

The Deregulation of University Education in Nigeria: Implications for Quality Assurance.

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Introduction

The role of education as an instrument for promoting the socio-economic, political and cultural development of any nation can never be over-emphasised. According to Abdulkareem (2001), a nation's growth and development is determined by its human resources. The provision of the much-needed manpower to accelerate the growth and development of the economy has been said to be the main relevance of university education in Nigeria (Ibukun, 1997).

Precisely, the National Policy on Education (2004) highlighted the aims of university education:

1. To contribute to national development through high-level relevant manpower training;
2. To develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of the individual and the society;
3. To develop the intellectual capability of individuals to understand and appreciate their local and external environments;
4. To acquire both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to be self-reliant and useful members of the society;
5. To promote and encourage scholarship and community service;
6. To forge and cement national unity; *and*
7. To promote national and international understanding and interactions.

The belief in the efficacy of education as a powerful instrument of development has led many nations to commit much of their wealth to the establishment of educational institutions at various levels. According to Ajayi and Ekundayo (2007), the funds allocated to higher education should not be considered as mere expense, but as a long-term investment of immense benefit to the society as a whole.

The importance of university education to the individual in particular and the society in general has made the demand for university education increase astronomically in the last twenty years, resulting in a very high percentage of unsatisfied demand every year. *See table 1.*

The demand for university education in the last 20 years is far greater than the supply. This is in spite of the phenomenal expansion in the publicly owned universities in Nigeria from 1 in 1948 to 56 in 2007. It is evident that the government alone cannot provide the much needed university education to the teeming applicants seeking places yearly – hence the involvement of private sectors.

Historical Development of University Education in Nigeria

The history of university education in Nigeria started with the Elliot Commission of 1943, which led to the establishment of University College Ibadan (UCI) in 1948. UCI was an affiliate of the University of London (Ike, 1976). According to Ibukun (1997), the UCI was saddled with a number of problems at inception ranging from rigid constitutional provisions, poor staffing, and low enrolment to high dropout rate.

In April 1959, the Federal Government commissioned an inquiry (the Ashby Commission) to advise it on the higher education needs of the country for its first two decades. Before the submission of the report, the eastern region government established its own university at Nsukka (University of Nigeria, Nsukka in 1960). The implementation of the Ashby Report led to the establishment of University of Ife (*now* Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife) in 1962 by the Western region, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria in 1962 by the Northern Region and University of Lagos (1962) by the Federal Government. Babalola et al (2007) posited that the University College, Ibadan became a full-fledged university in 1962. This meant that UCI, Ibadan and University of Lagos became the first two federal universities in Nigeria – the other three remained regional. In 1970, the newly created mid-western region opted for a university known as University of Benin. The six universities established during this period 1960-1970 are still referred to as first generation universities. Babalola et al (2007) remarked that during this period, universities in Nigeria were under the close surveillance of the government. Appointments of lay members of the council, and that of the vice-chancellor, were politically motivated.

In the third national development plan (1975—1980), the government established seven universities instead of the four proposed in the plan, and also took over the four regional universities in 1975. They were Universities of Calabar, Florin, Jos, Sokoto, Maiduguri, Port Harcourt and Ado Bayero University, Kano — all known as second generation universities.

The third generation universities were established between 1980 and early 1990. They are: the Federal University of Technology in Owerri, Makurdi, Yola, Akure and Bauchi.

While state universities were found in Imo, Ondo, Lagos, Akwa-Ibom, Oyo and Cross-Ricer states (Anyamelle, 2004).

The fourth generation universities are those established between 1991 and the present date. They include more state universities, Nigerian open universities and private universities. According to Okojie (2007), there are 26 federal, 30 state and 24 private universities currently operating.

Concept of Deregulation

Deregulation in the economic sense means freedom from governmental control. According to Akinwumi, Isuku and Agwaranze (2005), deregulation is the removal of government interference in the running of a system. This means that government rules and regulations governing the operations of the system are relaxed or held constant in order for the system to decide its own optimum level through the forces of supply and demand. Deregulation allows enterprises and services to be restricted as little as possible. Deregulation means the withdrawal of government controls in the allocation of resources and the production of goods and services.

Deregulation of Education

Deregulation of education means breaking the government's monopoly of the provision and management of education by giving free hand to private participation in the provision and management of education in the country. Caldwell and Spinks (1992) argued that the deregulation of education will help schools to become self-managing. Deregulation of education means relaxing or dismantling the legal and governmental restrictions on the operations of education business. Olatunbosun (2005) describes deregulation of education as a sale of knowledge to the highest bidder, which has the effect of lowering standards for the attraction of customers. As a deregulated sector, education will become a private enterprise undertaken by private individuals or corporate bodies that hope to maximise profit from their investment in education.

Deregulation of university education is a recent phenomenon in the country, which is borne out of the fact that the private schools are better managed than the public schools, judging from the experience of the lower levels (the primary and secondary schools). Nevertheless, the private sectors have been licensed to complement governmental efforts at providing university education to the masses. Today, there are 32 private universities in the country.

Reasons for the Deregulation of University Education

It has been argued that the standard of university education has fallen over the years following the myriad problems bedeviling the system, which has created the need for private handling of its provisions. Specifically, university education is deregulated so as to:

1. ***increase access to university education:*** Following the perennially acute shortage of places in the public universities and the need to increase the number of enrolments, private hands are called upon to create opportunities for the teeming number of youths seeking tertiary education. According to Oyebade (2005), the license given to private investors in university education is meant to address the problem of excessive demand over supply. Although, access is in this case provided for those who can afford the high fees charged.
2. ***address the problem of scarce educational resources:*** Akangbou (1992) asserts that national educational systems have always seemed to be tied to a life of crisis. Most universities in the country have consistently inadequate resources, which invariably effects the quality of output they produce. Besides, as Utulu (2001) points out, another factor that accounts for the decline in the quality of university output in Nigeria is the lack of physical facilities. The universities in Nigeria operate in adverse conditions; overcrowding and deteriorating physical facilities, lack of library books, educational materials and so on. Addressing this problem calls for the involvement of the private sector.
3. ***raise alternative ways of funding the university:*** Apart from the poor quality of graduates, as a result of poor physical facilities, another reason for the involvement of private hands in the provision and maintenance of university education is the under-funding of the education sector. Over the years, this problem has been generating a lot of strife between the ASUU and the government. However, the presence of private hands in university education is considered an alternative means of funding university education in the country.
4. ***improve the quality of university education:*** The government is of the view that the growth of private universities in the country will allow for competition between the public and the private universities, in terms of instructional delivery and other activities put in place to produce quality graduates for the economy. Competition brings improved quality of educational inputs and outputs (Ibadin, Shofoyeke and Ilusanya, 2005).

5. **enhance efficiency:** Ibibia (2003, in Akinwumi, et al, 2005) posits that pro-university deregulatory schools of thought opine that deregulating the system will enhance efficiency. According to the author, with more players in the university system, there would be more rational and efficient allocation of resources in the short term. The long-term effect is to stabilise the cost of operation, with an attendant increase in, and improved quality of, production.
6. **align with practices in other parts of the world:** It has been observed that in the more advanced countries of the world, both private and public sectors of the economy are involved in the provision and management of university education, and Nigeria cannot be an exemption – hence the need for private involvement in the provision and management of university education in Nigeria.
7. **irregular academic calendar:** The varying crises in the university sector, which had been paralyzing the academic calendars over the years constitute a source of worry to the stakeholders in the sector. However, there is need for the establishment of private universities, which are less prone to disruption in their academic calendars.

From the foregoing, it can be said that the Nigerian educational system needs private participation in the provision and management of educational institutions, especially at the university level. This is because of the dynamic nature of education, exacerbated by the enormous resources required for the realisation of national goals.

Problems of the Deregulation of University Education

Despite the immense benefits of private involvement in university education as highlighted above, the move had been criticized on various grounds, among which are:

1. **private universities are profit-making ventures:** Private universities have been criticised on the basis that they are profit-making ventures. According to Etuk (2005), private universities charge high fees. However, not many Nigerians can afford to pay these fees.
2. **it widens the social gap:** It has often been said that the deregulation of the university system will bring about greater inequality and widen the existing gap between the 'haves' and the 'have nots'.
3. **quality may be sacrificed for profit:** The private universities have again been criticised because, potentially, they may not produce the expected quality of education, as the proprietors are business owners who want big returns on their

investment. Hence, cost and returns-recovery plan may jeopardise quality.

Following the claims of potential shortcomings leveled against the establishment of private universities in the country, the question now is: how can quality be assured in the education system while private universities thrive in the country?

Private Universities and Quality Assurance

Concept of Quality Assurance

Quality assurance is a proactive means of ensuring quality in any organisation. Quality assurance in education aims at preventing quality problems and ensures that the products of the system conform to the expected standards. Ebong and Efue (2005) posit that it is a holistic term that is directed towards education as an entity. According to the authors, it entails the suppliers and consumers and all the various activities put in place to produce quality products and services. Besides, Enaohwo (2003) submitted that the concept of quality assurance in the education system can be looked at from two angles, *viz*: the internal perspective (within the system) and the external measures (checks and balances by the regulatory agencies).

Strategies for Quality Assurance in Private Universities

University education has been recognised to play an important role in the provision of high-level skilled manpower towards the development of the economy. Now, private hands are allowed to participate in the provision and management of university education. As a result, a lot of measures have to be put in place to ensure that the products of the private universities conform to societal needs. In this respect, the National Universities Commission, as a regulatory agency of the universities, has a vital role to play in ensuring that the standards laid down are strictly adhered to. According to Ehiamentalor (2005), the role of the NUC is to ensure standards in academics. The author argued that the NUC's role with regard to private universities would be to ensure that the standards laid down are maintained and that administration is not compromised, run mainly for profit, or academics undermined – the sole purpose of the license. Ehiamentalor posits that deregulation only confers ownership on the private education provider; the Federal Government is still in control of the university system. Below are the strategies that can be put in place to guarantee quality assurance in private universities:

1. ***availability of adequate and modern facilities:*** The NUC will have to make sure that the teaching-learning environment is made conducive to providing adequate and modern facilities. Modern facilities in this context include adequate classrooms, computers, recreational facilities, and instructional aids. It will guard against overcrowded classrooms in public universities, inadequate library and laboratory facilities and the like. The provision of these in the private universities will go a long way towards guaranteeing quality assurance.
2. ***adequate funding:*** Private universities should be well funded. According to Nwangwu (2005), when education is not adequately funded, the foundations of such education are weak; consequently the products of such education systems are generally weak intellectually. Therefore, the NUC has a vital role of ensuring that these private universities are adequately funded so as to guarantee quality output.
3. ***appraisal of educational programmes:*** Programmes run by private universities should be well monitored by the NUC to ensure quality and ensure that the programmes conform to societal needs. Continuous appraisal of programmes is vital for quality assurance in the university system.
4. ***quality teaching personnel:*** Teachers are responsible for ensuring positive changes in the lives of students in terms of skill acquisition, mental and moral development. In order to guarantee quality assurance in these private universities, highly qualified teachers or lecturers should be employed. Besides, highly-qualified lecturers, staff development programmes of various kinds should be put in place to ensure self-development and self-growth of lecturers.
5. ***prevention of the establishment of illegal campuses:*** Okojie (2007) posited that one of the activities of the NUC with regard to improving quality in the university system is preventing these universities from establishing illegal campuses all over the place. This hand of 'fellowship' should be extended to private universities. In this regard, the private universities will concentrate all their efforts on the single campus available, instead of running illegal campuses here and there, through which, at the end of the day, the totality is not up to a whole campus.
6. ***proper monitoring:*** Standards can be assured through proper monitoring. Hence private universities should be put under close watch by the NUC so that they do not deviate from the primary purpose of academic excellence in the pursuit of profit. The proprietors of private universities should be made to understand that the license granted for operation can be withdrawn at any time if there is deviation from the

standards laid down.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper examined the importance of university education to nation building. It examined the reasons for the deregulation of university education, which include the need to expand access to the teeming applicants; to address the problem of scarce educational resources, which had characterised all levels of education; to provide an alternative way of financing university education.

However, for deregulation to be meaningful, the government must set the minimum standards for would-be proprietors. It was therefore recommended that in order to guarantee quality assurance in private universities the following strategies should be put in place: provision of adequate and modern facilities; adequate funding; appraisal of educational programmes; employment of qualified teaching personnel and close monitoring of the activities of the universities so that their cost-recovery plans do not jeopardise the quality education they are to provide.

Table 1: Demand and supply of university education in Nigeria (1981/'81—2001/'02)

<i>Year</i>	<i>Number of Applicants</i>	<i>Number Admitted</i>	<i>Percentage Admitted %</i>	<i>Unsatisfied Demand %</i>
1980/'81	145,567	24,191	16.6	83.4
1981/'82	180,728	22,408	12.4	87.6
1982/'83	205,112	29,800	14.8	85.2
1983/'84	191,583	27,378	14.3	85.7
1984/'85	201,234	27,482	13.7	86.3
1985/'86	212,114	30,996	14.6	85.4
1986/'87	193,774	39,915	20.6	79.4
1987/'88	210,525	36,356	17.3	82.7
1988/'89	190,135	41,700	21.9	78.1
1989/'90	255,638	38,431	15.0	85.0
1990/'91	287,572	48,504	16.9	83.1
1991/'92	398,270	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	512,797	37,498	7.3	92.7
1996/'97	376,827	56,055	14.9	85.1
1997/'98	419,807	72,791	17.3	82.7
1998/'99	321,268	78,550	24.4	75.6
1999/2000	418,928	78,550	18.8	81.2
2000/2001	467,490	50,277	10.7	89.3
2001/2002	842,072	95,199	11.3	88.7

Note: — Admission not processed due to prolonged ASUU strike of 1994

Source: Oyebade (2005)

Table 2: List of Federal Universities

<i>S/N</i>	<i>University</i>	<i>Generation</i>	<i>Year of Establishment</i>
1.	University of Ibadan, Ibadan	First	1948
2.	University of Nigeria, Nsukka	First	1960
3.	Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria	First	1963
4.	Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife	First	1963
5.	University of Lagos, Akoka	First	1963
6.	University of Benin	First	1971
7.	Ado Bayero University, Kano	Second	1976
8.	University of Calabar	Second	1976
9.	University of Ilorin	Second	1976
10.	University of Jos	Second	1976
11.	University of Maiduguri	Second	1976
12.	University of PortHarcourt	Second	1976
13.	Usmanu Danfodiyo University	Second	1976
14.	Federal University Technology, Owerri	Third	1980
15.	Federal University Technology, Akure	Third	1981
16.	Federal University Technology, Yola	Third	1981
17.	Federal University Technology, Minna	Third	1982
18.	Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University, Bauchi	Third	1988
19.	University of Agriculture, Makurdi	Third	1988
20.	University of Agriculture, Abeokuta	Third	1988
21.	Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umuahia	Third	1992
22.	University of Uyo	Third	1991
23.	University of Abuja	Third	1988
24.	Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka	Third	1988

Table 3: List of State Universities

<i>S/N</i>	<i>University</i>	<i>State</i>
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1.	Rivers State University of Science and Technology, Port Harcourt	Rivers
2.	Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma	Edo
3.	Abia State University, Uturu	Abia
4.	Enugu State University of Technology, Enugu	Enugu
5.	Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye	Ogun
6.	University of Ado-Ekiti, Ado-Ekiti	Ekiti
7.	Lagos State University, Ojo	Lagos
8.	Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomoso	Osun
9.	Imo State University, Owerri	Imo
10.	Benue State University, Makurdi	Benue
11.	Delta State University, Abraka	Delta
12.	Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko	Ondo
13.	Kogi State University, Anyigba	Kogi
14.	Niger Delta University, Wilberforce Island	Bayelsa
15.	Anambra State University of Science and Technology, Uli	Anambra
16.	Kano University of Technology, Wudil-Kano	Kano
17.	Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki	Ebonyi
18.	Nasarawa State University, Keffi	Nasarawa
19.	Adamawa State University, Mubi	Adamawa
20.	Gombe State University, Gombe	Gombe
21.	Kaduna State University	Kaduna
22.	Cross River State University of Science and Technology	Cross River
23.	Akwa Ibom University of Technology, Uyo	Akwa Ibom
24.	Buka Abba Ibrahim University, Damaturu	Yobe
25.	Katsina State University	Katsina
26.	Ibrahim Babangida University, Lapai	Niger
27.	Plateau State University, Jos	Plateau
28.	Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijebu-Ode	Ogun
29.	Kebbi State University of Science and Techology, Aliero	Kebbi
30.	University of Mkar, Gboko	Benue

Table 4: List of Private Universities

S/N	University	State
1.	Babcock University, Illishan-Remo	Ogun
2.	Madonna University, Okija	Anambra
3.	Igbinedion University, Okada	Edo
4.	Bowen University, Iwo	Osun
5.	Covenant University, Ota	Ogun
6.	Benson Idahosa University, Benin City	Edo
7.	ABTI-American University, Yola	Adamawa
8.	Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo	Oyo
9.	Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin	Kwara
10.	Bingham University, New Karu	Nasarawa
11.	Caritas University, Enugu	Enugu
12.	CETEP City University, Mowe	Ogun
13.	Redeemer's University, Ede	Osun
14.	Lead City University, Ibadan	Oyo
15.	Bells University of Technology, Badagry	Lagos
16.	Crawford University, Igbesa	Ogun
17.	Wukari Jubilee University, Wukari	Taraba
18.	Crescent University, Abeokuta	Ogun
19.	Novena University, Ogume	Delta
20.	Renaissance University, Enugu	Enugu
21.	Joseph Ayo Babalola University, Ikeji-Arakeji	Osun
22.	Fountain University, Osogbo	Osun
23.	Caleb University	Lagos
24.	Salem University, Lokoja	Kogi

Source: Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board Brochure (2007/2008)

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