such as issuance of bonds (Weygandt et al, 2005); acquisition of essential infrastructures through the build-operate-transfer (BOT) contractual arrangements for estates developments, ICT services, library resources, etc. There is a strong need for the universities to explore a variety of internally generated funds besides school fees in areas like quasi businesses, consultancy and other forms of productive partnerships with staff and other third parties.
- c. Another area of recommendation is for the institutions to seek less expensive forms of loans with long term dimension to enable them engage in meaningful development of the infrastructures needed in the universities.
- d. The private universities' managements should seek to engage their alumni maximally as a strong partnership arm for funds-raising. Examples of the older and very successful institutions like Yale and Harvard should be emulated by the African private universities in their stride to set up sustainable funding sources.
- e. Private universities' academic planning offices should ensure that existing and new programmes incorporate economic viability to ensure that the programmes run beyond the level of subsistence. Each programme should be set up with financial viability in mind.
- f. Finally, the private universities' management should engage in shared costs through insurance schemes in things like student's medical expenses, scholarships and other foreseeable business and financial risks.

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