Historicizing the Development of Private Universities in Nigeria, 1980-2020s

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Abstract:
The paper discussed the development of private universities in Nigeria since its independence with a thrust from 1980s to 2020s. Private universities in Nigeria were first established in 1980s, but greeted with the challenges of discontinuity and continuity during cross-regime accounts in the civilian, military and the democratic dispensations of the post-independence era. Beyond the aesthetic architectural designs, the paper also discussed the issue of quality university education, the influence of the policy - 3rd National Development Plan; the Laws (Constitution) of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1979 and decrees 19 and 9 of 1984 and 1993 respectively, on the proliferation and operations of private universities, its relevance on Nigeria’s manpower needs and national development. As a qualitative study, historical research method was adopted, relying strongly on both primary and secondary sources of data; to generate dependable data for the analysis that have contributed to what the findings revealed as mainly the expansion of the content programmes and proliferation of private universities in the twenty-first century Nigeria. The recommendation of the study advocates for the establishment of private universities that would be adequately planned for and truly regulated, to complement public universities in terms of programmes, manpower needs and quality among others; so that Nigeria would adequately develop in order to effectively function in the comity of nations.

Keywords: Historicizing, Private Universities, Post-Independence, Development and Policy on University Education.

Suggested Citation

Introduction
The patriotism, civic responsibility of the individuals and expression of loyalty or good citizenship to the country are not limited to obeying the laws of the land or exercising direct and prescribed duties in the process of administering the country, such as payment of tax, contesting elective positions or voting in elections and etc. Some Nigerians, as individuals, religious organisations and the Nigerian incorporated establishments are so committed and ready in their capacities and resolve to commit even their resources to the good of the country. This is the manifestation in the high-level manpower development of the country focusing on education, especially at the tertiary level and playing complementary role till today.

In the overall analysis, provision of education was synonymous to meeting the manpower requirements of the missionaries and the
colonial government. Historically, manpower production started in the colonial era when the need to fill some vacancies in the colonial civil service became inevitable (Kosemani and Okorosaye-Orubite, 2002). The intent of education was *ab initio* conceived by the missionaries for evangelism as noted by Hauwa (2012) that the aim of education at its infancy, established by the Christian missionaries was just to enable the beneficiaries learn how to read the bible in both English and local languages; those based on activities were gardening, agriculture as well as the training of local school masters, catechists and clergymen and how to properly perform their roles such as interpreting or the Europeans and teaching of catechumens. Similarly, Boyd and King (1981:100) revealed that:

...the church undertook the business of education, not because it regarded education as good in itself, because it found that it could not do its own proper work without giving its adherents, and especially its clergy, as much of the formal learning as was required for the study of the sacred writings and for the performance of their religious duties.

On the part of the colonial government, education was the least in her priority. It was asserted that colonial government only had three priorities for their presence in Nigeria, clearly devoid of educational provision; but politics, military and trade/commerce (Osokoya, 1989 and Abdulrahman, 2014). In the long run, what the efforts of the missionaries achieved in terms of educational provision was only the primary and secondary levels of education. The level of manpower within the scope of education that the missionaries provided for the colonial civil service was not even the middle level, but the low level, such as messengers, cooks, stewards, interpreters and clerks. There was a dearth of educated indigenous people, to occupy the middle level cadre in the then colonial civil service.

It was imperative that the natives be trained to occupy these vacancies which the Europeans were not ordinarily disposed to occupy. Contrarily, the thought of the colonialists was that educating Africans would mean their empowerment to challenge the colonial authorities. When it was even glaring that there was the need for preparation and training of the natives for the available vacancies (administrative and technical) they proliferated post-secondary education, indicated in Abdulrahman (2014), Kosemani & Okorosaye-Orubite (1995), Osokoya (1989) and Fafunwa (1974) such as Central Agricultural Research Stations at Moor Plantation, Ibadan and another one at Samaru in Zaria. Other such schools were the Centre for Veterinary Research at Vom in Jos and in the training for Engineering was at Ebute-Meta, using the workshop of the Nigerian Railways.

From the foregoing, it is apparent that manpower need of the country was tied to being educated/literate. This was corroborated by Gabriel (2010) that university education constitutes a major force for the development of the nation through raising high quality human resources that are sensitive and responsible to the needs of the larger society. For middle and high level manpower needs to be fulfilled, higher education had long been identified as the instrument. By 1932 therefore, the first higher educational institution in Nigeria was achieved through the proposal of E.R.J. Hussey – then Nigeria’s first Director of Education in 1930, that led to the establishment of Yaba Higher College in 1932. It produced the middle level manpower needs for the Nigerian civil service. Fafunwa (1974) and Osokoya (1989) note that Yaba Higher College existed for fifteen years, churning out a number of educated Nigerians who became ripe for administrative and technical positions in the Nigerian civil service as at independence in 1960. This was complemented with the establishment of the University College of London, Ibadan in 1948; for more production of the needed manpower.

At present, all existing universities from the first, second, third and fourth generations, established at various times in the colonial, civilian, military or democratic eras have not satisfied the yearning of Nigerians for university education.
The establishment of private universities was believed to address this need, but it did not as the discourse would reflect.

The Concerns

The importance of university education has been realized and recognized as a topmost tool for individual and societal development. The pursuance and efforts at addressing the manpower needs of the country, through on education makes university education very necessary. Since the colonial period, government has at various times established universities and licenced individuals and organisations to do same. However, the establishment of universities has been challenged by inadequacies such as low carrying capacity in public universities in relation to large number of potential candidates jostling for enrolment, which partly informed the need for private universities.

Most worrisome are the different manifestations that favoured increase in the number (quantity) of universities established. But not with adequate state-of-the-art facilities and lecturers.

The Post-Independence Nature of University Education in Nigeria

The recognition of the important nexus between higher education and manpower needs for development of Nigeria at independence, necessitated the setting up of the Ashby Commission whose Report stressed the establishment of autonomous and indigenous universities. As reported by Fafunwa (1974), Harbison estimated that between 1960 and 1970, Nigeria would need to produce university graduates at the rate of 2,000 a year. In attempt to achieve this, the first in this category of universities, after the University College, Ibadan was the University of Nigeria, established in 1960 at Nsukka, by the Eastern Nigerian Government, immediately after independence.

Several others as revealed in Fafunwa (1971) followed, including the University of Lagos then at the Federal Capital; University of Ife 1962 (now Obafemi Awolowo University in 1987) established by the Western Nigerian Government and Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria (1962), established by the Northern Nigerian Government. With the creation of mid-western region in 1963 the Mid-West Institute of Technology was established and in 1971, it became University of Benin. These first set of universities are those referred to as the first-generation universities and they produced the best of academics, lawyers, doctors, engineers, literary artists, historians, agriculturists among others.

The foregoing shows that all the first-generation universities were established by the regional governments except those in Ibadan and Lagos owned by the Federal Government. In the post-independence status of university education in Nigeria, there was no clear statement as to deterrence of private individuals and organisations from establishing universities. As noted by Okorosaye-Orubite (2007), successive Constitutions of Nigeria did not categorically exclude private establishment of universities. For instance, the Constitution of the Federation in 1963 did not make any mention of the establishment of private institutions of higher learning, instead it restricted legislation on federal higher institutions to the Federal Parliament (item 17 of The Exclusive Legislative List), while placing Higher Education generally on the Concurrent Legislative List (item 10).

In 1971, Federal Government embarked on the process that will lead to her active involvement in the university education, therefore, transferring “higher education from the Concurrent Legislative List of the Constitution of Nigeria to the Exclusive Legislative List” (NUC, 1977:15). This policy published in the Daily Times of Nigeria, 21 August, 1971, page 17 and it states that: The Supreme Military Council has decided that the Federal Government should henceforth assume full responsibility for higher education throughout the country, with the provision that the status quo in respect of the existing universities should be maintained.
With the commitment of the federal Government to the federalization of university education in Nigeria, two of the existing regional universities, that is, Universities of Nigeria and Benin were voluntarily handed over to the Federal Government in April, 1975 by their respective proprietors - state governments. Later in August, the Federal Government announced the compulsory take-over of the remaining regional universities of Ife and Ahmadu Bello. It has to be noted that University of Ibadan remained a federal university since inception in 1948 and the University of Lagos that was established as a Federal Government university at the Nigeria’s capital then.

From the post-independence, national development plan’s scheduled a combined consideration of the 3rd National Development Plan and federalised university education in the country produced seven (7) additional universities; spread across all the states that were created in 1967 which were yet to have any university. It was in 1975 that Universities of Ilorin, Port Harcourt, Calabar, Jos, Maiduguri, Sokoto (now Usman Dan Fodio University) and Bayero University in Kano were established. This event of 1975 was very unique in the history of university education in Nigeria, as it marked the year of federalised university education, meaning that university education became a legislation in the coverage of Exclusive List.

However, the second republic ushered in a new Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria in 1979 which transferred university education to the Concurrent Legislative List, which encouraged the establishment of private universities.

This transfer of university education from Exclusive Legislative List to Concurrent Legislative List was a unique feature of the Second Republic that came into existence on 1st October, 1979 with a new constitution. Sections 27, 28, 29 and 30 of Part II of the Second Schedule of the 1979 Constitution brought university education and the establishment of university institutions back to the Concurrent Legislative List, empowering states to establish universities. Specifically, private organizations and individuals who wanted to establish universities, Section 36 (1 and 2) confers on them the constitutional right to establish and provide for university education. Section 36 (1 & 2) reads:

1. Every person shall be entitled to freedom of expression, including freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart ideas and information without interference.

2. Without prejudice to the generality of Sub-section (i) of this Section, every person shall be entitled to own, establish and operate any medium for the dissemination of information, ideas and opinions.

**Evolution and Fate of Private Universities in Nigeria**

As an important part of the provisions of Nigeria’s education policy document - National Policy on Education, from the second edition in 1981 to the current; government has consistently recognized education as an expensive social service which is capital intensive and requires adequate financial provision from all tiers of governments for a successful implementation of educational programmes, including the non-governmental organisations. The nation’s dwindling economic situation was recognized to have forced government to relax her stance on only Federal involvement in the provision of university education. Gabriel (2010) remarks that unfortunately, Nigerian economy was already plummeting when the second civilian regime came into office on October 1, 1979 and this condition had its toll on university education control by government. At a point, educational provision and funding went beyond only government’s responsibility. This therefore leveraged government’s recognition of complementary roles that the non-governmental bodies (private) could play.

Consequently, section 12, sub-section 106, FRN (1981) reveals that Government’s ultimate objective is to make education free at all levels, the financing of education is a joint responsibility of the federal, state and local governments. This sub-section further states that “…in this connection, government
welcomes and encourages the participation of local communities, individuals and other organizations.” This therefore made it clear and evident that educational provision, administration, funding and management are too enormous and far above what only the government could be responsible for.

Fate of Private Universities in Nigeria – Civilian Rule

Subsequently, a number of private universities were proposed and some were actually established by religious organizations and individuals. Imafidon (1982) recalls that the idea of private universities was first muted in the 1960s, but dropped; primarily due to government’s intolerance and rejection for lack of funds. What is sufficiently not in the public domain as far as private participation in the university education was the bold step taken by some private proprietors in floating private universities. In Okorosaye-Orubite (2007), Pope John Paul University established by the Catholic Church somewhere in Anambra State and Dr. Basil Nnanna Ukegbu’s established University at Imerienwe, Imo State were the provided examples of these private universities.

Attempt and Truncation of Private Involvement in the Provision of University Education in Nigeria

The 1999 official issuance of licences to the proprietors of private universities was not the beginning or first effort at the establishment of private universities in Nigeria.

History seems not to be kind to the pioneering efforts of some private proprietors and their universities before 1999, because it is hardly researched on or reported. However, this first attempt was unsuccessful.

Legal Struggle for the Survival of Private Universities in the ‘80s

It is of interest to chronicle the controversial struggle, or a tussle which involved Dr. Basil Nnanna Ukegbu who established Imo Technical University (ITU) at his Imerienwe home town, Owerri in late 1970s. The university was part of his Technical and Economic Development Mission (TEDEM) for the black world. The establishment of this University was embroiled in legal tussles with the State Governor – Sam Mbakwe who pronounced the proscription of ITU. Dr. Ukegbu was a close rival and Governorship aspirant in an election that returned Mbakwe as the then Governor of Imo State. This ban was challenged up to the Supreme Court of Nigeria in a case - Dr. Basil Ukegbu V. Attorney-General of Imo State: Suit No: SC.83/1982 (ILAW, 2016 and All N.L.R., 1792 (1983) 9 S.C 59, in the Supreme Court of Nigeria before their Lordships Justices of the Supreme Court of Nigeria - Chukwuweike Idigbe, Ayo Gabriel Irikefe, Mohammed Bello, Kayode Eso, Augustine Nnamani, Muhammadu Lawal Uwais and Atanda Fatai-Williams. The case was eventually decided in favour of the plaintiff, Dr. Ukegbu.

The victory of the proprietor of Imo Technical University (ITU), Dr. Basil Nnanna Ukegbu became a boost for other proprietors in the establishment of their various universities.

Osagie (2009) commented on this victory as motivating to the prospective private university proprietors who leveraged on this and went on to establish first ever ill-fated private universities in Nigeria; from 1979-83.

Ill-Fated Nigerian Private Universities 1979 to 1983

1. Afendomifok University, Ikot-Ekpene, in the then Cross River State (now Akwa Ibom State).
2. Afom Middle Belt University, Ibadan, Oyo State.
3. Afro-American University, Orogun, in the then Bendel State (now Delta State).
4. Akoko Christian University, Akungba, Ondo State.
5. Ekpoma University, Illeh; in the then Bendel State (now Edo State) – Distinct from the one, now known as Ambrosse Ali University.
6. Epe Graduate Teachers University, Epe, Lagos State.
7. Ezena University, Owerri, Imo State.
8. Feyon University, Ijebu-Ode, Ogun State.
9. God’s University, Anambra State (multi campuses).
10. Imo Technical University, Owerri, Imo State.
11. Institute of Open Cast Mining and Technology, in the then Bendel State (now Edo State).
12. Islamic University of Nigeria, Alabatan, Ogun State.
13. Laity School of African Thought, Nembe, in the then, Rivers State (now Bayelsa State).
14. National College of Advanced Studies, Aba; in the then Imo State (now Abia State).
15. Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Onitsha, Anambra State – Distinct from the one in Awka now.
16. Ogodagu University, Abuja.
17. Open University College, Kaduna, Kaduna State.
18. Pope John Paul University, Aba; in the then Imo State (now Abia State).
19. Technical University, Imo State (multi campuses).
20. Theological Colleges by Christian Association of Nigeria (different states).
21. Trinity University, Awo-Omamma, Oru, Imo State.
22. University Course of College, Port Harcourt, Rivers State.
24. Uzoma University, Afowa Akoko, Edo State.
25. West African University, Nkwerre, Imo State.
26. World University, Owerri, Imo State.

Fate of Private Universities in Nigeria under the Military Rule

These first set of private universities in Nigeria had prospects for viable economic contributions, compensate for the dearth of qualified manpower and facilitate Gross Domestic Products. Many of them were established as science and technology universities, some as agricultural, open, teacher producing, technical, mining and religious universities. However, these private universities were short-lived.

The Truncation

Unfortunately for these institutions, the Nigeria’s second attempt at democratic governance came to an abrupt and untimely end on 31st December, 1983, resulting from military overthrow of civilian government which ushered in the new military government under the fierce military administration of the then Major General Muhammadu Buhari and Brigadier General Tunde Idiagbon, often referred as Buhari-Idiagbon regime. In a bid to rationalize the university system, the military proscribed all the established private universities, and even barred the proposed ones from coming into existence when the Head of State signed into law the Private Universities (Abolition and Prohibition) Decree No. 19 on the 9th February, 1984 (Muo, 2007). As rendered in Okorosaye-Orubite (2007), Sections 1 and 2 of the Act read thus:

1. As from the commencement of this Act, all private universities and similar institutions in existence in any part of Nigeria are hereby abolished and no such private
university or similar institution shall henceforth be established.

2. All existing private universities and similar institutions are hereby, as from the commencement of this Act, closed down and all students’ registration and matriculation prior to the coming into effect of this Act are hereby cancelled.

As obnoxious and draconian as the Sections 1 and 3 of the Act were, for declaring the future establishment of private universities unlawful, and prescribing punishment for offenders as contained in Sections 2 and 5 which maintain that:

- As from the commencement of this Act, it shall be unlawful for any person or group of persons (whether corporate or incorporate) to establish any private University or similar institution of higher learning in any part of Nigeria.
- 5(1) Any person who contravenes any provision of this Act shall be guilty of an offence and shall be liable on conviction to imprisonment for a term not less than three years or not more than five years.
- (2) Where an offence under this section is committed by a body corporate, it shall be liable on conviction to a fine of not less than N10,000.

Legal and Policy Characteristics of Private Universities Under the Military Regime

In a straight forward and clear term, the advent of the military in December 1983 led to the proscription of the 26 listed private universities which Ogbondah (2012) corroborated to have fizzled out with Decree No. 19 Private Universities (Abolition and Prohibition) Act, 1984. It is therefore to be noted, that notwithstanding the fact that these first set of private universities in Nigeria are defunct, resulting from Decree 19 of 1984; many of them still maintain utilitarian purpose. For instance, the site of the ITU still survives till today for academic use. It houses two modern and standard secondary schools -TEDEM College and Dorothy College.

As reported in Abdulrahman (2014) that in 1985, Decree No. 19 of 1984 was amended to allow for the establishment of higher education by Governments (Federal and States), company incorporated in Nigeria, individual, or association of individuals who are citizens of Nigeria. In his own view, Anikpo (2000) remarks that it was under political pressure that the government was able to reverse itself and repeal the Private Universities Abolition and Prohibition Decree. Thus, the National Minimum Standards and Establishment of Institutions Decree No. 16, 1985, added to section 19 of the Principal Decree a new section, that is 19A, which reads thus: An institution of higher education may be sponsored or owned by the Government of the Federation or of a State or by Local Government or by any of the following, that is:

i. By a company incorporated in Nigeria; or  
ii. By an individual or association of individuals who are citizens of Nigeria, and who satisfy the criteria set out in the schedule to this Act for establishment of institutions.

In spite of the relief provided by this new and favourable amendment of 1985, no investor was still courageous to dabble into the establishment of private university; may be for the disappointing experience that was still fresh in their memory. However, continued concern and the reality for the need of additional universities to cater for the increasing number of prospective applicants which the existing ones had no carrying capacity informed why a bold step was taken by the new military regime under the leadership of General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida; to set up a Commission on the Review of Higher Education in Nigeria. This commission was set up in 1991 and headed by Chief Gray Longe and popularly called “the Longe’s Commission (Abdulrahman, 2017). The Report submitted was titled Higher Education in the Nineties and Beyond, wherein; the establishment of private higher institutions in Nigeria was clearly and categorically stressed.

In Okorosaye-Orubite (2007) was a mention of Section 10 (i) under Terms of Reference, item 13 (pg. 74); the Commission recommended that “sponsorship/proprietorship (of institutions of higher education in future) should be by the
Federal or State Government, a corporate body or any group of Nigerian citizens of high repute”. The report’s guidelines for the establishment of private institutions of higher learning sealed its position by concluding the recommendations under Terms of Reference 13 thus:

The Federal Government shall make laws/rules on the basis of these recommendations to guide the implementation of the constitutional right of private citizens and corporate bodies to establish tertiary institutions and ensure that it is used constructively and under controlled conditions and criteria. (FRN, 1991:75)

The acceptance of the recommendations of Longe’s Commission by the Federal Government led to the promulgation of the Education (National Minimum Standards and Establishment of Institutions) (Amendment) Decree No. 9 of 1993, thereby abrogating the government’s (federal and state) monopoly of university education. The new decree paved way for legally protected involvement of private organizations, groups and individuals in the establishment and ownership of universities.

Proprietorship of Private Universities

As provided in the recommendation of the Longe’s report, it has become the constitutional right of private citizens and corporate bodies to establish tertiary institutions and strengthened by the promulgation of the Education (National Minimum Standards and Establishment of Institutions) (Amendment) Decree No. 9 of 1993; proprietorship of private Universities in Nigeria includes, but not limited to Christian religious organisations such as Babcock, owned by Seventh Day Adventist; Bowen, owned by the Baptist; Redeemer’s University by Redeem Christian Church of God, Joseph Ayo Babalola (JABU) owned by Christ Apostolic Church (CAC); Crawford University which is owned by the Apostolic Faith Church Mission); among others, Individuals such as Very Rev. Father Prof Emmanuel Mathew Paul Edeh owns Madonna University; Esama of Benin Kingdom, Chief Gabriel Igbinedion owns Igbinedion University; Chief Olusegun Obasanjo owns Bells University; Chief Afe Babalola owns Afe Babalola University, Bishop David Oyedepo owns Landmark University and many others. The Muslims and Islamic organisations have also shown commitment in this regard, Al-Hikman, owned by Alhaji Abdulraheem Oladimedi Igbaja; Senator Datti Baba Ahmed owns Baze
University and Baba Ahmed University, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar owns American University of Nigeria, Crescent University is owned by Alhaji Prince Jabarudeen Bola Ajibola (former Justice of the International Court of Justice), Ahman Pategi University is owned by Alhaji Ahman Pategi.

Other private universities established by Muslim individuals include universities by Chief Kola Daisi in Ibadan, Khalifa Isiyaku Rabiu University in Kano, Khadijah University in Jigawa, and so on. There are other private universities established by the Islamic organisations / Groups, such as Fountain University, Oshogbo; established by NASFAT, Al-Qalam University (formerly International University of Katsina), Summit University Offa, by Ansarul-Deen; as well as Al-Ansar University in Borno.

Matters Arising in the establishment and Operations of Private Universities in Nigeria

At the initial time, particularly from 1999 when the private universities started receiving licences for operation, what gained prominence was the argument that the establishment of private universities would address the numerous challenges experienced in university education, particularly in the existing public universities.

These areas of need were inadequate number of public universities, given the increased population of potential or prospective candidates that those public universities could not accommodate.

Recruitment of more and better qualified academic and non-academic staff to meet the student-lecturer ratio of the National Universities Commission (NUC). Provision of adequate laboratories, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) centres and so on. Adequate hostel accommodation for students, sports complex.

Adequate accommodation for academic and non-academic staff and offices.

Objectively, it is not incontrovertible that only a few of the private universities are performing well, while very many others are struggling for survival. For example, an unprecedent step was taken by the NUC, withdrawing the licences of seven private universities for non-compliance with the statutory provisions establishing them (Fatunde, 2012). National Universities Commission realizes at some point that some universities licenced could not sail through, having provisionally given licences to operate.

Many of these universities had their licences revoked. Edeh (2015) captured an NUC revocation of the licences already issued to five private universities which fell short of the operation guidelines and procedures. Recently, the National Universities Commission has threatened a revocation of many non-performing private universities. This is the reality.

When a checklist is prepared to measure the quality performance of a large number of private universities in Nigeria, from the students’ enrollment, school fees, adequacy and specialization of staff, worth of the certificate, equipment and facilities; discipline and to many other areas of consideration, including management; the outcome would certainly fall short of expectation or meet satisfactory result. Again, academic programmes are focused on pecuniary intent – profit making.

Management courses, such as Accounting, Business Management, Banking and Finance, MBA which are money-spinning are given priority than a consideration of filling the gaps, for courses not yet popular in Nigeria, but relevant to societal advancement.

Though, only very few private universities are performing well, in some cases; even better than some public universities. It is worrisome that, the NUC still approves the establishment of more private universities. This even leaves one to doubt the stand of the regulatory body, whether for quality or quantity.
Developments in the Proliferation of Private Universities

The proliferation of universities in Nigeria is disappointing, particularly the private universities. As noted, that in recent times; both states and private universities have been established despite the evidence of perennial and endemic inadequacy of staff, facilities (infrastructure and equipment) and poor funding in existing universities (Gabriel 2003: 13).

The table below shows the frequency in the approval, licencing and the establishment of private universities by the Nigerian government since the eve of democratic era in 1999.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Universities</th>
<th>Remark</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Forerunner private universities of the Democratic era</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Highest number in the first decade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>2019</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>2021</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Covid-19 stalled the establishment in 2020. It informs why 2021 was the year that the largest number of private universities ever established</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>2022</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Just in the first quarter of the year. If this is the number for every quarter, by the end of the year, we shall have 36 private universities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Authors’ Compilation, 2022.

In view of the data from the table above, it is an indication that quantity has become the priority, even in the face of non-performance of many of the existing universities, government is still not deterred from ceaselessly proliferating universities. Report has it that more than 2000 applications are before the National Universities Commission (NUC). In first quarter of the year 2022 alone,12 private universities were established. Unfortunately, NUC is no longer proactive in her mandate to monitor and sanction the non-performing ones, rather quantity is now the top most priority and not the quality.

Production of First Class Graduates

Trailing the operations of the private universities in Nigeria is a serious outcry about the large number of first class graduates that has consistently been the feature of the Nigerian private universities at their convocations annually. Although, this outcry has been debunked and defended several times by their Vice Chancellors. For example, Prof. Olurotimi Ajayi, the Vice Chancellor of Crawford University gave his reasons to justify the milling of first class graduates in private universities adducing it to be because of lower rate of distractions and the quest for excellence by the private universities. Also, the former Vice Chancellor of Joseph Ayo Babalola University
(JABU), Prof. Sola Fajana in 2012 equally justified the 14 first class graduates of his university as what they merited. The VC further justified his claim by comparing the academic atmosphere in private universities and public ones, corroboratively claimed that distractions are not tolerated in the private universities.

If the explanations of these VCs are anything to hold on to, the outcry would not be a much talk about issue or become the concerns of the public.

Some reactions or arguments have refuted the claims of the VCs. A particular public opinion maintains that private universities produce more first class graduates is because the managements decorate and package their students with first class awards to attract more prospective students into the schools. Today, private universities are considered to be factories for the massive production of first class graduates, as these varsities at every convocation graduate over hundred students with first class degrees. NUC indicated in its 2017 report that private universities produced more first class graduates than the public universities. If the regulating agency could have a report indicting large production of first class graduates, it means something urgent needs to be done to encourage the promotion of quality that will meet international best practices. As earlier exclaimed in the foregoing, many of the private universities are doing excellently well.

From the in Pulse.ng, Wahab (2017) reports that seven private universities established in less than 20 years had produced 1,161 distinctions (first class) in a period of five years.

### Table 2. Comparison of 1st Class Graduates of Nigerian Private and Public Universities

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Universities</th>
<th>Year of Convocation</th>
<th>Total of First Class Graduates</th>
<th>Total Graduated</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Covenant University</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>1,125</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Crawford University</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. ABUAD</td>
<td>2019</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>979</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Covenant</td>
<td>0219</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>1580</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Unilag</td>
<td>2019</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>6,992</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Uniport</td>
<td>2019</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>4,771</td>
<td>2.22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. UI</td>
<td>2019</td>
<td>241</td>
<td>7,330 –</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. UDUSok</td>
<td>2019</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>10,994 -</td>
<td>1.03%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Authors’ Compilation, 2022.

![Figure 1. Comparison of 1st Class Graduates of Private and Public Universities in Percentage](image-url)
Both the values on the table and the charts representation are pointers to the fact that private universities are truly in the habit of milling first class graduates. It is evident from the table that no public university has produced beyond a single digit percentage in the number of first class graduates in relation to the total number of graduands at any year of review.

However, private universities have consistently maintained double digits number of first class graduates.

In this regard, Lawal (2021) reveals that between 2019 and 2020, private universities in Nigeria have been producing an army of first class graduates. Some examples include: Covenant University produced 206 First Class graduates, Igbinedion University recorded 350, Afe Babalola convocated 125, Lead University churned out 107, Bells University with 81, Babcock had 82, Bowen University presented 60, while Landmark University raised 59 and Benson Idahosa University with 37. It is good that attention is drawn to the infinitesimal students’ population of these institutions and even the questions of how sophisticated or the availability of equipment and facilities in many of these universities? Also, how adequate is the number of experts (lecturers) of these institutions; though, with no mention of the question on whether they have qualified personnel in their universities, as many of these institutions now have staff with Ph.Ds and a large number of those recruited on part-time from different public universities around.

It is a fact that incessant proliferation of private universities in Nigeria will not solve her problems of access and quality provision of higher education. Edema (2021) reporting former ASUU Chairman, Prof. Biodun Ogunyemi who once explained that the issues of access and quality in university education was for the government to pay due attention to the existing public universities. This is a pointer that failure of government to address an already glaring problem but embarking on the unknown will remain a clog on the wheel of tertiary education development.

Morality & Discipline

Contrary to what the general public is made to believe, portraying private universities as cool and calm; findings have shown that the level of moral decadence in some of the big names private universities is discouraging. It is no longer news that some of the students in the private universities use drugs and are addicted to them, recorded sex escapades, including rape are also in the public knowledge. These moral laxities have been the experience in the public universities, but unfortunately that indulgence is a feature in the private universities, particularly as most of them are faith-based. Some of these behaviours are believed to be the laxities from homes. Given the socio-economic status of parents of the private universities’ students, it is only the children from rich family background who could afford using drugs (Gabriel, 2006). It is sad that the authorities of private universities often times cover up for moral bankruptcy of the staff and students, to protect their business from being disparaged.

A study on sexual harassment in 3 faith-based private universities in Ogun State revealed that 41.5% of female students in University A experienced sexual harassment in the last five years; 33.2% of them claimed they had never experienced it, while 25.3% failed to indicate whether they had experienced it or not. In University B, 50.1% had experienced it, 26% had never, 25.3 undecided. In University C, 41.6% female students had experienced sexual harassment, 32% of them had never experienced it and 25.5% refused to indicate whether or not, they had been sexually harassed (Omonijo, et al, 2013). This study is a testimony that there are moral laxities in private universities, but least reported. Hardly can it be heard that any staff or students in private universities have been disciplined for wrong doing.


Quality of Private Universities’ Students

The performance of some private universities calls for concern. In the early period of establishing private universities in the country, it was observed that many of them that are licenced would not have been able to provide the quality of service expected. The scrutiny of the NUC on them ensured that they were erased from the list.

Decisive steps taken by the regulatory agency, revealed by Fatunde (2012) to include a proscription of 12 of such private universities and a denial of new students’ intakes into the affected universities for the forthcoming academic session. The low academic standards in most of the existing private universities in the country has been decried. To many academics in the same profession, particularly those in the public universities, the development has become a source of serious concern. The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), Chairman, University of Jos Branch, (Dr. Lazarus Maigoro) decried the alarming rate of poor quality graduates which private universities churn out annually (NAN, 2021).

According to Maigoro, most, private universities push out people with empty brains as graduates, these graduates hardly contribute meaningfully to the growth and development of the society. The consequence of which the manpower production of the country will be questionable in terms of quality skills and expected output. In Essence, having private universities was to reduce the pressure on the public universities, but still a mirage. The statement tallies with the remark of the former President of ASUU that before licencing additional 20 universities in the year 2021, the existing 79 private universities had not made any significant impact to reduce the pressure on public universities in terms of admission.

Maigoro further decries the exorbitant school fees charged by private universities in Nigeria. This is not a far-fetched reason for the poor enrollment in the private universities.

Below is a table showing fees charged by some of these private universities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Universities</th>
<th>School Fees in N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Achievers University</td>
<td>555,000 - 850,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afe Babalola University</td>
<td>700,000 – 1,800,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ajayi Crowther University</td>
<td>500,000 – 600,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al-Hikmah University</td>
<td>Up to 500,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American University</td>
<td>1,590,000.00 – 3,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Babcock University</td>
<td>500,000 – 3,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benson Idahosa University</td>
<td>500,000+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caleb University</td>
<td>500,000+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caritas University</td>
<td>250,000 – 500,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Covenant University</td>
<td>Up to 500,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crawford University</td>
<td>480,000 – 600,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crescent University</td>
<td>Up to 500,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fountain University</td>
<td>Up to 400,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ighemedion University</td>
<td>540,000 – 3,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph Ayo Babalola University</td>
<td>500,000+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lead City University</td>
<td>Up to 600,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McPherson University</td>
<td>Up to 500,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Novena University</td>
<td>400,000+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obong University</td>
<td>Up to 200,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Odudua University</td>
<td>160,000 – 200,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul University</td>
<td>Up to 300,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redeemer’s University</td>
<td>600,000 – 850,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhema University</td>
<td>350,000+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Note that these fees in some universities are inclusive of accommodation and feeding. From personal observations, one can hypothetically conclude that the higher the school fees, the higher the quality. However, some of these high fees paying private universities have not been ranked high in the provision of university education. Covenant University has consistently justified her own school fees, as it has always featured on the university ranking a number of times and mostly among the first 5 in Nigeria. This confirms that higher school fees may not add up quality output, particularly that public universities have low school fees (tuition), yet the best brains are produced. In the manpower production for the economy, products of the private universities are mostly looking up to jobs from multinationals, because they have parents that can achieve that for them. Some opt for foreign jobs in the free visa advertised countries and those in the public service at home have not proven to be extremely better in performance. There are high expectations from the graduates of private universities, because their graduate paid so much through their training; but the stories leave one with much to desire.

Universities’ Rankings

As maintained above, many of high school fee paying private universities are expected to be outstanding in their performance as universities, but very disappointing that the reverse is the case. It is not expected that public universities would be beating the private ones in the local and international rankings. Considering huge fees charged, as reflected in table 3 above; particularly that out of top 100 universities in Nigeria, only 24 made the list, with covenant making the lead and at the 2nd position on the list of the 2022 webometric ranking.

Going by the UniRank (2022), from the first 100 of the 160 Nigeria universities captured to have met the UniRank selection criteria, only 32 out of a total of 111 private universities made the list. Ordinarily, one would have expected that private universities, particularly those with big names and in the category of the first and second sets were going to dominate the ranking. Unfortunately, many of them could not even make the first best 50 universities in Nigeria. As already maintained, Covenant University has remained a private university to beat in the country, even among the public universities.

The current UniRank’s rating of private universities puts Covenant 5th position. Others are Landmark in 7th position, Babcock 10th, Afe Babalola 15th, American University of Nigeria 21st, Skyline University 23rd, Pan Atlantic and Nile Universities are on the 31st and 32nd respectively, Redeemer’s University 37. Bowen 40th, Veritas, Caleb & Al-Hikmah 45th, 46th & 47th, Baze, Lead & Adeleke Universities are placed 55th, 56th & 57th, Igbinedion 60th, Godfrey Okoye 61st, Benson Idahosa 70th, Ajayi Crowther, Bells and Bingham 72nd and 73rd, Madonna 80th, Joseph Ayo Babalola 83rd, Anchor, Achievers & Edwin Clark 86th, 87th & 88th, Crawford 90th, Chrisland 96th, Crescent 97th, Caritas 98.

Out of all the private universities in Nigeria, and a combination of state and federal universities, the ranking has consistently been in favour of public universities at the top. The truth about this is not far-fetched. Going by the measuring indices, most private universities are not even near recognition – staff-student ratio, staff mix, curriculum etc. Although, the sophistication and aesthetic value of many of them from the entrance are not commensurate with the inside, characterized with inadequate staff, skewed courses and programmes that only focus, mostly on management courses with high potentials of raking in money for the school, the extremely compressed or modified curriculum is being used in many of these private universities. As it is outcry in public universities due to inadequate funding and the believe that the private would
fill the vacuum, sadly, equipment and facilities in many of the private universities have been found to be clearly deficient or not meeting the contemporary requirements, even the population of students is somehow low because of high school fees. In the statistics of NUC, it showed that all the private universities had only about 5% of students’ population in Nigerian universities (Edema, 2021).

Conclusion

The emergence of private universities, it was believed would bring the needed change and reduce the vacuum left with only public universities in operation. Emergence of private universities were celebrated as a welcome development, with the full hope that all the challenges confronted by the existing public universities would change. Unfortunately, many of the private universities have left the country with even much to be desired. Private universities have the potentials to complement or even surpass how the public universities have been performing, but it is very clear that profit making or return on investment is the priority of many proprietors and the government is not helping matters, when quantity is celebrated at the expense of the quality. Consequently, we are faced with more problems. In the words of Amuda-Kannike (2018), any higher educational institution which its educational mandate falls short of standing on the four pillars of (1) international outlook of staff and students (2) quality of research. (3) quality of teaching and (4) Global graduate employability, should be called failed higher education and whoever is involved in such are all part of the failures.

References


