

Private Universities in Nigeria – the Challenges Ahead

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Abstract

Public universities had a near monopoly in providing university education in Nigeria until 1999. The market-friendly reforms initiated under the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP), the deregulation policies, and the financial crisis of the states created an encouraging environment for the emergence of the private universities in Nigeria. The legislative measures initiated to establish private universities in Nigeria also helped the entry of cross-border education, which is offered mainly through private providers. At present the private sector is a fast expanding segment of university education in Nigeria, although it still constitutes a small share of enrolment in university education. The paper attempts to analyse the growth, expansion, justification and the challenges of private universities in Nigeria.

Keywords: Private universities, public universities, access, globalization, social demand, academic staff.

Introduction

In many African countries, the provision of University education by private institutions is a growing phenomenon when compared to other parts of the world; however, most African countries have been slow to expand the private sector in University education (Altbach, 1999). So also in Nigeria, the emergence of private universities as a business enterprise is an emerging phenomenon, a number of issues plague its development including legal status, quality assurance and the cost of service. The status of much private university in Nigeria is shady. Many operate without licenses, commensurate resources or appropriate infrastructures. The quality of service by many is also shoddy, even at a few of the institutions that possess better equipment, newer buildings and better facilities than the public universities.

Private universities are a recent development in Nigeria as compared to the federal and state government owned universities. It has evolved during two historic phases: the first during the second republic under President Shehu Shagari administration 1979 – 1983 (all facilities). The second phase was during the fourth republic under President Olusegun Obasanjo (1999 – Date). 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.

To Belfied and Lerin (2003), private universities are non-public or independent universities who do not receive governmental funding and are usually administered by denominational or secular boards; others are universities operated for profit. Ndebbio (1983), Olaniyan (2001), also refer to private universities as those universities that are solely owned, financed and managed by private individuals with intention to recover cost in short time and make profit. The first federal university was established in 1948 (University of Ibadan), while the first state university was established in 1979

(Rivers State University of Science & Technology, Port Harcourt). However, the first set of surviving private universities were established in 1999 (Igbinedion University, Okada, Edo State, Babcock University, Ilisan-Remo, Ogun State, and Madonna University, Okija, Anambra State) this was according to Obasi (2006) as a result of the public failure theory expounded in classic literature as we have in Mexico and Peru and the demand absorption as public university education falls short of new demand. Kitaev (2003), in his own view concluded that the concept of privatization paved way for privatization of education, even in Eastern Europe, France, China where private-public ownership of educational institutions was alien, globalization and constant increase in the demand for education have changed their thinking.

In Africa, Nigeria has one of the oldest, biggest and most comprehensive university education systems (CODESRIA 2005). Since 1948 when the first university was established till 1979, university education was on the exclusive list of the government, thereby leaving the establishment, funding and management in the hand of the federal government that have the exclusive right. However, in 1979, the constitution was amended and university education was now put on the concurrent list of the government, which means that both federal and state government can now establish and own its university. It was from this time that various states started signifying intention to establish their own state universities named after them. From this time, it was becoming evidently clearer to the federal government that, funding university education effectively may be difficult for the federal government alone. University is a place where skilled manpower of various capacities are being trained and also an avenue to develop human capital needed to sustain the economy. Since 1948 to date, government has 27 federal universities and 34 states universities have been established. This transcends that there are some states in the country that do not have federal government university so also not all the states have state-owned university, despite the critical role of knowledge in economic development of a nation.

Table 1.1: List of Federal and State Government Universities as at July, 2009

Federal Universities	Year Established	State Universities	Year Established
1. Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University, Bauchi	1988	1. Abia State University Uturu	1981
2. Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria	1962	2. Adamawa State University, Mubi	2002
3. Bayero University, Kano	1975	3. Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba	1999
4. Federal University of Petroleum Resources, Effurun	2007	4. Akwa Ibom State University of Technology, Uyo	2005
5. Federal University of Technology, Yola	1981	5. Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma	1980
6. Federal University of Technology, Akure	1981	6. Anambra State University of Science & Tech., Uli	2000
7. Federal University of Technology, Minna	1982	7. Benue State University, Makurdi	1992
8. Federal University of Technology, Owerri	1980	8. Bukar Abba Ibrahim University, Yobe	2006
9. Micheal Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike	1992	9. Cross River State University of Science & Tech., Calabar	2004
10. National Open University of Nigeria, Lagos	2002	10. Delta State University, Abraka	1992
11. Nigerian Defense Academy, Kaduna	1985	11. Ebonyi State University Abakaliki	2000
12. Nnamdi Azikwe University, Awka	1992	12. Enugu State University of Science and Tech. Enugu	1982
13. Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife	1962	13. Gombe State University, Gombe	2004
14. University of Abuja, Gwagwalada	1988	14. Ibrahim Badamosi Babaginda University, Lapai Niger State	2005
15. University of Agric. Abeokuta	1988	15. Imo State University, Owerri	1992
16. University of Agric. Makurdi	1988	16. Kaduna State University, Kaduna	2004
17. University of Benin	1970	17. Kano State University of Technology, Wudil	2000
18. University of Calabar	1975	18. Umar Musa Yar-Adua University Katsina	2006
19. University of Ibadan	1948	19. Kebbi State University, Kebbi	2006
20. University of Ilorin	1975	20. Kogi State University, Anyigba	1999
21. University of Jos	1975	21. Ladoke Akintola University of Tech., Ogbomoso	1990
22. University of Lagos	1962	22. Lagos State University, Ojo, Lagos	1983
23. University of Maiduguri	1975	23. Nasarawa State University, Keffi	2002
24. University of Nigeria, Nsukka	1960	24. Niger Delta University yenagoa	2000
25. University of Port-Harcourt	1975	25. Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye	1982
26. University of Uyo	1991	26. Osun State University, Oshogbo	2006
27. Usman Danfodio University	1975	27. Plateau State University, Bokokos	2005
		28. Rivers State University of Science & Tech.	1979
		29. Tai Solarin Univ. of Education, Ijebu-Ode	2005
		30. University of Ado-Ekiti	1982
		31. University of Education, Ikere-Ekiti	2008
		32. Ondo State University of Science & Tech., Okiti Pupa	2008
		33. Taraba State University, Jalingo	2008
		34. Kwara State University, Ilorin	2009
		35. Sokoto State University	2009

Source: NUC Monday Bulletin 20th July, 2009

Establishment of universities in Nigeria has been limited by the amount of money made available by either the federal or state government depending on the owner. But recently, the federal government was aware that there is the need to involve private individuals and corporations in the ownership, funding and management of universities, more so, that it is becoming more difficult for the government to cope with the cost of running the university education and cost of expanding the existing universities as a result of dwindling world economy.

Evolution of Private Universities in Nigeria

The first attempt to establish private universities in Nigeria was between 1979 – 1983 after the Supreme Court ruling that establishment of private universities was legal (Barrow, 1996, Aliyu 1984 cited in Thaver 2004). But in December 2003, General Mohammadu Buhari who took over government from democratically elected government with a coup de tat ordered the closure of the 26 established private universities as well as lack of serious minded academics among others (Obassi, 2007). The issue of private universities since then was not given further attention until 1991 when the then Vice-Chancellor of the University of Agriculture, Makurdi in his convocation speech advocated the establishment of private universities and thereafter, the then Head of State; General Badamosi Babangida decided to lift ban on the establishment of private universities and set up the Longe Commission in 1991 to review higher education in Nigeria. The commission among their recommendations was the establishment of private universities (Longe Report 1991).

In 1999, when a new democratically elected government (President Olusegun Obasanjo) was sworn in as the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria after a prolonged military rule for 16 years, the federal government now vested in the power to receive and treat applications of establishment of private universities to National University Commission (NUC) who will thereafter make recommendation for approval to the federal government. NUC is the highest regulatory body of the universities in Nigeria. Out of forty (40) applications received in 1999, only 3 of them met the NUC requirement and were granted operating license. They could be referred to as the pioneer of private universities in Nigeria. They are: Igbinedion University, Okada, Edo State, Babcock University, Ilisan Remo, Ogun State, and Madonna University, Okija, Anambra State. Since then till March 2009, 34 private universities have been licensed. This means within a space of 10 years, there are more private universities than either the federal or state governments owned universities. Though altogether, there are still more public universities than the private in Nigeria, but with the trend of events, there will be more private universities than the public soonest. Though Okogie (2009) asserted that as at present, there are 44 unlicensed universities operating illegally in various parts of the country.

Table 1.2 List of Licensed Private Universities in Nigeria and year established

S/N	Name of University	Year Established
1.	Abti-American University, Yola	2003
2	Achievers University, Owo	2007
3	African University of Science & Tech., Abuja	2007
4	Ajayi Crowther University, Ibadan	2005
5	Al-Hikman University, Ilorin	2005
6	Babcock University, Ilisan-Remo	1999
7	Bells University of Tech., Otta	2005
8	Benson Idahosa University, Benin City	2002
9	Bingham University, Jos	2005
10	Bowen University, Iwo	2001
11	Caleb University, Lagos	2007
12	Caritas University, Enugu	2005
13	CETEP City University, Lagos	2005
14	Covenant University, Otta	2002
15	Crawford University, Igbesa	2005
16	Crescent University, Abeokuta	2005
17	Fountain University, Oshogbo	2007
18	Igbinedion University, Okada	1999
19	Joseph Ayo Babalola University, Ikeji-Arakeji Osun State	2006
20	Lead City University, Ibadan	2005
21	Madonna University, Okija	1999
22	Novena University, Ogume Delta State	2005
23	Obong Universities, Obong Ntak	2007
24	Pan African University, Lagos	2002
25	Redeemer's University, Mowe, Ogun State	2005
26	Renaissance University, Enugu	2005
27	Salem University, Lokoja	2007
28	Tansian University, Umunya	2007
29	University of Mkar, Mkar	2005
30	Veritas University, Abuja	2007
31	Wesley Univ. of Science & Tech., Ondo	2007
32	Western Delta Univ. Oghara	2007
33	Wukari Jubilee, University	2005
34	African University of Science & Tech. Abuja	2007

Source: NUC Monday Bulletin 23rd March, 2009

Justification for the Establishment of Private Universities in Nigeria

The need for private universities in Nigeria has been enhanced by a number of factors: a burgeoning demand from students for access and the inability of the public universities to satisfy the growing social demand for university education has necessitated the entry of private university in order to expand the access conditions, the declining capacity of public universities, the retrenchment of public servants and incessant strikes by academic staff union (ASU) and other public university staff, the demand for courses and subjects of study had changed and public universities were thus unable to respond to this phenomenon, pressure by external agencies to cut public services, a growing emphasis on and need for a highly skilled labour force that target the local market, and the beginning of interest by foreign providers. In Nigeria now in terms of numbers, there are more private universities than the federal government-owned universities as evidenced in table 1.1 and 1.2. Although, the private universities are smaller and tend to specialize in specific discipline e.g. Business Administration, Computer Science & Technology, Accounting and Management, Marketing, Banking & Finance etc.

Prior to 1999, there are thirty six (36) universities in Nigeria (25 federal & 11 state owned universities) excluding other degrees awarding institutions because they are not university. Since then, many of the qualified candidates are being denied admission as a result of problems of space and

facilities in the existing universities. Find below the total number of universities, number of applicants, number of admitted candidates and the left over since 1999 – 2009.

Table 1.3: Total number of Universities, Applications and Admission Between 1999 – 2009

Year	No of Universities	No of Applications	No Admitted	Left Over
1999/2000	45	417,773	78,550	339,223
2000/2001	46	467,490	50,277	417,213
2001/2002	52	550,399	60,718	544,321
2002/2003	53	994,380	51,845	942,535
2003/2004	54	1,046,950	105,157	941,793
2004/2005	56	841,878	122,492	719,386
2005/2006	75	916,371	N/A	N/A
2006/2007	76	803,472	123,626	679,846
2007/2008	94	1,054,053	194,521	859,532
2008/2009	95	1,182,381	N/A	N/A

Source: <http://www.ume.com.ng>

Note: That the figure of 2007/2008 and 2008/2009 are reports given by the NUC and JAMB in the Punch, Wednesday, May 21, 2008, pp7 and the Punch Wed., April 15, 2009, pp6

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. 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. These among others could be responsible for granting of operating license to private universities in Nigeria by National University Commission (NUC).

Another reason for the establishment of private universities in Nigeria is the effect of globalization. All over the world, private schools especially at the university levels have been responsive to the growing demand of education by qualified candidates. International Institute for Educational Planning (2003) posited that private university is a reality and its impact is fast growing around the world together with globalization in particular and non-compulsory levels, pre-schools, tertiary and postgraduate. According to Canada National Library Reports (2001) not less than 30% of all school students enrolled in private schools in Australia, in Columbia, not less than 67% of the total students enrolment are in private schools, in Belgium, not less than 60% of all enrollee are in the private schools, while there are not less than 30% and 25% enrollee in private schools in Spain and France. The East African Standard (2004) also reported that Kenya has witnessed a geographical increase in the number of private universities from three to seventeen between 1980s and 2004. From table 1.2, the number of private universities in Nigeria has also geometrically increased from three to thirty-four between 1999 and 2009. The owners of private educational institutions in Nigeria have realized that education business is an investment that is worth it. Most of them have invested in either primary or secondary levels of education and with their experience at those levels, they also signify their intention to establish private universities. Ali (2004), opined that private school system is one of the most profitable sectors of the sluggish Nigerian economy, readily attracting huge investment from banks, foreign investors, and well meaning Nigerians. Those investors who have tasted the profitability of educational institution at the lower levels desire to establish private universities.

Another reason justifying the establishment of private universities in Nigeria is the need to be internally efficient. The public universities are becoming internally inefficient because of the incessant strike action due to the deplorable situations of public universities and other areas of differences between the government and either the noticed that Nigeria has a peculiar attitude of providing individual solution to social problems. Those that see education as investment are becoming more aware of the economic and non-economic benefits of education and discovered that public universities are unable to deliver their services as expected due to poor performance as a result of shortage in staff

needs, funds, physical facilities etc. Resources needed for the provision of qualitative university education has been on the decline since the introduction of Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in the late 1980's by Ibrahim Babangida's led graduands are half-baked. Despite this, the demand for university education keeps going up. With the establishment of private universities in Nigeria, some of those unadmitted are taken care of and are graduated at record time because strikes and other vices found at the public universities are alien to private universities.

Increase in demand for university education is another reason for the upsurge of private universities in Nigeria. Olaniyan (2001) reported that there is a gross inadequate provision of university education in Nigeria due to absence of improved facilities to cope with the increasing demand for university education. While Okebukola (2004) believed that the absorptive capacity of Nigerian university would sooner get worse, he noted that by 2010, when the first set of Universal Basic Education (UBE) started graduating, secondary schools and at least 10% of them seeking university admission, the existing universities capacity will absorb less than 3% of the applicants then. To take care of about 97% others, establishment of private universities would go a long way in assisting the unadmitted candidates in public universities. As at 2009, 1,182,381 candidates sat for University Matriculation Examination (UME) out of which all the existing universities may not admit more than 200,000 due to various problems facing university system ranging from facilities to personnel.

Another reason for the establishment of private universities is to assist the government in funding education. Funding has been a major problem facing university education in Nigeria; this is because of the increase in the demand for it. Olaniyan (2001) opined that demand for university education has been growing faster than the willingness of education while resisting individual payment for it. Having realized this problem, the federal government is looking for every opportunity to shed these heavy responsibilities of funding university education all alone. This resulted in granting of operating license to private individuals, religious organizations, and corporate organizations to establish private university which is already a global phenomenon.

The Challenges of Private Universities in Nigeria

The challenges that needed to be addressed for the effective operation of private universities in Nigeria are discussed below:

Courses Offered by Private Universities

The public universities are large institutions offering courses in variety of disciplines. The academic interest and advances in frontiers of knowledge decide the type of courses offered in the public universities in Nigeria. The purpose behind the establishment of private universities is different from that of public universities. Since they are self-financing and profit oriented, they offered courses that have a premium both in the education market and on the labour market. The demand for a particular course and the charges by the private universities depend on the employability of the graduates. The education and labour market give signals to the private universities, and their success depends on their ability to respond quickly to such responses.

The courses offered in private universities in Nigeria reflect either a commercial consideration or religious orientation. They offered courses that require less investment in terms of infrastructure and equipment. This is in contrast with some of the private universities in countries like India, where Engineering and Medicine, which require a high level of capital investment in infrastructure and other facilities. The trend in Nigeria shows that courses offered in private universities are in subjects' areas which require lower levels of investment in infrastructural facilities. The type of courses offered depend on the basic orientation of the private universities, those who are self-financing and profit generating offered courses closely aligned to the private sector employment, especially in the manufacturing and service sectors. Courses on Information Communication Technology (ICT)

Management, and Business Administration, Accountancy, Banking & Finance are more common among courses offered by private universities in Nigeria. These are market driven courses where demand will be sufficient to break even.

The Academic Staff in Private Universities in Nigeria

Many of the private universities in Nigeria are relatively new and operate with a limited number of academic and other staffs. One of the unique qualities of private universities in Nigeria is that they have very few regular staff. The general trend is that of a large number of part-time academic staff or sabbatical staff and a very few number of full-time academic staff. This feature is not peculiar to Nigeria alone; in a study carried out by Varghese (2004) it was found out that reliance on part-time academic staff is a common feature of private universities irrespective of their location and orientation. He also found out that, there are occasions where private universities operate without any regular staff. The quality and quantity of academic staff available in Nigeria are too short of the need of the public universities talk less of having adequate for them. Most of the senior academic staff used for accreditation purpose are either on sabbatical or on part-time appointment because they are fully employed by the public university which has better condition of service for them. Those on regular appointment with private universities are young graduates who are not Ph.D holders as prescribed by NUC to be the minimum appointment in the public university where they will equally enjoy better condition of service. There is most likely to be dearth of academic staff in private universities in the future if their condition of service remains unattractive.

The Student Problem

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 1,000 students e.g. Babcock, Madonna etc, but now, 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. Most students also lack maintenance culture. If the demand for education keeps increasing as evident in Table 1.3, and nothing is done by the government at the public universities, private universities will face the challenge of admitting more than they can cater for and control and more so they have commercial mindset, their intention at all times is to maximize profit and this may be at the expense of quality. Presently admission to public universities is highly competitive; most of the students that seek admission into private universities are those who do not meet the public universities admission standard. In other words, the criteria for admission into most private universities in Nigeria are lowered than that of the public universities to attract more students.

The Quality of Education in Private Universities in Nigeria

The quality of education in the private universities could be based on various factors such as the level of infrastructural facilities, the quality of the programmes as assessed by the National Universities Commission (NUC), the qualification of the academic staff, and students' academic and performance in the labour market. There are requirements set by NUC to control the quality of programmes offered in Nigeria Universities, the universities and programmes that meet the requirements are accredited by NUC. Most of the courses on offered in the private universities do not meet the set accreditation criteria; some of the courses are recognized but not accredited and since there is no penalty for any university for offering courses not accredited, this make private universities in Nigeria to float courses

at will. The facilities for staff development and research opportunities are limited in private universities, this equally reduce the quality of education in private universities in Nigeria.

The Running Cost

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 because they have a commercial mindset, and thereby serve as a deterrent to many qualified candidates whose their parents cannot afford the exorbitant school fees.

Conclusion

The private universities are fast expanding segment of Nigerian University educational system. In terms of number, private universities out-numbered the federal government universities in Nigeria, see table 1.1 & 1.2, though in terms of enrolment, they enrolled small size and offered courses that are market friendly and in limited disciplines. The private universities in Nigeria are profit oriented in nature that is why they levied high school and other fees.

Operational efficiency of private universities should be higher than that of the public universities by increasing the gap between the revenue generated from the school fees and the running cost of the university. Staff cost being the major item of the expenditure, is reduced by relying heavily on part-time academic staff. This increases the profit margin level as this is an indication that there is high operational efficiency.

The emergence of private universities in Nigeria raises an issues related to national development from a broader perspective. There are some disciplines which are very important for the development of the country but are not market friendly; these courses are not offered by the private universities. Many of the private universities offered more of training than a deeper understanding of the subject area from a theoretical point of view. Their main function is transmission of knowledge rather than contributing to knowledge pool.

Finally, the private universities in Nigeria, contribute to the absorption of excess social demand for university education and in this sense, there is the need for more private universities in Nigeria because the role of private universities may be seen as complementary to the contribution of public universities. Therefore, there must be a better understanding and partnership between the private and public universities in Nigeria rather than leaving the university education either to the public or market forces.

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