

Time and Change: Development of Private Universities in Nigeria

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Abstract

The increasing complexity of the Nigerian society as a result of social changes has affected the educational institution, most especially, the tertiary level of education. The Federal Government has introduced some novel practices to contend these pressures one of which is the privatization of higher education for standards and quality; increased access and better funding to meet the needs of globalization and the deregulation of hitherto publicly managed organizations. This article explores the relationship between public and private university education in Nigeria. The paper is divided into three sections. The first section analyses the historical development of the private university education in Nigeria. The second section analyses the justification for the establishment of private university institutions. The third section examines the challenges facing private university education in Nigeria and the fourth section discusses the various recommendations for quality assurance in the private university education.

Keywords: Privatization of higher Education, Public University, Private University education.

Introduction

Universities were established after independence as the only means of achieving rapid and desired pattern of economic growth in the face of inadequate entrepreneurial skills, shortage of capital and fear of the foreign control of the national economy. University, hence, is a place where skilled manpower of various capacities is being trained and also an avenue to develop human capital needed to sustain the economy. For the past four years, since the beginning of the twenty-first century, the Nigerian university system has been going through radical transformation and reforms. These reforms, according to Imoke (2005), and (NUC 2005) are geared towards expanding access, promoting and ensuring quality and increasing institutional efficiency and thereby be responsive and relevant towards the production of qualitative, globally competitive entrepreneurial and self reliant graduates. This, among others could be responsible for the Federal Government sudden change of attitude towards granting of license to private universities in Nigeria as the National Universities Commission (NUC) represents the voice of government.

The objective of this work addresses the performance of the public tertiary educational institutions in Nigeria and the call for their Privatization. I will now consider trend in the development of tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The issue of performance in Nigerian Universities has been a serious concern of the government and the public. This is so because the quality of graduates being turned out is said to be discriminated against in the international labour market and also by foreign Universities for those seeking higher degrees.

Precisely, the National Policy on Education (2004) highlighted the aims of university education:

1. To contribute to national development through high-level relevant manpower training;
2. To develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of the individual and the society;
3. To develop the intellectual capability of individuals to understand and appreciate their local and external environments;
4. To acquire both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to be self-reliant and useful members of the society;
5. To promote and encourage scholarship and community service;
6. To forge and cement national unity; *and*
7. To promote national and international understanding and interactions.

The belief in the efficacy of education as a powerful instrument of development has led many nations to commit much of their wealth to the establishment of educational institutions at various levels. According to Ajayi and Ekundayo (2007), the funds allocated to higher education should not be considered as mere expense, but as a long-term investment. However, despite the enormous human and material resources at the disposal of the Nigeria Government, the Federal Government's investment in education is abysmally very low when and if compared with UNESCO's mandate to all governments of developing nations to invest as much as 26% of their annual budgetary allocation to education sub-sector.

Table 1: Federal Government Budgetary Allocation from 1994 -2003

Federal Government Budgetary Allocation to Education Year	Total Budget	Nigerian Government Allocation to Education	Allocation to Education as % of Total Budget
1994	N110.5 billion	8.66 billion	7.83
1995	N98.2 billion	12.73 billion	12.96
1996	N 124.2 billion	15.30 billion	12.32
1997	N 186 billion	21.8 billion	11.59
1998	N 260 billion	27.7 billion	10.27
1999	N 249 billion	27.7 billion	11.12
2000	N 277.5 billion	50.67 billion	8.36
2001	N 984.2 billion	62.6 billion	6.75
2002	N 844 billion	17.7 billion	6.8
2003	N 765.1 billion	13.9 billion	1.83

The table above shows the Federal Government's allocation to education from 1994 to 2003. The total budget has been on the increase from 1994 (N110.5 billion) to 2003 (N765.1 billion). However, the Nigerian government allocation to education by percentage of total budget revealed that the highest fund allocated to education was in 1994 (12.96) while 2003 had the lowest percentage of fund allocated.

Also, access to higher education and the lack of capacity of the system to absorb the number of students seeking admission to higher education institutions posed a serious problem. Attempts were made to provide equitable access to the limited places by prescribing admission quotas to Federal institutions. The formula for access to higher education made provision for admission based on academic merit, residential zones and discretion. Competition for access to limited places has led to practices such as cheating in examinations, bribery for admission and manipulation of examination scores. In most developed countries of the world where universal education has been achieved, the right of access to primary, secondary and higher education is guaranteed.

Find below the number of applicants, number of admitted candidates and the left over since 1978 – 2008.

For the past ten years, the Nigerian university educational system has been going through series of reforms, to expand access, quality and encouragement of both internal and external efficiency of the system.

Table 2: Total Applications and Admissions 1978-2008

Academic Year	Total Application	Total Admitted	Total % Admitted	% not Admitted
1978/79	114, 801	14, 417	12.6	87.4
1979/80	144, 939	28, 213	19.3	80.7
1980/81	180, 673	26, 808	14.8	85.2
1981/82	205,112	29,800	14.5	85.5
1982/83	191,583	27,373	14.3	85.7
1984/85	201,140	27, 482	13.7	86.3
1985/86	212,114	30,996	14.6	85.4
1986/87	193,774	39,915	20.6	79.4
1987/88	210,525	36,456	17.3	82.7
1988/89	190,353	41,700	21.9	78.1
1989/90	255,683	38,431	15.0	85.0
1990/91	287,572	48,504	16.9	83.1
1991/92	398,270	61,479	15.4	84.6
1992/93	357,950	57,685	16.1	83.9
1993/94	420,681	64,783	16.0	84.0
1995/96	512,797	37,498	7.3	92.7
1996/97	475,923	79,904	16.8	83.2
1997/98	419,807	72,791	17.3	82.7
1998/99	340,117	78,550	23.1	76.9
1999/2000	417,773	78,550	18.8	81.2
2000/01	416,381	45,766	11.0	89.0
2001/02	749,417	90,769	12.1	87.9
2002/03	994,381	51,845	5.2	94.8
2003/04	1,046,103	104,991	10.0	90.0
2004/05	841,878	112,492	14.6	85.4
2005/06	916,371	76,984	8.4	91.6
2006/07	803,472	88,524	11.0	89.0
2007/08	911,653	107,320	11.8	88.2

Source: JAMB Application and Admission Statistics (1978-2008)

As shown in Table 2, total applications since the inception of JAMB in 1987 has continued to rise rapidly from 144, 801 to 911, 653 in 2007/2008 academic session. The year 2003/2004 witnessed the highest number of applicants (1, 046, 103) with only ten percent gaining admission into the University. On the average, eighty percent of applicants could not gain admission into the University each academic year during the period studied.

Private universities are a recent development in Nigeria as compared to the federal and state universities. In the 90s there was the wind of change of deregulation policy aimed at enhancing active involvement of all stakeholders in the ownership, finance, administration and control of education and thereby making the system more efficient in responding to the learning needs of the society and that of the individuals in a dwindling economy in Africa.

Varghese (2004) claimed that Kenya blazed the trail in the establishment of private higher education institutions in Africa followed by Benin, Senegal, Tanzania, Uganda, Ghana, Mozambique, Cameroon among others Levy, (2003) in his submission however claims that the Francophone African countries lagged behind their Anglophone counterparts in terms of a move towards the establishment of private higher education institutions in Africa. Between 1991 and 1999, about 65 private universities had been established in Sub-Saharan Africa (World Bank 2002).

However, Nigeria's establishment of private higher education has evolved during two historic phases: the first was during the second republic under President Shehu Shagari administration 1979 – 1983 and the second was during the fourth republic under President Olusegun Obasanjo. Some private individual made bold move to establish private universities.

Hence, according to Okwori & Okwori, (2007), the legitimatization of private universities in Nigeria was due to the famous Supreme Court decision in favour of Dr. Basil Ukaegbu, the proprietor of the Imo State Technical University in a case against the Imo State Government that had declared the institution illegal. This singular Supreme Court judgment brought about the establishment of private higher institutions in Nigeria. In 2009, about thirty-two private universities were established.

During this phase necessary machines were put in place to visit and scrutinize applications from individuals, religious and corporate organizations of who are applying for private universities operating license.

Trend of Private Universities

There are fifty (50) approved private universities operating in Nigeria. These are:

Igbinedion University , Okada	10 th May, 1999
Babcock University , Ilishan Remo	10 th May, 1999
Madonna University , Okija	10 th May, 1999
Bowen University , Iwo	31 st July, 2001
Covenant University , Ota	12 th February, 2002
Pan-African University , Lagos	12 th February, 2002
Benson Idahosa University,	12 th February, 2002
American University of Nigeria , Yola	28 th May, 2003
Ajayi Crowther University , Oyo	7 th January, 2005
Al-Hikmah University , Ilorin	7 th January, 2005
Bingham University , New Karu	7 th January, 2005
Caritas University , Enugu	7 th January, 2005
CETEP City University , Yaba, Lagos	7 th January, 2005
Katsina University , Katsina	7 th January, 2005
Redeemer's University, Mowe	7 th January, 2005
City University , Ibadan	9 th June, 2005
Bells University of Technology, Badagry	9 th June, 2005
Wukari Jubilee University , Wukari	9 th June, 2005
Crescent University , Abeokuta	9 th June, 2005
Novena University , Ogume	9 th June, 2005
Renaissance University , Enugu	9 th June, 2005
University of Mkar , Mkar	9 th June, 2005
Joseph Ayo Babalola University , Ikeji-Arakeji	March 2006
Fountain University , Osogbo	17 th May, 2007
Obong University , Obong Ntak	17 th May, 2007
Salem University , Lokoja	17 th May, 2007
Tansian University , Oba, Anambra State	17 th May, 2007
Veritas University , Abuja	17 th May, 2007
Wesley Univ. of Science & Tech, Ondo	17 th May, 2007
Western Delta Univ., Oghara, Delta State	17 th May, 2007
Achievers University , Owo, Ondo State	11 th December, 2007
African Univ. of Science & Technology, Abuja	11 th December, 2007
Afe Babalola University, Ado Ekiti	3 rd Novemebr, 2009
Rhema University, Obeama-Asa, Rivers State	3 rd November, 2009
Nigerian –Turkish Nile International University, Abuja	3 rd November, 2009
Oduduwa University, Ipetumoda-Osun State	3 rd November, 2009
Wellspring University, Evboubanos, Edo State	3 rd November, 2009
Paul University, Awka-Anambra State	3 rd November, 2009
Godfrey Okoye University, Enugu State	3 rd November, 2009
Adeleke University, Ede, Osun State	7 th March, 2011
Baze University, Abuja	7 th March, 2011
Landmark University, Omu-Aran, Kwara State	7 th March, 2011
Samuel Adegboyega University, Ogwa, Edo State	7 th March, 2011
Evangel University, Akaeze, Ebonyi State	22nd February, 2012
Elizade University, Ilara-Mokin, Ondo State	22nd February, 2012
Gregory University, Uturu, Abia State	22nd February, 2012
Mcperson University, Seriki Sotayo, Ajebo, Ogun State	22nd February, 2012
Southwestern University, Oku Owa, Ogun State	22nd February, 2012

Source: NUC Monday Bulletin 23rd March, 2009

Justification for the Establishment of Private Universities in Nigeria

According to Okebukola (2002) and NUC (2004), the establishment of private tertiary institutions is justifiable because of the numerous benefits accrued to it. Some of its benefits are:

Provision of Enough and Adequate Teaching and Learning Materials

Most universities in the country have consistently inadequate resources, which invariably affects the quality of output they produce. Besides, as Utulu (2001) points out, another factor that accounts for the decline in the quality of university output in Nigeria is the lack of physical facilities. The universities in Nigeria operate in adverse conditions; overcrowding and deteriorating physical facilities, lack of library books, educational materials and so on. Addressing this problem calls for the involvement of the private sector.

Raise Alternative Ways of Funding the University

Apart from the poor quality of graduates, as a result of poor physical facilities in the federal and state universities, another reason for the involvement of private hands in the provision and maintenance of university education is the underfunding of the education sector. Over the years, this problem has been generating a lot of strife between the ASUU and the government. However, the presence of private hands in university education is considered an alternative means of funding university education in the country. In addition, the provision of technology by the private sector will bring down cost, fasten programme delivery and enhance the capacity of these institutions to reach student in distant places and larger number.

Improve the Quality of University Education

The government is of the view that the growth of private universities in the country will allow for competition between the public and the private universities, in terms of instructional delivery and other activities put in place to produce quality graduates for the economy. Competition brings improved quality of educational inputs and outputs.

Enhance Efficiency

Internal efficiency in terms of graduating students at record time with very few or no drop-out at all and external efficiency in terms of producing what the market would absorb on graduation to reduce to the barest minimum or eliminate unemployment. *Also* with more players in the university system, there would be more rational and efficient allocation of resources in the short term. The long-term effect is to stabilise the cost of operation, with an attendant increase in, and improved quality of production. These among others could be responsible for granting of operating license to private universities in Nigeria by National University Commission (NUC).

Widening Access to Tertiary Education

In America for instance, the demand for higher education is so high that the gross enrolment ratio is about 100% while that of Nigeria is 5%, Adiotomre (2007). What happens to the remaining 95%? Following the perennially acute shortage of places in the public universities and the need to increase the number of enrolments, private hands were called upon to create opportunities for the teeming number of youths seeking tertiary education. Hence, the license given to private investors in university education is meant to address the problem of excessive demand over supply. However, access is in this case provided for those who can afford the high fees charged.

Provision of Stable Academic Calendar

The varying crises in the university sector, which had been paralyzing the academic calendars over the years constitute a source of worry to the stakeholders in the sector. However, there is need for the establishment of private universities, which are less prone to disruption in their academic calendars. From the foregoing, it can be said that the Nigerian educational system needs private participation in the provision and management of educational institutions, especially at the university level. This is because of the dynamic nature of education, exacerbated by the enormous resources required for the realisation of national goals.

The Challenges of Private Universities in Nigeria

Despite the immense benefits of private involvement in university education as highlighted above, the move had been criticized on various grounds, among which are:

Private Universities are Profit-Making Institutions

Private universities have been criticised on the basis that they are profit-making institutions. High tuition fees are been charged. Therefore, not many parents can send their children to private universities in Nigeria.

It Widens the Social Gap

It has often been said that the introduction of private universities will bring about greater inequality and widen the existing gap between the 'haves' and the 'have nots'. According to Izuagba (2006) privatization of tertiary institutions has introduced inequality in the social system as it has created two different types of tertiary institutions – one is attended by the children of the rich while the second type, offers mass schooling and is attended by the children of the common man.

Quality may be sacrificed for Profit

The private universities have been criticised because, potentially, they may not produce the expected quality of education, as the proprietors are business owners who want big returns on their investments. Private universities are non-public or independent universities who do not receive governmental funding and are usually administered by denominational or secular boards. Private universities as also those universities that are solely owned, financed and managed by private individuals with intention to recover cost in short time and make profit.

The Population Explosion

The approval of private universities by the federal government and the NUC gave an opportunity to Nigerian who can afford the cost of private university to attain their educational desires. The facilities available initially were enough. When some private universities took-off, they started with less than 1000 students, for instance, Igbinedion, Babcock, Madonna among others. However, in recent time, there is explosion in student enrolment, the available facilities are no more enough and this brings in a lot of vices into the system e.g. examination malpractices, copying, bringing-in scripts into the examination hall, cultism that was alien in the private universities is now gaining ground. Also the explosion in student population is making teaching/learning difficult for both the lecturers and the students.

Adequate Funding

Public universities rely heavily on government subsidies and are able to operate with minimal tuition and other fees. As a result, the government can control and impose policies there as it wishes and make university education available at affordable cost to the citizenry. But private universities rely heavily on tuition fees and other Internally Generated Revenue (IGR) from the students to meet their expenditure. There are no subsidies from the government for the private universities and if it continues this way, the tuition and other fees payable will be on the high side that majority of the citizen will not be able to afford it. However, private universities is being financed mainly by the tuition and other fees paid by the students and the cost of running and sustaining university education is very high and may remain so because of the prevailing economic situation, this accounts for the reason why tuition and other fees in the private universities will keep on the increase unless government come to their rescue and subsidize the tuition fee. If education is not adequately funded, the foundations of such education will be weak; consequently the products of such education systems will generally be weak intellectually. Therefore, the NUC has a vital role of ensuring that these private universities are adequately funded so as to guarantee quality output.

Recommendations for Quality Assurance in Private Universities

1. Infrastructural Facilities

Private higher institutions in Africa are established by some legal provisions which stipulate some minimum requirements for infrastructural facilities. It is only institutions that meet the basic requirements that are given license by the governments. In Nigeria, a private higher institution is expected to be accredited by the Federal Government through its agency the (NUC) before granting license to operate. The National University Commission usually set up accreditation panels with duties to inspect the infrastructural facilities, curriculum as well as quality of staff of the private higher institutions that officially applied for license. The Federal Government of Nigeria no doubt adheres strictly to the minimum acceptable requirements before granting license. The NUC will have to make sure that the teaching-learning environment is made conducive to providing adequate and modern facilities.

Modern facilities in this context include adequate classrooms, computers, recreational facilities, and instructional aids. This will guard against overcrowded classrooms in public universities, inadequate library and laboratory facilities and the like. The provision of these in the private universities will go a long way towards guaranteeing quality assurance.

2. Appraisal of Educational Programmes

Programmes run by private universities should be well monitored by the NUC to ensure quality and ensure that the programmes conform to societal needs. Continuous appraisal of programmes is vital for quality assurance in the university system.

3. Quality Teaching Personnel

Teachers are responsible for ensuring positive changes in the lives of students in terms of skill acquisition, mental and moral development. In order to guarantee quality assurance in these private universities, highly qualified teachers or lecturers should be employed. Private university institutions are claimed to be better placed because they depended heavily on part-time staff drawn mainly from public universities. However, facilities for staff development and research opportunities for staff are limited in the private higher institutions compared with the public institutions. Besides, highly-qualified lecturers, staff development programmers of various kinds should be put in place to ensure self development and self-growth of lecturers.

4. Proper Monitoring

Standards can be assured through proper monitoring. Hence private universities should be put under close watch by the NUC so that they do not deviate from the primary purpose of academic excellence in the pursuit of profit. The proprietors of private universities should be made to understand that the license granted for operation can be withdrawn at any time if there is deviation from the.

Conclusion

This paper examined the importance of university education to nation building. It examined the reasons for the establishment of private university education, which include the need to expand access to the teeming applicants; to address the problem of scarce educational resources, which had characterised all levels of education; to provide an alternative way of financing university education. However, the government must set the minimum standards for private universities. It was therefore recommended that in order to guarantee quality assurance in private universities the following strategies should be put in place: provision of adequate and modern facilities; adequate funding; appraisal of educational programmes; employment of qualified teaching personnel and close monitoring of the activities of the universities so that their cost-recovery plans do not jeopardise the quality.

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