

QUALITY ISSUE: A Decade After University Privatisation in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT:

This paper was design to look into quality issue in Nigerian universities, a decade after the privatisation policy was established. This paper is a desk research with the intensity to observe how Nigeria University institutions have positioned itself after the introduction of privatisation policy. The study focuses attention on contemporary issues around what lead to the establishment of private universities in Nigeria and its effects on service delivery, that have raised concerns about quality or question of whether or not quality is factored into the development of privately owned university in the country. The findings reveals that the introduction of privatisation policy has reduce the public university unrest in terms of strike action, monopoly of market and many more. The existence of the private universities have created more access and have given candidates opportunity to choose among various options. The findings also reveals that at the start of the private universities, many of the university tend to be effective but after a few years they began to drop their standard due to lack of funding support, even overcrowding, late payment of staff salaries among others.

Keywords – government policy, privatisation, quality, quality management, university, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION:

The introduction of privatisation policy to Nigeria universities sector in the late 80's/ early 90's was an approach introduced by the government to improve funding and creates more access and to better services render by university institutions to the student as well as general public. With the added intention of Nigerian government to transfer responsibilities of financing university education to private investors and deregulate the institution, so that every university can enjoy autonomy to conduct meaningful research, plan teaching and learning as well as raise funds for themselves. Deregulation in this context means transfer of government ownership to private investors (Jerome, 2008) with the need for government to be accountable, democratic and prudent in the process (Fanira, 2012). Adetunji (2014) expressed that the federal government of Nigeria have charge and empowered a body called National University Commission, the responsibility to act on her behave in making the university prudent, accountable and democratic by setting the standard to be followed by all providers. The commission is responsible for monitoring, establishing and assuring that universities meet up with standards set (Igbuzor, 2006).

Although, Okechukwu and Okechukwu (2011) was of the opinion that the approach was a failure due to the present state of the university, where the NUC find it difficult to actually control

the private universities established nor formulate policies for universities properly. This was evident in the work of Ojerinde (2010), Duze, (2011) Akiyemi and Abiddin (2013), that 52 unlicensed private universities are operating illegally in various part of the country with 12 already prosecuted. NUC (2015) revealed an increased in number of university operating in the country illegally from 52 to 58 within 2years. These continued to raise the question of what kind of quality service will such universities provide to their student, when the body charge with the duties of monitoring and establishing universities in the country, especially privately owned ones, cannot control the formulation of universities operating in the country.

PRIVATE UNIVERSITY ANTIQUITY

University education started in Nigeria as a public good, operated solely by the federal government of Nigeria following the amalgamation of northern, southern and western protectorate. The federal government owned universities that were operating in the country. Although Fafunwa (1979) expressed that they first set of university in the country were college affiliates of university of London. That is, they were run, managed and supported by University of London until 1963 when the, Nigerian government decided to own and fully fledge the colleges of University of London. This was supported by the report of a committee called Ashby committee set up by the Nigerian government.

Adetunji (2014) identified that the first problem that emanate in the Nigerian higher education began when the committee set up by the government in 1963 did not come back with a consentient report, the committee were divided on opinions and views. As a result, the government decided to ignore the committee report and set up another committee called Ashby commission. The commission was tasked with the responsibility of looking into the need to create more universities to meet up with the challenges of accessed faced by Nigerian students (XXXX). The committee report was based on low enrolment at the public universities. They suggested that Nigeria government should not own her own university in the period. However, in defiance to the recommendations of the commission, the government went ahead to create 6 universities for each geo-political region in the country.

After number of years of limited access to the university, the demand for university place continues to loom and as a result government continue to create more universities to meet up with this demand. At a point, government can no longer measure up with the level of demand. Then the state governments delve in and began owning their own universities as well, but due to large number of applicants already waiting to gain admission into the university the established universities cannot met up with the demand as the government owned university suddenly began to face some challenging issues. Such as reduction in funding, lack of competent hand to teach, obsolesce of materials, mismanagement and many more.

THE PRESENT STATE OF NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES

As mentioned in the introductory section, the NUC are in charge of monitoring Nigerian university affairs and the closure of illegal campuses, the approval of courses or programmes and the maintenance of minimum academic standards, amongst others (Okechukwu & Okechukwu, 2011). Recently, the NUC has involved herself in many approaches or techniques to help improve Nigerian universities. These efforts cannot be overemphasized, as the NUC's continuous attempts to move Nigerian university education forward involve matching their activities with international standards on a continuous basis, through several strategies such as benchmark setting, accreditations, standards and regulatory frameworks (Akiyemi & Abiddin, 2013, p. 229). Equally,

in recent times, the number of licensed universities has grown from twenty-five Federal, seventeen state and three private in 2000 (NUC, 2010) to forty Federal, thirty-nine state and fifty private in 2014 (NUC, 2014), although the time frame of this study will cover the period from 2000 to 2014. In the time window between 2000 and 2014, eighty-one universities have been created, among which fifteen were federal, nineteen state and forty-seven private universities. These universities vary in sizes and quality with regards to capacity, infrastructure, library facilities, courses and curriculum (Salmin, 2009; Ojerinde, 2010; Duze, 2011). Equally, there are fifty-three unlicensed private universities operating illegally in various parts of the country and eight facing prosecution (NUC, 2010; 2014).

It is important to highlight here that Nigeria owns the largest universities in Africa, Salmin (2009) and Akinyemi and Abiddin (2013) indicated that Nigerian universities enrolled the highest number of students in any African countries, with 129 universities enrolling over 500,000 students yearly with approximately 1.5 million candidates awaiting enrolment yearly (Adetunji & Ogunleye, 2015b). With enrolment numbers increasing and the creation of more universities, the issue of quality has come to the top of the research agenda due to the continued repetition of problems without a long-lasting solution. In view of this difficult situation, Nigerian universities have found themselves in a condition where they need to manage the sudden growth of universities all over the country. Nigerians are beginning to comment on the position of Nigeria universities, the environment in which they operate, coupled with the needs and demand for them to provide quality service. Nigerians are concerned that the difficult situation the universities face is making them less and less significant to the needs of the society and increasingly ineffective in accomplishing the mission for which these institutions were created (Adamolekun, 2007).

Materu (2007), in his review, argued that an effective approach to quality would be one that allows universities to improve their interactions with the quality of their provision and achieve their longer-term vision and mission statement, with experience of university management. However, Abukari and Corner (2010) observed that the current quality control practices by the NUC in Nigeria have been seen largely as a means of control on funding bodies and place undue emphasis on management (internal) documentation, which sometime results in disruption of normal activity and threatens the enthusiasm and commitment of principal officers (Ocho, 2006; Alani, 2008; Adekola, 2012). The ineffectiveness of the control and approach is what Srikanthan and Dalrymple (2002) stressed as fundamental principles of quality management: when one relates service quality to processes, it ultimately affects the morale of the management. Therefore, adequate control is required to made changes in such a multifaceted system. This calls for principal officers as co-participants to consider quality management as a continuous function of all events as a normal integral process, rather than at certain times when unnecessary emphasis is placed on documentation, bureaucracy and other requirements.

Likewise, Okojie (2007) discussed, the pressure placed on a university in terms of demand, limited availability of physical facilities and demand for academic staff to cater for students' needs has taken a high toll on the quality of programmes in the institutions. Okojie asserted that employers, parents and the general public have conveyed concern about the quality of graduates produced from Nigerian universities for under performance, while Oyewole (2009) held the view that quality in education deals with issues of functionalism, validity, relevance and efficiency of the educational system in the realisation of national goals and objectives. In an attempt to marry the goal and objective together, Harvey (1996) expressed that there is huge difficulty of recognizing the right management structure, that would not limit the multiplicity, innovation and creativity of academic institutions and that, this on its own, is problematic (Harvey, 1996; Sohail et al. 2003; Srikanthan & Dalrymple 2007; Blackmore, 2009).

Adesina (2002) expressed that an attempt to solve the quality problem universities in Nigeria are faced with, the government has adopted inappropriate strategy of reducing variation in educational processes and outcomes, arising from over-regulation, government policies and control of academic freedom. This approach have been applied by the Nigerian government on many occasions in order to make Nigerian universities' education more relevant (Oyewole, 2009). Conversely, the history of Nigerian university education in the 1990s shows that university education in Nigeria has been faced with many long standing crises, especially inadequate resources in terms of input.

In agreement with this inadequate resources Igbuzor (2006); Ekundayo and Ajayi (2009) argued that Nigerian universities are suffering from overcrowded lecture rooms, meaning that lecturer-to-student interactions are obviously limited. Where laboratories are found, they are usually obsolete and starved of modern equipment. However, it was argue by Kleijnen, et al. (2011), that material such as the curriculum, teaching materials, the environment and many more can encourage or discourage the development of core transferable skills, subject and practical knowledge. They express that the choice of teaching and learning methods and the assessment strategies can expose students to practical knowledge. This statement was challenged by the work of Ekundayo and Ajayi (2009), Obasi, Akuchie and Obasi (2010), who found that Nigerian students are not exposed to practical application of skills, while the study by Eagle and Brennan (2007) mentioned that the universities' focus should be on student intake, teaching and learning, curriculum design, application of practical knowledge to help students learn for themselves and development of a continuous quality culture (Doherty, 1997; Gibbs & Simpson, 2005). But an attempt to replicate this approach in the Nigerian context has revealed that the approach has failed and stakeholders are now calling for a better approach to manage the university sector (NUC, 2010).

Again, the work of Adamolekun (2007); Obasi, Akuchie and Obasi (2010) provides evidence that focusing on student intake, teaching and learning is not the case in Nigerian universities, while Akinyemi and Abiddin (2013) also revealed evidence that there are shortages of learning materials such as textbooks, journals, electronic journals and other educational materials, including shortage of manpower, prolonged strikes by academic staff and a lack of infrastructural facilities and resources. This was compounded by continuous engagement of the union of universities' academic staff in industrial strike action (Akinyemi and Abiddin, 2013). However, the resources available in form of inputs to learners, as well as the overall supporting systems, are also critical aspects of quality management that are scarce in Nigerian universities. It is also clear in Ekundayo and Ajayi's (2009) work that the above listed problems are major difficulties in Nigerian universities. This raises the argument as to whether or not Nigerian universities are providing quality services to their students.

All the aforementioned problems and concerns raised and discussed in this study have been studied in past literature using a quantitative approach to address the issues. Researcher who have looked into these problems have focused on creating solutions, ignoring the fact that the problems do not create themselves, since a process is put in place (Njihia, 2011). This was what the quality gurus were talking about, especially Crosby's (1996) contribution, that management should be responsible for any unacceptable outcome, be it as a result of the personnel involved or materials used. Again, it was observed that many Nigerian researchers had moved from academia to consultancy roles for monetary values, which might be the main reason why their focus was on problem-solving, not theory application.

Contemporary Quality issues inside private university

It is shocking to hear that the private universities are now struggling for survival as they are also faced with similar issues that were in existence before their establishment. Among these challenges are lack of funding's, late payment of staff salaries, learning environment not conducive, lack of social amenities to engage student well (such as lack of water, no power, accommodation are not in good condition). Following a review in the work of Adetunji (2015a), quality issue: beyond institutional management, the author suggest some fundamental amenities needed to run a university which are missing in the Nigeria context. They are the numerous key factors that affect the kind of services provided by the university irrespective of whether private or public.

Although, it is worth mentioning that prior to the establishment of private university in the country overcrowding, limited access, strike action by academics staff due to low wages or delay in salaries are major problems already in existence in Nigeria public universities (Duze, 2011). Akinyemi and Abiddin (2013) explained and detailed that the introduction of private university has directly or indirectly limit or reduce the problems in the last decade. However it was observed recently by Adetunji (2014) that both private and public universities are back to the same old problems. Although many of the private universities can still avoid paying their staff salaries as of when due but they have compromised satisfying the need of the student. They failed to meet up with staff demand because they need to attract better academia especially the once with good reputation all for the sake of accreditation (that is quality assurance normally carried out by the NUC). Some of these professionals or experts sometimes take four times the salaries of Ph. D holders. Satisfying staff, especially professors, is a big problem for the private universities management in order to make sure they satisfy the NUC requirement for staffing level at the expense of student needs such laboratory, library facilities, and competent hands to support the subordinates, to the experts required by NUC standard. Many of the private universities now resort to making use of graduate assistant, teaching assistant to teach student in the university in other to cover their cost, while graduate and teaching assistance duties should have been to support the lecture in teaching, handling of tutorial groups or helping student general needs on academics, in terms of direction and guidance.

Adetunji (2014) expressed that another surprising approach taking by many private universities owners, if not all of them, was to include in their policy to house all their students on site. It is understandable that this approach was assume as a method to generate money for the running of the university but you will be very surprise the state of most of these accommodation. Student are sometimes 8 to 12 in a room, which may cause distraction for serious student, ventilation are compromised in the safety of the student, the kind of materials provided to student in their accommodation is such that you would not use personally, to talk of given to your young adult. However due to the stress and difficulty of student getting admission of their choice, student will not complain to talk of discussing these fundamental problem with their parent or sponsors. These was one of the major reason why students in private universities now organise riot, crying for help and justice to complement what they pay for the service. These issues question the debate on quality as value for money. Is the education received by student same as the value of the money they pay

That means the goal post have been shifted from staff in public universities rioting for salaries increase or payment to students in private universities rioting for safety and better treatment. No wonder some author like Obasi, Akuchie and Obasi (2010) called such private universities a glorified secondary schools. While Duze (2011) assumed that students from private universities are half-baked. But without an atom of doubt private universities have been able to

produce many excellent students doing well both outside and within the country. Likewise, in the last decade many parent have come to understand that university education is no more a public goods as painted by the government in the early days, especially when education is free for all till tertiary level. The private universities have put up fees as tuition starting from 120,000-naira equivalent of approximately 100USD in year 2000 compare to 650,000-naira equivalent of 2800USD in 2015. While the public universities (that is state and federal) charge 25,000 naira equivalent of 200USD in 2000 compare to 65000 naira equivalent of 300USD or less in 2015. It is very hard to believe that Nigerian pay less for their education among other country in the world. No wonder the system continues to experience financial issues.

It is difficult to know how a university can be run under 350 USD tuition fees per student per year. The good news is that private university are given free hand to up their fees base on the standard they claim to have put in place for the students (Ocho, 2006). This is also supported by the level of reputable academia on their list. The ways and manner in which the private university increases the tuition fees today has damage the mind-set of anybody who wants/desires a better education. The question asked here is that, does the highest paying tuition fees private university providing the highest quality service to the student and the community.

Surprisingly few of these highest pay private universities are now having more population than few public universities and in the name of assuming the private university will give extra services to their students better than that of public university. This is also debatable. This aspect can be looked into in a future research. The claim, which make parent and community assume paying high tuition fee will mean receiving high quality service is debatable, because in some cases, it might be a marketing strategy to control admission or even to become more competitive.

Conclusion

Having a belief that there is link between the university, its management and how the system operates would make it appropriate to study quality issue has it affect Nigeria universities. Again, from the evidence provided in the discussions above, one could easily agree that university management are agents to make the university structure function effectively through their application and implementation of government policies,) that can help them to achieve the university vision and mission statement.

Likewise, the Nigeria government have introduced privatisation with the intention to reduce their spending on their parastatals, while they have forgotten that the primary purpose of university education is to develop the citizen that will influence the economy, develop the nation and promote good image of the country outside the country. In other words, that graduates produced by any Nigeria university will be able to compete with their counterpart anywhere in the world. However, this aim became unrealistic as the necessary materials needed to provide quality service are scared and where an attempt are made to support the institution, financial aids from foreign bodies are sometime diverted to other things such as operational needs (like water, electricity, internet, roads among others) that the government have failed to cater for.

A decade after the introduction of privatisation policy that is meant to improve the university education sector, these institutions still struggle with many basic needs that affects every institution both public and private such as overcrowding, funding, teacher ratio to student, well equipped library and laboratory and other physical facilities. This study looked back to the origin of the policy of privatisation and identified that even though the sector continue to survive without any concern of not getting student as the problem of overcrowding are yet to be resolved. The

policies have also assisted in reducing the public university unrest in terms of strike action that the public universities are normally embarked in very often. The activities that is becoming synonymous with the Nigeria university education has gradually alleviate as a result of privatisation policy.

Practical Implication

The study exposed that privatisation of universities in Nigeria have helped to some certain stage, as strike is no more order of the day as it used to be before the introduction of the policy. The country universities are now competing for students reputation, name/ goodwill with the community, although the issue of not getting student does not trouble the mind of any university as the population waiting to be admitted into the university increases daily while those who can avoid to study abroad continue to leave the country for better education as they claimed. It was revealed from this study that privatisation policies in university have helped to some certain level but have not profound permanent solution to the problem the institutions are faced, rather it has opened up quality issue. This paper suggested that more still need to be done by the government to improve the sector as well as need for the government to fully support the development of the institution, encourage principal officers to work in a good working condition, to enable them impact meaningfully into student life.

After a decade of privatisation government attention is still on only creating access ignoring or fully supporting the existing universities. This paper become an important document to remind the Nigeria government, external bodies that are involved in the administration of the university that more work need to be done to make sure universities they created are fully functioning for the purpose for which they are created. This paper is not design to probe the activities of Nigeria universities but to fill the gap in literature and develop practical knowledge that could help improve service offer in all Nigerian university. There are so many ways to consider this topic and complement or take action on issues discussed but the research advice that it is good to first study the environment and it owing the responsibility on the reader to apply carefully any line of this paper.

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