



RESEARCH ARTICLE

CONTEMPORARY PROBLEMS IN NIGERIA PRIVATE UNIVERSITY THAT AFFECTS QUALITY

*Dr. Adeniyi T. Adetunji, Mr Adediran. V. Adetunji and Mrs. Opeyemi. O. Oyelude

Business Administration Department, Bowen University, Iwo Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This paper was designed to understudy the contemporary issues affecting quality provisions in the Nigerian university context. It has been observed that qualities are declining gradually in the provision of university education in the country. However, studies that have looked into the problems the universities are faced with are yet to close the gap in knowledge of other factors that remain problematic within the sector especially problems created by the private universities. This study uses a standard literature review to study quality and the problems the universities are faced with. The paper uses a qualitative approach to gather the opinion of academic staff from public universities to explain why they think the private universities are causing the decline in the sector. The finding reveals that there is need for private universities to adhere to the principle of reciprocity (that is mutuality) of capacity and accountability. This is because in a system governed by the principle of reciprocity of capacity and accountability, everyone re-writes his job description in terms of the value they add to enhance the instructional programme. It is all about what you can do best and how best you can put other functions of the system to work.

INTRODUCTION

The observed inadequacy in the number of Universities in Nigeria coupled with the high demand for University education has created the problems of entrance (admission) into the available Universities and the sustenance of good standards has been affected. An effort to check these problems prompted the Federal Government of Nigeria to establish the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) in 1978 to handle all admission matters with respect to Universities at the first instance and later other tertiary institutions were involved (Ogbogu, 2013). As a result of the need to create more access for university education undue pressure has been placed on the government. The government has opened door for private investor(s) to participate in the university provision in order to meet up with the need to close the gap in access to the university (Aina, 2007). However, these issues have since then created some other fundamental issues that many authors had discussed (such as low funding, lack of facilities to teach, laboratory equipment's, etc) and suggested possible solutions to it. Adetunji and Oladejo (2016) expressed that in their observation that some of these problems remain a contemporary issue within the university providers (public and private). These problems include diminishing financial resources; problems of access and equity; lack of vision and integration of higher education into national planning by political leaders; limitations on university autonomy and academic freedom (Obasi, Akuchie and Obasi, 2010).

Duze (2011) mentioned that problems of effectiveness and efficiency; brain drain; lack of or limited access to new technologies in every area, particularly in science and technology programs and limited number of teachers in the area of science and technology (Ekundayo and Ajayi, 2009). Adetunji and Ogunleye (2015) pointed that lack of innovation in teaching and research; incessant industrial action by university unions; the dominance of consumers and patrimonial networks among university administrators, academic and non-academic staff, which has led to Vice-chancellors acting like traditional rulers; centralization of university administration; implosion in the population of students which is not matched by greater spaces and opportunities within existing schools; absence of a standardized system that rewards hard-work and productivity and, at the same time, discourages indolence in a consistent way; the preponderance on non-PhD holders as instructors in the universities; high fees among private universities thereby shutting out indigent students; non-availability of scholarships, student loans and grants, etc. The experience of the industrialized nations has established a casual relationship between heavy investment in university education and economic growth and social development. Under the pressure to expand access and at the same time, reduce the financial burden of education, governments take relief to welcome other providers of higher education. However, the onus falls on government to ensure that quality is assumed through the maintenance of minimum accepted standards in all institutions of higher education. Kasirim (2005) observed that in Africa, and especially Nigeria, where the capacity problem is believed to be a major impediment to economic growth, private providers of higher education play an important role in alleviating this problem.

Inadequate capacity explains in large part, the failure of African countries to respond appropriately and timely to international cooperative initiatives such as the Poverty Reduction Strategy Programme (PRSP). Private universities are definitely on the increase in Africa, Nigeria witnessing the fastest growth (Adetunji 2014). Imhanlahimi and Maduwesi (2006) state clearly that among the factors responsible for the increase in private provision of higher education in Nigeria are: the rapid growth in the university age population and the public outcry about the deterioration in quality of public education. Adetunji (2015) expressed that the decline in quality is brought about by a number of factors, which include demography, poor states of economy, weak internal capacity, poor governance, poor research activities, brain drain, political interference, incessant industrial actions, unruly and destructive conduct of undergraduates, poor preparation of entering students, unsuitable policy environment, poor funding, shortages in instructional materials, laboratory equipment and poor library facilities. Other factors are the unexpected consequences of the government policy at the primary and secondary level. All of these have had a devastating effect on the quality of education (Ijeoma and Osagie, 2005; Uvah, 2005; FME, 2003) and have therefore informed this study.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This paper was designed to study contemporary problems in Nigerian Universities. The paper assumed that if the top officials are involved in the study, they may become very defensive and focus their discussion on only issues that will benefit them. Some may likely not want to get involved which will jeopardize the intention of the study. Therefore, the paper uses a purposive selection procedure to select 5 participants who are involved in the transformation of students; they are Deans of five major faculties (Agricultural Science, Humanities, Sciences, Management Science, and Law). These faculties are selected based on commonality across selected university owners. The involvement and centre roles played by these selected informants were very important and were assumed suitable for investigating what happened and the roles the Deans of Faculties played in the development of universities.

knowledge on contemporary problem they assumed private universities are faced with. They were able to uncover contemporary problems going on within the universities. The study covers 6 universities in the southwest of Nigeria, some participants claimed to have a busy schedule and every effort made to get them involved in the study proved abortive. The universities selected were assigned numbers from 1 to 6 based on category (see Table 1) where Dean Faculty of Agricultural Science are represented by DFA, Dean Faculty of Humanities by DFH, Dean Faculty of Sciences represented by DFS, Dean Faculty of Management Sciences represented by DFM and Dean Faculty of Law represented by DFL were selected based on their position of authorities.

RESULTS

Many of the Deans agreed that education is a necessary tool for human development. They stated that from the elementary stage to the tertiary level, a child is nurtured into adulthood through knowledge acquired within the educational community. They also maintained that the university education goes beyond mere academic (book) knowledge to other aspects of human development. Three of the participants were of the view that a person develops other critical parts of his/her life, through other elements of education (A2, B3, E1). Two of the participants claimed that although one can say the process of human development seem to be missing from our today’s learning institutions, especially the private ones from high school to University (D3, E5). One of the participants explained that private University education in Nigeria was revisited and got kicked off in 1999 during the Obasanjo administration and since then, there are about 60 licensed private universities and still counting which is already getting closer to the number of federal and state universities in the country (D3). The study participants also identified some contemporary problems as listed below. These problems were discussed based on importance the interviewee placed on them and similarity in contribution.

Students and Lecturers Quality

Four of the interviewees suggested that in recent times, the quality of students that gain admission into universities,

Table 1. Participants grids

S/N	Owners	Participants				
		Dean Faculty of Agric. Science (A)	Dean Faculty of Humanities (B)	Dean Faculty of Sciences (C)	Dean Faculty of Management Science (D)	Dean Faculty of Law (E)
1	State	*	-	*	*	*
2	State	*	*	*	*	-
3	State	*	*	*	*	*
4	Federal	*	*	-	*	*
5	Federal	*	-	*	*	*
6	Federal	*	*	*	*	*

The participants were coded as follows DFA = A, DFH = B, DFS = C, DFM = D, DFL = E. Thus A1 to A6 = DFA; B1 to B6 = DFH, E1 to E6 = DFL. While A1 to A3; B1 to B3...E1 to E3 are from state universities and A4 to A6; B4 to B6...E4 to E6 are from federal universities. A1, B1 to E1 are participants from state university 1, A2, B2, to E2 are from state university 2... and A6, B6 to E6 are from state university 6.

The use of interviews as the sole research instrument was assumed appropriate because it allows the participants to express themselves anonymously without identifying who they are, or which institution they represent. The interview section engaged the participants who responded to the best of their

especially the private ones, gives one a cause for concern, because within this sect lies the future leaders of the country (B4, C2, D4, E5). One of the respondents articulated that,

I am talking about some students not being qualified to be in a university, because they are not mature to face the challenges

of university education, they still need to be spoon-fed by their parents (C2).

Another group of Participants also declared that most of the private universities tried to admit students that are underage so that they can have control over them (E1). Two respondents from state universities said they cannot blame the university management especially the private ones for taking such decisions to admit underage because mature students sometimes get involved in cultism and other vice of anti-social behavior. They claimed that no private investors will want to waste his or her resource just to admit indisciplined set of students to vandalize their properties (B2, C3). Four respondents from federal university pointed out that it is not uncommon to find children who are barely through with their secondary school education to sit for O' level and exit at very tender ages or carted off within a short period to private universities (A4, A6, D4, E6). One of the deans expressed that,

I think this is a contemporary problem for our labour market, the age student graduate from the institution of higher learning matters, because knowledge and experiences show that most of the students who graduate at very little age have failed to deliver properly at the labour market (D4).

Three respondents shared that these individuals who got admitted to the university at early age are bound to have some problems adjusting to life in the tertiary institution. They stressed that such problems don't necessarily have to be academically related problems, yet some of these students cope well (A2, D2, E4). One of the participants respondent that,

I think it may be difficult to train these students at start, many of these children may be wrongly influenced by their peers who are way more matured than them but the most important thing is that we have seen these students doing well both in character and moral in the labour market. We do get reports from companies (D2).

Another respondent shared that,

I think younger candidates may have problem and be influenced in their decision-making. I think taking decision on major issues would also prove to be a difficult task for them as they might not be accustomed to making decisions for themselves, rather relying on their friends or parents (A2).

By any standard I don't think students have any problem, it is important for lecturers who have pre-knowledge of age of students they are dealing with to come to their level. I believe young students are more serious than mature students in my own view (E4).

Four of the Deans also mentioned that it is common to find students who do not pass the necessary examinations such as National Examination Council (NECO), Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) requirements who can not gain admission into a federal or state school, enrolling in a private university of choice (A4, B3, C5, D2). Three of the Deans from federal universities expressed that the quality of students supplied to JAMB are sometimes not of high standard but will find their ways to pass JAMB (A4, C5, E6). No wonder universities still have to go through their own internal screening after JAMB before they could admit students. One of the Deans from state university exposed that,

I can tell you point blank that students are made to write a simple test in some private universities and on this basis they are given admission irrespective of whether or not that candidate is academically sound or matured enough to be in the university (C1).

Two respondents expressed that the private university existence has led to students competition to gain admission by all course because some students who do not do well in their examinations - NECO or JAMB but their parents have money to pay in the private university can easily get admission for their children (D1, E4). One of the respondents explained that,

I have no doubt in my mind that what the investors care about is making profit, as long as they can pay, they can stay (E4).

The question now is: if such student is allowed to graduate from the university, would they be able to make a positive impact on the society? Your guess is as good as mine says three of the participants, claimed B4, C2 and D3. Likewise, four of the Deans from federal universities expressed concern that the issues of the lecturers that are employed to teach in many of the private universities do not have the prerequisite degree, i.e. Ph.D, which qualifies them to teach at the university level (A5, C5, D5, E5). One of the respondents lamented,

I tell you the kind of lecturers employed are those who are either fresh graduates or experienced lecturers with the right qualifications, who are on sabbatical and teaching part-time because they have full time jobs at federal or state universities (E5).

Two other respondents expressed that you will agree that these problems are yet to be resolved as the university is still lacking the right set of employee to do the academic job effectively (A3, D5).

Less Qualified Academic Staff

Many of the respondents agreed that the recommended level a lecturer must obtain before he/she is qualified to lecture at the university is the Ph.D level; they escalated that this is the National Universities Commission recommendation. However three of the respondents expressed that this is not the case, universities have a lot of staff shortage in all courses. They pointed out that we have very small number of qualified staff in most of the departments. To be fair, this problem is not peculiar to private universities in Nigeria alone. Although it might be more rampant in the private universities and in Nigeria than any country due to high demand for university education compared to any other developing country in the world (C6, D1, E4). Two other Deans from federal universities also shared that less qualified academic staff has caused the university to hire qualified academia's with good track records for accreditation when they needed to do so, but after the accreditation the students are left with no one to teach them than graduate assistants, a problem that is supported by the fraudulent act of the top officials of the universities (A1, E6). One of the respondents pointed out that,

I do not say it is bad for graduate assistant to teach a course but they also need to be mentored properly, not that they will

be handling four courses in a semester as they are doing in every universities today, I have no apology for this statement, I mean for generalizing the whole institution, that is just the truth (E6).

When you talked about the contemporary problem the universities are facing in general you will discover today that the staff in public universities will continue to point accusing figures at the staff in the private universities as if staff in the private universities are not products of public universities (D2). One of the respondents also mentioned that,

One thing I will not but mention is yes academic staff number is not enough, but what the hell is the government thinking of when they still continue to give approval to new public and private universities? I think our government is killing our education, not the fault of the private providers (B2).

Two participants who also supported that there is a dearth of academic staff in private universities in the country, expressed that the public universities who are licensed to produce more Ph.D holders and postgraduates who could support the creation of more access to the university have failed to do so over the year causing lots of problems in the university today (A4, C3). One of the respondents expressed that,

You can imagine when a Ph.D student stay 6 to 8 years doing fulltime Ph.D course in the university, they learnt something that Ph.D is not for all, yes I believe its not for all but there should be a standard to be followed. If a candidate meets up with the standard then award him or her his/her degree (C3)

Another respondent added, due to long period of studying and non concern of most supervisors many students tend to study for their Ph.D on a part-time basis which even makes it more longer than normal before they graduate.

I think the government and university need to look into this problem, if they will continue to establish more universities. Otherwise the problem of half-baked will be order of the day (C5).

Three Deans claimed that private universities reliance on part-time academic staff that are usually on sabbatical or employed part-time due to the fact that they are fully employed by the public universities; is a common feature of private universities irrespective of their location and orientation. This leaves the regular staff of the Private Nigerian universities to comprise mostly of lecturers without the required level of experience (A3, D1, D3).

Quality Assurance

Quality assurance in relation to the level and standard of resources and infrastructure are at best shoddy in some of these Nigerian private universities. What should apply in this situation is the utilization of commensurate facilities and appropriate infrastructure. But as one would notice, this is not the case in many of the private universities in Nigeria (E3). Three Deans from faculty of agricultural science shared a similar view that for private universities having issues with quality assurance, it all boils down to insufficient funding since the universities are independently owned and receive little or

no help from the state and federal government (A1, A3, A5). One of the Deans argued against private universities having quality assurance problem that,

I tell you now, if the problem of private university with quality assurance is insufficient funding then what will the problem of quality assurance be in the university where institutions are seriously underfunded? (A1).

Another respondent debated that the issue of quality assurance in the university is the problem of individual officers who are expected to manage the institution effectively,

I will not but fault the involvement of the National Universities Commission (NUC). They are charged with the duties to make sure that universities in the country produce quality graduates, if any university is not producing what they should be doing then they have right to close such university down until they comply (C1).

Two of the respondents pointed out that it doesn't matter which of the universities in Nigeria a student attends, they have no right to produce half-baked graduate as people called it. Because the monitoring body, National Universities Commission, is expected to organize periodic visits to all the institutions to ensure that they operate within the acceptable standards (C6, D6). The issues of quality assurance in both public and private institutions have been surrounded by unfair practices (B3, D5, D6, E3). One of the Deans said,

I will continue to question the integrity of those who are employed as the accreditation officers for the university if any probe or short coming is found in the university, this is because the system trusts them to keep the sector on their toes but they failed to perform their own duties (E3).

Another Dean said,

I will place problem of quality assurance on the undue number of paper works that are not necessary that the institutions have to go through before they are accredited (D5).

One Dean also expressed that,

I think when we talk about quality we place more emphasis on external factors too much, what about the university themselves assuring the quality of the services they render with or without any one asking them to do so? (D6).

This is also the view of a Dean,

I will say the management system used by the university is no more working, I mean the bureaucracy system. Each unit now needs to work independently to achieve a common goal rather than the time when the Vice-chancellor is the superman in the university (B3).

Some Good News

Three Deans from Faculty of Management Sciences expressed that the bitter truth is that the quality of education in some private schools are far better than those of most state and federal universities (D1, D4, D5). One of the respondents pointed out that this is because in private universities, the 75%

attendance requirement is observed to the latter and the number of students who are being admitted yearly is sizeable enough for proper monitoring unlike the size of students in other universities. Also, the NUC regulation as regard the number of students to academic staff.

I mean a student has to receive lectures on a particular course to the tune of at least 75% of the total lecture period to be qualified to take an exam (D1).

Another dean claimed that this attendance system was actualized because each course lecturer was allowed to keep an up-to-date attendance sheet (C6). In support of the debate, two other respondents pointed out that if a student sat for an exam and failed, he or she is made to re-sit that course the following session, just as the case in state or federal universities (B3, D3). One of the Deans from state university added that if at the end of the entire duration of his or her course of study the course is not passed, then the student must register for an extra session (that extra session is known as extension in some universities and spill in others) (C5). Another respondent mentioned that in private universities, it is mandatory for lecturers to be present at every class as scheduled and teach because they answer directly to school authority.

I tell you what is shocking here is that lecturers also get mark by other university officers, they check whether they are in class doing their work or not otherwise they get a query letter to explain why they were not in class as scheduled (A3).

Another Dean added that the only thing that worries me about some of the students in private universities is their lack of proper preparation and qualifications thereby finding it difficult to comprehend the lectures (E3).

Three other Deans also expressed that in all fairness the Private universities differ from the public schools where appointments come from the state or federal government. They claimed that in government institutions most of the lecturers do not take their jobs seriously, some don't go to class for a better part of the semester only to surface towards the end of the semester and rush the students by just running through the course, just as some of them go to classes to tell tales and give notes without a thorough breakdown or explanation on the course (A5, B2, C1). Two Deans from Faculty of Management Sciences argued that who is producing the half-baked student is yet to be identified between the public and private universities (D1, D6). One of the respondents expressed that,

I think public universities are still living on the on glory; they fail to accept that their standard has dropped (D6).

Two other interviewees who worked part-time in a separate private university mentioned that it is good that public universities have been in existence for long period of time now but they are not doing any better than private universities (C3, D4). One of the interviewees mentioned that,

I think one day students form public university and private university need to be put to test on practical issues not just theoretical knowledge, I think this is one of the contemporary issues that affect the development of the universities in this country (D4).

Three Deans from Faculty of Science also mentioned that one of the things that are affecting the university today is because government owned the largest number of university in the country and then they tend to make policy to manage their own universities and request it is replicated for other universities who might as well be better than their own universities (C1, C5, C6). Three of other Deans agree that yes the university (public) has been in operation for many years, they have produced millions of graduate yet they have lesser impact on the community rather they all wait out there to get white-collar jobs (B4, C2, E3). One of the respondents expressed,

I am not here to fault the public universities products because I am one, but I am only saying this to challenge them so that they can rise up to their responsibilities and be a good role model to the private ones (C2).

Four of the participants said the good news here is that students themselves are beginning to demand for their right in term of requesting for more facilities to aid learning, although they might be doing it in a wrong way; that is by vandalizing properties just for their voice to be heard (A5, B2, B6, C1). One of the participants posited that students do not have right in the university because it is called a learning institution; every experience through the process is for them to learn and find a way out of the problem. Having said that,

I belief they can learn how they can exercise their right in the community from the university even though they are learning how to deal with such situation. I really need to say this; student can be upset by continued misuse of words or no communication (B6).

Conclusion

This paper concludes that Private Universities certainly have the challenge of quality control to contend with although that does not mean there is better quality in public universities than private once. The study finds that there is need for private universities to adhere to the principle of reciprocity (that is mutuality) of capacity and accountability. In a system governed by the principle of reciprocity of capacity and accountability, everyone re-writes his job description in terms of the value they add to enhance the instructional programme. The issue of autonomy is also crucial in the university and Private universities should be given the autonomy to create their Governing Councils, Senates and other Academic Boards with the most qualified manpower to meet criteria for the accreditation of programmes. The NUC should be more determined to play its statutory role of enforcing minimum standards for private universities. Within the private universities it should be a prioritized issue for NUC to enforce criteria such as quality of admission, appointment, employment, quality of teachers, accreditation of courses/programmes, funding requirements, and other educational inputs to ensure that there is effective teaching and learning. Private Universities should avoid replicating the conventional courses/programmes offered in public Universities; rather they should move towards specialization in certain disciplines so they can be centers of excellence. Universities should develop a culture of quality through strategic planning, which will set out the university's notion of quality, quality management goals and objectives, entrench a

framework for quality management and a framework for Monitoring and Evaluation. Quality control units should also be set up at all levels of the University i.e. departmental level, faculty level. Finally, attracting high caliber staff with good salary and better conditions of service to recruit and retain staff. Where there is high quality teaching staff and students, universities will attract grants, endowments and fellowships needed to promote scholarship and sustain excellence in private universities in Nigeria.

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