

From Public University Dominance to Private University Policy Initiatives in Nigeria: The Push and Pull Factors

by

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This study evaluated the precipitating and debilitating factors that occurred in the emergence and growth of the private university system in Nigeria. Three research questions guided the analysis and examined enrolment patterns in seven pre-2003 private universities, students' preferences for enrolment and the factors that encouraged and discouraged their emergence and growth in Nigeria. Data was gathered from published documents, research reports, government releases, memos, newspapers and the Internet and then analysed qualitatively, using tables and simple percentage computations. The study found that the private university system, having suffered an initial setback in the 1980s, has renewed success today because of the obvious failure of the public university system to adequately address multiple problems such as access, quality, funding, strikes, cultism and stability of the academic calendar – which the private system has been able to overcome more effectively. However, it was noted that the private system is prohibitively expensive for the majority of qualified but indigent prospective applicants. The study recommends, in addition to special scholarship programmes, the design of a special student aid programme, accompanied by a traceable and institutionalised repayment system based on models found in certain developed countries.

Introduction

A glance at the African scene

The emergence of private universities in Africa is a relatively new phenomenon. In Africa, until recently, all higher institutions were publicly owned (Ajayi, 1990). This was linked to the ethos inherited from the Colonial Government after World War II that social services were the responsibilities of the state and that private higher education could be very expensive and could not compete effectively with the public sector.

However, things began to change across Africa in the 1990s. Sanyal (1998) reported governments encouraging recognition of the private sector's role in providing higher education in Tunisia in the following words: "The encouragement of the participation of the private sector is becoming indispensable, along with the preparation of a legal framework for private higher education so as to respond to the need for pedagogical and financial diversification."

From non-existence in the late 1980s, private university education has continued to spread across Africa since the 1990s. Altbach and Teffera's (2003) study showed that private universities have emerged in many countries in Africa. Subostzky (2003) also reported a rapid proliferation of universities in South Africa as a result of the activities of both local and international providers, mainly from Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States.

In Tunisia, legal recognition was given to private higher education and in 2000, the total enrolment in higher educational institutions stood at 207 000, of which 3 500 were enrolled in 6 private higher institutions (licensed).

In Zimbabwe, private universities started in March 1992 and by 2001, 1 681 students were enrolled in the 4 private universities. These included Africa University (owned by the United Methodist Church), Solusi University (sponsored by the Seventh-Day Adventist Church), the Catholic University in Zimbabwe and Arrupe College (an exclusively Jesuit College affiliated to the University of Zimbabwe). All these universities are mission-supported, as is the case in Kenya where, apart from 7 national universities and 17 private universities with either a full or an interim charter, all are backed by religious organisations. A single exception is the United States International University.

The Nigerian scene

The Nigerian Constitution (1979) demarcates certain issues into the exclusive and concurrent legislative lists (the exclusive legislative list applies exclusively to the federal government and the concurrent legislative list is shared by the federal and state governments). During the 13 years of military rule in Nigeria (1966-1979), the establishment of universities was the exclusive right of the Federal Military Government which had taken over all universities in 1975. The policy decision to take over universities was validated by Military Decree No. 46 (1977). The decree prohibited the establishment and ownership of universities by any state government, voluntary agencies or private persons. It explained further the constitutional transfer of education from the exclusive legislative to the concurrent legislative list by which state governments and private individuals (or groups) were allowed to establish universities. A change came after a suit at the Supreme Court in 1983 ruled in favour of private interests' rights to establish universities in Nigeria. Within 6 months, 26 private universities emerged on the scene. However issues of quality, planning and funding were not addressed (Aliyu, quoting Beaver, 2004).

The proliferation of private universities in the early 1980s and the possibility of adverse implications for the quality of education prompted a series of government interventions. This culminated in the promulgation of the Private Universities Abolition and Prohibition Decree No. 14 of 1984 which abolished all existing private universities in order to restore some order in the then chaotic university education sub-sector. We view the banning of these private universities (including the nearly nascent National Open University) as a retrograde step for the system in Nigeria. The system, although suspended by military decree in 1984, was restored by another military regime in May 1999 which licensed the first set of three private universities. From 1999 to the writing of this report, many more private universities have emerged (24 by 2006) but enrolment in them has been slower than enrolment in the public universities probably because of cost, space, and paucity of accredited programmes and staffing situations.

In this study we intend to examine the “push” factors (that have encouraged) and the “pull” factors (that have discouraged) the growth of private university education in Nigeria. We shall also review the enrolment situation in these universities with regard to their carrying capacities, preference patterns in University Matriculation Examinations (UME) applicants or candidates and various factors that have created unique opportunities for the growth of private universities in the education sub-sector in contemporary Nigeria. Finally, the study projects into the immediate future and recommends the way forward.

Table 1. **List of approved private universities in Nigeria, 2006**

| No. | University | Registration no. | Date of licensing |
|-----|---|------------------|-------------------|
| 1 | Igbinedion University, Okada | 01 | 10 May 1999 |
| 2 | Babcock University, Ilishan-Remo | 02 | 10 May 1999 |
| 3 | Madonna University, Okija | 03 | 10 May 1999 |
| 4 | Bowen University, Iwo | 04 | 31 July 2001 |
| 5 | Covenant University, Ota | 05 | 12 Feb. 2002 |
| 6 | Pan-African University, Lagos | 06 | 12 Feb. 2002 |
| 7 | Benson Idahosa University, Benin | 07 | 12 Feb. 2002 |
| 8 | ABTI-American University, Yola | 08 | 28 May 2003 |
| 9 | Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo | 09 | 7 January 2005 |
| 10 | Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin | 10 | 7 January 2005 |
| 11 | Bingham University, Enugu | 11 | 7 January 2005 |
| 12 | Caritas University, Enugu | 12 | 7 January 2005 |
| 13 | CETEP City University, Lagos | 13 | 7 January 2005 |
| 14 | Katsina University Katsina | 14 | 7 January 2005 |
| 15 | Redeemers University, Mowe | 15 | 7 January 2005 |
| 16 | Lead-City University, Ibadan | 16 | 9 June 2005 |
| 17 | Bells University of Technology, Badagry | 17 | 9 June 2005 |
| 18 | Crawford University, Igbesa | 18 | 9 June 2005 |
| 19 | Wukari Jubilee University, Wukari | 19 | 9 June 2005 |
| 20 | Crescent University, Abeokuta | 20 | 9 June 2005 |
| 21 | Novena University, Ogume | 21 | 9 June 2005 |
| 22 | Renaissance University, Enugu | 22 | 9 June 2005 |
| 23 | University of Mkar, Mkar | 23 | 9 June 2005 |
| 24 | Joseph Ayo Babalola University, Ikeji Arakeji | 24 | 6 March 2006 |

Source: National Universities Commission, published in *The Guardian* (2006a).

Data presentation

Research question 1: What is the enrolment structure of private universities in Nigeria?

Table 2 shows enrolment in the first seven universities that started up prior to the October/November 2005 academic session. The total capacity for all 7 universities was 28 539 students, and the 2006 total enrolment in these universities was 19 740 students. Therefore during this period, only 68.8% of the available projected spaces were filled, leaving the remaining 31.2% vacant.

Also, the analysis of the enrolment pattern of each of these 7 institutions reveals that 3 universities (numbers 1, 4 and 5) enrolled less than half of their capacity while numbers 2, 3 and 6 were close to full enrolment, and number 7 exceeded its enrolment target.

Table 2. **Enrolment structure in private universities in Nigeria, 2006**

| No. | Name | Current enrolment | Date of establishment | Capacity ¹ | % enrolment | Difference | % under enrolment/ over- enrolments |
|-----|----------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------------|------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1 | Madonna University, Okija | 4 824 | 10 May 1999 | 9 853 | 48.9 | -5 029 | |
| | -51.0 | | | | | | |
| 2 | Babcock University, Ilishan-Remo | 3 609 | 12 May 2002 | 4 075 | 88.5 | -466 | -11.4 |
| 3 | Igbinedion University, Okada | 3 313 | 10 May 1999 | 3 465 | 95.8 | -152 | -4.1 |
| 4 | Benson Idahosa University, Benin | 1 916 | 12 February 2002 | 4 175 | 45.9 | -2 259 | -54.1 |
| 5 | Pan-African University, Lagos | 121 | 12 February 2002 | 870 | 13.9 | -7.49 | -86.0 |
| 6 | Bowen University, Iwo | 1 759 | 31 July 2001 | 2 090 | 84.1 | -331 | -15.8 |
| 7 | Covenant University, Ota | 4 198 | 12 February 2002 | 4 020 | 104.4 | +178 | +4.4 |
| | Total | 19 740 | | 28 539 | 68.8 | 8 244 | |

1. Capacity is the total number of students that a university can conveniently accept with regard to the human and material resources available.

Source: NUC (2005a).

Research question 2: What were the selection criteria and the preference pattern of UME candidates for these private universities in the 2005 admission season?

Table 3. **Preference pattern of University Matriculation Examination (UME) candidates for private universities, 2005**

| Rank | Name of University | % Share | No. of UME applicants to university |
|------|---|---------|-------------------------------------|
| 1 | Covenant University, Ota | 30.78 | 1 125 |
| 2 | Babcock University, Ilishan-Remo | 24.38 | 891 |
| 3 | Madonna University, Okija | 22.38 | 818 |
| 4 | Igbinedion University, Okada | 8.80 | 323 |
| 5 | Bowen University, Iwo | 6.13 | 238 |
| 6 | Benson Idahosa University, Benin | 6.05 | 221 |
| 7 | Redeemers University Lagos | 1.12 | 37 |
| 8 | Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo | 0.03 | 1 |
| 9 | ABTI-American University, Yola | - | Nil |
| 10 | Caritas University, Enugu | - | Nil |
| 11 | Al-Hikmat University, Kastina | - | Nil |
| 12 | CETEP University, Yaba | - | Nil |
| 13 | Bells University of Technology, Badagry | - | Nil |
| 14 | Crawford University, Igbesa | - | Nil |

Source: NUC (2005b).

From Table 3, only one university (Covenant) had full subscription to date and the largest number of UME applicants with 1 125 students (or 30.8% of the total). This was followed by Babcock University with 891 students (or 24.4% of the total) and then Madonna University with 818 applicants (or 22.4%). In all, for 2005, only 3 654 candidates (just 0.4%) opted for a private university out of 913 862 that applied for admission to all Nigerian universities, even though there were only 147 323 places for the academic year. This may be due to the public perception of the quality of infrastructure, equipment, personnel policy and discipline in the institutions.

Research question 3: What were the “push” and “pull” factors in the development of private sector participation in higher education in Nigeria?

Generally, two factors account for the necessity for private sector participation in university education, and these are listed by James (Sanyal, 1998) as follows:

- excess demand for higher education when the absorptive capacity of the public system (free or subscribed) is less than the demand for places;
- diversity of learning needs to satisfy, and heterogeneity in candidates' preferences for content and method because of religious, linguistic, cultural and ethnic reasons on one hand, and their need for special skills among enterprises on the other.

As far as Nigeria is concerned, the “push” factors include absorptive capacity of the public university system that is further burdened with too frequent policy changes, high secondary level output, declining funding patterns, frequent staff and student strikes, increasing student cultism (clashes, often extremely violent, between secret cults throughout the tertiary educational sector), and many other difficulties that have paralysed the public system.

The “pull” factors include, among others, the generally high level of poverty in Nigeria and the high cost of private university education. Yet bursary or loan facilities for those qualified and able prospective students seeking to acquire quality university education are limited.

These “push” and “pull” factors are more closely examined below.

The “push” factors

Absorptive capacity of the Nigerian university system and opportunities created for private universities

The shortfall in the capacity of public universities in Nigeria in the last 15 years has reached 25%. This is not a problem peculiar to Nigeria; in

Colombia, Hernandez and Revelo (2003) reported that the number of applicants stood at 236 000 during the early 1980s and by 2000, it had increased to 582 000. The insufficiency in available places in state-owned higher education institutions led to a considerable growth in the private sector. By 1997 in Colombia, enrolment in private higher education reached 67.8%. In Nigeria also, the yearly accumulation of unabsorbed university-age candidates became a problem. By the 1995/96 academic session, the public university system could admit only 7.3% of the total applicants. This happened to be the lowest rate of admission into the university system as a proportion of applications since the establishment of the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board in 1978. This massive denial of spaces increased the need to establish private universities, which began in 1999.

Table 4 shows the pattern of demand and supply of places in Nigerian Universities.

Table 4. Demand and supply of university places in Nigeria, 1990-2005

| Session | UME applications | UME admissions | % admissions | % unmet demand |
|-----------|------------------|----------------|--------------|----------------|
| 1990/91 | 287 572 | 48 504 | 16.9 | 83.1 |
| 1991/92 | 388 270 | 61 479 | 15.4 | 84.6 |
| 1992/93 | 357 950 | 57 685 | 16.1 | 83.9 |
| 1993/94 | 420 681 | 59 378 | 14.1 | 85.9 |
| 1994/95 | – | – | – | – |
| 1995/96 | 412 797 | 37 498 | 7.3 | 92.7 |
| 1996/97 | 376 829 | 79 904 | 16.8 | 83.2 |
| 1997/98 | 419 807 | 72 791 | 17.3 | 82.7 |
| 1998/99 | 321 368 | 78 550 | 24.4 | 81.2 |
| 1999/2000 | 418 928 | 78 550 | 18.8 | 81.2 |
| 2000/01 | 467 490 | 50 277 | 10.7 | 89.3 |
| 2001/02 | 842 072 | 95 199 | 11.3 | 88.7 |
| 2002/03 | 994 380 | 51 845 | 5.21 | 94.79 |
| 2003/04 | 1 046 950 | 105 157 | 10.04 | 89.96 |
| 2004/05 | 893 000 | n.a. | n.a. | n.a. |
| 2005/06 | 913 862 | 147 323 | 16.12 | 83.88 |

Sources: FOS (various years), JAMB (various years), NUC (2005b), Oyebadé (2005).

Policy changes in higher education and opportunities created for private universities

The *National Policy on Education* (NPE) was first published in 1977 and later revised in 1981; the publication was further revised twice, in 1998 and 2004. From 1981 to 1997, university education was solely directed and administered by the government. Only federal and state governments established and ran universities. A shift in policy became noticeable in 1998. The NPE (Federal

Republic of Nigeria, 1998), Section 6, subsection 53 stated that “voluntary agencies, individuals and groups shall be allowed to establish universities provided they comply with minimum standards laid down by the Federal Government of Nigeria”. Hence the NPE reflected constitutional provisions that first appeared in 1979 and the component of Decree 9 of 1993 on private sector involvement in the establishment of universities and other levels of higher education.

The National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (NEEDS), which the Obasanjo administration (1999-May 2007) established for the purpose of reforming all sectors of the economy, identified education as one of the sectors that had to be reformed. One of the policy thrusts of NEEDS was to “provide an enabling environment and stimulate active participation of the private sector, civil society organisations, communities and development partners in educational development”. The National Universities Commission (NUC) has vigorously pursued this to the extent that it has over 100 applications with its Standing Committee for the establishment of Private Universities (SCOPU). This committee verifies the level of preparedness of institutions and organisations that have shown interest in establishing private universities. It also verifies claims of proposing organisations/bodies with reference to benchmarks and guidelines used in establishing institutions. SCOPU then conducts on-the-spot assessments of facilities and evaluates the level of preparedness based on visual evidence. The NUC (2005a) approved seven additional private universities, having awarded them the following readiness scores in terms of programme and facilities:

1. Bells University of Technology, 82.8%;
2. Crawford University, 81.6%;
3. Joseph Ayo Babalola University, 80.4%;
4. Renaissance University, 80.8%;
5. Crescent University, 77.1%;
6. University of Mkar, 73.2%;
7. Wukari Jubilee University, 62.7%.

In granting licenses to these universities, the NUC management closely examined SCOPU’s report. NUC (2005a) noted: “The proposed universities were the top of the list of over 100 applications currently undergoing processing; the most advanced in terms of readiness for take-off, the most aligned to the priority needs of Nigerians in terms of programme offering and are those that have met the conditions for licensing. It is worth stating that the upper limit of the number of private universities that the National Universities Commission (NUC) is able to cope with in terms of quality assurance is being approached.”

Secondary level output and opportunities for private universities

The unprecedented increase in the number of secondary level leavers has created unusual pressure on higher education, in particular, on universities. The enrolment figures in terminal classes, i.e. at senior secondary level between 1999 and 2002, increased at varying rates. The total absorptive capacity of the universities was put at 160 000 in 2004 and 147 303 in 2005 (Okebukola 2004, 2005). The statistics of secondary level output from 1999 to 2003 are presented below.

Table 5. National enrolment statistics of terminal class and applications

| Year | Enrolment in terminal class | % annual increase | Applications |
|------|-----------------------------|-------------------|--------------|
| 1999 | 511 328 | – | – |
| 2000 | 571 089 | 11.68 | 418 928 |
| 2001 | 622 248 | 8.95 | 467 490 |
| 2002 | 648 123 | 4.15 | 842 072 |
| 2003 | 791 123 | 22.06 | 893 000 |

Sources: FOS (2001), Federal Ministry of Education (2003a, 2003b).

Table 5 shows that there has been an annual increase in the number of students graduating from secondary level. When we compared the figures of prospective applicants to the universities between the years 1999 and 2003 and the number of actual applications for university education, they showed that the number of applicants doubled between the 2001 academic session and the 2002 session, when the total was 842 079 applications. This implies that those who were not admitted the first year re-applied massively for admission to the universities the following year. Also, in 2005, the Joint Admissions and Matriculations Board (JAMB) record of applications to the country's 150 polytechnics, monotechnics and colleges of education was just 150 000, thus increasing the number of applications for UME courses or programmes. The percentage increases in the output pattern of secondary level graduates have been steady and also significant. These increases constitute one of the factors that have encouraged the growth of private university education, as parents who have the means switch automatically to the private university alternative instead of waiting fruitlessly for spaces in the vastly oversubscribed public system.

Decline in public funding of education

The education system in Nigeria (from primary to tertiary) has experienced unprecedented growth over the years. In fact, the growth and expansion at tertiary level has defied all projections. The NUC (Saint, Hartnett and Strassner, 2003) reported that the Nigerian Federal University System

grew by 12% annually during the 1990s and totalled 325 299 students by 2000. Ilusanya (2007), computing from NUC records, reported that the total number of students in 25 federally funded universities (excluding the National Open University) had risen to 442 864 and that of state universities to 265 166 at the end of 2005. With expansion uncontrolled, the cost of running the federal university system totalled USD 210 million in 1999. The recurrent allocation per university student in the federal system fell from USD 610 to USD 360 between 1990 and 1999 (Saint, Hartnett and Strassner, 2003). Balami (2004) reported that unlike other federal subsystems, the education sector tends to be allocated a small proportion at sub-national government (state and local) budget level. The federal government's continued inability to fund the educational system, which it had allowed to expand freely, began to show in the amount of funds made available to a rapidly expanding sector over successive years.

Table 6. Education sector share of federal budget, 1989-2003 in NGN millions

| Year | Annual budget | Allocation to education | % total |
|------|---------------|-------------------------|---------|
| 1989 | 30 107.0 | 1 941.7 | 6.45 |
| 1990 | 40 660.7 | 2 204.7 | 5.45 |
| 1991 | 38 665.9 | 1 787.6 | 4.62 |
| 1992 | 52 036.4 | 2 392.9 | 4.00 |
| 1993 | 111 616.5 | 7 999.1 | 7.20 |
| 1994 | 69 200.0 | 10 283.8 | 14.86 |
| 1995 | 111 457.5 | 12 816.4 | 11.50 |
| 1996 | 121 221.9 | 15 351.7 | 10.81 |
| 1997 | 188 089.3 | 16 841.2 | 11.53 |
| 1998 | 246 342.4 | 23 668.1 | 9.61 |
| 1999 | 249 000.0 | 27 710.0 | 11.13 |
| 2000 | 677 510.0 | 50 660.0 | 8.36 |
| 2001 | 894 200.0 | 626 000.0 | 7.0 |
| 2002 | n.d. | n.d. | - |
| 2003 | 765 000.0 | 13 500.0 | 1.81 |

Sources: Federal Ministry of Education (2003b), Arikewuyo (2004), Central Bank of Nigeria (various years).

Table 6 shows that the allocation for education in the federal budget fluctuated greatly between 1989 and 2003. The percentage allocation was at an extreme low in 2003 when the government budgeted 1.81% to education, which was far below the UNESCO recommendation of 26% for developing countries. These decreasing sectorial allocations for education in the national budget also had implications for decreased funding of the higher education sub-sector. As a result, university facilities and infrastructure eventually declined in quality and quantity while appropriate staff could not be hired and

overall system efficiency dropped sharply. Saint, Hartnett and Strassner (2003) noted that efforts to expand enrolments and improve educational quality were severely constrained by shortages of qualified academic staff. Between 1997 and 1999, academic staff numbers declined by 12%, while enrolments expanded by 13%. The NUC's *Monday Memo* of 9 January 2006 confirmed that the universities were still under-funded at this point.

All 26 state universities had a total state government grant of about NGN 35 billion, which compared unfavourably with the NGN 50 billion received by 26 federal universities. The amount for federal universities was still a long way from that required to maintain institutional quality. The government's inability to fund even the existing higher education system and the increasing social demand for university education caused government to re-focus its policy on higher education.

Similarly, in Colombia, the inability of the government to sufficiently fund the existing higher education system was behind the growth of private sector higher education and the proliferation of numerous private programmes and institutions that offer higher education with different levels of quality and relevance (Hernandez and Revelo, 2003). The Government of Nigeria, in its reform efforts and policy thrust, encouraged private sector participation in university education and licensed 24 private universities from the inception of the administration in 1999. This excludes the three that were licensed by the military government toward the end of their tenure in 1999.

The federal government expenditure on education between 1997 and 2003 was below 12% of its overall budgets, the trend being largely downward. The funding predicament of these institutions, which adversely affected their quality, led to the establishment of private universities with the focus on qualitative university education. As funding declined, university environments deteriorated, thus losing public confidence and patronage. The situation was comparable to what happened at lower levels such as basic primary and secondary education; there the erosion of the system's quality and an unfavourable school environment reduced patronage of state schools and opened the way for private institutions to thrive and in some Nigerian states out-number public schools.

Strikes in public universities and opportunities created for private university development

Nigerian universities have become notorious around the world for frequent staff strikes. Ilusanya (2005b) reported on the multiplicity of labour Unions in the university system, which often engage in what might be described as strike competition arising from parity and disparity' in issues relating to wages, salaries, allowances and conditions of service within the

system. Okebukola (2003) lamented the strike situation in Nigerian Universities when he said that for 36 months of closure due to strikes in the period 1993-2005, the country can earn an ignoble gold medal for strikes in universities and a dishonourable mention in the *Guinness Books of Records* perhaps, as the country with the highest cases of university strikes in the world.

The Education Sector Status Report (2003) also confirmed the opinion of Okebukola when it noted that universities were closed for 36 months between 1993 and 2003. This translates to almost four academic sessions. Also, Ilusanya (2005b) reported that in Nigeria, between December 2002 and May 2003, all the public universities were closed by strikes and only privately-owned universities opened for academic activities. Due to the strikes, students in public universities could not know when they would graduate. Many families began to send their dependents to neighbouring countries, where academic calendars were more stable, to acquire university degrees. Okebukola (2003) noted that the strikes that took place in Nigerian universities in 2003 represented a significant loss to the country. Besides the financial setback, the NUC identified the devaluation of the academic qualification, the knowledge and skills deficits, and the loss of overseas scholarships. The social costs included an increase in the rate of student involvement in anti-social activities since the students were otherwise unoccupied, an increase in reported cases of both unwanted pregnancies and deaths of students in motor accidents. The economic cost was paid by the students, the parents, the institutions and the country. Some individuals chose to avoid these costs by moving to private universities. This created a favourable climate in which private universities could flourish.

The strike situation in public universities precluded all admissions to Nigerian universities in the 1993/94 academic session nationwide. In September 2005, when universities should have commenced the 2005/2006 academic session, some universities merged two admission years. The University of Benin did this in 2000 (Ilusanya, 2005b), and the University of Ibadan would not admit candidates for 2005/06 because it had a backlog of 2004/05 students to admit.

Cultism

Cultism is another plague that has created a credibility problem for public universities in Nigeria. This is a situation in which some unofficial, secret student groups unleash terror by killing, raping and maiming innocent students, staff and members of rival groups. The first clubs started in the 1950s and developed into violent secret societies by the 1990's. Olugbile (2005) reported that the situation was so bad that hardly a semester would pass without reports of cult clashes, leaving in their trail shocking tales of

violence, death, maiming, rape, destruction of property and permanent scars on the people's psyche. Ilusanya (2005a) reported that over 33 students' lives were taken between 1986-1996 while at least 7 higher education staff were killed. The analysis carried out by Olugbile (2005) based on 4 newspaper reports of students deaths as a result of cultism showed that between March 2003 and August 2004, 47 students were killed in 13 higher institutions in Nigeria (this figure included deaths occurring in polytechnics). Table 7 shows the names of institutions, period and number of students killed in cult clashes between March 2003 and August 2004.

Table 7. Deaths from cult clashes in Nigerian higher education institutions, 2003-04

| S/N | Institution | Period | Ownership | No. of students killed |
|-----|--|----------------------------|-----------|------------------------|
| 1 | Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki | July 2003 | Public | 6 |
| 2 | Lagos State University, Ojo | August 2003-2004 | Public | 5 |
| 3 | Kwara State Polytechnic, Ilorin | March-August 2003 | Public | 5 |
| 4 | Federal Polytechnic, Ilaro | June 2003- January 2004 | Public | 3 |
| 5 | University of Ilorin, Ilorin | March 2003 | Public | 1 |
| 6 | Osun State College of Technology, Iree | February 2004 | Public | 2 |
| 7 | Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Enugu | April 2004 | Public | 1 |
| 8 | Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye | June 2004 | Public | 2 |
| 9 | The Polytechnic, Ibadan | 2003-2004 | Public | 7 |
| 10 | University of Ibadan, Ibadan | July 2004 | Public | 4 |
| 11 | Federal Polytechnic Kaura Namoda, Zamfara | June 2004 | Public | 2 |
| 12 | Lagos State Polytechnic, Isolo | April-May 2004 | Public | 4 |
| 13 | University of Port-Harcourt, Port-Harcourt | 2003 | Public | 5 |
| | | | | 47 total |

Source: Olugbile (2005).

The statistics shows that 47 students were killed within the 18-month period from March 2003 to July 2004. All these happened in public higher education institutions. The intensity of this menace in public higher institutions in Nigeria over the last decade and the seeming failure to find a lasting solution despite strenuous efforts have made many parents deliberately avoid public universities and opt for the better-supervised private system where controls are more stringent.

The “pull” factors

Poverty

There are, however, constraints to the growth of private universities in Nigeria. Despite the presence of university applicants seeking admission, the amount of disposable income available to university education subscribers may have a severe bearing on the choice that parents and students make. From the primary to higher education level, poverty has had a significant influence on school enrolment and patronage. Ekaguere (quoted in Ehiametalor, 2005) reported that when the enrolment data of six-year-olds in school was segregated by level of family income, 83.1% from middle class households and only 21.1% from poor households were enrolled in primary schools. Ehiametalor (2005) investigated factors that might prevent pupils from attending secondary education and 50.3% of the pupils cited financial problems as the major factor. *The Guardian* of 19 August 2004 reported that 89 million Nigerians live on below one US dollar a day and consequently 70.2% cannot afford to send their children to primary school. This leaves 29.8% of families living on above one US dollar a day (NGN 140), according to the Minister of Labour and Productivity. In Nigeria, with its population of 126 million, this translates into about 89 million people living in abject poverty, thereby making Nigeria a country with one of the highest concentrations of poor people on earth.

The poverty factor was also evidenced in the 2005 Country Report of the UK Department for International Development on the state of poverty in Nigeria which showed that 90 million people were living in absolute poverty having access to less than NGN 127 per day (less than one US dollar) (DIFD Nigeria, 2005). This poverty challenge does not affect basic and secondary level enrolments alone but is also affecting the trend of enrolment in private universities. Out of the seven private universities that were operational in October 2005, only one of them was fully subscribed; the remaining six were undersubscribed despite existing for six years. When this situation was compared to the high percentage of unmet demand (see Table 4) in public universities, one might wonder why these applicants did not apply to private universities that were not full. The inevitable conclusion is that the poverty level of the majority of the applicants had made the choice impossible. The policy initiative of the government in licensing more universities is rendered ineffectual; without a corresponding fight against poverty and ensuring economic empowerment for its citizens, measures to address the enrolment and demand crises will fail.

The cost of private university education

Related to the issue of poverty is the cost of private university education. If its cost is far beyond the income level of prospective subscribers, then it becomes a hindrance to the development of private university education. The cost of private university education has been left primarily for market forces to determine and this compares unfavourably with situations in places like the Philippines which has many private universities. Arcelo (2003) reported that in the Philippines there are restrictions on student fee increases in private higher educational institutions. Only 10% of any increase in fees can be retained by private owners of educational institutions. Student bodies must be consulted before increases are announced. Also, 70% of the increase must be allocated for salary increases, while 20% goes towards maintenance and operating expenses and 10% toward investment by the owners. The system in the Philippines allows more students to enrol in private higher education whereas, in Nigeria, some private proprietors of universities are said to exploit prospective applicants, making heavy profits at their expense. The non-regulated fee structures may eventually defeat the purpose of deregulation of university education which was designed to increase access to prospective students. The high cost of private university education, which at present varies between NGN 250 000 and NGN 800 000 per session, may be responsible for the under-subscription noted in the private universities that have opened.

Conclusion

Private university education in Nigeria has been growing steadily from 3 establishments in 1999, to 24 in 2006. It appears that there may be more private than public universities in the near future. Private universities have continued to emerge and grow, benefiting from some of the difficulties experienced by both state and federal universities. The social structure that has continuously placed demand of places far above supply, the changes in government policy, the decline in funding, and the rise in strikes and cultism have created far-reaching opportunities for private universities.

The cost of private university education and the poverty level of the people may eventually become a stumbling block in the growth and consolidation of government efforts. It is therefore necessary for a more effective and workable student aid programme to be designed for those who wish to attend private universities, allowing them to utilise a type of loan facility which has a traceable and institutionalised repayment system. Though some argue against this because of the way the Students' Loans Board became moribund in the 1980s, the lessons learnt from this experience could be used to develop a student aid system that does not suffer from the defects of the former programme. Otherwise, government efforts at widening access

will be a mirage with the combination of the high cost of private education and poverty threatening not only higher education, but also primary and secondary education.

Some modern, though expensive, institutions now operating in Nigeria, such as the ABTI-American University of Nigeria, Yola, have introduced scholarship programmes for the top ten performers both in UME scores entering the institution and in promotion examinations (*The Guardian*, 2006b). We regard this as good practice that should be adopted by other institutions to further improve the already enhanced image of private higher education in Nigeria.

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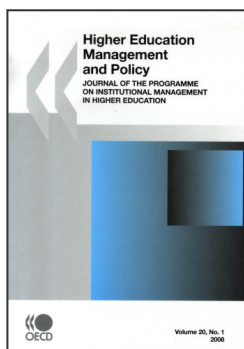
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