

Deregulation of university education in Nigeria: Implication on education standard and quality assurance

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the deregulation of University education in Nigeria, its pitfalls and future expectations. The paper highlights what university education entails with special regard to higher institutions and its goals as enshrined in the National Policy on Education and global perspectives. Nigeria as a country gives much credence to higher education as the means for social and economic mobility, social transformation, and a major platform for higher level workforce development both Managerial and technological. To achieve these laudable objectives, government have given approval to private individuals and organisations to own and manage private higher institutions of learning. This paper examines some of the problems militating against the liberalization of private institutions of higher learning, such as extortion, inflation of tuition fees, its profit making venture, difficulty in accommodating the poor, among others. The reason why government grants deregulation was looked into. The way forward to eliminate the menace that manifests from deregulation was also considered and inspected. The paper concluded that for deregulation of education to gain grounds and maintain its modus operandi, managers should maintain standard in quality assurance in university education for those already in private universities and those that will be joining later. It recommended among others that there should be a reduction and control in the establishment of Universities. Political propoganda and self-aggrandizement should not be the panacea for the establishment of University education.

Keyword: Deregulation, Education Standard, Implication, Quality Assurance.

Introduction

Education is an instrument for national development and social change. Education maximizes the creative potentials and skills of the individual for self-fulfilment

and general development of the society Federal Ministry of Education (2014).

University education is education that an individual acquires after secondary education. It is established to impact positively on societal development through its objectives and purposes (Akegwu, 2016). The statutory

right for attending the University ranges from 18 years till death; as far as the individual is ready to transform his life to his benefit and that of the society. University education adds to what other forms of education had offered by increasing knowledge of the learners which they had previously acquired (Peretomode, 2008). University education has its objectives as specified in the National Policy on Education (FME, 2013). These are, to:

1. Contribute to National development through higher level manpower training.
2. Provide accessible and affordable quality learning opportunities in formal and informal education in response to the needs and interest of all Nigerians.
3. Provide high quality career counselling and life-long programme that prepare students with the knowledge and skills for self-reliance and the world of work.
4. Reduce skill shortages through the production of skilled manpower relevant to the needs of the labour market.
5. Promote and encourage scholarship, entrepreneurship and community service.
6. Forge and promote National unity.
7. Promote National and international understanding and interaction.

As a result of education being an instrument par-excellence and for developing of an individual for self-reliance, many nations have invested heavily in education and as such enrolment has increased thereby placing more financial burden on government in terms of funding the schools. This has made government to hands-off full funding of education, rather has opted to calling for joint responsibilities from both the Federal, State, Local governments and the private sector. As government discovered that the responsibility of funding and managing schools in Nigeria cannot be a single hand funding, the Policy Statement in the National Policy on Education (2013) section 10 (153, 154), recorded that "Education is a capital-intensive social service, which requires adequate financial provisions from all tiers of government for successful implementation of its programmes. Government's ultimate goal is to make education free at all levels in addition to assistance from International and local development partners, grants from research and other donor agencies. The financing of education is joint responsibility of the Federal, States/FCT and local governments and the private sector. In this connection, government welcomes and encourages the participation of local communities, individuals and organisations." (FME, 2013).

Government extended their hands to private individuals in funding schools through National Policy on Education and that gave the masses the opportunity and wherewithal to attend any institution of their choice, be it public or private schools. The increase in competition gives rise to the notion of deregulation in higher education thereby breaking government's monopoly in the provision and management of education (Uyanga et al, 2017). By giving a free hand to private participation in the provision and management of education in the

country, government relaxed the legal and governmental restrictions on the operations of the education business (Ajayi & Ekundayo, 2008).

However, some issues and challenges have emanated from the liberalization through which the private sectors were allowed to manage and run schools. This research is out to elucidate on the policy.

History of University Education in Nigeria

The history of University education started with the Elliot Commission of 1943, which led to the establishment of University College, Ibadan (UCI) in 1948 as an affiliated of the University of London (Ike, 1976 in Ajayi and Ekundayo, 2007). According to Ibokun, (1997) in Ajayi, et al, (2007), 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 investigate and advise 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 Ashbly Report led to the establishment of University of Ife, (now Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife), by the Western Region; Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria was also established in 1962 by the Northern Region and University of Lagos (1962) by the Federal Government. Babalola, Jaiyeoba and Okediran (2007) posited that the University College, Ibadan became a full-fledged University in 1962, thus UCI, Ibadan and University of Lagos became the first 2 Federal Universities in Nigeria – the other 3 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 handled.

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, Ilorin, Jos, Sokoto, Maiduguri, Port Harcourt and Ado Bayero – all known as second generation Universities.

The third generation Universities were established between 1980 and early 1990. They are: the Federal Universities of Technology in Owerri, Makurdi, Yola, Akure and Bauchi while State Universities were found in Imo, Ondo, Lagos, Akwa Ibom, Oyo and Cross River States (Anyamele, 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 currently operating.

The Concept of Deregulation

Deregulation of education is a government policy which broke the monopoly by allocating the management of education to individual members of the society. This was aimed at establishing and running education business without government interference.

The quest by individual seeking to establish, control and fund University education brought about government's laissez-a-faire and non-intervention in the management of education especially higher institutions. Due to the liberalisation concept of joint partnership in University education, Uyanga, et al (2017) concludes that despite the recent economic trends in Nigeria, the expansion of higher education has continued at an accelerating pace thus placing considerable stress and strain on available infrastructure, resources and expertise.

Subsequently, private sector funding of education has metamorphosed into illegal establishment of Universities because "who blows the pipe detects the tone". This implies that any affluent individual that has the

wherewithal should engage in establishing University, whether such an individual knows the prerequisite or has the technical knowledge of what it takes to run such an institution or not. He or she can apply for supervisory visit from the government and when they must have investigated such facilities, school plant and the rest of it, accreditation follows. In some cases, such accreditation is not ascertained from the real source (authentic personnel in charge of carrying out such functions as accreditation), not minding as well the condition of the facilities so inspected. Uyanga, et al (2017) also highlighted that the number of illegal Universities and campuses have been growing steadily from four (4) in 2006 to thirty-five (35) by 2016. This is the outcome of excessive demand on education and government's monopoly of University management to hands off to private sector.

Information gathered from Joint Admissions Matriculation Board (JAMB) on University Matriculation Examination (UME) applicants from **2005, 2016** states as follows:

Table 1: Joint Admissions Matriculation Board (JAMB) on University Matriculation Examination (UME) applicants

| Rank | State | No. of applicants | % of total applicants |
|------|---------|-------------------|-----------------------|
| 1 | Imo | 99, 512 | 10.89 |
| 2 | Delta | 70, 481 | 7.71 |
| 3 | Anambra | 65, 656 | 7.18 |
| 4 | Edo | 54, 356 | 5.95 |
| 5 | Ogun | 50, 802 | 5.56 |

(Source: JAMB, 2005)

| Rank | State | No. of applicants | % of total applicants |
|------|-------|-------------------|-----------------------|
| 1 | Imo | 102, 727 | 12.79 |
| 2 | Osun | 83, 060 | 9.16 |
| 3 | Oyo | 81,060 | 9.14 |

(Source: JAMB, 2016)

Indeed, this (Table 1) shows that the rate of University education seekers is enormous and as such it has resulted to so many legal and illegal establishments of Universities across the nation.

Reasons for Deregulation of University Education

There are some positive reasons why government decided to deregulate University education in Nigeria. The policy may not be connected with an effort to forgo synergy between public and private Universities so as to inject quality assurance in the whole system. However, it is sad to note that irrespective of government ideas and intention efforts towards achieving desirable qualities in Nigerian Universities have been thwarted.

The following emerges as the reasons why government decided to deregulate University education:

1. **Increased Access to Universities:** Due to increase in demand for University education by the citizens, the call for the establishment of more Universities became imperative and urgent, and government felt that incorporating the private

sector into the University business will go a long way to salvaging the situation. Private Universities were to help in accommodating excess students for admission (Undie, 2008). The question now is, has the purpose been achieved? The answer is No. According to Agabi, (2002), one of the primary causes which scuttled government objectives is the issue of exorbitant fees demanded by private University proprietors from students. As a result, those that public Universities cannot accommodate end up frustrated at different corners of the Country. This issue of deregulation according to Uyanga, et al (2017), has caused private educational institutions to assume greater role in meeting the growing demand for students' access, and in providing specialized courses in particular fields like, Information Communication Technology (ICT), Engineering, Early Childhood Education, Management and Business. Information gathered by the researchers show that there are 74 (Seventy Four) NUC approved private Universities in Nigeria. In order words, many of the private Universities have tried to solve the

problem of funding which government was unable to facilitate, and in the other way, turned around to extort from students to recover their supposed investment (Enaohwo, 1990).

2. The Problem of Scarce Educational Resources:

According to Okeshola, (2018), who noted that the higher institutions in Nigeria are faced with obsolete, archaic and dilapidated infrastructures, caused by government neglect and poor management of those facilities? The Nigerian policy is interested to making her populace better off rather than worse off. Government want people to invest in education through the process of deregulation and at the same time, the benefits are foreseen by the same government in the case of skills to produce earning and accruals to both the individual (Undie, 2017). The question arises 'why deregulating cost without deregulating benefits'? This is a major setback that mitigates the economic alternative to funding of education which is devoid of human face (Enaowho, 1990). We may dare to ask; in what ways are the operators facilitating the education system in Nigerian Universities?. Our pessimism is without prejudice to some private Universities like: Afe Babalola University, Ado-Ekiti (ABUAD); Covenant University, Ota to mention and others in that category which have really demonstrated quality in their provision of high standard of educational resources in terms of teaching-learning, equipment such as laboratory, Engineering apparatus, e-library and ICT facilities, which go pari passu with gigantic buildings, good hostel facilities, plants and conducive climate which cannot be found in some public Universities.

Nevertheless, both public and private university educational institutions in Nigeria are faced with the problem of quality assurance (ensuring that students receive quality and relevant education and that the degrees and diplomas meet national and international recognition standard of award, and public accountability), (Uyanga, et al 2017).

3. Alternative Ways of Funding University Education:

The presence of private Universities

has gone a long way towards solving and bridging the gap of funding occasioned by poor mechanism in public Universities (Undie, 2008). Suffice it to say that the incessant strikes by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) and the rest of them are caused by under-funding of the educational sector, and public concern over poor academic quality, and the churning out of graduates with little or no technical know-how, or adequate skills with which to contribute to the nation's economy, be self-employed or fit into the workforce (Uyanga et al, 2017). Such students do not only turn out to be wastes but are also labelled 'educated illiterates'. Permit us to say that the problem of Nigerian Universities is not in the establishment and proliferation of Universities, rather it calls for the 'big heart' financial muscle and political will to management premise. Accordingly, Babalola et al, (2007) opined that the illusion that the number of Universities is relative to the population of the country, signifying the level of development of the nation economically, socially, politically, educationally and otherwise, is questionable. There are countries with much larger population and lesser Universities which have achieved more in developing their citizens educationally and have produced greater number of qualified graduates that have contributed to their National development in all ramifications.

Consider the number of private Universities established in Nigeria, measuring as well its relative impact on Nigerian University education: In Nigeria, we have 38 Federal Universities; 38 State Universities and 74 Private Universities, making a total of 150 Universities. As earlier pointed out, the establishment of public or private Universities is not the solution to address or influence the economic problems of this country, instead the ability and spur of having 'big heart' in funding University education will be the love affair that triggers academic output (Ukoette & Iroegbu, 2018).

Let's take a cursory look at Nigeria's yearly budget on education allocation from 2010 – 2018

Table 2: Nigeria's yearly budget on education allocation from 2010 – 2018

| S/N | Year | Budget |
|-----|------|--------------------------|
| 1 | 2010 | 234.8 billion Naira |
| 2 | 2011 | 306.3 billion Naira |
| 3 | 2012 | 400.15 billion Naira |
| 4 | 2013 | 426.53 billion Naira |
| 5 | 2014 | 493.00 billion Naira |
| 6 | 2015 | 492.2 billion Naira |
| 7 | 2016 | 369.6 billion Naira |
| 8 | 2017 | 398.01 billion Naira |
| 9 | 2018 | 435.1 billion Naira (7%) |

Source: Nigerian Bureau of Statistics 2018

Above figures are lower than the 26% as recommended by UNESCO, (Babalola, 2007). This is what led to ASUU strike from August 13 – September 18, 2017.

This explains why Nigerian Universities will continue to rank low among her counterparts in terms of academic excellence, openness and research. Research concluded in by Uyanga, et al, (2017) stated that Nigeria is not among the academic ranking of world's Universities for the period 2013-2016.

In a nutshell, despite the drastic failure by government regarding the funding of education, private establishment of Universities has finally wiped away gross deficiency in University education because government cannot single-handedly fund university education (Enaohwo, 1990).

- 4. Improve the quality of education:** From the outset, it has been revealed that Nigerian educational sector has not for once, dedicated enough funds to smoothly run her education system. That is why her Universities cannot be applauded for establishing an effective quality assurance. According to Uko (2015), education has been badly cheated and under-funded among other sectors, and the same education is where all manpower needs and requirements in other sectors or parastatals are drawn from. A simple question is 'who is fooling who?' Nigerian University education cannot automatically improve its quality without redressing its financial commitment and recurrent expenses. There is need for the government to stop politicking and politicizing of the educational sector for mere aggrandizement. When Nigerian leaders do not know the worth of education and never reckoned with Western and Globalized education, demands and reforms what do we expect? If University education has been adequately allocated with funds, there will be less need for deregulation but because of Governments' failure to allocate appropriate funding; private Universities have taken the lead through the appropriate funding policies and maintenance of their facilities: machines, plants and aesthetics. Despite the exorbitant fees charged by private Universities, most of them have made remarkable impact through improving the quality of education by their well informed Academics and the physical infrastructures which cannot be provided by public Universities. Most Private Universities regulate their standard and curriculum implementation more than the public Universities because their owners want to see positive outcome and have more enrolment in subsequent admission. This is not the case in the public Universities.

The private Universities are profit making ventures. Because of the weak and inappropriate public sector and the lack of appropriate education and scholarship, government is misdirected to spend more on worthless and less profitable projects that have no appreciable benefits to the present society, and the generation unborn. The over-dependence on oil has brought about corruption in every sphere of public parastatals (Ayamele, 2004). National Planning Commission (2004) stated that Nigeria's legacy of mismanagement and corrupt governance has encouraged many people to seek ways of sharing the national cake instead of helping to bake it. The Commission added that government was widely regarded as a provider of large contracts, but this was distributed by officers in power to people wealthy enough to buy their influence.

The money that Nigeria would use to fund education and match the statement in her National Policy on Education philosophy, section 1(3e), which states: "Education is to be qualitative, comprehensive, functional and relevant to the needs of the society", must be appropriated and utilised to promote functional education for skill acquisition, job creation and poverty reduction.

If the Nigerian government was to stick to what is specified in its National Policy on Education, she would have engaged in productive activities that would help the economy to grow by appropriating adequately for funding the root of the nation's prosperity and development which is Education (Babalola et al, 2007). As a result of this laxity, Emenalo, (2016) ascertained that those wealthy, rich and powerful citizens that have shared the National cake devise the means of establishing big private Universities as profit-making machinery so as not to be probed and antagonized by government. They established these Universities at the detriment of the poor masses who cannot afford the services of such Universities despite one's intelligent quotient and academic prowess. These have caused an average citizen not to attend private Universities due to high cost of tuition fees. Many have been driven by this to devise ways of living and survival in illegality (Ajayi et al, 2008).

Deregulation and liberalisation will diminish government control and attract private sector investment as stated by the National Planning Commission, (2004). The government has promoted private sector so that it will be the engine of economic growth under NEEDS, to be the executor, investor, and manager of most businesses. The government plays the role of enabler, facilitator and regulator, helping the private sector grow and create jobs and generate wealth. Private Universities have not fully achieved this aspect of job creation. They rather employ few Professors, part-time Lecturers and adjunct Lecturers for academic activities. There must always be the prize to pay for such acts because as at today, such 'short cuts' have caused lack of quality assurance and effective academic outcomes (Peretmode, 2008).

Implications of Deregulation on University Education

- 1. Proper Monitoring:** Ownership of private Universities established and run by individuals or

The Problem of Deregulation

organizations does not imply total hands off of the supervisory aspect of checking for quality as the case may be, so as not to allow for deviation from laid down principles. Uyanga, et al (2017) stated that interest should not be in the proliferation of higher education in Nigeria, but on its quality assurance so that the product of the system would be able to fit into, and face the challenges of globalization, as well as contribute to National economic development and environmental sustainability.

2. **Appraisal of Educational Programmes:** The programmes stated in the National policy on education should be highly reciprocated by private Universities to meet up with the mandate of producing qualified graduates who will in turn contribute to the National economic development (Ukoette, 2020).
3. **Adequate Funding:** No private University is accredited without weighing its capital adequacy – cash at bank and at hand vis-à-vis the facilities on ground. NUC should effectively monitor for quality assurance so that universities will not derail in quality and bring out illiterate graduates. According to Nwaugwu (2005), when education is not funded, the foundations of such education are weak, consequently, the products of such education system are generally weak intellectually.
4. **Quality Teaching Personnel:** Teachers are the pivot of academic excellence in any University because they develop and inculcate the right mental or moral life to the students positively (Ukoette & Ihisota, 2019). So private Universities should ensure that they employ the services of qualified Lecturers and ensure that they are well trained and dedicate funds to send them for further training to acquire requisite norms and values for self-reliance and development.

to the fallen standard of education because it poses a great challenge to education Managers and the Lecturers' in the teaching-learning process. Lecturers these days struggle to make out refined products from these unmerited quota admitted students who might not have the capacities and competencies to be in higher education. This is a big and challenging task (Emenalo, 2016).

2. **Physical Facilities Update and Innovation:** When the school has good and excellent facilities, both in instructional materials, aids, good laboratories, equipped e-library and good atmosphere and climate, it challenges the learners' creative and innovative domain. They ought to relax and face the business that warrants them to leave their comfort zones for their study. The need for the rehabilitation of the old facilities to complement with new technological advancement must not be overlooked.
3. **Availability of Effective Managers:** A Manager is the one who uses the acronym "PODSCORBE" to efficiently and effectively manage University education. The leader or Manager here refers to the Vice-Chancellor of the University who supervises and ensures the overall realization of the institution's goals. He has to plan, organise, put staff in place, direct, coordinate, report, budget and evaluate outcomes in order to be effective in his management. The application of all of these will ginger decision-making, creativity, innovation, knowledge, skills acquisition, team spirit and academic excellence and keep him abreast of the future challenges. When a leader manages the resources both human and material in a unified whole and actualized goal, he is tagged 'an excellent leader', in his sphere of jurisdiction, be it in the University or elsewhere. Such a leader in the University system will prop up quality education.
4. **Keeping Abreast of Government Rules and Regulations:** The National policy on education specifies the National philosophy and goals of education in section 1 FME, (2014), which all Managers of the University system should strive to uphold as well as keep in their offices for daily reference to remind them of the policy that guides the day to day running of the University education to assure quality.
5. **Curriculum Diversification:** This is where the issue of quality lies. The curriculum of University education should be diversified to capture skills acquisition at all levels. Managers should endeavour to design the curriculum for the achievement of general educational objectives. NUC has included entrepreneurship as a course of study so that students would be introduced to

Sustainability and the Way Forward for the Deregulation of University Education in Nigeria

1. **Revisiting Admission Policy:** This has been a menace to the National Universities' Managers. They should work out modalities for admission based on merits and not resorting to merging Dick, Tom and Harry for the reason of unity or quota system. This jeopardizes the fervent spirit of intelligence of the qualified candidates, causing them to give up University education easily hence it makes no sense to strife and read, write Jamb and score 250-260 and above and be denied admission because of quota system; when those with 150-170 are admitted just to balance unnecessary equation and for 'equity and fairness'. This is why some Universities train and graduate blunts and dispatch them into the society and they end up destroying the polity. This must have contributed

skills that will equip them for self-employment if and after their graduation, that is if no white collar job was handy to them, they will not be a liability to the country, rather will survive using acquired skills to promote the National economy.(Self-Employed). Uchendu, et al (2016), revealed that entrepreneurship education has a significant relationship with economic security which means that when students are equipped with such skills they will be self-sufficient, self-employed and also be employers of labour.

Conclusion and Recommendation

A nation's growth and development is determined by its human resources Abdulkareem, (2001). The author concludes that for deregulation of education to gain ground and maintain its promulgation, Managers should maintain standard in quality assurance in University education for those already in private University and those that will be admitted later.

This research recommends that:

1. There should be a reduction and control in the establishment of Universities. Political propoganda and self-aggrandizement should not be a panacea for the establishment of any University.
2. Funding should be considered crucial and made available as at when due, and as the need arises to the existing Universities in such a way that the system can provide for human and material resources to meet with the globalized standard of education for optimum productivity and competitiveness.
3. Managers should maintain equity and standard in curriculum content and implementation, not excluding entrepreneurship skills' drive.
4. Regulating bodies like NUC, et al should make regular visits to institutions without bias and politicking and as well monitor both the private and public Universities to ensure quality assurance at all levels of the educational sector. Such visits should not make room for gratification and or indirect lobbying. If room is given for the tolerance of corruption or its likelihood, the products there-from would be absolutely corrupt.
5. National Universities Commission (NUC) should step into mediating with the private education providers to reduce their high tuition so that lower income citizens will have access to University education from that sector.

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