

PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES AS PANACEA TO INCREASED ACCESS TO UNIVERSITY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: A STUDY OF THREE PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES.

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ABSTRACT

Providing university education to citizens should not be the solitary efforts of government, but should be the responsibility of adults at all levels hence, the involvement of the private sector in the provision of university education. This study investigated the rationale for the establishment of private universities in Nigeria using three selected universities namely Adeleke University, Ede, Bowen University, Iwo and Fountain University Osogbo. Qualitatively, secondary data were collected and analyzed to establish the areas in which private universities have contributed to the development of higher education in Nigeria. Quantitatively, 140 copies of questionnaire were distributed among randomly selected respondents from the universities while principal officers were interviewed. Findings of the study revealed that private universities were established to provide university education to some of those who failed to gain admission into public universities. This was clearly shown when 92.1% of respondents agreed that public university admissions were with pressure. It also revealed that private universities have contributed to the improvement of the quality of university education in the areas of stable academic calendar (96.9%), creation of jobs for both academics and non-academics (52.8%), and provision of adequate facilities for conducive learning (86.6%). The study concluded that the selected private universities have played a significant role in the provision of university education in Nigeria, especially by way of making available opportunities to some of those who would not have been able to have university education because of the tight admission opportunity into public universities in Nigeria.

Keywords: Access, Private Universities, University Education, Panacea, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

The private sector contributes immensely to national development and it has played a dominant role in the Nigerian higher educational system. Higher education provides the opportunity for people to develop through dissemination of specialized knowledge and skill. The inability of the public sector to provide for all those aspiring to acquire university education has created the avenue for the establishment of private universities in Nigeria. This has eased admission challenges, even though there is still the need for continuous effort of the private sector in the establishment of more private universities that will give a chance to more individuals, rich or poor, to access university education. This study considered three selected private universities to analyze the role of private universities in the provision of university education in Nigeria.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The role of education as a channel for promoting the socio-economic, political and cultural development of any nation can never be over-emphasized. Higher education in Nigeria is dated back to 1932 with the establishment of the Yaba Higher College. Nigerians later agitated for a more comprehensive higher education, This agitation made the colonial secretary, Oliver Stanley to set up the constitution of the Asquith and Elliot Commission on Higher Education in 1943 (Taiwo. 2006). The result of their report in 1943 led to the establishment of the first university in Nigeria. Consequently, the University College Ibadan was established in 1948, as an affiliate of the University of London. The University College was the only university in Nigeria until 1960 (Jubril, 2003). The need for higher education in the new nation prompted the Nigerian government to commission an Inquiry called the Ashby Commission in April 1959. The Commission was to advise government on the higher education needs of the new nation for its first two decades of independence. Between 1960 and 1970, the first generation universities were founded namely: University of Nigeria, Nsukka in the Eastern Region, University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University) in the Western Region, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria in the Northern Region, University of Lagos and University of Benin.

Consequently, the second generation universities were established between 1975 and 1977, this was done in reflection of the 19 states structure. These include University of Calabar (1975); the University of Jos (1975); the University of Ilorin (1976); the University of Sokoto (1977); the University of Port Harcourt (1977); and Bayero University, Kano (1977). These universities became federal universities by virtue of Decree 46 of 1977 which provided for Federal Government take-over of all universities in Nigeria (Jubril, 2003). The 1979 Constitution permitted state governments to establish state-owned universities if they so desired. Based on this, eight state universities were founded between 1979 and 1983. They include Anambra State University of Technology, Enugu; Bendel State University (now Ambrose Alli University) Ekpoma; Cross River State University, Uyo; Imo State University, Owerri; Lagos State University, Ijanikin; Ogun State University, Ago Iwoye; Ondo State University, Ado-Ekiti and Rivers State University of Science and Technology, Port Harcourt. Moja (2000) in her paper titled Nigeria Education Sector Analysis: An analytical synthesis of performance and main issues, affirmed that:

“Access to higher education and the lack of the capacity of the system to absorb the numbers of students seeking admission to higher education institutions

continues to pose a serious problem. For example, it is estimated that out of 1,800,000 JAMB candidates seeking admission to universities, more than 1,200,000, which is about 66.6% are not able to gain admission to any of the Nigerian universities”.

As at 2018, Nigeria has 165 approved universities comprising 43 Federal Universities, 47 State Universities and 75 Private Universities (NUC, 2019). The establishment of private universities broke the monopoly of provision of university education by the public sector because for decades, university education was solely provided by public universities and their inability to grant admission to teeming applicants became obvious from the 1990s.

The central aim of the policy to implement private participation in the nation tertiary education system is to catalyze enrolment, given the fact that the existing public tertiary institutions have proven, over time to have failed to fully accommodate the higher number of applicants for admissions. Even in some of the existing public universities, there were decaying infrastructural facilities, incessant strikes caused by poor welfare of the work force through delay in salary payments and student unrest, cultism, immoral attitudes of some lecturers and moral decadence among students.

Right from inception of private universities in Nigeria from 1999 to 2018, we have seen a dramatic increment in the number of enrolment of students into tertiary education nationwide. In comparative terms, the number of student enrolment within the same time frame prior to commencement of private universities shows increase of an average of 6% which buttress the fact that private universities impact positively in that sector of the economy. However, existing literatures in this area of study show that the current level of achievement made by private universities engagement in the private sector is far from optimum level desirable or achievable due to certain fundamental challenges faced by private universities in Nigeria. This study therefore, situates its study problematic at the critical nexus of a litany of factors that have mitigated the potential of private universities to perform their roles in the nation’s educational system. This study focuses on three selected private universities for the analysis of the role that private universities play in the provision of university education in Nigeria. They are Adeleke University, Ede, Bowen University, Iwo and Fountain University, Osogbo.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Human Capital Theory by Adam Smith which was formulated in 1776 (“in the wealth of Nations”) is relevant to this study. The theory argues intuitively that education endows an individual with productivity-enhancing human capital and that this increased productivity results in increased earnings in the labour market. The underlying principle on which this study is based is the provision of further education for an individual above the education at the primary and secondary levels to enable an increased productivity leading to increased earnings in the labour market. The human capital theory is the most influential economic theory of western education which sets the framework of government policies on higher education since the early 1960s.

The determinant, known as the 'human capital' differs from the 'physical capital'. While the physical capital represents the assets, properties and materials including money which are used for the production process, the human capital signifies the innate abilities, knowledge or skills of workers in an organization (Olaniyan and Okemakinde, 2008). The theory hypothesized that the human capital can be obtained through education, which can be at primary, secondary or tertiary level. The level of education reified by an individual will dictate the ability of the individual. When the level of education is high, the quality of the human capital will be high, but low if the level of education is low. The theory also stipulates that the production of human capital will yield considerable return in future, in terms of greater life time income. The higher the quality of individual in terms of the level of education attained, the higher will be the level of income. The theory further states that better educated individual with more skills will get better job and will thus be more productive and will contribute more to the economic growth of the nation (Olaniyan and Okemakinde, 2008). In view of the above review of the Human Capital Theory and its relevance to the study, it has been found expedient to anchor the study on it.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Globally, education is considered as a way of enlightening people in the society, it is a concept that is considered as the foundation to a successful life. It also serves as a major tool to the development of any nation that desires to be ranked as one of the developed nations in the world (Akpotu & Akpochofo, 2009). Private universities are universities that are not owned, funded or operated by the government but, are subjected to government regulations. University education is a tertiary education leading to award of an academic degree and it is an optional final stage of formal learning that occurs after completion of secondary education. Universally, university education is seen as the apex of education. It is an essential aspect of the development of the innovative workforce of any economy while acquisition of university education appears to promote self-reliance and contributes to the development of the nation. The funding of education system should be the priority of any focused government. As important as university is to the development of a nation, the funding necessary to provide it has not been easy to achieve by the government. Due to the population explosion in Nigeria, government has not found it easy to provide university education for the teeming number of those aspiring to acquire it. This has led to people advocating for the establishment of private universities in the country. It is quite evident that public universities alone cannot provide university education based on the number of candidates who fail to get admission each year.

Historical Development of University Education in Nigeria

The history of university education in Nigeria is dated back to 1948 with the establishment of University College, Ibadan which was affiliated to the University of London. The University College remained the only university in Nigeria until 1960. The agitations of Nigerians for a more comprehensive higher education that will cut across all regions of the newly created nation prompted the government to set up a commission in 1959 that will develop education policy, which will cater for the nation's educational need in her first twenty years of existence (Ajayi & Ekundayo, 2010). The report of Eric Ashby Commission led to the establishment of regional universities which resulted in the establishment of six universities between 1960 and 1970. These universities were referred to as the first generation universities (Alele-Williams, 1996).

The geographical restructuring of Nigeria into 12 States and the post-civil war oil boom era led to the demands for more universities (Ajayi& Ayodele, 2002). Government acceded to this demand and more universities were established by both federal and state government from 1975. These universities were referred to as second, third and fourth generation universities. These include the Open University and private universities. Table 1 shows the evolution of universities in Nigeria from 1948 to 2018:

Table 1: Evolution of Universities in Nigeria: 1948 to 2018

Period	Number of Federal Universities	Number of State Universities	Number of Private Universities	Total
1948	1	-----	-----	1
1950 - 1959	-----	-----	-----	---
1960 - 1969	4	-----	-----	4
1970 - 1979	8	1	-----	9
1980 - 1989	9	6	-----	15
1990 - 1999	3	5	3	11
2000 - 2006	4	18	25	47
2007 - 2018	14	17	47	78
TOTAL	43	47	75	165

Source: Various Publications of the Federal Ministry of Education and National Universities Commission

Development of Private Universities between 1999 and 2018

The democratic system of government under President Olusegun Obasanjo in 1999 was the turning point in the history of private sector involvement in the provision of higher education in Nigeria. The new government saddled the National Universities Commission (NUC) – a federal government regulatory agency for all the universities (federal, state and private) – with the responsibility to receive applications, inspect and verify the facilities of intended applicants of private universities across the country. Consequently, it processed all applications and made recommendations to the federal government. Based on this, the government approved the first three licensed private universities in Nigeria in 1999 namely Babcock University, Ilishan Remo, Ogun State; Igbinedion University, Okada, Edo State and Madonna University, Okija, Anambra State. Since then, there was virtually no year that a private university was not established. As at 2018, the number of private universities approved by the Nigeria Universities Commission stood at 75 and it is believed that more will still emerge.

Justification for the Establishment of Private Universities in Nigeria

The role played and the positive impact that private universities had on the education and socio-economic development of Nigeria cannot be overemphasized (Isibor, 2011; Osho, 2012). Isibor, posited that before now, the challenges facing public universities were enormous. The incidences of irregular academic calendar, inability to offer admission to teeming applicants due to insufficient facilities, strike actions by academic and non-academic staff and student unrest impacted negatively on the government owned universities. The private involvement

in the provision of university education for all interested citizens eased the admission pressure on public universities. This was also corroborated by Ajadi (2010) and Obasi (2007). In the words of Ajadi (2010) private universities have also 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, Adeleke University, Ede, Bowen University, Iwo and Fountain University, Osogbo, are privately owned faith-based universities and have since admitted a good number of students who probably would not have had access to university education.

Table 2: Number of admitted students in the selected institutions since its inception

Year of establishment	Adeleke University, Ede	Bowen University, Iwo	Fountain University, Osogbo
2002/2003	---	508	---
2003/2004	---	1749	---
2004/2005	---	2686	---
2005/2006	---	3447	---
2006/2007	---	3924	---
2007/2008	---	4011	200
2008/2009	---	4197	148
2009/2010	---	4328	181
2010/2011	---	4629	204
2011/2012	191	4800	296
2012/2013	342	4587	187
2013/2014	310	4609	221
2014/2015	261	4386	364
2015/2016	425	4009	394
2016/2017	844	3910	341
2017/2018	1180	4051	410
Total	3,553	59,831	2,946

Source: Admission Office Records 2019.

This, in no small measure, gave hope and opportunities to candidates that would have been denied admission into public schools. It is observed that private universities have been able to raise the academic standards and moral values in the education system. These have been done through improved quality delivery of education and the restoration of sanity and discipline into the system. In addition, industrial action has reduced in the system. Muzali (1999) opines that the establishment of private universities in Nigeria has boosted standardization and enhanced healthy competition between the public and private universities. Private universities were able to meet the criteria and all the guidelines given by NUC as regards university establishment. The establishment of private universities has also brought about employment opportunities to Nigerians. For instance, Adeleke University, Ede, as at 2018, has a staff capacity of 154 teaching staff, 177 senior non teaching staff and 190 junior staff comprising of administrative staff, labourers, messengers, clerical officers, security men and women. This has reduced the rate of unemployment in Nigeria. The 2017 report of

National Bureau of Statistic / The Joint Admission Matriculation Board reveals that the admission percentage into higher education is still very low. The Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board data reflected that a total of 11,703,709 applications were received between 2007 and 2016 while a total of 2,674,485 students were admitted into both public and private universities across the 36 states and the FCT between 2007 and 2016.

Table 3: JAMB Admission Statistics from 2007-2016

YEAR	NUMBER OF APPLICATION	NUMBER ADMITTED	% OF STUDENTS ADMITTED
2007	1,028,984	129,445	12.6%
2008	1,192,050	113,100	9.5%
2009	1,306,193	190, 868	6.8%
2010	1,513,940	423,531	28%
2011	1,636,356	417,341	26%
2012	1,632,835	447,176	27%
2013	1,924,393	463,395	24%
2014	1,785,608	437,704	25%
2015	1,612,247	485,338	30%
2016	1,598,330*	****	****
Total	11,703,709	2,674,485	

Data Source: National Bureau of Statistics /Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board. February 2017

* Only the number of applicants was made available in the report.

1. METHODOLOGY

Qualitative and quantitative methods were used in this study. Secondary data were collected from published books, journals, research papers, conferences and workshop papers, government publications, newspapers, magazines and related internet sources. Quantitatively, the research design used in this study is the descriptive method. There are three main types of descriptive method: observational, case-study and survey methods. For the purpose of this study, the case-study method was used. The case-study methods involve an in-depth study of a group of people and determining their expectancy effect. This method of research allows representative samples to be selected from the population through the use of random and purposive sampling technique while research instruments are used to elicit information from the respondents. For the purpose of this study simple random sampling technique was combined with purposive sampling technique to select 140 employees out of the total respondents' population for the study. Three of the 140 respondents were Registrars of each university; they were selected through purposive sampling technique while 137 of the 140 respondents 15.11% fifty (50) of the 331 teaching and non-teaching staff of Adeleke University, 10.84% seventy (70) of the 646 teaching and non-teaching staff of Bowen University and 19.8% twenty (20) of the 101 teaching and non-teaching staff were selected through simple random sampling technique. These techniques were used because they ensured that everyone in the population had an equal chance of being selected but the nature of the study would not permit everyone to participate. The goal of the sampling method used

was to obtain a sample that was representative of the population. The techniques used by the researcher to select the sample size required prior knowledge and availability of the target population which allowed a determination of the size of the sample needed to achieve a reasonable estimate with accepted precision and accuracy of population. The information gathered was edited, coded and the variables were given sequential numbers for easy identification using computer programmes. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to carry out the analysis of this study.

2. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 4: Rationale for the Establishment of Private Universities in Nigeria

S/NO	Reasons for the establishment of Private Universities in Nigeria	Yes %	No %	No Response %	Total %
1	Public Universities are with admission pressure?	92.1	1.6	6.3	100
2	Poor standard of some public University students?	62.2	31.5	6.3	100
3	Inadequate funding of public Universities resulting in poor and inadequate infrastructure?	85.0	8.7	6.3	100
4	Increase in enrollment of students in public Universities resulting in inadequate education delivery, inspection, monitoring and other quality assurance activities	87.4	4.7	7.9	100
5	Increase in the number of students seeking admission into Universities	83.5	11.8	4.7	100
6	Reduction in state funding for public higher education	72.4	18.1	9.4	100
7	The need to improve the technological standard of University education in Nigeria in order to meet up with the World standard	79.5	14.2	6.3	100
8	Problem of irregular school calendar in public Universities as a result of strike by students and staff	98.4	0	1.6	100
9	Non and late payment of staff salaries, allowances and benefits	50.4	40.2	9.4	100

Source: Field Survey 2019.

Table 4 shows that (92.1%) of the respondents agreed that public universities are with admission pressure, 1.6% did not agree and 6.3% made no response. Majority (62.2%) of the respondents agreed that poor standard of some public universities is the reason for the

establishment of private universities, 31.5% said otherwise and 6.3% made no response. Most (85.0%) of the respondents also said that inadequate funding of public Universities results in poor and inadequate infrastructure, 8.7% said otherwise and 6.3% made no response; 87.4% of the respondents said increase in enrolment of students in public universities results in inadequate education delivery, monitoring, inspection and other quality assurance activities, 4.7% said otherwise and 7.9% made no response. Majority (83.5%) of the respondents also said that increase in the number of students seeking admission into universities is one of the reasons for the establishment of private universities, 11.8% said otherwise while 4.7% made no response. Furthermore, 72.4% of the respondents asserted that reduction in state funding for public higher education is among the reasons for the establishment of private universities, 18.1% said otherwise and 9.4% made no response. Similarly, 79.5% of the respondents said the need to improve the technological standard of university education in Nigeria in order to meet up with the World standard is among the reasons for the establishment of private universities, 14.2% said otherwise and 6.3% made no response. Majority (98.4%) of the respondents said that the problem of irregular school calendar in public universities as a result of strike by students and staff is among the reasons and 1.6% made no response. Lastly, 50.4% of the respondents said non and late payment of staff salaries, allowances and benefits are one of the reasons for private universities, 40.2% said otherwise and 9.4% made no response.

The contributions of private universities towards the development of university education in Nigeria cannot be over-emphasized. These contributions are reflected in Findings 1 – 4

Finding 1

Private universities have been able to provide university education to those who failed to gain admission into public universities. In fact some parents desire their wards to attend private universities because of the timeliness in terms of graduation. The advent of these private universities gave prospective students and their parents the opportunity to make choices. The sponsorship and scholarship schemes of these universities have also been a great advantage to the less privileged.

Finding 2

Private universities have helped, to a great extent, in solving the problem of irregular school calendar. They are not saddled with incessant strikes, cultism and other factors that affect students' learning which can lead to the closure of the school. The availability of private universities thus enables students to finish their academic programme within the period allocated to the programme without interruption.

Finding 3

Creation of jobs has to do with providing job opportunities for those who are searching or looking for job opportunities. There is no way universities will be established without recruiting people to work there. There will be recruitment from the external environment of the private universities. Job creation is one of the strengths of private universities in Nigeria as the establishments of private universities have reduced unemployment in the society.

Finding 4

Since universities are seen as a citadel of learning, it needs appropriate structures for effective teaching and learning activities. These private universities have been able to provide conducive learning and living environment to students and some members of staff, even though there will always be need for improvement as the number of enrolment increases.

CONCLUSION

The need for university education, whether public or private, stems from the fact that universities are the centers of knowledge, the citadel for the production of critically- minded individuals and the incubators of international best practices. It is a place where ideas contest for supremacy and the best ideas prevail. The university 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 universities are the bedrock of development in the country.

The result of this research generated findings that are valuable and showed the rationale for the establishment of private universities in Nigeria. No doubt, university education promotes income growth, the quality of any country's higher education sector is therefore a factor which decisively affects the outcome of that country's relative position in the world economy. To this extent, therefore, access to university education is a very important policy focus of any development conscious country. Private universities, within the past two decades of its participation in the provision of university education in Nigeria, have made remarkable success. The success achieved by Adeleke University, Ede, Bowen University, Iwo and Fountain University, Osogbo within their short period of existence is noteworthy. These universities have been able to provide regular academic calendar in which students know when they will conclude their programmes once they are admitted into the university; they are free from strike actions and there is absence of students' unrest. The universities have provided secured and peaceful environment for conducive learning. Considering the fact that the three selected private universities are faith-based institutions, they have contributed to improved morality among students and staff of the institutions.

Based on the research findings, the study concludes that the selected private universities have played a significant role in providing university education in Nigeria, especially by way of making available the opportunities to some of those who would not have been able to have university education because of the tight admissions into public universities in Nigeria and those who willingly chose to attend private universities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Though the establishment of private universities has contributed to improved access to education, this does not disprove the fact that there are varying challenges confronting these private universities in which, if right measures are put in place, there will be improved service delivery in the university education sector. Therefore, there is a need for major stakeholders such as the government to come up with policies that will enhance provision of access to university education. 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 giving them

access to Education Trust Fund (ETF) grant and providing them with necessary logistics support.

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