

EXPANDING PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN AFRICA: IMPLICATIONS FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE

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ABSTRACT: *The conventional wisdom is that the proliferation of and concomitant increase in access to, tertiary education is central to bridging poverty gap in developing country and fast-tracking development. Scholars have also proposed the existence of a nexus between such educational advancements and good governance, especially in terms of the multiplier effect on political education, public participation and public accountability. The proposed paper assessed the conventional wisdom on the nexus between education, development and democracy in Africa drawing key insights from cross-sectional data obtained from national universities in the sub-region. The paper challenged the orthodoxy dominant within the international development community that increase in tertiary education is directly related to improved development and good governance. Although the number of universities have grown over the decade, the paper is keen to show that aside from increasing enrollment and improving access (to the neglect of quality) the preponderance of privately-owned universities, many of them with constricted visions on the open knowledge production and ideals that universities are supposed to represent and pursue, is problematic; indeed, as the paper argues, the political economy that drive their establishment and proliferation does not automatically translate into improved access due to skyrocketing school fees and sundry charges in a continent with a record of about 70% poverty ratio. Furthermore, the peculiar teaching curriculum and authoritarian management styles of the growing number of private universities have the potential to blunt the political and civic consciousness of their students and, in the final analysis, deepen the festering governance crisis in the country.*

KEYWORDS: Higher Education, Education Funding, Governance Crisis, Public Financial Management, Africa, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

The festering governance crisis in Africa has been on the front burner of scholarly and media debate in recent times. Literature is replete with how, over the past decade, Africa has been plagued by frequent political unrest and instability; the types that are generating negative impacts on the country, including the educational sector (Moja, 2000). Although the educational system has been in crises of poor funding and gradual erosion of academic freedom for many years, the situation has worsened with industrial strikes by staff unions and violent demonstrations by students. In part, much of these lie in the fact that the educational sector is increasingly poorly funded; even though much is unlikely to change even if they are satisfactorily funded. Whereas they are hamstrung and overwhelmed by a range of problems, the crises facing the educational sector are pronounced at the foundational levels; especially in primary and secondary schools. Thus, as far back as 1997, the Nigerian Federal Minister of Education, following a nation-wide survey of

schools, acknowledged that the basic infrastructure in schools such as classrooms, laboratories, workshops, sporting facilities, equipment, libraries were pathetic and in a state of total decays (Kpakor, 1999). It was partly this concern that prompted successive governments to declare education a national priority; with the goal of reforming the sector and enhancing access at all levels, along with improving quality and efficiency. While these are lofty goals, the real challenge will lie in the successful implementation of them.

By any means, Nigeria is not a basket case in education system that is ill-prepared to cope with the challenges of governance in Africa. In other climes across Africa, a closer examination of many systems, especially in a developing context, indicate that the educational sector has not been adequately aligned to prepare students for the enormity of challenges evoked by the contemporary global order. The education needs of an emergent Nigeria are well articulated by Obanya (1999) when he suggested that Nigerian education should be marked by a continuous search for excellence supported by the political will for good governance and transparency. To be sure, successive governments since 1977 have articulated their visions for the educational sector in various blueprints mostly labelled *National Policy on Education* (NPE). Subsequently revised in 1981 and 1990, the NPE aimed to ensure that the educational sector complements development, and vice versa. Following recent political changes, especially the return to multiparty civilian rule in 1999 in the country, the need to revise and update the NPE cannot be understated. It is inevitable that the educational system in its entirety can benefit both from a coherent national development policy (rather than piecemeal and ad hoc reforms) as well as new policy blueprints to meet the imperatives of a new democracy and Nigeria's changing role in the new global order.

In order to bridge the gap left by the inadequacy of public higher institutions, most African countries have created enabling environment for the establishment of private schools. However, no sooner had the private institutions are established than the problem that plagued the public ones – like poor funding and governance crisis – started manifesting. Apart from these, in nearly all the countries, most of the private institutions are based in the major capital cities and in cities where the student pool is robust and the infrastructure is relatively good but nevertheless compounding the rural-urban population drift endemic in the continent. It also should be noted that even though the number of private institutions on the continent has increased dramatically and appears higher in absolute numbers than the number of public institutions, student enrolment in public institutions outnumbers enrolment in private institutions in nearly all countries. For instance, while the enrolment in the six public universities in Madagascar was not more than 9,000, the total enrolment of the sixteen private institutions was less than 2,000, and none of the private institutions had more than 500 students (Stiles, 2003). Kenya is one of the few countries in Africa that has a well-developed private university system, yet only 20 percent of the 50,000 enrolled students attend the thirteen private universities (Ngome, 2003). In Uganda, the total student population of the ten private institutions amounts to 3,600, while the two public universities enroll 23,000 students (Musisi, 2003). This depicts a system change with no visible sign of progress.

A possible explanation for this lack of progress is suggested by Clark (2001). He argues that an institution's incapacity to respond is the outcome of limits on government funding capability combined with rigid internal organizational structures. For the most part, the funding of the institutions relies heavily on the founding organizations – based both locally and/or abroad – or their affiliates. Most private institutions in Africa therefore depend on student tuition and fees to

generate their revenue as government hardly give financial support to them. As a consequence, the cost of education in these institutions is generally higher in comparison to public institutions. In certain cases, however, the private institutions receive direct financial support from governments. In Liberia, for instance, the state provides subsidies to private and church-operated post-secondary institutions. It also provides financial aid to students attending these institutions to cover the cost of tuition and textbooks (Seyon, 2003). In Togo, private institutions that offer short-period technician degrees are subsidized by the state in the same way as other institutions are (Edee, 2003). In Mozambique, some scholarships are also made available to private higher education students to help them pay their tuition fees (Chilundo, 2003).

These conditions seem to prevail in Nigeria where funding of the funding of the public institution has been quite inadequate even just as there is no government funding for the private universities. Also noted in Nigeria is the presence of organizational and procedural rigidities making the coordination of the universities problematic (Clark, 2001). The system's principal oversight body, the National Universities Commission, currently constitutes a barrier to the autonomy-induced responsiveness that government policy seeks to foster. The NUC is staffed almost entirely by long time public servants. Most of its 600 staff has received no professional training in the management of higher education or in technical aspects associated with the NUC's mandates, such as quality assurance, policy analysis, or expenditure effectiveness.

METHODOLOGY

This study begins with rigorous findings on the subject of higher education provision from global and African context, before narrowing the focus to the African experience. It then proceeds to the general findings emanating from empirical research conducted by various scholars on the Nigerian and African experiences regarding higher educational administration. Essentially, the methodology used was a systematic examination of the documents available from the Nigerian universities and their regulatory institutions. Selected interviews on relevant personalities and agencies/institutions were conducted, supplemented by opinion survey from newspaper and magazines on analysis of educational situation in Nigeria in particular and Africa as a whole, analysis of Nigerian national policies on higher education, and information from academic journals and books. In addition, this report has made extensive use of the international data banks, like World Bank, IMF, etc, that carry information related to higher educational institutions in Africa and the implications they exert on good governance. However, the research is limited to empirical data obtained from Nigeria on Nigerian higher educational institutions.

Higher Educational Institutions in Development Strategies of Nigeria

Nigeria's university system is perhaps the largest in terms of number, if not quality of output, in sub-Saharan Africa. Saint et al (2003) reported that even though South Africa's tertiary enrollments are higher, Nigeria boasts more institutions. A survey of tertiary institutions in the country reveals their diversity in terms of ownership (federal, state and private) and number (over 300

institutions).^{*} Even though Nigerian universities alone enroll annually over 350,000 students, aside those from neighboring countries (Olugbile, 2012), this is still considered inadequate going by the population of over 150 million people. Quoting data estimated from the National University Commission (NUC), Olugbile stated that 1.5 million youths apply for the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination on a yearly basis and the universities cannot accommodate more than 350,000. This is because the university system represents much of the country's effort at research development and the training of skilled manpower.

In Nigeria, the universities are supervised by the National Universities Commission (NUC), acting as the intermediary agency for the Federal Ministry of Education, the overarching but nominal government department supervising the entire educational sector (Saint, Hartnett and Strassner, 2003). Despite this, the capacity to properly coordinate the institutions appears lacking in some sense. Only recently, each university has been empowered to conduct its own pre-admission assessment; the entrance examination is still coordinated by the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) on a national basis. There is no doubt that this singular action casts serious aspersion on national coordination, which in a way could give room for individualistic orientation rather than national psyche. The commanding opinion is that the system thus lacked necessary institutional arrangements to gear up a rational and effective socio-economic development. This opinion has been however countered by the World Bank, which opined that Nigeria surpass any other country in Sub-Saharan Africa in terms of structural balance that could provide fast-track development” (World Bank, 1988).

The World Bank opinion above, indeed, represents the conventional wisdom in the development literature. There is no gainsaying the fact that the structure being referred to by the World Bank must have been pointing at the number of universities and the concomitant volume of students that the system would admit. Following this perspective is the proposition that the increased number of educated citizens could bridge poverty gap, foster educational advancements and engender good governance, especially in terms of the multiplier effect on political education, public participation and public accountability. However, available socio-economic indices and political manifestations in the country appear to contradict these claims (Ogbimi, 2012). If anything, it seems that the decadence in the governance system has been able to stifle the potentials of the university system and allowing it to grow only in sizes and number, and not in productivity (Moja, 2000).

But records show that Nigerians have always developed the quest to acquire higher education. Clark (2004) wrote that the search for education began during the colonial era when Nigerians traversed all parts of the globe in search of university education prior to the establishment of the first full-fledged university in the country in 1948. Earlier, this spirited quest undoubtedly prompted the establishment of the first tertiary institutions in the country – Yaba Higher College

^{*} In all, there are 17 federal universities, 4 federal universities of technology, 3 federal universities of agriculture, 1 national open university, 4 national centers for specialized tertiary instruction, 21 state universities, 78 private universities (some operate illegally), 1 military university, 17 federal polytechnics, 31 state polytechnics, 16 private polytechnics, 22 federal teacher training colleges, 38 state teacher training colleges, 12 private teacher training colleges, 36 colleges of agriculture, 12 specialized training institutes, and 4 parastatal supervisory agencies.

which was established in 1934 (Clark, 2004). The Government subsequently established the first university in Nigeria (viz., University College, Ibadan) in 1948 shortly after the recommendation of the Commission was adopted. It began as a college of the University of London. The examiners came from London University and the Senate of the University granted the degrees of the early batches of students who received their education at Ibadan College. Thus, the first batch of graduates of Nigerian origin obtained their degrees in the middle of the twentieth century. Later on, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife (then known as the University of Ife), Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, and the University of Nigeria, Nsukka were established by the Governments of Western, Northern and Eastern respectively. The Federal Government added the University of Lagos to its list of institutions in 1962.

As mentioned earlier, one of the principal reasons for the rapid expansion of university education in Nigeria is the demand for it in the population. In line with the conventional thinking, Nigerians seemed to reckon that university education will open opportunities to them for personal, and then, national development, hence their avid demand for it. Clark (2004) wrote that even though all the institutions in the country can barely accommodate 2 percent to 3 percent of the qualified candidates (National Universities Commission 2004) not less than a million Nigerians annually seek admission into all the degree awarding institutions in the country. There is therefore no gainsaying the fact that there is improved national interest in university education. A critical question begging for answer is therefore why this has not sufficiently fast-track development and foster good governance. Two reasons have been examined in this paper. One is the stop-gap between educational training and acquisition of complementary practical skills as to promote development. The second is the myriad of crises in the ivory towers of which the breeding of the theoretical framework for good governance has become elusive.

The thinking that Nigerian education is not commensurably linked with acquisition of practical skills is not entirely novel. For instance, Ogbimi (2007) observed that the 'biggest obstacle' to realising the benefit of education in developing countries is 'lack of understanding of the need to acquire adequate, balanced (complementary) theoretical skills and practical skills' to equip individual with the relevant knowledge that could position him/her in good stead to contribute meaningfully to development efforts. He argued that university education must target capacity-building potential rather than bare theoretical learning to foster industrialisation, since knowledge and skills can hardly be applied during employment. However, the problem appears to be much more than this; because there have been efforts to bring skill acquisition into the Nigerian educational system, even though at the secondary school level known as 6-3-3-4 educational system. The system did not achieve its objectives of skill-acquisition and capacity-building strategy due to lack of political will to follow it to logical conclusion.

Secondly, even as it is, the Nigerian universities are also facing myriad of crises to be in vantage position to breed developmental knowledge. These crises range from financial, administrative and social shortcomings: some of which are direct effect of the governance crisis in the polity but for which the institutions are not well-equipped to withstand. The physical facilities of all public universities that offer most of the places to students are grossly inadequate and/or in a complete state of disrepair. Their libraries are bereft of leading international journals and new books while the quality and quantity of teachers have declined. Most of them also lack information and

communication technologies. Finally, most of the public institutions have become a haven for cultism, sexual harassment, and other unsavoury practices.

Despite the obvious management and financial crises in the universities, the number has continued to increase, almost unabated, exacerbating an already deplorable state of Nigeria's public universities. Banjo (2004), a former Vice-Chancellor of Nigeria's premier University, the University of Ibadan, observed that between 1948, when the University of Ibadan was established as the first degree-awarding institution in the country, and mid-80s, a total of seven new universities were created. To date, more than eighty other ones mostly private ones have been found. Clearly, other motivations than excellence were behind this proliferation. Not unexpectedly, the new universities found it hard to keep up with the older ones, and what is worse, they have had the effect of dragging these older ones down with them into the quagmire of under-funding and a welter of attendant problems, not the least of which is compromised quality.

Prolonged military rule also affected all departments of life in Nigeria including universities (Alubo 1999; Adesina et al. 2004). Successive military regimes eroded the autonomy of these institutions and most of the vice-chancellors gradually became dignified agents of the government of the day. Military rule also affected management style as well as subverted the due process that is customary of universities (Ekong 2002). The hallowed function of the universities as a service station for the immediate and remote communities became extinct. However, the advent of military in politics diminished the self-concept of academics and the capacity of their institutions to play their accustomed role in society. The final crisis on universities came through the implementation of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in the 1980s. A direct impact of SAP was that it led to brain-drain due to massive exodus of trained university lecturer for greener pastures elsewhere due the curtailed funding of these institutions, which is the bedrock of the adjustment programme (Obikoya, 2002). In order to mitigate the effect of SAP on the dwindling university education, the Nigerian authorities began to look towards the private sector providers in university education. They opened the gate for them to establish universities. Much like those of public universities, the proliferation of private universities is throwing up unanticipated challenges. Some observers are inclined to argue that the approval of private universities is without regard to their capacity to provide quality education. Others are of the view that they can only fill certain gaps and would therefore not be in a position to offer wide ranging courses as in public universities. Be that as it may, the emergence of private universities offers an opportunity to appraise their potential benefits and the possible risks.

In practice, however, the university system developed less rationally than anticipated. Enrollments in the federal universities grew at the rapid rate of 12% annually during the 1990s and totaled 325,299 students by 2000 (NUC, 2002). Enrollment growth rates were the highest in the South-South Region, followed by the North-East Region. Overall growth rates far exceeded government policy guidelines. As of 2002, Nigeria's entire tertiary education system (federal, state and private) comprises 220 institutions: 17 federal universities, 4 federal universities of technology, federal universities of agriculture, 1 national open university, 4 national centers for specialized tertiary instruction, 16 state universities, 7 private universities, 1 military university, 17 federal polytechnics, 27 state polytechnics, 7 private polytechnics, 22 federal teacher training colleges, 38 state teacher training colleges, 4 private teacher training colleges, 36 colleges of agriculture, 12 specialized training institutes, and 4 parastatal supervisory agencies. The government traditionally

categorizes its conventional federal universities into groups based on their dates of establishment, as follows: 1st Generation (Ile-Ife, Benin, Ibadan, Lagos, Nsukka, Zaria); 2nd Generation (Calabar, Ilorin, Jos, Kano, Maidugari, Port Harcourt, Sokoto); 3rd Generation (Abeokuta, Abuja, Akure, Akwa, Bauchi, Makurdi, Minna, Owerri, Umudike, Uyo, Yola). In comparison, state university enrollments totaled 104,776 in 1997/98, accounting for 28% of Nigeria's total university enrollments in that year (NUC, 2002).

However, efforts to expand enrolments and improve educational quality are constrained by growing shortages of qualified academic staff due largely to the brain-drain of the 1980s. Thus, between 1997 and 1999, even though enrolment improved by about 13%, the numbers of academic staff declined by more than 12%. Available records from NUC (2002) shows that the sustained brain drain, combined with insufficient output from national postgraduate programs in the face of rising enrolments, has left the federal universities with only 48% of its estimated staffing needs filled. Staffing scarcity is most acute in engineering, science and business disciplines. Shortfalls are estimated at 73% in engineering, 62% in medicine, 58% in administration, and 53% in sciences. In contrast, no staffing shortages exist in the disciplinary areas of Arts and Education (NUC, 2002).

Despite the unprecedented economic growth of the 1970s because of oil boom, the Nigerian education sector did not benefit commensurably from the windfall. Apart from the fact that windfall profits from oil price generically encourages wasteful expenditures in the public sector and thus distorts the revenue bases for policy planning (Olaiya, 2002), the large swings in public revenues, and the lack of a stabilisation mechanism at the national level, have led to unpredictable and inconsistent financing of education in Nigeria. So, when the bubble burst in the first half of the 1980s, expenditure on education suffered a large decline in real terms as a result of the sharp fall in oil earnings at the time. In the period 1997-2002, the Federal Government's expenditure on education has been below 12% of its overall expenditure, the trend being largely downward. Of this share, 70-80% has been for recurrent items, except in 2000 when the capital expenditure rose to 45% of the total. Each level of education has at various times been a concurrent responsibility of both Federal and State Governments, although the Federal Government has been most heavily involved at the tertiary level, allocating at least 68% of its total education expenditure to this level between 1996 and 2002 (FME, 2003).

Nevertheless, when the financing of higher education is compared to education sector financing taken as a whole, the picture is disheartening. Although tertiary education presently receives a larger share of the education budget, the latter's portion of the federal budget has diminished. Over the past four decades, various Nigerian governments have increased university subventions at the expense of investments in primary and secondary education, as they struggled to maintain financial support in the face of burgeoning higher education enrolments. Using data from 1962, Callaway and Musone (1965) concluded that Nigeria's education expenditure represented 3.5% of GDP and 15.2% of total government expenditure. Of this amount, 50% was allocated to primary education, 31% to secondary education, and 19% to tertiary education. According to Hinchliffe (2002) education expenditure is equal to only 2.4% of GDP and 14.3% of government expenditure.

Nigeria's recent allocation shares for education diverge sharply from regional and international norms. This divergence begs justification. For example, UNESCO's World Education Report 2000 indicates that for 19 other countries of Sub-Saharan Africa, education expenditures averaged 5.1%

of GDP and 19.6% of total government expenditures. On average, these countries allocated 21% of their education budgets to tertiary education. In comparison with other African nations, Nigeria's funding effort on behalf of education is less than half as vigorous and its budgetary priority for the education sector is lower, but tertiary education receives a much higher share of these comparatively smaller amounts of national resources.

In Africa, Nigeria ranks among the countries with the oldest, biggest and most comprehensive university education systems (CODESRIA, 2005). Both the 1960 and 1963 constitutions put university education on the exclusive list of the government, thereby leaving the establishment, funding and management in the hand of the federal government that have the exclusive right. However, with 1979 Constitution university education was now put on the concurrent list of the government, which means that both federal and state government can now establish and own its university. It was from this time that various states started signifying intention to establish their own state universities named after them. From this time, it was becoming evidently clearer to the federal government that, funding university education effectively may be difficult for the federal government alone. University is a place where skilled manpower of various capacities is being trained and also an avenue to develop human capital needed to sustain the economy. Since 1948 to date, government has federal universities and 34 states universities have been established. This transcends that there are some states in the country that do not have federal government university so also not all the states have state-owned university, despite the critical role of knowledge in economic development of a nation.

It appears that there is a poor perception of higher education by government and other stakeholders as burden rather than asset. The principal reason for this, perhaps, is the poor understanding of the place of universities and other tertiary institutions in facilitating sustainable growth in most part of the world. In all, the Nigerian universities suffered series of setbacks to be in good position as an asset for driving national development. The positive impacts of higher institutions as custodians of the concepts and practical skills that can drive development has been elusive due to myriads of crises, but most significantly because there is no fundamental bases for linking education sector with the rest of the economy. Besides, the programmes are not based on well articulated goal oriented curricula, which is a serious defect common to all training programme in Nigeria in addition to poor, irregular funding.

Evolution of Private Universities in Africa

Over the past three decades, the provision of higher education by private institutions in many African countries is a growing phenomenon. Altbach (1999) however submitted that most African countries have been slow to expand the private sector in higher education in comparison to other parts of the world. The trend toward private higher education has nevertheless been enhanced by a number of factors: a burgeoning demand from students for access, the declining capacity of public universities, the retrenchment of public services, pressure by external agencies to cut public services, a growing emphasis on and need for a highly skilled labour force that targets the local market, and the beginning of interest by foreign providers. In terms of numbers, there are now more private institutions than public ones in some countries, although the private schools are smaller and tend to specialize in specific fields, such as business administration.

The following examples showcase the development of private higher education in Africa: Kenya has nineteen universities, of which thirteen are private (Ngome, 2003). In Sudan, Mohamed Elamin El Tom (2003) observes that the number of private higher education institutions increased from one in 1989 to sixteen in 1996 and to twenty-two in 2001. The number of students enrolled in private higher education institutions increased nearly nine fold within four years – from under 3,000 in 1990–1991 to close to 24,000 in 1994–1995. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, over 260 private institutions were operating in 1996, of which 28.9 percent were approved by the government, 32.3 percent were authorized to operate, and 38.8 percent were being considered for authorization. Many newly established institutions, unfortunately, do not meet the required higher education standards because of their organization and the conditions within which they operate (Lelo, 2003).

In Ghana, there has been an upsurge, especially among religious organizations, in the establishment of private higher education institutions. By August 2000, the National Accreditation Board had granted accreditation to eleven private tertiary institutions to offer degree programs. Ghana has five public universities and eight polytechnics whose status has been upgraded (Effah 2003). In Uganda, more than ten private universities have been established or being established. Currently, Uganda has two public universities; and the founding of two more public universities was also recently announced by the government (Musisi 2003). Togo's case presents a peculiar case of a country that has one major university and four other postsecondary institutions but which has encouraged the creation of private institutions of higher education. As at 2003, there are twenty-two private postsecondary institutions, of which eighteen were created between 1998 and 2000 (Edee 2003). Ethiopia, with a very small public academic sector, has seen the establishment of 20 private postsecondary institutions recently.

Ajadi (2010) argued that the establishment of private universities in Nigeria was initiated between 1979 – 1983 after the epoch-making ruling of the Supreme Court of Nigeria that it was legal to establish private universities. This led to the establishment of 26 private universities as at 1983. However, General Mohammadu Buhari who took over government from democratically elected government with a coup de tat ordered the closure of the 26 established private universities in December, 1983 for reasons of undue proliferation and lack of serious minded academics, among others (Obassi, 2007). The issue of private universities then remained comatose until advocated in the 1991 convocation speech of the then Vice-Chancellor of the University of Agriculture, Makurdi. Coincidentally and following the reports of Longe Commission in 1991 set up by the then Head of State General Badamosi Babangida to review higher education in Nigeria, which recommended, among others, the establishment of private universities to complement and strengthen the public universities, ban on the establishment of private universities was lifted (Longe Report, 1991).

The establishment of private universities actually received the much-needed boost in 1991, when Fourth Republic commenced, after a prolonged military rule for 16 years by removing some levels of bureaucratic bottlenecks. The new democratically elected government headed by President Olusegun Obasanjo decided to remove the administrative bottlenecks by vesting the power to receive and treat applications of establishment of private universities in the National University Commission (NUC), of which recommendations for final approval will then be made to the Federal Executive Council. By the same token, the NUC became the highest regulatory body of the

universities in Nigeria. Ajadi (2010) however reported that out of forty (40) applications submitted to the Commission in 1999, only three of them met the set requirements. The three pioneer private universities, namely, Igbinedion University, Okada, Edo State; Babcock University, Ilisan-Remo Ogun State; and Madonna University, Okija, Anambra State were finally granted operating license by the Federal Government. Unfortunately, the establishment of private universities became proliferated. Between 1999 and 2009, a space of about 10 years, 34 private universities had been licensed, with 44 other unlicensed ones operating illegally (Okogie, 2009). Despite the fact that, altogether, there are still more public universities than the private in Nigeria, the trend of events nevertheless suggests that the number of private universities will soon surpass the public ones, at least in quantity.

Consequently, even though the proliferation of the private universities in Nigeria portends a cause for concern, a number of factors have been identified, which enhanced this unprecedented increase. Foremost in this regards is the ever-increasing demand from prospective students for access, occasioned remotely by the population upsurge, and the inability of the public universities to satisfy the growing social demand for university education. Also identified is the declining funding of public universities, leading, among others, to declining capacity building and utilisation, and incessant industrial crisis between the government as employer of public universities' workers, most especially the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), and other public university staff unions. The shift in economic demand for labour leading to change in the demand for courses and subjects of study for which public universities were thus unable to respond and pressure by the Breton Woods Institutions and allied external agencies to cut public spending on education equally contributed to the burgeoning private universities in Nigeria.

The market-friendly reforms initiated under the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP), the deregulation policies, and the financial crisis of the states therefore created an encouraging environment for the emergence of the private universities in Nigeria. The thinking seems to be that, to ensure qualitative education, and quantitative alike, and most especially, to make university education meet with the need to drive development upward, the rationale for private-sector-driven university education cannot be overemphasised. However, no sooner had the private universities came on board that the rot endemic in the Nigerian Universities, particularly which necessitated the clamour for privately owned ones became evident. Matters such as the falling academic standards, opaqueness in administration and extortion of students are problems that are known as common to most of, if not all, the privately owned Nigerian Universities (Ajadi, 2010). Indeed, what the private universities gained on the swing, by utilising the market efficiency of knowledge production and skating away from the encumbrances of epileptic academic calendar, they lost on the important roundabout of lack of the much-needed financial muzzle and insistence on academic excellence required of standard universities.

The Political-Economy of Higher Educations

Evidence consistently shows that countries that invest heavily in higher education benefit economically and socially. For example, in countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), every dollar invested in attaining higher-level qualifications results in a significant return through economic growth. This investment provides tangible benefits

to all of society, not only to those who benefit from greater educational opportunities (Schleicher 2006).

Historically, the development of many higher education systems (particularly in Western Europe, Central and Eastern Europe, Russia and the nations of the former-Soviet Union and Francophone Africa) were developed based on an ideology of free tertiary education for qualified students. Of the several rationales on which the argument for free higher education can be based, the cost-benefit reason appears the more plausible. The economic and social returns from investment on education to society from an educated population are very high and, as guaranteed in Chapter II of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, education is (or should be) a fundamental right and as such fundamentally free. Tuition fees may therefore dampen the participation of students from low-income families, rural areas or ethnic minorities with negative impacts in terms of social equality and social benefits. Politically, it can also be argued that free higher education bridges economic gap and by creating a relatively self sustaining lower and middle classes thus curtailing the excesses of the politically powerful upper classes by using their numerical strength to support their own interest in keeping higher education free. By the same token, a level of equity and sanity may also be ushered in the democratic system of the nation by the checks and balances of the two forces of politically strong but few class of elite and numerically strong and highly informed and vociferous lower working class. In other words, a totally free higher education--especially to the extent that most parents would willingly pay a minimal fee if one were levied and even more so if there are opportunities for grants and fellowship for those unable to pay—is effectively a redistribution of income from the poor to the wealthy.

In Nigeria, the Federal government is the major funder of public higher education. Funding allocations at the university level have been higher than at other levels of education partly due to the expansion in the number of universities. However, the growth in expenditure has been inconsistent over the years (FME, 2003). The funding pattern has not reflected inflation rates and the growing enrolment figures. In addition; students are charged low fees and thus contribute an insignificant proportion of the total income of the institutions. The funding allocations to higher education institutions have been inadequate and the government has been unwilling to increase the fees charged to students to make up for the short fall. In order to survive, public universities have thus relied heavily on government subsidies and are able to operate with minimal tuition and other fees. A direct consequence of this is that the government can control and impose policies the universities, sometimes by whims and caprices while at the same time pursue the populist agenda of making university education available at affordable cost to the citizenry.

Conversely, private universities rely solely on tuition fees and other Internally Generated Revenue (IGR) from the students to meet their expenditure. There are no subsidies from the government for the private universities and most of the institutions are not vibrant enough to attract funding from donor agencies. Since the cost of running and sustaining university education is very high, if not prohibitive, and may remain so because of the prevailing economic situation, the tuition and other fees in the private universities will most likely be on the increase because they have a commercial mindset, and thereby serve as a deterrent to many qualified candidates whose parents are too poor to afford the exorbitant school fees.

In addition, there is very little financial support from the public to the universities through gifts or endowment funds. Minimal additional income is derived from income generating activities such as farm product sales and consultancy services. There has been actually a decrease in income to institutions from these additional sources. Institutions have recently started paying more attention to income generating activities to supplement their funds. The World Bank project report on the reform of Federal universities concluded that it might not be cost effective to develop university income generation activities and warns that such activities might undermine the main university mission of teaching and research.

The charging of tuition fees by higher education institutions is a critical component in any cost sharing strategy and one that has become increasingly salient as more and more countries turn to cost sharing in an effort to meet growing demand for, and offset decreasing government investment in, higher education. The immediate issue addressed in a country's tuition fee policy is the division of the burden of higher education's instructional costs between the student and his/her family and the government, or taxpayer, as well as the accompanying financial assistance policies/programmes that are adopted to ensure that the implementation of tuition fees does not reduce access to higher education for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Thus, the policies by which tuition fees are established (or opposed or rejected) are critical both for the very considerable revenue at stake as well as for the potential impact on higher education accessibility and the implications to equity and social justice, not to talk of the long term benefit, which is national development.

The tuition policy of a country is generally dependent on a law or other type of legal instrument that provides the basis for charging or for prohibiting tuition fees. The United States, Canada, Japan, India, South Korea, the Philippines and some of the Anglophone nations in Africa have national and/or state policies requiring moderate tuition fees in most or all public higher educational institutions (Johnstone, 1992). Whereas the 1998 Higher Education Law in China calls for the charging of tuition fees to all students, there are countries whose laws prohibit the charging of tuition fees (Johnstone, 1992). In Central and Eastern Europe, Russia and some other countries of the former Soviet Union, their constitutions or framework laws frequently guarantee free higher education. In Ireland, government efforts to reinstate tuition fees, abolished in 1996, met with failure in the summer of 2003 just as in Germany, until recently, the federal framework law (HRG: Hochschulrahmengesetz) imposed restrictions on the individual Länder's (state's) authority to charge tuition fees, and the Social Democratic government banned tuition fees for the first degree outright (Ziegele, 2003). The author argued that certain exceptions were made, and several states (Baden-Württemberg, Bavaria, Saxony, Berlin, Lower Saxony and Brandenburg) implemented the special forms of fees that were allowed, such as tuition fees for students who exceeded the normal duration of a certain programme plus 4 semesters and tuition fees for students enrolled in a second degree. In January of 2005, after several years of emotional debate, the country's Supreme Court overturned the ban in a case brought by six Länder and ruled that individual Länder could introduce tuition fees. As of 2005, several Länder plan to pass enabling legislation and impose fees of about 500 Euros per semester in the next couple of years, while others have no intention of changing their tuition policies.

In Nigeria, there is no particular law prohibiting high tuition fees. However, under the fundamental objectives and directive principles of state policy, the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999, vide Section 18 provides as follows:

- (1) Government shall direct its policy towards ensuring that there are qual and adequate educational opportunities at all levels.
- (2) Government shall promote science and technology
- (3) Government shall strive to eradicate illiteracy; and to this end Government shall as and when practicable provide
 - (a) free, compulsory and universal primary education;
 - (b) free secondary education;
 - (c) free university education; and
 - (d) free adult literacy programme.

There is no doubt that, *ceteris paribus*, apart from the fact that the above assertion refers exclusively to public institutions only, there is no clear-cut guarantee for free tuition fee in the provisions. The phrase ‘as and when practicable’ in Section 18(3) further deepens the lack of commitment on the part of the government in addition to the fact that the entire Chapter II of the 1999 Constitution containing the section is not legally justiceable. There was however a policy statement from the NUC in which the government announced in May 2002 that the 24 Federal universities were forbidden to charge tuition or other academic fees (NUC, 2002b). This is observed more in breach as all the universities now charge tuition and other fees to meet the inevitable lag created by the poor funding received from government. In Mexico, the same constitutional ambiguity exists as to whether higher education is the sole responsibility of the state thus enabling the public universities to charge, albeit inconsistently, very low tuition fees for the past 30 years. The very public student protests in the late 1990s that accompanied the first (and fairly modest) increase in tuition fees at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México since 1948 illustrated the volatility and uncertainty surrounding this issue.

Whereas the authority to set tuition fees at public higher education institutions is vested in specific entities in countries, the institutions are at liberty to fix their fees in some others. In many countries, including Canada, India, and the United States, tuition levels are set at the state or provincial level. Particularly in the US, the entity or entities responsible for setting tuition differs from state to state and may include the governor, legislature, state higher education coordinating or governing board, or the individual institution. Although, it is often difficult to determine the exact mix of legal authority and political influence in the setting of tuition fees in US public institutions or higher educational systems, but nevertheless the students are protected in a somewhat weave of checks and balances between bureaucracy and politics. For example, the power reposed in an institution (or the system), given the authority to set tuition fees, cannot be exercised against the clear wishes of the governor and the legislature; the government may in turn effectively get even and undo the revenue effect of the tuition fee simply by reducing the state taxpayer allocation. In the same vein,

the governing board may have the sole authority to institute the amount to be paid as tuition fee but only the state government may have the power for the appropriation of the revenue raised therefrom (Creedy, 1994).

In unitary system of government, including Hong Kong, and the United Kingdom (at present), the central government is responsible for setting tuition fee levels. In UK, the new Higher Education Act passed in 2004 amid great controversy, which allows universities to charge “top up” fees over and above the standard governmental fee up to a maximum of £3,000 (US\$ 4,846) is already yielding negative results. Creedy (1994) observed that most universities will charge the maximum allowable tuition fee. In the same vein the legislation passed in Australia in 2005, which gives universities the power to increase their tuitions by up to 25 percent above current levels yielded similar results. There can be no doubt the fact that in countries, such as Nigeria, Chile and South Korea, where the individual institutions are authorised to set their own tuition fees, university educations are bound to be out of reach for the poor. In several countries, tuition fee setting authority is split between the central and state governments or between the state and institutions. In the Netherlands, for example, the government sets tuition fees for those students eligible for student support and the institutions set tuition fees for the students who are not eligible (i.e. part-time students, students who have used up all of their entitlement for student support and students whose personal income exceeds the income limits for student support). Reforms to the higher education system have been proposed to Parliament, however, that if accepted would lead to a much more differentiated and market based system and institutions would have considerably more latitude to set tuition levels (Creedy, 1994).

In Japan, a major reform in 2004 authorized the national universities to incorporate as public corporations and to set their own tuition fees. However, universities may not exceed 110 percent of the standard fee set by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Finance. The local authorities continue to determine the tuition fee levels at local public institutions. In Nigeria, there is no statutory provision in this respect beyond a policy statement from the federal government that forbids the charging of tuition fees at the federal universities, with exception of universities that are owned and financed by the states who are allowed to set their own tuition fees. It is particularly interesting that in a country such as Nigeria, where explosive student protests against tuition fees have probably played a considerable role in the federal government policy, there is not much opposition to the charging of tuition fees at the state level. Ishengoma (2002) hypothesized that at the state level the community feels more involved in, and responsible for, their universities.

Utilising Modern Public Financial Management

Public Financial Management can be defined as the management of the flows of money or financial resources through an organisation (public), whether it is a company, a school, bank, or government agency in the interest of public policy. Public Financial Management is a specialised functional area found under the general classification public administration and finance. The traditional concept of finance (providing funds needed by an organisation) has the merit of highlighting the central core of the financial function –the treasury function which is simply keeping the organisation supplied with enough funds to accomplish its objectives but most fundamentally the demerit of lacking in consideration for social justice. In the present modern economy, there is

increase in complexity, size, technology, inflation, recession and government control with a lot of implications to financial management in many organizations.

As a result the focus of financial management has shifted from treasury function to the concept of managerial finance, which is concerned not only with the acquisition but also with the application, conservation, timing, volume and composition of funds in order to ensure an effective utilisation of funds. Thus financial management is seen as the provision of the needed funds from the most suitable and appropriate sources in the required amount at the right time and a cost that will make their employment beneficial.

Whereas the traditional public finance concept hinges more on market efficiency, public accountability and financial control for judicious use of available fund, in modern public financial management, decision is rather based on equity and efficiency back-up by public policy (not on sentiment and personal aggrandisement). This is not only to ensure efficient employment of resources in production but also that both real and nominal benefits accruing to society in the form of income and wealth are equitably distributed. A modern government is thus expected to assume mother status like an overseer and responsibility-carrier, not only for ensuring healthy state of the economy but also to ensure the greatest good to the greatest number of people, notwithstanding whether the sector involved is public or private. It is expected that governments will intervene in the market economy in order to fine tune it and provide the enabling environment first to minimize or eliminate distortions arising from natural or artificial monopoly from externalities and from lack of information about the safety of products or workplaces. In some state, antitrust legislation are promulgated as regulation against expectable gang-up by certain private service providers that are considered too essential to be left with market forces but nevertheless beneficial to the citizens.

The enrolment ratio for the 18–22 age groups is generally low. In Egypt, the highest enrolment of over 1.5 million (including about a quarter of a million part-time) students is approximately 6 percent of the age group (Elmahdy, 2003). Nigeria is second with close to 900,000 students enrolled in its postsecondary institutions. It has over seventy-two universities, about seventy-four colleges of education, and forty-five polytechnics – the largest number in Africa. Of the total student population, 35 percent go to universities and 55 percent to colleges of education. However, the gross enrolment ratio for ages 18 to 25 is only about 5 percent (Jibril, 2003). South Africa, with more than half a million students in its twenty-one universities and fifteen technikons (postsecondary vocational colleges), is third in the number of enrolled students on the continent. Of these, 55 percent go to universities (Subotzky, 2003). Tunisia and Libya have enrolments of close to 210,000 and over 140,000, respectively (Millot, Waite, and Zaiem, 2003; El-Hawat, 2003). With a population of 32million, the enrolment in Tanzanian higher education institutions for the year 2000 was under 21,000 (Mkude and Cooksey 2003). With a population of about 65 million, Ethiopia has no more than 50,000 students in its postsecondary institutions (and student figures are not always directly correlated. Sudan, for example, with its twenty-six public universities and twenty-one private universities and colleges, has an enrollment of about 40,000 (El Tom, 2003). In some countries, academic institutions may be quite small. Enrolment in Ghana is less than 3 percent of the eligible age group, and in many countries the figure is under 1 percent of the eligible age cohort. For instance, in Malawi and Tanzania, the proportion is 0.5 percent and 0.3 percent of the eligible age group, respectively (Chimombo, 2003; Mkude and Cooksey, 2003). Those who have access to postsecondary education in Africa overall represent less than 3 percent of the

eligible age group – the lowest in the world by a significant percentage. This is one of the reasons for the current surging demand for access to education as Africa seeks to catch up with the rest of the world. Africa faces a significant challenge in providing access to higher education, not only to reach the levels of other developing and middle-income countries but also to satisfy the demand of populations that are eager for opportunities to study and that have achieved a level of secondary education that qualifies them for postsecondary study.

In Nigeria, the Ashby Commission was set up to examine the problems of accessibility in higher education as early as 1959. The Commission reported that there was an imbalance in educational opportunities between the southern and northern parts of the country and that opportunities for enrolment were generally inadequate for the needs of the entire country. Up till today, access to higher education and the lack of capacity of the system to absorb the numbers of students seeking admission to higher education institutions continues to pose a serious problem as evident in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Total Number of Universities, Applications and Admission (1999 – 2009)

Year	No of Universities	No of Applications	No Admitted	Left Over
1999/2000	45	417,773	78,550	339,223
2000/01	46	467,490	50,277	417,213
2001/02	52	550,399	60,718	544,321
2002/03	53	994,380	51,845	942,535
2003/04	54	1,046,950	105,157	941,793
2004/05	56	841,878	122,492	719,386
2005/06	75	916,371	N/A	N/A
2006/07	76	803,472	123,626	679,846
2007/08	94	1,054,053	194,521	859,532
2008/2009	95	1,182,381	N/A	N/A

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

Running through 1999 to 2009 as indicated in Table 1 above, there is a wide gap between demand and supply for higher education in Nigeria. From the table, out of over 400,000 candidates seeking admission into Nigerian university in 1999/2000 academic year, more than 320,000, which is about 80% are not able to gain admission to any of the universities. Attempts have been made to provide equitable access to the limited places by prescribing admission quotas to Federal institutions technically tagged ‘federal character’. This formula underlies the blue-print for admission into higher institutions based on academic merit, residential zones, and discretion. Despite this important measure to ensure equity in the spread of higher education across the country, the wide gap between demand and supply cannot be wished away. The limited spaces were keenly contested leading to sharp practices such as cheating in examinations, bribery for admission, and manipulation of examination scores.

The government considered distance learning as an alternative mode of delivering education to a greater number of students against the gross inadequacy of the conventional universities and against the dire need to produce highly skilled labour for an economy that must compete within

the new globalizing context. Much like the conventional ones, funding allocations for the delivery of distance education have been inadequate and numerous other factors have impacted negatively on the delivery of higher education via distance learning.

CONCLUSION

Private for-profit higher learning institutions provide high supply but at relatively high cost. This paper found evidences that even though these institutions are free from the bottlenecks that constrain other public institutions, achieving the broader national objectives of mass literacy is still elusive. Moreover, despite private institutions serving as immediate safety net in addressing the overwhelming need of higher learning in the continent the overall enrolment rate in higher education institutions is still very low. Although important new higher education policies have recently been initiated in most African States, there is need to insulate them from the previous plagues arising from lack of coordinated attention and poor funding. There is every tendency that, if the new policies are properly followed-up, they could possess the necessary feedback mechanism that can respond to the age-long problems of equitable accessibility among every stratum of the society in such a way as to bridge poverty gap. A good application of the policies could also foster quality, within the nation's higher educational system, and bring it in line with global good practices. The need has thus arisen for changes not in the least generally appreciated among system stakeholders that should enhance socio-economic development as well as a curriculum system that could sharpen civic consciousness of students.

The private universities have not been well monitored to overcome the weakness in the public universities. Although, there is proliferation of private universities, which has translated into increased access in the continent. However, the exorbitant tuition fees and sundry charges, as well as the weak curriculum and authoritarian mode of governance of such private universities may hamper the connection rod between increased access to higher education and good governance in Africa.

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