

Emergence of Private Universities in Nigeria and Monitoring Standards between 2002 and 2012

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University education is at the centre of human resource development. The nation's professional and highly skilled personnel are trained and developed in the universities. The emergence of the private sector universities in Nigeria is well remarkable. No doubt, there is need for more private sector participation in establishing universities as a result of the large population of deserving students for university admission, critically important is to ensure a universal standard is upheld. The study methodology is literature exploratory on the emergence, and future sustainability of the private universities for higher education in Nigeria focusing on assessment and standard regulations. The study has largely drawn from articles on the subject and reports of regulatory education authorities. Quality is therefore, significantly a function of cost-effectiveness, current technology, accountability and transparency in expenditure and strict adherence to requirements set out in the academic briefs and master Plans. Strategic planning and uncompromising adherence to estimate as contained in the Annual Budget. Consequently, running a private university is a more serious business than profit making.

Keywords: private universities, quality control, standards and policy, monitoring

Introduction

University is an institution of higher education and research which grants academic degrees in a variety of subjects and disciplines. Universities give instructions and directions on both undergraduate and postgraduate education. It provides courses of instruction and other facilities for the acquisition of knowledge in all fields, to encourage the advancement of learning, culture and character; encourage and promote scholarship, and to conduct research in all fields of learning and human endeavour; and ultimately to relate all its activities to the social, cultural and economic needs of mankind (Omorie, 1997).

The mission of universities is to promote intellectual inquiry and to generate, store and transmit specialized knowledge and sophisticated expertise, higher forms of culture and ethical bases of conduct. The World Bank also justify the usefulness of university education to a nation's development and well being. University education is fundamental to the construction of a knowledge economy and the society at large (Anho, 2011).

The eagerness for a large Nigerian populace regardless of age, to obtain higher university education has caused various problems in processing

and getting admissions into public universities across the country. Due to prolong academic programmes, crowded students population, poor conditions of infra-structures in public institutions, and general indiscipline among staff and students in government-owned universities, many university candidates have preferred to apply to private universities instead of going to public universities. However, some private universities in the Nigeria operate below the regulatory standards. Some universities have operated illegally within Nigeria not securing license and accreditation from regulatory authorities in Nigeria.

No doubt, there is need for more private sector participation in establishing universities as a result of large population of deserving students, never the less, there is need to ensure good standards to ensure a universal standard is upheld in the university system. The study methodology is literature exploratory on the emergence, and future sustainability of the private universities for higher education in Nigeria focusing on assessment and standard regulations. The study has largely drawn from articles on the subject and reports of regulatory education authorities. The purpose of this study is to evaluate various issues regulatory standards for private universities establishment in the country, such as availability and quality of required man power, required facilities and expected quality of graduate output. The study is

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segmented into the Introduction, Review of relevant literature, Discussions and Analysis and Conclusion and Recommendations.

Literature Review

University is an autonomous and complex corporate entity which is governed through some sets of laid down rules and regulations for both the Internal and Corporate operations of the University. University is a veritable agent of developing, revamping and sustaining any nation's economy through harnessing human talents to achieve industrial objectives and development. Furthermore, manpower development and training which is obtainable in higher institutions emerge as a veritable method of making human resources to adapt to the changing technological improvement (Anho, 2011)

Internal structure of the University is made of different departments or units that are interdependent and indispensable to one another. Those units and departments include the Central Administration Section which also have sub-units as; Vice-Chancellor office, Security unit, Internal Audit unit, Directorate of Students' Affairs, Directorate of Academic Planning. Apart from the Central Administration, there are other sections like; Registry, Bursary, University Library, Physical Planning and Works and various Academic Colleges or Faculties or Schools. Each of the main units has its own sub units in order to operate effectively and efficiently. Based on this, there is a need to evaluate the University operational guidelines and procedures (internal control procedures laid down) so as to ascertain how these interrelated sub units perform their functions and how tasks are being coordinated to arrive at the University main goal and objective (Badmus, 2010)

Origin of university education in Nigeria

According to Okojie (2010), higher Education in Nigeria can be traced back to 19th century introduced by the early missionaries shortly before independence. A few Nigerians made use of the opportunity at home rather than travelling abroad for tertiary education. The colonial government established the Yaba Higher College around 1932. The college was established to provide well-qualified assistants in medical, engineering, and other vocations as well as teachers for secondary schools, and then known as higher middle schools. With passage of time, the college offered sub-degree courses in engineering, medicine, agriculture and teacher training to fill specific vacancies in the colonial administration.

The Elliot commission in 1945 was established and Ashby Commission in 1959 which both reviewed and assessed the pre-and post-independence needs of Nigerians concerning higher education. Thus in 1948, the University College Ibadan was established as residential and tutorial college under the tutelage of the University of London. Meanwhile, there were various need to upgrade Yaba College of Technology and Kaduna Polytechnic to Universities of Technology as well as the Colleges of Education at Zaria and Kano along with Alvan Ikoku and Adeyemi Colleges of Education to Universities of Education (Okojie, 2010).

Currently, the Nigerian Universities may be classified according to ownership into Federal, State and Private institutions respectively. The Federal Universities are categorized according to age into first, second and third generation institutions. Many more State and Private Universities emerged from the many proposals that were evaluated by the NUC.

Oloyede and Adekola (2010) observe that private universities are recent developments in Nigeria as compared to the Federal and State government-owned universities. The dispensation has evolved during two historic phases, namely, the first during the second Republic under President Shehu Shagari's administration (1979- 1983), the second phase was during the Fourth Republic under President Olusegun Obasanjo (1999-2007). During the second Republic, some interested stakeholder decided to utilize the opportunity of the democratic freedom to establish private universities. It was observed that the boldest of the initiatives came from Dr Nnanna Ukaegbu who established a technical university in Imo State though the attempt was challenged by the Federal Government. The litigation on the case went as far as to the Supreme Court of Nigeria which later ruled in favour of the right of private citizens and non governmental bodies to establish universities but with a caveat that the quality of the programmes to be offered by private institutions could be legislated by the National Assembly.

It is noted that the idea of private university education was borne out of the idea for privatization of the different sectors of the economy. Thus, despite the nature of socialist orientation that permeated Eastern Europe, France, China, and the alien nature of private-public ownership of educational institutions, globalization and constant increase in the demand for education has changed their view.

Regulation of university education in Nigeria

Tertiary education in Nigeria is regulated by the Ministry of Education at varied government levels which have the general oversight on education in the

country. The Federal Ministry of Education is responsible for various enactments and pronouncements on policies, provisions, rules, and enforcement of general standards on education. In addition, there is the National Universities Commission (NUC) which regulates University education, the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) which regulates the Polytechnics and Colleges of Technology and the National Council for Colleges of Education (NCCE) which regulates the administration of Colleges of Education. The common objective of all the regulatory bodies was to monitor, maintain and enforce the Benchmark Minimum Academic Standards (BMAS) in the respective tertiary institutions (FGN, 2004).

According to Njoku (2002), the NUC was set up in 1962 and the functions of the commission then were: i) To inquire into and advise the government on financial needs both recurrent and capital expenditure of University education in Nigeria. ii) To assist in consultation with the Universities and other bodies concerned in planning the balanced and coordinated development of Universities in order to ensure that they are fully adequate to national needs. iii) To collate, analyse and publish information relating to Universities' finance and University education both in Nigeria and abroad. iv) To make such other recommendations to the Federal Government or to Universities relating to higher education as the commission may consider to be in the national interest among others.

More so, the department of Inspection and Monitoring in the NUC comprises Office of the Director and three (3) divisions, namely: i) *Federal Universities Inspection and Monitoring Division*; ii) *State Universities Inspection and Monitoring Division*. iii) *Private Universities Inspection and Monitoring Division*.

NUC administrative structure was designed to accommodate various units and sub units which include; Executive Secretary Office, Management Support Services department, Finance and Accounts department, Quality Assurance department, Information and Communications Technology department, Students Supports Service department, Inspection and Monitoring department among other departments and units.

Each of these units in the NUC is inter-related and interdependent in discharging its functions in order to achieve aims and objectives of setting NUC. For the purpose of standards monitoring and enforcement of rules and regulations among the Universities in Nigeria, the following Units/departments of NUC are most concerned and with their responsibilities. For quality assurance, the department of Quality Assurance sets standards for the Nigerian University System. It is the responsibility of

this department to ensure continuous compliance with the set standards. It was charged with the responsibility of ensuring quality inputs, process and graduate output with the view to achieving national developmental and global competitiveness. It monitors the level of compliance of Nigerian Universities with the provisions of the Benchmark Minimum Academic Standards (BMAS) and other quality assurance guidelines that may be laid down by Government, through the Commission and any assigned functions as may be determined by the commission from time to time. (NUC, 2012)

The Inspection and Monitoring Department ensures that Nigerian Universities comply with all the provisions of the Benchmark Minimum Academic Standards (BMAS) and other quality assurance guidelines that Government may lay down (through the Commission) from time to time through scrupulous inspection and regular monitoring. It monitors and evaluates all Universities with focus on such areas as academic briefs and master plan implementation, institutional management and governance, student and staff numbers, staff quality and mix, teaching and research quality; infrastructural input and other issues pertinent to quality assurance. It inspects and advises the Commission (NUC) and proprietors of Universities on the state of the institutions, highlighting areas that require remediation as the need arises. It monitors and inspects, from time to time, the certificates awarded to approve programmes in order to maintain quality and standards. It collects and collates information from Universities that may assist in the inspection and ascertainment of compliance with the standards prescribed by law and any assigned functions as may be determined by the commission from time to time.

For the purpose of this paper, discussions will be limited to Private Universities Inspection and Monitoring Division of NUC which has these specific functions as relate to Private Universities in Nigeria;

- Analyses past accreditation results of Private Universities preparatory to comprehensive inspection and monitoring visits.
- Undertakes inspection and monitoring visits to Private Universities reported to be involved in any unwholesome practice(s) with a view to advising the Commission on same.
- Reviewing the instruments for the inspection and monitoring of Private Universities periodically;
- Developing database for the activities of Private Universities;
- Monitoring the compliance of Private Universities with the provisions of BMAS and other quality assurance guidelines, as well as those of their individual Academic Brief, Master Plan and University Law;
- Undertaking regular inspection to Private Universities to assess compliance on matters such as admission of

qualified candidates, Science-Arts ratio, carrying capacity, admission quota, implementation of curriculum and staff mix, and highlighting areas of remediation;

-Participating in ad-hoc activities in the commission; and; Any other assignment from the Director or Executive Secretary from time to time (NUC², 2012).

The importance of Nigerian tertiary education and University education in particular is aptly spelt out by the Federal Government of Nigeria in its National Policy on Education document (2004) which include: i) To contribute to national development through high level relevant, man power training; ii) To develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of the individual and society; iii) To develop the intellectual capability of individual to understand and appreciate their level and external environment; iv) To acquire both physical and intellectual skills, this will enable individuals to be self-reliant and useful members; v) To promote and encourage scholarship and community service.

Similarly, section 8 Sub A (64) of the National Policy on Education document (2004) states that University education shall make optimum contribution to national development by:

-Intensifying and diversifying its programmes for the development of high level manpower within the content of the needs of the nation;

-Making professional course contents to reflect our national requirements;

-Making all students, as part of a general programme of all round improvement in University education to offer general study courses such as history of ideas, philosophy of knowledge and nationalism.

-Sub-section 65 also states that University research shall be relevant to the nation's developmental goals.

Therefore, Universities shall be encouraged to disseminate their research results to both government and industries.

Discussion and Analysis

According to Fafunwa (2010), some private individuals took the advantages of 1979 constitution which empowered private individuals to open Universities by establishing sub standard institutions. Some were noted in the Eastern part of Nigeria of which some of the institutions were located in private homes such as flats and garages and were below university standard in all respects.

It was observed also, that many of the private universities were located in Eastern Nigeria and attended only by western region students. Probably, no Eastern Nigerian student enrolled in any of them because they knew that they were substandard non

accredited institutions. Although, Nigerian higher education was overdue for a review, after Ashby Commission of 1959/60, another committee was set up in 1990 and was headed by Chief G.A. Longe with a membership of twenty-one eminent Nigerians representing various professions: education, science, law, engineering, medicine, NUT, women societies, and employers' associations. Because of the stringent condition laid down by the commission and which was approved by the Federal Government in 1992, it took seven years before the first private Universities was granted a license by the NUC. Chief Gabriel Igbinedeon was the first to apply for license to open a private university (Fafunwa, 2010).

Performance of Nigerian universities

In the university faculty, staff and facilities are important resources that determine the failure or success of universities, society or nation. Anho (2010) observed that during the 2006/2007 accreditation and admission exercises, the NUC discovered gross inadequate human and non-human resources as well as dilapidated decaying and almost non-available infrastructural facilities in majority of the universities.

It was noted that the accreditation exercise of 2006/2007 involved the evaluation of 1,343 undergraduate degree programmes in 48 Universities comprising 25 Federal, 20 States and three private Universities. The NUC memorandum further revealed that 42.5% of the University programmes earned full accreditation status, 40.9% earned interim accreditation while 7.6% were deprived accreditation for failing to meet the prescribed minimum academic standards. The factors used in considering accreditation are: quality of teaching, facilities, ratio of teachers to students, level of research contributions to international journals, and number of foreign students among others.

It was suggested that inadequate funding had contributed to many of the falling standards in the universities. This was reflected in the findings of the NUC's 2006 which showed that 18,328 lecturers were responsible for the teaching of 433,871 students; that is a ratio of 1:24. This shows a deficit of 15,718 academic staff across all Universities in the country with the effect of having excess work load on foremost lecturers and consequently leading to dwindling academic standards. One other reason for the shortage of lecturers was 'brain drain' in that many Nigerian scholars migrates abroad (Anho, 2010).

Emergence of private universities in Nigeria

Osagie (2009) is of the opinion that private higher education in Nigeria is emerging as one of the most

dynamic segments of postsecondary education at the turn of the 21st century. Its prominence is linked with the ideology of deregulation that is so influential at present and with the trend worldwide to cut public spending. The Federal Government of Nigeria in the spirit of deregulation and has privatized the Nigerian Telecommunication Limited (NITEL), Delta Steel Company, NICON and others. Why not privatize the University of Ibadan or Amado Bello University? Private higher education had long historical tradition in some countries like the United States of America, Japan and the Philippines. The concept of private university in Nigeria caught most of African countries unprepared.

Nigerians are still adjusting to the reality of private Universities which legally made first appearance in more than a decade. Serious doubts remain and questions are still being asked every day. This is an opportune time to focus attention on the desirability or otherwise of private Universities in Nigeria

Virtually, all the fifty private Universities in the country are still battling with funding problems except a few that are owned by religious organizations who augment the University's funding. This funding problem limited the growth and expansion of private universities. According to Oloyede and Adekola, (2010), the following are itemized as challenges confronting Private Universities in Nigeria:

- Limited number of courses approved to offer by the regulatory bodies. This really affects the growth and expansion of Private Universities in the country.
- Staffing problems; Most of them do not have regular staff but part-time academic staff and sabbatical staff. They often have high labour turnover compared to public institutions.
- Enrolment problems;

Running a private University is a more serious business than profit making. Quality is therefore, significantly a function of cost-effectiveness, application of current technology, accountability and transparency in expenditure and strict adherence to requirements set out in the academic briefs and master Plans. Strategic planning and uncompromising adherence to estimate as contained in the Annual Budget.

Funding by proprietors is usually considered critical by NUC to the successful operation before maturity of the University. Proprietor's funding will be augmented through other sources or inflows from linkage programmes and various forms of internally generated revenue means. Priority should, right from inception be placed on optimal or near optimal utilization of available human and non human resources to ensure that quality of services is comparable to those obtainable in developed countries. As such, greedy and undisciplined expansion of academic programmes beyond what are contained in

the academic brief is a sure recipe for poor academic standards and abysmally low ranking of Universities (Osagie, 2009)

Private Universities have come to stay in Nigeria. The government is commendable for this initiative. However, if the private Universities will not fall into decadence in the quality desired, the government through the regulatory bodies (NUC) and other professional bodies must ensure that these Universities maintain a balance between enrolments and resources at unit cost that allows the system to sustain itself at an acceptable standard. In order words, as enrolments rise, budget allocations should keep pace. Admissions should be systematic and responsive to available resources.

In the same vein, conscious attention to the design, flow, and accessibility of the information needed for management decision-making is therefore necessary. Private universities may need to know and implement how to diversify own revenue sources so as to reduce their vulnerability to fluctuation in proprietors' funding. The range of stakeholders may be broadened so that the influence of any single interest group is reduced. Consultancies, rental services, hospitality businesses and others are to be aggressively thought of (Adekunle & Tayo, 2009).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Resulting from NUC inspection and monitoring on standards, some private universities were found wanting for not adequately complying with the laid down rules and regulations on standards by the commission. NUC had sanctioned some universities in the past by suspending their operating licenses (Adesulu et al, 2012).

The regulatory authorities and relevant stakeholders such as the Federal Ministry of Education, National Universities Commission, Standards Organization of Nigeria, the Nigeria Labour Congress and others that are concerned with the setting of standards, maintenance and enforcement of standards in the university administration. Federal Ministry of Education and the National Universities Commission should ensure that private university applying for approval should have met up with up to fifty percent of the operational requirements or more before approval to commence is issued. However, the standards required by the regulatory authorities should be attainable so as to encourage private sector participation in developing the higher education sector in the country.

Continuous monitoring of the private sector universities for accreditation is of the whole essence, and cannot be over-emphasized in a developing

country such as Nigeria. The focus on accreditation should be quality of staff and graduates from the institutions, infrastructure, facility, research effort among others.

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