

Towards Effective Management of Private University Education in Nigeria

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Abstract

University education plays a crucial role in the provision of high-level manpower for the socio-political and economic development of any nation. To this end, the effective management of this educational sector most especially at the private level becomes very imperative. This paper therefore aims at examine the myriads of problems militating against the effective management of private universities in Nigeria and how this problems can be curbed or reduced to the bearest minimum. Prominent among these problems are: Inadequate funding, profit maximization motive, shortage of faculty member, wideness of social gap and so on. It was therefore recommended that government should work hand in hand with proprietors of private universities by giving them access to Education Tax Fund (ETF) grant and providing them with necessary logistics supports so as to enhance or promote effective performances on their parts

Keywords: effective management, private university, access, education, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Education is widely accepted as a major instrument for promoting socio-economic, political and cultural development, Universities whether public or private undoubtedly have come to be regarded as the apex, of the Nigerian educational system. (Abiodun-Oyebanji, 2009). It is therefore expected of every University to be the basic think tank of the society in all areas, generate ideas and knowledge, and equally disseminate them (Ogbodo & Nwaoku, 2007). National Policy on Education (NPE 2004) further buttressed the above view by stating that the goals of University Education shall be to contribute to National development through high level relevant manpower training, developing the intellectual capacity of an individual and the society at large; to develop also the intellectual capacity of individuals to understand their local and external environments, to acquire both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to be self reliant and useful members of the society. Considering the importance of University education, Ajayi and Ekundayo (2006) submitted that the funds allocated to higher education should not be merely considered as an expense but a long-term investment; of benefit to society as a whole. These benefits in the words of Okebukola (2007) are reflected on a societal levels in terms of producing quality graduates to catalyse the economy, lowers unemployment rates, improved health, lower crime rates, higher tax returns and other trickle down effects.

Historical Development of University Education in Nigeria

The provision and management of university education started in Nigeria with the establishment of University College Ibadan in 1948 and affiliated to

the University of London to award degrees. The University College continued as the only university in Nigeria until 1960. (Ajayi & Ekundayo, 2010).

In the words of Alele-Williams (1996), the report of Eric Ashby Commission which was set up in 1959 later led to the establishment of the "Ashby University" as regional universities in the then three regions of Nigeria: In the East, the university of Nigeria, Nsukka 1960, in the West, the university of Ife 1961, and Ahmadu Bello university Zaria in the North 1962. Also, in 1962, according to Babalola et al (2007) University College, Ibadan was granted full-fledged University status. University of Lagos, Akoka was established in 1962, and university of Benin, which was established in 1970, constitutes Nigerian first generation universities.

The post-civil war oil boom era and the geographical restructuring of Nigeria into 12 States led to the stringent demands for more universities in the newly created states. (Ajayi & Ayodele, 2002). Government acceded to this demand and in 1975, seven new universities of the second generation were found in Jos, Calabar, Kano, Maiduguri, Sokoto, Ilorin and Port-Harcourt by the Federal government.

In the 80s, there was proliferation of state owned universities which Shehu (2005) described as senseless, political proliferation of tertiary institutions during the period of economic decline, when there were no enough resources to back up such action. These state universities constitute Nigerian third generation universities.

The fourth generation Universities are those ones established between 1991 to date. These include more federal and state universities, Nigeria open

universities and private universities. All these universities according to Ajayi & Ayodele (2002) should be autonomous and national in outlook. In the words of John (2011), Nigerian universities has now risen to 117 with states and the federal government having 36 each and private individuals having 45; as at the time of this study.

Emergence of Private Universities in Nigeria

The establishment of universities dates back to 1979 when education was placed on the concurrent list in the nation's constitution. By the provision of the constitution, individuals, private entrepreneurs and organization were empowered along with the state and federal government to establish and fund such institutions. Within a period of four years, twenty-four private universities were established without due regard to proper planning and implementation.

The Buhari-Idiagbon regime that seized power December 31st 1983 promulgated Decree (Act) 19 of 1984 and 16 of 1985 which cancelled, the approval for setting up private universities. The federal university did not only repeal the private universities (Abolition and Prohibition) Decree of 1984 but also outlined the criteria to be satisfied by prospective proprietors of such universities in the country. The act stipulated the conditions that must be met to enable the National Universities Commission (NUC) assess the adequacy or otherwise of the applications and process before approval and licensing.

Management of Private University Education in Nigeria

Management of private university education can be looked at from two dimensions; the external and internal levels. At the external level, this is control by the federal government through National Universities Commission (NUC), a body charged with the coordination of university management in the country. In the words of Okojie (2007), improving quality of university education in the country include accreditation of courses, approval of courses and programmes, maintenance of minimum academic standards, monitoring of universities giving guidelines for setting up of universities, monitoring of private universities, prevention of the establishment of illegal campus and implementation of appropriate sanctions.

On the other hand, the internal management of a private university is represented by a simple orgnogram. The first is the chancellor, who is the titular head of the University who by law, in relation to the university, takes precedence before all other members of the university and when he is present, presides at all meeting of the convocation held for conferring degrees. At the apex of the management structure within each university is the Governing Council, headed by the pro-Chancellor which is in

charge of administrative functions such as setting of goals, formulation of policy, staff development, general discipline, and budget approval among others. In addition to this, there is the senate, headed by the Vice-Chancellor and the Registrar as the Secretary. The senate regulates the academic activities of the university following the general guidelines provided by the NUC.

According to Mgbekem (2004), Universities, whether private or public are run through committee systems which are either responsible to the council or the senate, prominent among these committee are finance and general purpose committee, development committee, appointment and promotion committee, admission committee, academic planning committee, committee of deans, research grants committee, timetable committee, ceremonies committee and so on.

Justification for the Establishment of Private Universities in Nigeria

In the words of Isibor (2011), the positive impact private universities had on the development of education in Nigeria can not be over-emphasized. According to him, private universities have impacted positively on the education sector so far. Before now, there were incidences of strike actions in the government owned or public universities, no regular academic calendar and a programme that should last for just four years could end up causing a student six or seven years. In fact, student then could only know the year of admission they could not predict their year of convocation. Consequently, the Nigeria universities certificates that were once highly rated in foreign countries lost their credibility, such that when a Nigerian graduate wanted to pursue a master's degree abroad, they were forced to undergo undergraduate courses before they were enrolled. However, the entrance of private universities has brought stability into the system.

Morenike (2003) further argues that since the major university teachers' strike in 1989, the university system in Nigeria has been rooted into pungent soil; according to him, from that point on-ward, the university degree has become no more a university degree but a certificate, armed with which a job might be obtained at a later date. Therefore, there is a need for private involvement in providing educational opportunities for people in developing countries, particularly in Nigeria, to ensure that all categories of the citizens have access to university education.

Also, private universities have reduced admission pressure on public universities. Though, access to university education is still low, private universities have afforded Nigerians the opportunity to seek admission alternatives. To buttress this, Oyedepo (2002) says that covenant university; a privately owned university has admitted 1,530 students within

seven months as pioneers. Private universities have also raised academic standard and moral values in the nation's ivory towers; it has equally improved quality delivery of education, they have restored sanity and discipline into the system and have reduced industrial action drastically in the system. For instance, the first ranking of universities done by the National Universities Commission revealed that private universities despite their young ages, performed better than many of the public and old universities. Muzali (1999) argues further that the establishment of private universities in Nigeria has boosted healthy competition and enhanced standardization between the public and private universities. These competitions according to Robinson and Nwaham (2007) could be based on research teaching, infrastructural and manpower development.

Ajayi and Ekundayo (2010) further posited that, in order to align with practices in other parts of the world, there is therefore a need for the establishment of private universities in Nigeria. In advanced countries of the world, both private and public sector of the economy are involved in the provision and management of university education. For instance in Japan, 74% of the universities are privately owned. Establishment of private universities has also brought about employment opportunities to Nigerians. For instance, in the words of Robinson and Nwaham (2007), Covenant University a privately owned university at inception in 2002 offered employment to 46 academics staff (including 6 professors and 2 senior lecturers), 12 administrative staff, labourers, security men, messengers, clerical officers and so on and this has drastically reduced the rate of unemployment in the country. This scenario is also typical of other privately owned universities in the country.

Challenges Confronting Private Universities Management in Nigeria

The story of university education in Nigeria today has largely been that of mixed fortunes Ibukun (1997) observed that university management in Nigeria today is nothing but crises management. Prominent among the challenges confronting private universities management in Nigeria include:

i. Inadequate funding: Running a private university is a capital intensive venture that a 'trader' can not venture into. To run a University is not cheap and unfortunately many private universities owners in Nigeria appear not to have the financial muscle to bear the financial burdens of these institutions. According to Oyeneye (2006) and Adegbite (2007); the major challenge facing the management of university system in Nigeria, whether public or private is inadequate funding and the apparent shortage of fund available to the university system has been responsible for inadequate facilities in many of

these universities; many of them seem to be groaning, silently for lack of funds. (Olugbamila, 2008). Fadipe (1999) opines that the high cost of facilities such as building for classrooms, offices, furniture items for students and staff, laboratory equipment, relevant books and journals in the library in terms of procurement and maintenance, however, constitute a very serious problem to private universities.

ii. Motive for profit maximization: It is generally believed that many operators of private universities are out to rake in much profit. Majority of the private universities being run in Nigeria are profit making ventures. Ajayi & Ekundayo (2010) in their words opined that they charged high fees which many Nigerians can not afford but only the few rich or privilege ones. Adewole (2011) further argued that some private university operators are after profit and according to him, in this business of running a university, one may have to wait for between 20 and 25 years before one can talk of profit. So, anyone that came with the mindset of a "trader" will get his or her fingers burnt, because university is a capital intensive venture and to sustain a university is beyond what an individual can do, Adewole (2011) submitted. Many private universities owner appear to be motivated by profit rather than service.

iii. Problem of shortage of faculty members: Many Nigerian private universities are in dire need of adequate human capital, modern infrastructure without which one cannot run and manage an ideal university that is globally competitive and locally relevant. Some of the needed or required manpower are not available to some of these private universities. Majority of their staff, especial academic staff are bottom heavy in terms of mix. Many of these private universities are contending with the problem of shortage of faculty members to drive or beef up their universities. Fadipe (1999) asserts that non-professional teachers who are neither good nor effective can not be said to be contributing much to quality education. Many of the lecturers are found to lack both technical and personnel competences required in teaching because they are not professionally qualified. (Robinson and Nwaham 2007).

iv. Wideness of social gap: Education Services provided by Private individuals do create inequality and widen the already existing social gap between the children of the well-to-do Nigerians and that of commoners. The children of the rich have more access to private universities than the children of the poor and this has continued to aggravated the social gap between the rich and the poor in the country.

v. Cost recovery plans may jeopardize quality: The owners of some of the private universities

are businessman and women who have invested in education and therefore expect returns on their investments. The cost-recovery plans however may affect the quality of services they render and consequently affect the output in the long run and this may jeopardize the applicability of acquired knowledge to the industry.

Possible Solutions to the Management Problems of Private Universities in Nigeria

Since inadequate funding is the bane of many private universities, It may therefore, be right to say that government should therefore help ease their financial burden as it does for public universities; this can be achieved through their access to the Education Trust Fund (ETF) grant and also through support from the private sector and international agencies. This idea seems to be in order since many of the parents of children who attend private universities also contribute to Education Trust Fund. With proper funding, quality staff and adequate facilities would be ensured and then, some of the challenges confronting private universities can therefore be tackled. Government could also assist by providing them with infrastructural facilities or generally provide them with logistic supports.

Since many of the private universities are confronted with the problem of shortage of quality Faculty members, this could be addressed by strengthen local staff and enhance their international staff ratio by recruiting top-class foreign teachers/researchers in programmes it desires to excel. Enticing outstanding academic-prize winners in the words of Okebukola (2008) will add significant value to the standing of many private universities. Also, the proprietor of private universities must not be motivated by profit but by service. Private universities are not something that one can invest in and get money the next day, if that is the mind set of people going into it, then they do not have any business coming into the establishment of private universities if they can not make the sacrifice required. National University Commission (NUC) must also ensure that minimum academic standard is enforced in many of the private universities which are bottom heavy with its academic staff mix. The quality should be such that will consist a good proportion of seasoned and experience academic staff.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The need for university education whether public or private stems from the fact that universities are the centres of knowledge, the incubators of international best practices. It is the citadel for the production of critically minded individuals, a place where ideas contest for supremacy and the best ideas prevail. The system is responsible for the development and production of high-level manpower within the context of the nation's needs.

It has therefore been seen that university which is the bedrock of development in the country, especially the privately owned ones which are newly coming up are bisected with myriads of problem which include inadequate funding, acute shortage of quality faculty members, profit maximization motive and so on. However, for meaningful development to take place in private university system in Nigeria, the government must be ready to work hand in hand with the proprietors of these universities by lending helping hands to them in terms of given them access to ETF grant and providing them with necessary logistics support.

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