

THE ROLES OF NIGERIAN PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES IN THE 21ST CENTURY: A REVISIT OF THE ISSUES AND CHALLENGES.

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Abstract

The study centered on the roles of Nigerian private universities of 21st century: A revisit of the issues and challenges. The main of the discourse is to examine if the private universities has brought back quality education in Nigeria as they proclaim. The study was sparked by the common observation that private universities are yet to salvage our educational system, upon the fact that our public universities are suffering from insufficient budgetary allocation, incessant labour unrest, poor lecturer's motivation, outdated academic materials, dilapidated infrastructures, among others. The paper presents historical perceptive of university education in Nigeria. Since there is no university system without its challenges, some of the challenges are highlighted. The methodology used in this paper is mainly the analysis of secondary data from, literatures, documentaries, local and international publications (learned journals). The study contends that private universities in Nigeria have failed to contribute immensely to national development through pursuing quality education in Nigeria. The paper recommends among others that: Cutting-edge researches should be conducted at all times by lectures to understand the changing nature of the society. The findings of the researchers should be used to review the existing policies to bring out new ones that will meet needs of the moment. Government should therefore give listening ears to these researchers and purposively harness the contents of the research findings for the good of the Nigerian nation.

Key words: Nigeria, private universities, challenges, Public Universities.

Introduction

It is a maxim that education in Nigeria is an instrument “par excellence” for effecting national development, and has witnessed active participation by non-governmental agencies, communities, and individuals as well as government intervention. However, it is therefore desirous for the Nation to spell out in clear and unequivocal terms the philosophy and objectives that underlie its investment and possible growth in education. University education should make optimum contributions to national development and intensify or diversify its programmes for the development of high level manpower within the context of the needs of the nation (National Policy on Education, 2014). Education is an experience which can be termed the sum total of a person’s experience. Education can be seen as culture, way of life and as the process of transmitting, advancing and consolidating culture to and in individuals.

The prime of place education occupies in the developmental effort of nations has never been doubted the world over, with education considered as the biggest industry that touches on every fabric of human endeavor (Blaike, 2002).

The private university education has seriously cause unprecedented changes in the face of the world more rapidly in the 21st century than in the preceding centuries. Our private educational system has been evolving faster than before, and the term “21st century” has become an integral part of educational thinking and planning for the future, with educators and administrators actively searching for ways to prepare students for the future. An in-depth look and search of the literature in this preparation of the students for the future reveals that, various studies have shown that rote memorization is not an effective learning strategy and that teacher centered classroom may not be the most efficient structure ones for student engagement. However, the role of education is to prepare students to become active, responsible, and successful contributing members of the society, I must say that this has not changed. According to Otonko, (2012) different skills and teaching methods are required for the improvement of private education in the 21st century, and educators are not relenting in their efforts to fashion out, research into, adopt and implement teaching methods compatible with the 21st century educational orientation.

In another development, despite learning about different skills, methods and activities in improving the 21st century private education by educators, there is still a need for universities to possess some qualities that will foster 21st century learning in order to produce effective and efficient learners who can apply that which has been learnt to all life situations, with the ability to reason critically and proffer solution to and in different situations. From the foregoing, one can pause for a moment to ask some pertinent questions such as: Is Nigerian private universities still performing their roles in practical terms in the present? If no, what could be responsible for the changing roles in the recent past? This paper seeks to examine the various ways Nigerian private universities have contributed or failed to bring back quality education system in Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarifications and Theoretical Underpinning

In order to establish a firm grasp of the subject matter of the discourse, it is necessary to attempt to define each of the operational terms. This is more necessary to establish the linkages between Nigerian private universities, and educational development in 21st century.

Nigerian: Nigerian is also subjected to various definitions like many other concepts. But simply put, Nigerian is people that come from Nigeria or of Nigerian decent.

Private Universities: The term has known one universally accepted definition. In order words, it has no settled meaning as its meaning is elastic and inexhaustible. For some people private universities means, those institutions or tertiary education that belongs only to an individual, person or a specific group which government have limited control on their affairs.

Challenges: According to Oxford Advance Learners Dictionary, challenges are situations that make an action or something a difficult task.

Theoretical Underpinning

This study adopted the Neo-Liberalism Approach for its analysis. Neo-liberalism is a very broad approach that usually refers to fewer government regulations and restrictions in the economy, in exchange for greater participation of private entities; the approach is associated with economic liberalism and deregulation. Neo-liberalism approach is both a body of economic approach and policy stance. The liberal school of economics became famous in Europe when Adam Smith, a Scottish economist, published a book in 1776 titled *the Wealth of*

Nations. He and others advocated the abolition of government involvement in the entire sector through the concept of deregulation and the assumption was that government alone cannot fund educational system for example, that such system should be open up to private entrepreneurs. The major assumption of the approach is for any nation to grow and develop they must be 'liberal' in the sense of no control. The idea encourages 'free' enterprise, 'free' competition that came to mean, free for the capitalists to make huge profits as they wished (Cheadle, 2006). Most countries in the world, to remain globally competitive have pursued the path of economic liberalization: Partial or full privatization of government institutions and assets, greater labour-market flexibility, lower tax for businesses, less restriction on domestic and foreign capital, open market, etc. The approach is the driving force behind the sharp increase in the spread of private owned universities in Nigeria today.

Therefore, in this study, neo-liberalism approach is relevant and strong to analyze the work because the approach believes staunchly in any form of job engagement or working with employers in any terms or condition of service deem fit. Again, the approach is committed to reducing what is seen are over-dependence on government jobs which are vulnerable to long-term job service. For Neo-liberalism, it is a normal duty for private universities to fix any amount as school fees, and to arrange their own employment decisions to maximize their advantage in the labour market which encourages hiring and firing, to reduce cost of running university system. Therefore, the approach is the appropriate theoretical underpinning for this study entitled: The role of Nigerian private universities of 21st century: A revisit of the issues and challenges.

Historical Background of the Development of Universities in Nigeria

Nigeria as a nation came into existence in 1914; it was not until 1934 that the first form of higher education institution, Yaba Higher College, was established in the country. Its establishment was sequel to a realization by Mr. E.R.J Hussey, the then country's colonial Director of Education who noted that, the number of Europeans in posts in Nigeria, not only of senior but also of junior ranks, was very large and that the situation if not checked, could continue indefinitely. Indeed, British personnel were performing duties which already in other countries in Africa were being performed by Africans. It was obviously necessary to start an institution which in the first instance would be a "Higher College" and develop in due course into a university (Hussey, 1959). The aim of the college was to provide post-secondary training to Nigerians in the fields of agriculture, teacher training and engineering. The college was housed at the King College, Lagos. Shortly after the Yaba Higher College started operation, they faced extensive criticism by the Nigerian nationalists on the basis of the inferior quality of education they accused the college of providing.

However, Yaba Higher College only qualified its graduates for lower level jobs such as junior staff and assistants in the colonial government, and to compound the issue, the degree was not recognized outside Nigeria. Hussey was also of the opinion that although no limit would be set to the scope of the institution, it may take a long time before it reached the standard of that of a British university (Hussey, 1930), which must be its ultimate aim. Again, the history of university education in Nigeria cannot be given without the strong contributions of the two Commissions that gave credence to it. Though it was the Elliot Commission which climaxed in the establishment of University College Ibadan (UCI) in 1948, but the contribution of the Asquith Commission cannot be wished away. In August 1943 the British colonial government set up the Asquith Commission to consider the principles which should guide the promotion of higher education, learning and research and the development of higher education, not only in Nigeria, but indeed in all the then Colonies of the British Government.

In another development, an outcome of the Commission's report was a recommendation for "the creation of a University College in an area of approximately five square miles on the outskirts of Ibadan" (Ejiogu, 1986). In May 1947, Principal designate, Dr. Kenneth Mellanby, an ecologist of Cambridge University, England was appointed Principal of the University College Ibadan (UCI). In July 1947 Mellanby arrived Ibadan but saw "no college, no building, no student body, no staff, no governing body" (Mellanby, 1952). But by January 1948, staff and students of Yaba Higher College numbering 13 and 104 respectively were absorbed into the University College as a College of the University of London. It simply means that, graduates of the College would receive degrees of the University of Ibadan; UCI was an affiliate of the University of London (Ike, 1976). Mellanby (1952) recalled:

"A brand new college cannot enjoy the status of an established university until it has time to show its merit. If degrees were from the outset granted at Ibadan, neither in Nigeria nor in the world at large would their holders be recognized as the equate of men and women holding degrees of established Universities"

By this special relationship agreement, the University of Ibadan determined the University College's syllabus, examination schemes, setting of examination questions and grading of answer scripts, and the ultimate award of degrees to the UCI students. This arrangement persisted till 1963 when UCI attained a full university status as the University of Ibadan (U.I). However, it was contended that the UCI was burdened with a number of problems at inception, ranging from rigid constitutional provisions, poor staffing, and low enrolment to high dropout rate (Ibukun, 1997). The University College Ibadan was criticized by some Nigerian nationalists for its overt colonial orientation in staffing and course offerings. Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, a foremost nationalist, speaking in the Nigerian House of Representatives, nicknamed it "a million-dollar baby" because of what he termed the College's "financial irresponsibility" arguing that whereas between 1948 and 1953 the average cost per student each year at U.C.I was between 1,800 and 2,830 US dollars, the average cost per student in U.S.A was approximately, 835 US dollars (Ejiogu, 1986). The Action Group party also scowled at the idea of trying the College to the injunctions of London University, arguing that:

Our political independence would be a sham and at best incomplete if the control of much of our intellectual life remained in foreign hands and the policy of our premier university college is decisively influence by bodies established outside the country (Taiwo, 1980).

Nigerian elites demanded for a full-fledged "African" university in spite of the apparent success of UCI (Ejiogu, 1986). The opportunity came in 1954 when, Azikiwe as the premier of the Eastern Region led an economic mission to Europe to, among other things, "make arrangements for facilitating vocational higher education in Eastern Nigeria". The Mission recommended the establishment of a university in the region. According to Azikiwe and Ojukwu (1954):

"In order that the foundation of Nigeria leadership shall be securely laid, to the end that this country shall cease to imitate the outgrowths of a civilization which is not rooted in African life, we recommend

that a full-fledged University should be established in this Region ...Such a higher institution of learning should not only be culturally, according to the classical concept of Universities, but should also be vocational in its objective and Nigerian in its content”.

Deliberately modeled after the land-grant colleges of U.S.A the recommendation was that six Faculties namely: Arts, Science, Law, Theology, Engineering and Medicine and 22 institutes should take off at inception (Ejiogu, 1986), and it was hoped that these institutes with various foci would help in the transformation of lives of the people of the Region. Besides, it was recommended that the university should be so structured as to make it possible for those wishing to combine studies with their regular work to do so. Thus, on October 5, 1960, the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN) emerged, deliberately designed with a somewhat different perspective from that which had hitherto characterized the idea of a university in West Africa. From its very beginning, the University articulated its first commitment to a philosophy that provides for the broadening of higher education whereby it can be fully equipped to offer courses in such branches of learning as are related to agriculture, business and industry without excluding the classics, the arts and scientific studies (UUN,1965).

In related vein, the conceptualization of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, is one such case when the peculiarities of the immediate milieu, and the most contiguous catchment area was given top priority and good consideration. The inclusion of commerce, business and industry in the curriculum of the university as well as the provision that, those wishing to combine studies with their regular work to do so, was a direct response to the predominant commerce orientation of majority of the people in the region and the time on task available to them. In anticipation of indigenous manpower needs of a soon-to-be independent Nigeria, the Federal Government, in 1959, commissioned an inquiry under the chairmanship of Sir Eric Ashby of Cambridge University, U.K. to investigate Nigeria’s needs in the field of post-school certificate education for its first two decades. Among the Commission’s recommendations were that: a university should be established in Lagos, (this was strategic, as it was the then capital city), with emphasis on evening and correspondence programmes; in addition, a university should be established in each of the three regions (North, East, and West) with each university to be autonomous and independent in the conduct of its affairs.

Consequently, the implementation of the Ashby Report led to the establishment of University of University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife) in 1962 by the Western region, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria in 1962 by the Northern Region; the East already had its own University of Nigeria, Nsukka, established in 1960 and University of Lagos (1962) by the Federal Government. Babalola, Jaiyeoba, and Okediran, (2007) speculated that the University College, Ibadan became a full-fledged University in 1962. This meant that UCI, Ibadan and University of Lagos became the first two federal Universities in Nigeria, the other three remained regional. Midwestern region was created in 1963, and after ‘fighting’ and was granted to have its own share of a university, it opted in 1970 to have its University called University of Benin. To date, the six Universities established during the 1960-1970 decade still go by the appellation of the ‘first generation Universities’. Babalola et al stated that during this period, Universities in Nigeria were under the close surveillance of the government. Appointments of lay members of the Governing Councils of the universities, and that of their Vice-Chancellors, were politically motivated.

Thus, is it the need for expansion of university education? Or the patriotic stance of let have our share of the national cake mentality? Or simply political manipulation or a

combination of these mentioned and more other factors that led to the creation of seven universities instead of the initially proposed four in the Third National Development Plan (1975-1980)? The universities were: Universities of Calabar (1975), university of Ilorin (1976), university of Jos (1975), university of Sokoto (1977), university of Maiduguri (1977), Port Harcourt (1977) and Ado Bayero University Kano (1977) all known and called the 'second generation universities'.

In another development, the federal government took over all these universities by stipulations of Decree 46 of 1977 which provided for Federal Government powers to take-over all universities in Nigeria (Jibril, 2003). The government also took over the four regional Universities during the same period. The Federal Universities of Technology in Owerri, Makurdi, Yola, Akure and Bauchi, along with state universities founded in Imo, Ondo, Lagos, Akwa-Ibom, Oyo and Cross-River states were established between 1980 and early 1990 and were collectively referred to as the 'third generation Universities' (Nwangwu,2003). But the 1979 constitution transferred university education from the exclusive list to concurrent legislative list which meant that state governments are empowered to establish state-owned universities if they desired. The fourth generation universities are those established between 1991 and the present date. They include more state Universities, Nigeria's first and only Open University (National Open University-(NOUN) and many private Universities around the country (Otonkos, 2012). Today Nigeria has 170 Universities government approved (43 Federal government owned; 48 state/regional controlled; and 79 private owned (NUC 2019).

However, government owned universities has over the years continue to dominate higher education landscape in our country, but their noticeable flaws to provide admission for all the candidates seeking for university admission became challenging since 1990s. Statistically speaking, in 1990 about 250,000 candidates applied for university admission and less than 50,000 constituting (20%) of the candidates were successfully admitted. Again, in 1992 close to 30,000 candidates applied for university admission and about 50,000 amounting to 17% only got the admission into different tertiary institutions while in 1994, out of a total number of 400,000 that wrote JAMB examination for admission, less than 50,000 totaling 13% got admitted into higher institution (Obasi & Eboh, 2001).

The Key Goals A 21st Century Private University Should Pursue

Any organization desirous of achieving success must set goals and objectives serving as guidelines for the activities that will make the achievement of the goals a reality. The university sector is not excluded from setting goals and objectives and the 21st century private university must as a matter of urgency ask some pertinent goal-oriented questions if it must distinguish itself and fulfill its roles in the 21st century. Some of these goal-oriented questions include among others:

1. To what extent are students being prepared for leading roles in an innovation-driven economy and a globally society? In the present global village, which the world has become, information and knowledge flow freely across economic sectors and national boundaries. Students who must operate purposefully in such a village must be equipped to welcome different points of view and systems of belief, while not jettisoning their own, but imply examining and refining their own ideas so as to situate them appropriately within the gamut of available ideas and challenges. The 21st century private universities must therefore recognize the responsibilities and pursue the goal of providing students with knowledge about the human and natural worlds, train them to organize that knowledge, and teach them to express and apply the knowledge effectively to make a difference.

2. How are research and creative work being promoted to increase the intellectual, social and economic capital of graduates within and beyond their borders? The dual and/or centrally revolving purpose of conducting translational research that expands the frontiers of knowledge and enhance innovations geared towards societal development is one of the goal of a 21st century private universities. To the extent to which private universities are enthusiastically embracing the challenges of substantially increasing the volume and the quality of their research efforts, it is to that extent; any university in the present age can fulfill its mission statement and be relevant in the 21st century environs. Rigorous, deliberate and fund-driven translational research is a goal of the 21st century private university education.
3. How are physical and human resources being developed to achieve different goals? The quality of the human resources in any establishment is a dictating factor to the achievement of the goals of that establishment. When 21st century private universities are committed to recruiting and retaining a corpus of talented and exceptional staff (teaching and non-teaching), with an equal access approach and orientation, the capacity for growth and contribution to societal development will become the clearly defined hallmark of such universities. A university and indeed any establishment are only as strong as the people who populate it and the tools-both physical and professional –they are given to work effectively.

The Indicator of 21st Century Private University

The focus here is to examine what convince us to say emphatically that this is a 21st century private university, later on in the discourse, whether the present-day Nigerian private universities fit into what makes a private university of 21st century with justification for what the situation is. I must say in one word that what makes a 21st century private university is quality. With this quality pervading every facet of the university system.

A 21st century private university is a university principally in the context of the education it provides. Private university education in the 21st century must be qualitatively inclusive; it should be available to all who can benefit from it and who are cognitively prepared to pass through the experience. In other words, while university education should be an opportunity accessible to all the citizenry, it must nonetheless be for those citizens who are truly qualified to undergo the rigour of private university education and profit from it. Though I share view with the postulation that say university education should be recognized as a right and a public good rather than as a privilege, it is also my singular considered opinion that, the right to private university should be given to those who have recognized that university education is a serious business, can be capital intensive, taxing, and required being industrious. Again, the curriculum for a quality 21st century private university must be broad and diverse. Innovation and creativity are in high demand to grow not just any economy, but indeed any democracy.

Nations that reduce university education to “job training” condemn their graduates to a path that leads to career obsolescence. In present day era, where careers are being replaced by technology and industry reorganization, a university system that has narrowly trained its graduates will confer on those graduates, the misfortune of finding themselves in the same position as 19th century artisans who saw their skilled work taken over by mechanized factories of the 20th century. Private university of 21st century should provide access to broad base general education and skills, give their graduates the ability to be lifelong learners who will be more flexible in adjusting to the rapidly emerging shifts in the job market.

Possible Challenges Confronting the Nigerian Private University System in the 21st Century

The cheering news about the positive evolving trend just enunciated in the last section notwithstanding, the reality is that, the Nigerian private university education system is still ridden with a lot of challenges and issues which if not reiterated and emphasized for positive action-taking, the private university education system may really not become a 21st century one. These challenges and issues include:

Persistent Increase in School Fees and its Effect

Private university education costs have greatly increased and those responsible for making the accessing of education in private university in possible for (parent, other sponsors and even students themselves at times) now pay heavily for items coming under various nomenclatures as: tuition, health fee, acceptance fee, restoration fee, and fees for identity card, laboratory, library, and accommodation, among others. These fees which keep increasing by the sessions also witness variations across private universities today. This has triggered some challenges that have made negative impact on the students and their programmes. Sad to note, is the current day validity of Okoli (2003) who investigated the Nigerian situation and reported thus:

Students resort to vices in order to cope in the face of fees increase. Many females engage in prostitution while males indulge in robbery. Students with weak background, who would have been brushed up, do not have the opportunity because of these difficult situations. These conditions lend breath to failure in examinations, and most often lead to examination malpractices.

Certificate Racketeering and Marketability of University Graduates

Certificate racketeering-the acquisition of certificate through dishonest and illegal activities-is existent in the university education system today. Alutu and Aluede (2006), Crimefacts (2013) have reported the high level of "cash for certificate" scam going on, even in the Law School, and they like some others are of the opinion that, most certificates today are no longer true representations of the intellectual capabilities of their owners. The globalization of the 21st century universities demands that university graduates possess skills, knowledge, attitude and competences to meet the challenges of the dynamic work environments in their capacity as the "total man", which the university education is expected to fashion them into. This assumption defiles the urge and the glamour for paper qualifications, but stresses on the actual learning experiences which an individual is to transfer in practical situations in working settings. A way out of the racketeering saga is for less emphasis to be accorded to certificates and greater consideration be given to practical skills by both the public and the organized private sector.

Poor Infrastructural Facilities

One would expect that the increase in all forms of fees which result into more quantum of money for the private universities would bring about facelift in various ways to the universities. But there are visible many cases of decay, dilapidation of existing facilities, and lack of infrastructures; classrooms are at times substandard and grossly inadequate.

The world is advancing technologically, and the educational system is not left out of this movement. Coming to the classroom, that things are still being run in the old way is worrisome, as this may be inimical quickly reaching or getting close to where the developed world education system has reached. It is a surprise today, that large numbers of students still

take lectures in small spaces. Courses expected to be learnt in the laboratories are learnt just by listening to the lecturer and this brings us to the question of if our private universities are still run like public or government universities? Time shall tell.

Table 1: Budgetary Allocation to Public Universities Education by successive Nigeria Government. A Possible Causes of Proliferation of Private Universities.

Year	Percentage Allocation	Year	Percentage Allocation
1989	6.46%	2002	7.90%
1990	5.45%	2003	4.70%
1991	4.62%	2004	4.54%
1992	4.60%	2005	5.30%
1993	7.20%	2006	8.7%
1994	14.86%	2007	8.19%
1995	11.50%	2008	8.3%
1996	10.81%	2009	8.5%
1997	11.53%	2010	6.1%
1998	9.61%	2011	6.8%
1999	11.13%	2012	8.5%
2000	8.70%	2013	8.5%

Source: Federal Ministry of Finance (2011-2013) Babalola, A. (2014).

Table 2: Country by country Budgetary Allocation to Education

Country	% Budget Allocation to Education	Position
Ghana	31.0	1 st
Cote d'ivoire	30.0	2 nd
Uganda	27.0	3 rd
Morocco	26.4	4 th
South Africa	25.8	5 th
Swaziland	24.6	6 th
Mexico	24.3	7 th
Kenya	23.0	8 th
United Arab Emirates	22.5	9 th
Botswana	19.0	10 th
Iran	17.7	11 th
USA	17.1	12 th
Tunisia	17.0	13 th
Lesotho	17.0	14 th
Burkinafaso	16.8	15 th
Norway	16.2	16 th
Columbia	15.6	17 th
Nicaragua	15.0	18 th
India	12.7	19 th
Nigeria	8.4	20 th

Conclusion

Let it be reiterated that, quality private university education in the 21st century will require excellent lectures that have the academic freedom and the institutional support they need to do a professional job. University teaching-learning process is a highly skilled field, and would therefore; require a high level of competitiveness from the fairly large pool of hundreds of potential qualified applicants for any single position. Once quality candidates are hired or

recruited, universities must from thereon provide all lectures with the resources and opportunity to stay current in their respective fields and to develop the most effective methods for teaching their subject matter. Lecturers must also have the academic freedom to make educational decisions about what to teach and how to teach it in the best interests of their students and of quality education.

This paper posits that quality private university in the 21st century must incorporate technology in ways that will expand opportunity and maintain quality. Technological advancement that enhances learning is a welcome addition to private universities in the 21st century. Undoubtedly, the internet has already revolutionized teaching and learning in universities and in the wider world. Let the discussion continue by other interested researchers.

Recommendations

1. Cutting-edge researches should be conducted at all times by lecturers to understand the changing nature of the society. The findings of the researchers should be used to review the existing policies to bring out new ones that will meet needs of the moment. Government should therefore give listening ears to these researchers and purposively harness the contents of the research findings for the good of the Nigerian nation.
2. Private universities should produce graduates with a new mind-set that will broaden participation and drive globally competitiveness that will fill the gap in our national education system.
3. All the relevant stakeholders (National University Commission, University Senate) should work towards ensuring that policy briefs find their way by all legitimate and procedural ways to the National Assembly and the Presidency, so that both the Legislative and the Executive are well informed and aware of the policy briefs for uptake.
4. Private universities should work to achieve self-sufficiency in different areas especially in the area of Agriculture. More and more attention should be given to agriculture, with more and more cutting-edge researchers in all the line chains of agriculture until self sufficiency in this very important sphere that touch the young and the old, the literate and the illiterate is achieved.

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