

Higher Education in Nigeria and the Emergence of Private Universities

BY

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ABSTRACT

This paper is an exploratory study that focuses on the problems facing higher education in Nigeria and the emergence of private universities. The Nigerian educational system is today bedeviled by series of challenges such as issues of inadequate funding, inconsistent policies and lack of continuity of programmes which are more pronounced in Public Universities (both Federal and State owned). Other issues include infrastructural decay and the disruption of the higher education system and academic calendars due to strikes and riots. Insufficient budgetary allocation, obsolete equipment, old and outdated curricula and text books, lack of research grants, poor remuneration and general welfare for lecturers including the heightened level of brain drain. The current discourse on this issue is in line with the incessant complaints by employers of labour that most Nigerian graduates are half baked needing a lot of training in the world of work. Private universities such as Covenant University emerged to salvage the situation bearing in mind the fact that education remains the engine that drives the growth and development of a nation. The emphasis here is on the emergence of private universities in Nigeria, how well they have fared, current challenges and prospects for future development.

Keywords: Development; Higher education; Nigeria; Private Universities; Public Universities.

Historical Development of University Education in Nigeria

Nigeria is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country. Before the 18th century, there was little or no difference between Europe and Africa, but the slave trade coupled with the industrial revolution in Europe changed the socio-economic equation. Africa became the trading subordinate of Europe and later its colony. A review of the Nigerian educational system from 1842 to 1959 revealed that there was absolutely nothing in the Nigerian educational system that promoted “national consciousness”, “national unity”, “patriotism” or the like (Fafunwa, 2003). Infact, the colonial government never pretended to build a Nigerian nation. The citizens were either British subjects or British protected persons whose loyalty was supposed to be for the British Empire and the King or Queen of

England. The consequent effect of this was that instead of training the people in the area of technology, majority of the citizens were educated in the area of civics as they were meant to assist the British colonizers in some administrative duties (Fafunwa, 2003)

The first higher educational institution in Nigeria, the Yaba Higher College, was established in 1932. The agitation of Nigerians for a more comprehensive higher education provision led to the constitution of the Asquith and Elliot Commission on Higher Education. Their reports in 1943 favoured the establishment of universities in Nigeria. Consequently, in 1948, the University College Ibadan was founded as an affiliate of the University of London. The University College continued as the only university institution in Nigeria until 1960 (Jubril, 2003).

In April 1959, the Nigerian government commissioned an inquiry (Ashby Commission) to advise it on the higher education needs of the new nation for its first two decades of independence. Before the submission of the report on 2nd September 1960, the Eastern Region government established its own university at Nsukka, the University of Nigeria Nsukka, 1960. The recommendations of the Ashby report include:

- i. the Federal Government should give support to the development of new universities in Nigeria;
- ii. a university should be established in the North using the old site of the Nigerian College in Zaria as its base;
- iii. a university should be established in Lagos to handle courses in business, commerce and economics;
- iv. University College Ibadan should widen its curriculum and develop into a full university;
- v. a National Universities Commission should be set up to have undisputed control over the affairs of the universities, particularly in terms of finance, staff and courses.

So, the University of Nigeria, Nsukka was founded in 1960 while the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife (formerly, the University of Ife) was established in 1961. Ahmadu Bello University Zaria and University of Lagos were both established in 1962 while the University College transformed into a substantive university also in 1962. In 1970, the newly created Bendel State established a university, known as University of Benin. Consequently, the six universities established during this period 1960-1970 became known as first generation federal universities.

Also, between 1975 and 1977, seven new universities were established which was to reflect the then 19 state structure. These second generation universities as they were referred to include the University of Calabar (1975); the University of Ilorin (1976); the University of Jos (1975); the University of Sokoto (1977); the University of Port Harcourt (1977); and Bayero University, Kano (1977). These universities became federal universities by virtue of Decree 46 of 1977 which provided for Federal Government take-over of all universities in Nigeria (Jubril, 2003). The 1979 constitution transferred university education from the exclusive to the concurrent legislative list which meant that state governments were free to establish state-owned universities if they so desired. Based on this, a number of universities were established between 1979 and 1983. They include, Bendel State University (now Ambrose Alli University) Ekpoma; Anambra State University of Technology, Enugu; Imo State University, Owerri; Ogun State University, Ago-

Iwoye; Ondo State University, Ado-Ekiti; Rivers State University of Science and Technology, Port Harcourt; Cross River State University, Uyo and Lagos State University, Ijanikin.

Nigeria currently operates the 9-3-4 system of education which is part of the Universal Basic Education, UBE, which came as a replacement for Nigeria's Universal Primary Education Scheme of the 6-3-3-4 system of education. Students spend six years in secondary school that is 3years of JSS (Junior Secondary School) and 3years of SSS (Senior Secondary School). First-year entry requirements into most universities in Nigeria include: Minimum of SSCE/GCE Ordinary Level Credits at maximum of two sittings; Minimum cut-off marks in Joint Admission and Matriculation Board Entrance Examination (JAMB) of 200 and above out of a maximum of 400 marks are required. Candidates with minimum of Merit Pass in National Certificate of Education (NCE), National Diploma (ND) and other Advanced Level Certificates with minimum of 5 O/L Credits are given direct entry admission into the appropriate undergraduate degree programs. Higher educational Institutions in Nigeria include Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education. There are currently 129 approved universities in Nigeria comprising 40 Federal Universities, 39 State Universities and 50 Private Universities (NUC, 2014). Also, Nigeria has a total 128 approved polytechnics and 117 approved Colleges of Education in Nigeria, making it the largest higher education system on the African Continent (Adesulu, 2013).

Although Public Universities have dominated the higher education landscape in Nigeria for several decades, their failure to cope with admission pressure became more compelling from the 1990s. In 1990 about 250,000 candidates applied for admission and less than 50,000 constituting (20%) of the candidates were admitted. In 1992, close to 300,000 applied for admission and about 50,000 amounting to 17% got admitted while in 1994, out of the 400,000 that applied for admission, less than 50,000 totaling 13% got admitted into different universities in Nigeria (Obasi & Eboh, 2001). Moja (2000), affirmed that "Access to higher education and the lack of the capacity of the system to absorb the numbers of students seeking admission to higher education institutions continues to pose a serious problem. For example, it is estimated that out of 400,000 JAMB candidates seeking admission to university education, more than 320,000, which is about 80% are not able to gain admission to any of the 37 Nigerian universities". Also, Onyekakeyah (2005), stated that, "The Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) figures clearly show that the situation has not improved. According to JAMB figures, out of about 800,000 candidates that sat for the 2005 examination, only 147,000 were offered places in the existing universities, representing only 18.4 percent".

Another major problem facing higher education especially Federal and State Institutions is funding. Enrolments have increased more quickly than government's capacity to finance these institutions. This has hampered education delivery, monitoring, inspection and other quality assurance activities. Government has made efforts at addressing this problem; for example, in 1993, the Education Tax Decree was enacted to provide 2% of the profits of companies registered in Nigeria to be collected by government and paid into a fund called the Education Tax Fund (ETF) now (Education Trust Fund). Despite increase in funding from over 11 billion naira in 1999 to over 90 billion naira in 2008, funding still remains a major challenge (Dawodu, 2010).

This was the trend in Nigeria such that the admission crisis became more critical after 2001. The access rate had fallen by 2002 to less than 13 percent (Okebukola 2002). Based on this fact, the expansion of access through the establishment of Private Universities became one of the most

reasonable policy options (Obasi, 2005). According to Aluede et al (2012), of the number of candidates applying for admission every year in Nigeria, only about 5.2 percent to 15.3 percent get admitted every year, meaning that about 84.7 percent to 94.8 percent of the candidates seeking admission never get admitted. The emergence of private provision of higher education in Nigeria came with the inauguration of a democratic system of government under President Olusegun Obasanjo in 1999. The National Universities Commission was empowered to receive applications, examine and validate the facilities of serious applicants of private Universities across the country. And so, in 1999, three private universities emerged namely, Igbinedion University, Okada, Edo State; Babcock University, Ileshan Remo, Ogun State and Madonna University, Okija, Anambra State. In 2001, Bowen University, Iwo, Oyo State was established while Covenant University, Ota, Ogun State was established in 2002.

Table1: Total Number of Universities, Applications and Admission Between 1999 – 2009

S/N	YEAR	NO OF UNIVERSITIES	NO OF APPLICATIONS	NO ADMITTED	LEFT OVER
1.	1999/2000	45	417,773	78,550	339,223
2.	2000/2001	46	467,490	50,277	417,213
3.	2001/2002	52	550,399	60,718	544,321
4.	2002/2003	53	994,380	51,845	942,535
5.	2003/2004	54	1,046,950	105,157	941,793
6.	2004/2005	56	841,878	122,492	719,386
7.	2005/2006	75	916,371	N/A	N/A
8.	2006/2007	76	803,472	123,626	679,846
9.	2007/2008	94	1,054,053	194,521	859,532
10.	2008/2009	95	1,182,381	N/A	N/A
..
X	2012/2013	122	1,503,9	N/A	N/A

Source: (Ajadi, 2012)

Table 1 shows the admission capacity of Nigerian universities between 1999 and 2009. This shows that the available universities are barely able to accommodate 20% of the applicants. This also reflects the fact that government alone cannot help because the available public universities are poorly funded and there is a dearth of adequate human and material resources; which invariably gives credence to the emergence of private universities in Nigeria.

According to Ojerinde (2011), of the 1,185,579 persons that took the JAMB examination in 2009, a total of 211,991 was admitted, amounting to 17.9 percent of the applicants. This shows that less than 20 percent of those who apply to universities are admitted. Also, Adesulu (2013) reports that, in 2010/2011, Nigeria had 112 universities with carrying capacity of 450,000 and 1,493,611 applicants. Thus, the admitting capacity was 30.13 per cent of the total number of applicants. This means that at best, only 30.13 per cent of the total number of applicants were accommodated during that academic session. In the 2011/2012 session, five universities were added, bringing the number to 117, with 500,000 carrying capacity amounting to 33.25 per cent and 1,503,933 students applied that year. However, in 2012/2013, 11 universities were added bringing it to 128 with 520,000 (29.96 percent) admission spaces. In that year, a total of 1,735,729 applied for UTME. In fact, the National Universities Commission report of 2011/2012 showed that, most of the universities in Nigeria exceeded their allotted admission quota.

Problems Facing Higher Education in Nigeria

There are enormous problems facing the education system in Nigeria. Indeed, over the years, education in Nigeria has suffered much neglect manifested in the form of inadequate funding, inconsistent policy changes; lack of infrastructure and disruption of the school system. These problems in the education system have been very disturbing. In fact, budgetary allocations to education in Nigeria have been grossly inadequate leading to agitations by lecturers and students about obsolete equipment, old and outdated textbooks and journals including poor remuneration for lecturers especially at the tertiary level, which have also heightened the level of brain drain in the country as many of them moved to different parts of the world in search of greener pastures.

There have been complaints by employers of labour within and outside the country that most graduates from Nigerian Universities are not properly trained to fit into the world of work in terms of desirable knowledge and skill. In developed countries, especially in Europe and America, most Nigerian graduates are seen as half-baked due to such issues as constant strikes, conflicts, disruption of academic calendar and cultism which have destroyed the quality of education in Nigeria including the dearth of qualified and experienced lecturers.

Education is the engine that drives the growth and development of a nation. Some developing countries, especially in Asia, have been able to transform their economies and their people. Countries such as Japan, Korea, India and China did not necessarily wait for the transfer of technology as observed from most African countries like Nigeria but were committed to a system where they copied, adapted and fabricated foreign technology through an inward-looking strategy to suit their own cultures, environment and needs. This is where the country failed to understand that education must be pragmatic in nature if it is to create any meaningful impact in the life and living conditions of the people.

The role of education in the development of a society and the pathetic stories about Nigeria's university education has been vastly documented in higher education literature. It suffices to note here that the state of education is one of the crucial indicators of the seriousness of a society in its quest for national development because the quality of education in a society determines the quality of its leaders and the pace of social development. Universities (higher institutions) in advanced and well-organized societies are the center of social activities and the environment provides good settings for research, teaching and learning. Unfortunately, the culture of corruption has prevented Nigeria from providing good quality education to the youth to prepare them for the challenges of the 21st century economy.

Characteristics of University Education in Nigeria

In the 1960s, schools were properly administered and discipline was enforced. The quality of graduates was high and certificates awarded by the schools were equal to those awarded by schools in the West. Demand for higher education in Nigeria increased during the oil boom of the 1970s and the number of students increased without commensurate funding. However, things went really sour in the late 1980s, and education was neglected; and the quality of graduates has since been compromised, affecting every facet of the society. In the 1990s, some of the loans from the World Bank for education were used to purchase irrelevant books and "expensive equipment" that could not be maintained.

Funding for education has not been commensurate with the demand of the education sector. Reportedly, the percentage of federal budgetary allocation to education has been dwindling. It was 7.2% in 1995 and 4.5% in 2004. The condition becomes more pathetic when Nigeria's Gross National Product (GNP) allocation to education is compared with those of less affluent African nations that allocate greater percentage: Ivory Coast allocates 5% of its GNP to education, Kenya 6.5% and Nigeria 0.76%. Lack of teaching tools and poor remuneration has contributed to "acute shortage of qualified teachers" that leads to the falling standards of university education. More revealing is the 2006 ranking of African universities in which Nigerian universities, that were once highly rated, were behind universities in poorer countries.

It is imperative to add that in 2004, the sum of N216, 708,206.00 was requested by the federal funded universities. The Federal government released the sum of N53, 406,287.01 representing 24.7% of the budget request from the Universities (Okuwa, 2004; Aluede, et al, 2012). As espoused by Odebiyi and Aina (1999), the multiplier effects of this low level of funding include: poor laboratory facilities; limited number of field trips and academic conferences; inadequate and obsolete infrastructure and equipment; embargo on study fellowship and reduction in study grants. This is the educational situation in Nigeria that gave birth to the emergence of private universities. It is imperative to state that private universities especially Christian or Mission-based Universities of which Covenant University from the webometrics ranking (CSIC, 2014) is the leading private university in Nigeria, is aimed at raising a new generation of leaders for the emancipation of the black race. At present, the private sector is a fast expanding segment of university education in Nigeria, although it still constitutes a small share of enrolment in university education (Ajadi, 2012).

Good education is the best way to prepare a nation for excellence. Without good education and proper skill, how would the people grow, develop and compete effectively in the rapidly changing global economy? The failure of the government to implement its agreement with university teachers prompted the 2003 ASUU strike that lasted for about six months. This exacerbated the mass exodus ('brain-drain') of experienced professors to countries with better working conditions. Not much has changed because ASUU strike actions have become a common occurrence in Nigeria. How would the nation ensure sustainable growth and development without investing in the educational sector? How would the society train the critical and creative minds to manage its democratic process without investing copiously on human capital development? How would the youth compete effectively in the global marketplace without giving the citizens the skills and knowledge to produce high quality goods and services?

Education is the cornerstone of a nation; something is obviously wrong with any society that does not take its educational institutions seriously. Corruption and mismanagement of funds are at the centre of the sordid state of university system in Nigeria. The neglect of the sector has created many problems in the society, including cultism and cheating in examinations, poor quality graduates, unemployment and poverty including rising moral laxity and gross in-discipline (Dike, 2006).

So the problems with university education in Nigeria are many. Indeed, poor working condition is dissuading talented individuals from entering the teaching profession. Some lecturers in Nigerian universities are said to teach up to six courses per semester. That is a lot of course load. Teachers are not expected to perform miracles without the necessary teaching tools. Schools need functional libraries, current books and modern laboratories. Also, classrooms need modern instructional

technologies and computers connected to the Internet, projectors, audio-visual and video conferencing equipment, and others. Essentially, there are six major problems to be solved in order to achieve quality education in Nigerian universities. Three of the problems are primary in the sense that they are largely responsible for the other three. The primary problems are: funding shortages; the negative influence of a corruptive and valueless political system; and planning and implementation problems.

These have led to the weakening of university administration; poor teaching and learning outcomes; diminishing research and consultancy traditions; and questionable service to the community. Viewed very closely, the last three problems point to diminishing returns in the basic missions of universities. The government's poor planning and defective implementation of policies and projects has also adversely affected the universities. The situation has since worsened to the point that it is unclear which education policy is now operative. Within the past year alone, the overall education structure changed, or so we were told, from 6-3-3-4 to 9-3-4. Within the same period, President Goodluck Jonathan's administration established nine new universities without regard to the problems facing existing universities and mass unemployment of existing graduates. The future of the new universities and their graduates was never seriously considered.

According to Akinnaso (2012), in the absence of adequate funding and clear direction, universities are left to engage mainly in routine activities. There are master plans alright and periodic development plans are constructed, but neither is implemented. A number of federal and state universities have remained on their temporary sites for decades because the government has failed to back up its initial promise with adequate funding. The government's failure to respect its agreements with the Academic Staff Union of Universities has frequently led to strikes and university closures. Inadequate funding, poor planning, and the erosion of values have produced a culture of underachievement that will take decades to change. Particularly affected by these factors are the universities' internal administration and the trio of teaching/learning; research/consultancies; and community service.

Regulatory Frameworks on Higher Education in Nigeria

Generally speaking, higher education refers to post-secondary education or tertiary educational institutions other than universities. The National Policy on Education in Nigeria (FGN, 2004) defines higher education as post-secondary education comprising universities, polytechnics and colleges of education including such institutions as may be allied to them. In Nigeria, higher education is involved in the traditional functions of teaching, research and community service so as to develop manpower and disseminate necessary knowledge needed in Industry and other sectors. Education in general and higher education in particular are fundamental to the construction of a knowledge economy in all nations.

The decade from 1990 witnessed an upsurge in the number of private institutions of learning in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular. Before this decade, most African countries committed much of their expenditures on public education, which served as an instrument for building the nation, following independence. Today, there is an increasing pressure on African governments to shift from subsidization to privatization of their education systems especially at the university level. This pressure arises from economic liberalism, growing political pluralism, rising public demand for education in the face of a declining economy and increasing competition among public sectors, as well as lingering government's failure in the provision of qualitative schooling. In many parts of

the world, increased competition from private institutions has brought about greater diversity and choice for students and has served as a powerful incentive for public universities to innovate and modernize (IBRD/World Bank, 2002:72).

The establishment of higher educational institutions was in pursuit of meeting the global requirements of producing manpower that will serve in different capacities and contribute positively to the nation's socio-economic and political development in Nigeria (Abdulkareem, Fasasi & Akinubi, 2011). Federal Government of Nigeria promulgated enabling law to found higher education towards producing high level relevant manpower training, self-reliance, national utility through the establishment of both conventional and special universities, polytechnics, colleges of education and monotechnics in different parts of the country by the Federal, state governments, private organizations and individuals (Abdulkareem, Fasasi & Akinubi, 2011).

Akinyemi (2013) reported that the 1979 constitution placed education on the concurrent legislative list with the establishment of Rivers State University of Science and Technology (RSUST) in 1980 as the first state University. Okojie, Oloyede, and Obanya, (2011) listed 41 private universities to have been issued licenses to operate in accordance with Decree 9 of 1993 for the establishment of private universities expanding Nigerian university education system from one University College in 1948 to 117 in 2011.

According to Okojie (2007), the National University Commission (NUC) has control over all federal, state and private universities, especially in terms of accreditation of courses, approval of courses and programmes, maintenance of minimum academic standards, monitoring of universities, giving guidelines for setting up of universities, monitoring of private universities, deterrence of the establishment of illegal campus and implementing appropriate sanctions.

There is no doubt that the quality of higher education determines the quality of human resources of a country. One of the major objectives of the universities is to produce a qualified, skilled and globally competent workforce for the labour market of business and industry, which is a critical factor to national growth and development (Obadara & Alaka, 2013). Since no nation can develop beyond the quality of its higher education. Recent developments such as increasing student enrolments; reduced state funding for public higher education; increasing number of private providers; internationalization cross border education have also influenced the purpose and functions of higher education (Hayward, 2006). As part of the efforts to ensure qualitative university education in Nigeria, the NUC was particular about ensuring accreditation of academic programmes in Nigerian universities in order to produce graduates who are relevant to the Nigerian economy. Emphasis was laid on the quality of academic staff and students to be admitted and employed respectively.

The National Universities Commission started as an advisory agency in the Cabinet Office in 1962. However, in 1974, it became a corporate body with statutory functions and powers by virtue of the National Universities Commission Act No. 1 of 1974. The Commission is committed to improving the quality of university programmes through injection of requisite inputs as well as assuring quality process and outputs based on the decree 49 of 1988 that widen its scope. Also, the power to lay down minimum standards for all universities and other institutions of higher learning in the federation and the accreditation of their degrees and other academic awards is vested in the National Universities Commission by virtue of section 10(1) of the Education (National Minimum Standards and Establishment of Institutions) Act, Cap. E3, Laws of the Federation, 2004 (formerly Section 10

of Act No. 16 of 1985). This Act vested in the NUC very wide and enormous powers with respect to the supervision and regulation of university education in Nigeria (NUC, 2006). The need for global competitiveness is another recent development that has impacted higher education. In Nigeria, some of these recent developments are reflected in the mission statement of the National Universities Commission (NUC), which is the regulatory body established to oversee the administration and delivery of higher education in Nigeria: 'to ensure the orderly development of a well-coordinated and productive university system that will guarantee quality and relevant education for national development and global competitiveness (NUC, 2009).

The rapid expansion of universities is at a price to the nation. Universities are facing serious crises in all respects. 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 unlawful practices. One of the reasons for the deplorable state of Nigeria's public universities is uncontrolled expansion. Banjo (2004), a former Vice-Chancellor of Nigeria's premier University, the University of Ibadan, observed that: Ibadan is the first degree-awarding institution in the country. Then followed the big explosions: seven new universities in the seventies and eighties. 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 also began to drag the older ones down with them into the quagmire of under-funding, compromised quality and other attendant problems

Prolonged military rule affected all departments of life in Nigeria including universities (Adesina & Awonusi, 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 self-concept of academics and the capacity of their institutions to play their accustomed role in society also diminished. The final assault on universities came through the implementation of SAP in the 1980s which had a deleterious impact on the funding of these institutions (Obikoya, 2002) resulting in low salaries and poor facilities including low morale.

Comparing Nigerian Universities with the Rest of the World

There have often been mixed reactions concerning the issue of university education in Nigeria and how this can be compared to what is obtainable in other countries of the world. The assumption has been that Nigerian education system is substandard because it does not meet the technological needs of the 21st century. In addition, there have been complaints that graduates from tertiary Institutions in Nigeria are mostly half baked due to the irregular school system and dearth of facilities. Nigerians struggle to study abroad because of their conviction that this will give them a competitive edge in terms of job opportunities and placement if they decide to return back to their country of origin. This is hinged on the exposure and training including the use of superior technology in advanced industrial countries such as the United States that is today at the cutting edge in education and technology manifested in the fact that globally, most of the highly ranked Universities both public and private are in the United States.

The government of Nigeria recently initiated higher education policy reforms intended to bring its university system more in line with international good practices. The reforms promote increased institutional autonomy, greater system differentiation, strengthened governance, and mechanisms for quality assurance. They seek to create a more flexible and responsive system of university teaching and research that, over time, will contribute increasingly to national innovation capacities, productivity gains, and economic growth (Saint et al, 2003). From a global perspective, economic and social development is increasingly driven by the advancement and application of knowledge. Education in general and higher education in particular, are fundamental to the construction of a knowledge economy and society in all nations (World Bank, 1999). Yet the potential of higher education systems in developing countries like Nigeria to fulfill this responsibility is frequently thwarted by long-standing problems of finance, efficiency, equity, quality and governance (Saint, et al, 2003). Nigeria is Africa's largest country with 20 percent of the region's population; yet it has only 15 scientists and engineers engaged in research and development per million persons when compared with 168 in Brazil, 459 in China, 158 in India, and 4,103 in the United States (World Bank, 2002).

Nigeria is Africa's sleeping economic giant. It is also a somewhat deformed giant. While one-third of its population pursues a lifestyle oriented in various degrees towards Europe and North America, the other two-thirds struggle to survive on less than one dollar per day (World Bank, 1996). Wrapped in a culture noted for industry, creativity and initiative, some Nigerians prefer to apply these talents to questionable or illicit pursuits, while many others expect government to provide the cure for their economic and social ills. Consequently, the country's business environment is distorted and restrictive. In spite of substantial oil revenues, per capita income is lower today than it was in 1970, just as the non-oil economy sector has become stagnant.

However, efforts to expand enrollments and improve educational quality are severely constrained by growing shortages of qualified academic staff. Between 1997 and 1999, the numbers of academic staff declined by 12% even as enrollments expanded by 13%. Long-term brain drain, combined with insufficient output from national postgraduate programs in the face of rising enrollments, has left the federal university system 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). And Hinchliffe (2002) asserts that education expenditure in Nigeria is only 2.4% of GDP and 14.3% of government expenditure. The share of these funds going to primary education is about 35% and secondary education's portion is put at 29%, while tertiary education's share is about 36%.

In today's globally competitive knowledge economy, updating of curricula which lacks quality needs to be an almost permanent undertaking. Clark (2001) suggests that university departments in Nigeria will need to change their curricula every two or three years in order to ensure that the content of their teaching reflects the rapidly advancing frontiers of scientific knowledge. This is premised on the fact that public and private employers of university graduates consider the quality of university graduates to be inadequate. A study of the labor market for graduates found that employers believe "university graduates are poorly trained and unproductive on the job, and shortcomings are particularly severe in oral and written communication, and in applied technical skills" (Dabalén, Oni & Adekola, 2001). Much of university teaching in Nigeria is based on traditional pedagogy and conventional curricula, and does not even meet the government's own standards in these areas. In today's world, the content and method of Nigerian university teaching is

often outdated, not responsive to employers' requirements, and disconnected from the labor market. Likewise, its research output is extremely low and unable to prompt innovation-based productivity gains.

Ironically, despite these issues, most Nigerians who go to study abroad often come tops in their classes and several others have made remarkable success in the world of work, in companies and organizations as doctors, lawyers, scientists, academics and others in Europe, USA, and other advanced economies of the world. Within the African Continent, Nigeria has one of the oldest, biggest and most comprehensive university education system (CODESRIA, 2005). Nigeria has attained remarkable achievements in its drive to achieving academic excellence that can stand the test of time. One way this has been achieved is through the Technical Aids Corps Scheme (TAC) which was established in 1987 by the Federal Government of Nigeria to assist countries of the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) regions in manpower and skills development as a way of strengthening South-South cooperation and self reliance among the various countries of these regions. Since inception in 1987, over 3,000 Nigerians have been deployed to 38 African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries. The countries include: Seychelles, Eritrea, Congo Brazzaville, Gambia, Liberia, Guinea Bissau, Fiji Island, Sao Tome and Principe, and the Commonwealth of Dominica. Namibia (MFA, 2011).

Recommendation and Conclusion

It is necessary to emphasize that the public university system with all its associated problems no longer has a strong hold on university education in Nigeria. The private-sector driven universities are emerging and available records show that they have regular academic calendars and have also been able to absorb the excess social demand for university education.

Table 2: WEBOMETRIC RANKING OF UNIVERSITIES IN NIGERIA

Ranking	World Rank ▲	University	Det.	Presence Rank*	Impact Rank*	Openness Rank*	Excellence Rank*
1	1655	<u>Obafemi Awolowo University</u>	▶▶	1392	1644	3988	2340
2	2075	<u>Covenant University Ota</u>	▶▶	3631	3096	955	2993
3	2355	<u>University of Ibadan</u>	▶▶	7946	3698	3731	1491
4	2367	<u>University of Lagos</u>	▶▶	3489	4102	2962	2259
5	2723	<u>University of Ilorin</u>	▶▶	3463	6939	923	2594
6	3359	<u>Ahmadu Bello University</u>	▶▶	3837	8121	2769	2466
7	3368	<u>University of Agriculture Abeokuta</u>	▶▶	4803	8493	992	2993
8	3685	<u>Landmark University</u>	▶▶	5685	1645	6454	5442
9	3920	<u>Federal University of Technology Akure</u>	▶▶	4549	10026	1593	2900
10	3976	<u>University of Nigeria</u>	▶▶	7794	6220	5978	2520

Source: CSIC, Spain (2014)

The 2014 Webometric ranking of Universities in Nigeria shows that of the 129 Universities in the country comprising, 40 Federal Universities, 39 State Universities and 50 Private Universities, there are 2 private universities among the top 10. They are, Covenant University, which is the second best

university on the webometric ranking and Landmark University which is placed eight in the webometric ranking for universities in Nigeria. This is a proof of not just the wisdom in setting up these private universities, but it also shows that their regular academic calendars have yielded amazing benefits, showing clearly that this must be the way to go.

Table 3: WEBOMETRIC RANKING OF UNIVERSITIES IN AFRICA

Ranking	World Rank ▲	University	Det.	Country	Presence Rank*	Impact Rank*	Openness Rank*	Excellence Rank*
1	350	University of Cape Town	👉		947	521	540	267
2	358	Cairo University	👉		800	142	1361	633
3	439	Stellenbosch University	👉		487	994	199	454
4	444	University of Pretoria	👉		336	986	117	608
5	580	University of the Witwatersrand	👉		1685	1230	359	414
6	752	University of Kwazulu Natal	👉		1655	1221	1320	559
7	789	University of the Western Cape	👉		1076	935	932	1239
8	904	American University in Cairo	👉		1410	544	1138	2214
9	907	University of Nairobi	👉		1109	2225	44	1403
10	911	Mansoura University	👉		1136	853	2944	1047
11	968	Rhodes University	👉		1077	1601	896	1316
12	1058	University of South Africa	👉		535	2028	371	1925
13	1134	Makerere University	👉		1677	2990	719	880
14	1204	University of Johannesburg	👉		2719	2949	462	1004
15	1223	Alexandria University	👉		1382	2072	2502	996
16	1430	North West University	👉		1926	4274	433	1232
17	1493	Benha University	👉		1728	2004	1426	2259
18	1599	Addis Ababa University	👉		561	5487	746	1447
19	1655	Obafemi Awolowo University	👉		1392	1644	3988	2340
20	1729	Zagazig University	👉		2826	3826	1881	1377
21	1826	University of Ghana	👉		3792	3944	1690	1455
22	1983	Kenyatta University	👉		993	5874	299	2484
23	1987	University of the Free State	👉		2385	4507	2856	1342
24	2070	University of Khartoum	👉		97	5341	3012	2101
25	2075	Covenant University Ota	👉		3631	3096	955	2993

Source: CSIC, Spain (2014)

It is imperative to add that, of the 1,306 Universities considered for the Webometric ranking in Africa, Covenant University which is a private university emerged as the 25th best University in Africa. This is a testimony to the success of private universities in Nigeria and across Africa with particular emphasis on the wisdom behind the establishment of private universities under the approval of the National Universities Commission (NUC) in Nigeria.

In addition, many private universities are forging healthy academic and industry relevant linkages including international linkages with universities in advanced industrial societies in the area of

manpower development and exchange programmes involving lecturers and students which will go a long way in strengthening the educational landscape in Nigeria.

This and other reform policies by the National Universities Commission (NUC) will help bring the university system more in line with international good practices. It is also expected that there will be a general overhaul in the entire education system of the country to make it competitive internationally. Education remains a critical factor in Nigeria's development and so must continue to receive prominence in terms of visibility and coverage so that government officials and organs no longer play pretense about being ignorant of the true state of the educational sector in Nigeria.

School administrators and the government should develop the political will to restore sanity in the higher education sector and motivate the students by providing them a healthy learning environment (modern classrooms and living quarters) and assist the needy with affordable loans and grants to finance their education. To improve the quality of graduates' university admissions should be strictly on merit; and schools should offer courses that meet the challenges of the 21st century economy. Higher institutions should be granted full autonomy and allowed unfettered hands to source funds through private sector partnership.

There is the need to rebuild a culture of scholarship that has been neglected in the society. Without taking care of students' needs, violence and cultism on the campuses will continue. The society could tackle the vices by redefining Nigeria's value system and attending to the needs of the students; providing the students with enough recreational activities, attend to their medical and psychological needs, and provide adequate security on campuses, among others. Students should also have the opportunity to appraise the effectiveness of their lecturers at the end of every course and semester. This process will help lecturers to improve their teaching method and classroom management technique. The method of teaching in the university should shift from the traditional (theory-based) to progressive and pragmatic education (in-built practical application).

Granted that the nation's university system should be staffed by competent and highly educated professors, the policy of hiring only those with Ph.D. degrees for teaching positions may be counterproductive. Thus experienced career professionals with adequate industry experience (and gifted individuals with passion for education and teaching) with good quality education at a graduate level (Master's degrees) could teach undergraduate classes at the university level in specific areas of specialty. It has been this way in many advanced nations, as the professionals bring in their hands-on life experiences to the classroom. There is a lot of difference between theory and practical education, which is lacking in the system.

Lack of proper supervision is also part of the problem bedeviling the nation's educational system. Nigeria's education administrators are good at documenting the crucial problems facing the universities without solving the problems. Despite their inability to provide the necessary resources for effective teaching and learning, most of the existing universities are offering programs they are not capable of handling especially their inability to provide adequate and modern laboratories and libraries. The NUC must also be careful in the issuance of licenses to individuals and organizations rushing to establish private universities without serious plans on how to train the requisite manpower of the institutions. Rather, they should be required to show concrete and serious plans for training or acquiring the needed teachers for the programs they intend to offer.

As an exploratory study, this paper has examined the problems facing higher education in Nigeria and the emergence of private universities. The public university system has been tackled by different crises which have made it incapable of delivering quality higher education to the Nigerian people. The emergence of private universities has somewhat helped to ameliorate the situation. However, with greater supervision from the regulatory authorities, an improved funding environment and provision of basic infrastructure such as power supply, Nigerian universities stand the chance of competing favorably if not outpacing their rivals in Africa and in the global academic community.

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