



Analysis of the Emergence and Development of Private Universities in Nigeria* (1999–2006)

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Abstract

One of the devastating consequences of the prolonged period of military dictatorship in Nigeria is the non-development of a private higher education system. However, with the emergence of democratic rule in 1999 and the liberalization of higher education, there has been a surge in the provision of private higher education. From a modest number of three pioneer private universities in 1999, there were 23 licensed private universities as at June 2005. This article provides an assessment of the development of these universities using the older ones as the basis of empirical analysis. Also, based on the available evidence, the article concludes that private universities are currently setting the pace, and serving as a source of positive challenge to the public universities, thereby providing the much-needed healthy competitive environment for the future growth and diversification of the entire higher education system in Nigeria.

Résumé

Une des conséquences dévastatrices de la longue période de dictature militaire au Nigeria est la non mise en place d'un système d'enseignement supérieur privé. Cependant, avec l'émergence d'un régime démocratique en 1999 et la libéralisation de l'enseignement supérieur, il y a eu un essor dans l'offre d'enseignement supérieur privé. À partir d'un nombre modeste de trois universités pionnières en 1999, il y a eu 23 universités privées agréées en juin 2005. Cet article donne une évaluation de l'évolution de ces universités en utilisant les plus anciennes comme base d'une analyse empirique. Aussi, sur la base des preuves disponibles, l'article

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conclut que les universités privées sont en train de donner le ton et de servir comme une source de défi positif pour les universités publiques, offrant ainsi un environnement compétitif sain qui est nécessaire pour la croissance future et la diversification de tout le système d'enseignement supérieur au Nigeria.

Introduction

In 1998, private higher education was rightly predicted to be 'emerging as one of the most dynamic segments of post-secondary education at the turn of the 21st century' (Altbach 1998). Also not too long after that, Altbach (2000) again aptly described it as the fastest growing segment of the entire higher education system. This prediction can be true of many settings, including Nigeria.

Nigeria, no doubt, 'has one of the oldest, biggest and most comprehensive higher education systems in Africa' (CODESRIA 2005). Yet, the reality is that its private higher education system is still at an infant stage when compared with some other African countries that have had longer periods of democratic rule. Again, according to CODESRIA (2005), Nigeria's higher education system has 'undergone a considerable amount of growth and diversification over the years since the first post-secondary "modern" centres of learning were established in the country early in the 20th century'. However, surprisingly, the history of Nigeria's higher education system is simply that of underdevelopment rather than that of 'considerable amount of growth and diversification', given its size, population and material resources as well as its highly enormous, skilled and versatile human capital. This underdevelopment, which is rooted in the long period of military dictatorship (1966–1979 & 1984–1999), is glaringly manifested in the non-establishment of private universities under military rule. It is against this background that this article examines the emergence and rapid growth of private university education system in Nigeria since 1999 when military dictatorship gave way to the present civilian democratic government.

The article begins with a historical analysis of Nigeria's earlier attempts at establishing private universities under President Shehu Shagari's democratic administration (1979–1983) and the reasons that led to the abolition of these already established private universities in the subsequent period of military regime of General Muhammadu Buhari (1983–1985). Thereafter, the article traces the foundation laid by President Ibrahim Babangida's military regime (1985–1993) that eventually led much later to the re-emergence and growth of private universities under the democratic government of President Olusegun Obasanjo. In complementing earlier studies (Oladapo 1988; Barrow 1996; Nwamuo 2000; and Thaver 2004), the article assesses the state of these private universities (mainly the older ones) using some selected indicators.

The purposes of making this assessment are two-pronged. The first is to capture the dynamics of this private surge amid public dominance in Nigeria's higher education system. This would enable readers compare developments in the private provision of higher education in Nigeria, with global trends in the last few years. Secondly, the analysis is aimed at establishing if private universities are actually adding values towards the robust growth and diversification of Nigeria's higher education system.

For purpose of clarification, it is important to provide a brief background on Nigeria's system of government and ownership structure of universities. Nigeria runs a federal system of government made up of three tiers of government namely at the federal, state, and local government levels. Presently, among these three tiers, only the federal and state governments own universities. There are therefore two types of public universities in Nigeria. The first category is made up of those owned by the federal government while the second is composed of those owned by the state governments. Since the mid-seventies, the federal government has been operating a tuition-free policy in its own universities (and also in its federal polytechnics and Colleges of Education). But in the State government-owned universities, tuition fees are charged. Part of the reason for this discriminatory practice is rooted in the inequitable inter-governmental fiscal relations, which largely favours the federal government at the expense of 36 state governments. This is one of the legacies of the long period of military dictatorship. Nigeria's higher education system runs an academic session made up of two semesters and under normal circumstances this runs from October to June. For institutions that charge fees, the word 'per session' or annually is usually used to describe this period covered by the payment.

Global Trends in the Private Provision of Higher Education

The Driving Forces of Private Surge

Studies across regions of the world indicate that there are both internal and external driving forces of the private surge in higher education (see for instance, Altbach 2000; Levy 2002a 2002b & 2003; Thaver 2004; Mabizela 2002; 2004; Otieno 2004; Teferra 2005; Obasi 2005g). These studies and many others (see particularly many country case studies in *International Higher Education* published by the Center for International Higher Education, Boston College) reveal a wide range of experiences, which nevertheless revolve around the combination of internal and external driving forces of the private surge in higher education. The internal driving forces include the inability of public universities to cope with increasing demands for admission; inability of the governments to fund expansion; the concomitant falling standards in public univer-

sities; frequent closures and unstable academic calendar due to staff and students' unrest among many others. The external driving forces are rooted in the prevailing neo-liberal economic policies, globalization, and the information and communication technology (ICT) revolution, all of which have affected higher education worldwide.

Dominant Themes in Studies of Private Higher Education

A survey of literature reveals that studies on private higher education have been pre-occupied mainly with, but not limited to, the following issues: character of ownership, institutional types, contexts within which private institutions emerge, operating milieu, size and factors influencing rapid expansion, financing and level of tuition fees, type of programmes and their quality, autonomy and control, level of enrolment and the quality of enrolled students, nature of staffing and its quality, infrastructural facilities, governance structures, nature and level of involvement by the state, and the sustainability questions (Barrow 1996; Useem 1999; Altbach 2002, 2000, & 1998; Levy 2002a & 2003; Thaver 2004; Mabizela 2004). These issues have continued to remain the major focus of research on private provision of higher education and this article is using some of these themes as framework for assessing the development that has taken place in Nigeria's private universities.

The Historical Context of the Emergence of Private Universities in Nigeria

The Earlier Background (1979–1999)

The first successful attempt to establish private universities in Nigeria was during the period of the second democratic experiment (1979–1983) when twenty-six private universities came into being following the ruling by the Supreme Court of Nigeria that the establishment of private universities was constitutional (see Barrow 1996; Aliyu 1984, cited in Thaver 2004).

However, these private universities were poorly planned with neither good infrastructure facilities conducive for learning, nor serious-minded academics in their foundation list. Some of the institutions were widely seen as glorified secondary high schools thereby bringing to the fore the issue of quality and academic standards. This situation could be likened to what happened in India in 2002 following the proliferation of private universities in the State of Chhattisgarh. Under the State of Chhattisgarh Private Sector Universities (Establishment and Regulation) Act of 2002, a legion of private universities (108 in number) emerged over-night (Neelakantan 2005; Obasi 2005d). The establishment and operation of these poorly planned and equipped institutions de-

scribed by Neelakantan (2005), as ‘storefront universities offering dubious courses of study’ was challenged in court by an aggrieved Indian professor. And disposing the case in February 2005, the Supreme Court of India declared the provisions of the Chhattisgarh’s law to be *ultra vires* of the Constitution (Neelakantan 2005). Consequently, the new private universities were ordered to close down. In the Nigerian case however, a military government that came into existence in December 2003 (under General Muhammadu Buhari as head of state) ordered the closure of all the established private universities under a decree it promulgated.

However, following another successful military coup in 1985, the new leader General Ibrahim Babangida gradually began to reverse some of the policies of his predecessor. One issue re-visited was the ban on private universities. But one factor that brought the issue on the agenda of public discourse in 1991 was the Convocation Speech given by the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Agriculture (Federal), Makurdi, who advocated for the establishment of private universities. And thereafter the government decided to lift the ban on private universities (news report by Abubakar 2005).

This was the policy climate that led to the setting up of the *Commission on the Review of Higher Education in Nigeria* of 1991 (widely known as The Longe Commission and accordingly Longe Report, and hereafter referred to as such). One of the fifteen-item terms of reference of the Commission was to ‘propose eligibility criteria for the establishment of future universities in Nigeria’ (see Longe Report, 1991 pp15-16). The Commission’s recommendations became later the foundation upon which today’s guidelines on the establishment of private universities were based.

Guided by its belief, that ‘indiscriminate proliferation of tertiary institutions should not be permitted’ (a view that derived from the lesson of history) the Longe Commission identified stringent conditions and measures under which new higher education institutions could be established. Using some criteria such as fund resources, educational standards, clear mission and geographical distribution of related institutions, the Commission identified fourteen eligibility criteria (see Appendix) for the establishment of private universities.

Developments Since 1999

The inauguration of the democratic system of government under President Olusegun Obasanjo in 1999 could be described as the turning point in the chequered history of private provision of higher education in Nigeria. With the new government, the National Universities Commission (NUC) – a federal government regulatory agency for all the universities (federal, state and private) – was empowered to receive applications, inspect and verify the facilities of

serious applicants of private universities across the country. Consequently, it processed all submitted applications and made recommendations to the federal government. Based on this, the government approved the first three licensed private universities in Nigeria in 1999 and subsequently in 2001, 2002, 2003, and 2005. Table 1 presents the evolution of these universities from 1999 to 2005 (see Obasi 2005c; Oyekanmi 2005 for an elaborate account).

Table 1: Evolution and Growth of Private Universities in Nigeria (1999–2005)

S/N	Name of University	Founder/Proprietor*	Date Established
1.	Igbinedion University, Okada, Edo State	Chief Gabriel Igbinedion	1999 (May)
2.	Babcock University, Ilishan Remo, Ogun State	Seventh-Day Adventist Church	1999 (May)
3.	Madonna University, Okija, Anambra State	Very Rev. Prof. Emmanuel Ede's Catholic Religious Holy Ghost Ministry Baptist Convention	1999 (May)
4.	Bowen University, Iwo, Oyo State	Baptist Convention	2001 (July)
5.	Covenant University, Ota, Ogun State	Bishop David Oyedepo (World Mission Agency (Arm of Living Faith Church Worldwide Inc, - aka Winners Chapel)	2002 (February)
6.	Pan African University, Lagos, Lagos State	Lagos Business School	2002 (February)
7.	Benson Idahosa University, Benin City, Edo State	Bishop Benson Idahosa (Church Mission International)	2002 (February)
8.	ABTI-American University, Yola, Adamawa State	H.E. Alhaji Abubakar Atiku (Nigeria's current Vice-President)	2003 (May)
9.	Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, Kwara State	Abdur-Rahim Oladimeji Islamic Foundation	2005 (January)
10.	Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo, Oyo State	The Church of Nigeria, Anglican Communion	2005 (January)
11.	Bingham University, New Karu, Nassarawa State	Evangelical Church of West Africa (ECWA)	2005 (January)
12.	Caritas University, Amorji-Nike, Enugu, Enugu State	The Sisters of Jesus the Saviour (Linked also with the Founder of Madonna University, Okija Very Rev. Emmanuel Ede	2005 (January)

Table 1: (Continued)

S/N	Name of University	Founder/Proprietor*	Date Established
13.	Cetep City University, Lagos, Lagos State	Board of Trustees with Chief Joseph Omoyajowo as Chairman	2005 (January)
14.	Katsina University, Katsina State	Katsina Islamic Foundation	2005 (January)
15.	Redeemer's University, Ede, Oyo State	Redeemed Christian Church of God	2005 (January)
16.	Bells University of Technology, Badagry, Lagos State	H.E. Chief Olusegun Obasanjo (Nigeria's current President), **	2005 (June)
17.	Crawford University, Igbesa, Ogun State	The Apostolic Faith Mission	2005 (June)
18.	Crescent University, Abeokuta, Ogun State	Prince Bola Ajibola (President & Founder of the Islamic Movement for Africa - Crescent University is an offshoot of its Research Centre). Described as 'First Muslim University' in the Southern part of Nigeria.	2005 (June)
19.	University of Mkar, Mkar, Benue State	N.K.S.T Mission ('Nongu U Sudan hen Tiv' ie. Church of Christ in Sudan among the Tiv People in Benue State)	2005 (June)
20.	Novena University, Ogume, Delta State	A Businessman (Mr. Chuks Ochonogor as Pro-Chancellor)	2005 (June)
21.	Renaissance University, Enugu, Enugu State	Governor (Dr.) Chimaroke Nnamani of Enugu State via Mia Mater Elizabeth Foundation but his spokesperson 'denies' that he owns the university.	2005 (June)
22.	Wukari Jubilee University, Taraba State	Jointly owned by JBC Seminary Inc. (Missionary Organization) & Taraba Community Project.	2005 (June)
23.	Lead City University, Ibadan, Oyo State	Eduserve Consult, Ibadan/ Prof. Jide Owwoye***	2005 (June)

Sources: Obasi (2005c); Oyekanmi (2005).

Notes

- * This describes the individuals or organizations behind the universities, which may not necessarily coincide with the official name used for registration and licensing purposes. The NUC disclosed the names of Nos 1-15 during their licensing ceremonies but never did that (at least to this author's best knowledge) for Nos 16-23, which incidentally has President Obasanjo, and one state governor as founders.
- ** That President Obasanjo is the Founder/Owner of Bells University is a public knowledge (see Lohor 2005; Ojedokun 2005). Bell is a trade name for President Obasanjo's educational institutions (see Ogwuche & Ashamu 2005 *Saturday Champion*, September 3, 2005)
- ***This is the only university owned by academic(s), which is novel in a country long overshadowed by corrupt military and political class.

Table 1 shows that majority of the universities are owned by religious organizations. The table reveals that out of 23 private universities licensed so far, 15 (65 percent) are directly owned by Christian (13) and Islamic (3) religious organizations. This reflects global trend whereas Altbach (1998; 2000) and Otieno (*in this journal issue*) rightly pointed out, religious organizations have been in the forefront of the establishment of private universities. The Nigerian case can partly be attributed to widespread public disenchantment over the high level of moral decay, indiscipline and secret cult activities prevailing in public universities, and among other things, their unstable academic calendar arising from frequent unrest by both staff and students. These universities therefore came to fill this void. For example, in a six African country case study, Thaver (2004) found that private universities were performing differentiated function through the promotion of particular religions within higher education.

Dominance of Public Universities and the Reality of their Failure

Although public universities have dominated the higher education landscape in Nigeria for several decades, their failure to cope with admission pressure became more critical with the introduction of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in the later part of the 1980s. For example, in 1990, about 250,000 candidates applied for admission, and less than 50,000 (about 20 percent) were admitted. In 1992, close to 300,000 applied for admission and about 50,000 (17 percent) got admission. In 1994, out of the 400,000 that applied, less than 50,000 (13 percent) were admitted (Jibril 2000; Obasi & Eboh 2004). This has been the trend over the years as also shown in table 2.

Table 2 shows that on the average, the access rate was as low as 13.7 percent. The admission crisis became more critical after 2001. For example, by 2002, the access rate had fallen to less than 13 percent (Okebukola 2002). Based on this fact, the expansion of access through the establishment of private univer-

sities became one of the most reasonable policy options (Obasi 2004a; 2005a-c).

Table 2: Trends in University Admissions (1995–2000)

Year	No. of Applications Received	No. of Admissions Given	% of those Admitted
1995/96	508,280	32,473	6.4
1996	376,645	56,055	14.9
1997	419,807	73,781	17.6
1998	321,368	78,550	24.4
1999	593,670	64,358	10.8
2000	467,490	50,277	10.8
2000/2001	550,399	60,718	11.0
Average			13.7%

Sources: JAMB, *Annual Report*, various years; as cited in Yaqub 2002; Obasi 2002; Okebukola 2002).

All these show that Nigeria's participation rate in higher education is very low given its human and material resources. For instance, as at 1995 when the world average was 1,434 per 100,000 inhabitants, Nigeria had only 395 and later 667 in 1996. Yet South Africa had 1,524 in 1995 and the average for developing countries was 824 (Jibril 2000; Obasi 2002).

It is within this context that the emergence and rapid expansion of private universities in Nigeria can be appreciated. The Nigeria experience reflects global trends (Altbach 1998 & 2000; Mabizela 2004; Otieno 2004; Thaver 2004; Teferra 2005). But again, this domestic context does not exist in isolation of the wider external driving forces of neo-liberal economic change (Levy 2002a; Otieno in this issue), and globalization and logic of today's market economies (Altbach 2000 & 2004) in a knowledge society.

Assessing the State of Private Provision of Higher Education

Overview of the Relative Size of Nigeria's Public and Private University Sectors

The number of federal government-owned universities remained stagnant at 25 from 1992 to 2002. But in 2003, the National Open University was established

bringing the total number of federal government-owned universities to 26. In contrast, the number of state government-owned universities grew rapidly from its pre-1999 number of 13 to its present figure of 26. But the stagnancy experienced at the federal level or the expansion at state level, had nothing to do with either constitutional restriction or freedom. Both were free to run and establish universities. However, over the years, the federal government was unwilling to establish new universities against the background of its gross under-funding of the existing ones. In the case of state governments, there was healthy political competition among them to establish their own universities as a way of satisfying the yearning needs of their citizens who could not be admitted in the highly competitive and tuition-free federal government-owned universities. It can therefore be said that the size of Nigeria's public higher education sector (like its private sector counterpart) witnessed appreciable growth since the demise of military rule in 1999. Table 3 presents a summary of the size and ownership structure of universities in Nigeria.

Table 3: Overview of the Relative Size of Nigeria's Public and Private University Sectors

Structure of Ownership	Number of Universities	% of Total
Federal Government	26*	34.66
State Governments	26	34.66
Private (individual & corporate bodies)	23	30.68
Total	75**	100%

* This number includes the National Defence Academy, Kaduna, and the National Open University.

**There are also 17 Colleges of Education that award degrees but these are excluded here because they are not regarded as universities but are affiliated to the universities for purposes of quality assurance.

The table shows that presently, there is relative balance in the number of universities owned by the federal, state and private entities. However, in terms of public-private sector divide, the size of the public sector predominates as it controls 69 percent while the private sector controls 31 percent. But the Standing Committee on Private Universities (SCOPU) of the NUC is still processing a large number of already received applications (Taiwo & Adoba 2004) said to be about 146 in number. This makes the prospects of more private universities in the near future a possibility. It is possible that with time, its size may dominate as already

happening in some other countries like Japan (Altbach 2000; 2002; Obasi 2005f); Philippines, South Korea and Indonesia (Altbach 2000, 2002).

Student Enrolment Profile in Private Universities

Available statistics show that enrolment in the private universities is modest but there is significant potential for growth based on statistics from older private universities. Madonna University graduated 390 students during its convocation ceremony in 2004 (Ukeh 2004) and as at 2005, it had 7000 undergraduate students, of whom 5000 were full time and 2000 part time (Madonna University 2005). The Covenant University started with a first batch of 1500 undergraduate students and matriculated 1681 students in its third matriculation ceremony for the 2004/2005 session (Covenant University, 2005a). The Benson Idahosa University registered 989 full time undergraduate students and 131 part time students (Benson Idahosa University, 2005). Also the Igbinedion University had 1027 students in the 2001-2002, while Bowen University had 650 in the same session (Okebukola 2002). The present enrolment profile which shows significant potential does not differ from that of other African countries (Thaver 2004). In Kenya for instance, the private share of total enrolment is currently 12.1 percent (Otieno's, *in this journal issue*).

Table 4: Total Students Enrolments in Nigerian Private Universities (May, 2007)

University	Full-Time	Part-Time (FT)	Total (PT)
Abti-American University, Yola	497		497
Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo	805	17	822
Al-Hikma University, Ilorin	167		167
Babcock University, Ilesha-Remo, Ogun State	4,046		4,046
Bells University of Technology, Ota	176		176
Benson Idahosa University, Benin City	2,212		2,212
Bingham University, New Karu	269		269
Bowen University, Iwo	3,901		3,901
Caritas University, Amorji-Nike, Enugu	1,625		1,625
Covenant University, Ota	6,617	190	6,807
Crawford University, Igbesa	311		311
Crescent University, Abeokuta	66		66

Table 4: Total Students Enrolments in Nigerian Private Universities (Contd.)

University	Full-Time	Part-Time (FT)	Total (PT)
Igbinedion University, Okada	5,235		5,235
Joseph Ayo Babalola University, Ikeji-Arakeji	246		246
Katsina University, Katsina	312		312
Lead City University, Ibadan	1,572		1,572
Madonna University, Okija	7,561		7,561
Novena University, Ogume, Delta State.	236		236
Pan-African University, Lagos.	77	130	207
Redeemer's University, Ogun State.	625		625
Renaissance University, Agbani, Enugu*	-	-	-
University of Mkar, Mkar.	566		566
Wukari Jubilee University, Wukari	117		117
Total Enrollment (both UG & PG)			
in Private Universities			37,636
Total Enrollment in All 76 Universities with Students			
as at May 2007 (Both UG & PG)			1,108,199
**Percentage of Private to Public Universities (both UG & PG)			3.4%

Source of primary data: NUC, Abuja, May 2007.

Notes

* With no students as at May 2007 but to start admitting students with effect from 2007/2008 session & with a proposed figure of about 250 students. (Source: *The Guardian*, September 7, 2007). Note also that 9 other private universities already licensed are yet to admit students, hence not included in this table.

** But % of Total UG Enrolment (ie 34,675) in Private Universities to UG Enrolment (ie 691,224) in Public Universities (excluding PG and diploma-related courses) is 4.8 percent showing higher enrolment figures at UG level. (Source: Extracted from NUC Primary Data, 2007).

In the United States, for example, (even with its long established tradition of private universities), only 20 percent enrolments are in such private institutions (Altbach 2002). The current admission trend in Nigerian private universities indicates the existence of significant potentials for higher education enrolments in the future perhaps as found in some other countries in Asia where enrolments

are in the range of 76 percent to 80 percent (Chiba 2000; Altbach 2002; Obasi 2005f) or in Chile (Latin America) which has 71 percent enrolment (Bernasconi 2002).

Major Programme Focus of Private Universities in Nigeria

Adapting Thaver's (2004) criteria for determining institutional types of private universities, this author presents in table 5 the status, identity and the major programme focus of eight older private universities.

The diverse nature of the programmes offered by the older private universities suggest that they are conforming to the expectation of providing 'differentiated education' (Geiger 1986; James 1991 as cited in Thaver, 2004) and adding value to existing public higher education system. This differentiated function has to do with the entrepreneurial contents and moral undertone of the programmes. For example, the Covenant University has what it calls *Unique Programmes*, which include Total Man Concept (TMC), Entrepreneurial Development Studies (EDS), Faculty Support Programme (FSP) and the Centre for Wealth Creation (CWC). The FSP for instance 'performs its role as *in-loco-parentis* to students and assist them spiritually, academically, emotionally, socially and physically during their period in the university' (Covenant University, 2005d). But more importantly, they have not fallen into the temptation of running only programmes which Mabizela (2004) describes as 'inexpensive fields of study that are in high demand' and in which 'natural and physical sciences, engineering, and technology remain largely peripheral', a trend found in Latin America, Eastern Europe and some Asian countries. In other words, these universities are actually confronting the challenges of 'offering diverse disciplines' which Mabizela (2004) fears private universities in Africa may be faced with as experiences elsewhere reveal.

Fee Structure: The Blurring Line of Distinction between For-Profit and Not-for-Profit Organizations

The issue of whether private universities in Nigeria are in reality, non-profit organizations or not, is an interesting as well as a difficult question. The crucial issue is not just a matter of what their registration status is in terms of for-profit or not-for-profit organization. Although, the distinction is helpful in issues such as tax exemption, tax relief and other privileges (Altbach 1998) but to the average fee paying student or his/her parent in Nigeria, the distinction exists mainly on paper because it does not really make them to pay less across the divide. The universities owned by religious organizations are all in the category of not-for-profit entities but except in some cases their fee structure lies close to the range that other for-profit organizations are charging.

Table 5: The Status, Identity and Major Programme Focus of Private Universities

University	Status	Identity	Major Programme Focus
Igbinedion University, Okada*	For-profit	Secular	Emphasis on Business/ Entrepreneurial, & Pure/ Applied Sciences
Babcock University, Ilishan Remo	Not-for-profit	Religious	Diverse Focus but more on professionalism in Science & Tech, Mgt Social Sciences & Educ./ humanities
Madonna University, Okija	Not-for-profit	Religious	More emphasis on professionalism in Medical, Legal and Management/ Social science fields
Bowen University, Iwo	Not-for-profit	Religious	Diverse Focus but not too sure of prime focus
Covenant University, Ota	Not-for-profit	Religious	Focus on Entrepreneurial in Science/Tech, Human development/Business/ Social Sciences /Arts
Pan African University, Lagos **	For-profit	Secular & Religious	Emphasis on Business/ Entrepreneurial education
Benson Idahosa University, Benin City	Not-for-profit	Religious	Diverse Focus but emphasis on Basic/Applied Sciences, Social Science/ Management, Arts and Education, & Law
Abti-American University of Nigeria	For-profit	Secular	Focus on Business & Entrepreneurship/ ICT/Arts& Science

Sources: Websites of the some of the different institutions (see References).

Notes

* The proprietor says it was not established, as a profit making organization but the university is generally seen as a high profile businesslike institution.

** It originated from the Lagos Business School known for its 'businesslike' orientation.

The gap between form and reality can be illustrated with the case of Igbinedion University. For instance, in this university's website, its proprietor clearly states that the university was not established as a profit making organization (Igbinedion University 2005), yet the fee structure negates this claim. For example, the lat-

est (2005/2006) fee structure of this university as released by the NUC shows that its range of fees from N311,000 to N427,000 (US\$2,392–3,285) is far above many others. Again, the contradiction in the proprietor's statement comes out clearly from Thaver's (2004) observation that this university reflects a 'pattern of educational entrepreneurship' in which 'private higher education is perceived as a marketable commodity that can be traded'.

Available statistics in table 6 on the tuition fee structure of many older private universities reveal that the range is between N100,000–N427,000 (One-hundred thousand Naira to Four-hundred and twenty-seven thousand Naira ie US\$769–\$3,285) per session (made up of two semesters). However, the fees charged by the ABTI-American University, is completely outside this range (see the website of ABTI-American University of Nigeria, 2006). Some universities include meals and textbooks in the fees while in some others these are excluded. The fees charged differ across universities and across disciplines in the same universities.

Table 6: Range of Student Fees in Selected Older Private Universities (2005–2006)

University	Nigerian Currency (Naira) (N)	US Dollar (US\$) @ N130 per \$1
Benson Idahosa University	100,000–170,000	769–1,308
Covenant University	228,000–258,000	1,754 –1,985
Babcock University	337,570–357,730*	2,597–2,752
Madonna University	200,000**	1,538
Igbinedion University	311,000–427,000	2,393–3,285
ABTI-American University	Highly differentiated fees (see dollar column)	a) Tuition: 6,600 (including laptop, internet access within campus) b) Meals: 1,900; c) Lodging: 500–1,900 depending on number in a room; d) Books: 1,900; e) Technology Fee: 150

Sources:

(a) (NUC Accreditation Report, 2006 (see news report by Oyekanmi, 2006); Different websites of some of the universities (listed under References). Some fees listed in the websites have been revised in 2006; (e.g. Covenant University, 2005b).

Notes

* Reflecting Science only, which was available to this author.

** For medical students only which was available to this author.

A comparison of this fee structure with what obtains in some African countries reveals that it appears to be on the high side. For example, in Kenya some private universities charged US\$1,268 while in Zimbabwe one university charged US\$55 as at 1999 (Thaver 2004).

Assessing the Level of Tuition Fees within the Prevailing Financial Environment

Defending its level of fees, the founder of the Covenant University, argued that an NUC statistics shows that the Federal Government spends about N300,000.00 (US\$2,308) per session as subsidy on training an undergraduate in its universities (Covenant University 2005c). For example, in 2001, the total average unit cost student in science-based disciplines was N239,408 (US\$1,842) and N186,505 (US\$1,435) for the Arts-based disciplines (Okebukola 2002). The institution's pioneer Vice-chancellor, who also defended the fee explained that if they had followed the recommendation of the NUC on fees, then they would have charged over N290,000 (US\$2,231). He cited cases of secondary schools in Lagos that charge more than that amount (Covenant University 2005c). The Executive Secretary of the NUC also confirmed that the fees charged by private universities (as at 2005), was not too exorbitant if judged against the unit cost of university education in the country (news report by Dambatta 2005). Also when the fees are compared with what the high profile (yet highly patronized private secondary schools) charge in Nigeria, the fees may be properly put in context. For example, the Loyola Jesuit Secondary School in Abuja charges above N300,000.00 (US\$2,308) per session. Another Catholic Secondary School in Abuja (The Christ the King College, Gwagwalada), charges above N150,000 (US\$1,154) per session. But it is being argued that the prevailing level of fees in the private universities can be reduced if the federal government offers some financial assistance to private universities, as it is the case in Japan. And according to Obasi (2005a), this can be achieved through the Education Trust Fund (ETF) that manages the 2 percent education tax.

State of Existing Facilities and Programme Quality

It appears that the enforcement of the criteria for granting of licenses to private universities has had positive impact on the quality of facilities for teaching and learning in the institutions. Some of the universities for example have state-of-the-art facilities that are the envy of students in public universities where there are dilapidated infrastructural facilities. The NUC accreditation report of 2006 made elaborate positive comments on the state of infrastructural facilities in many of the older private universities (see news report by Oyekanmi, 2006). In all the private universities evaluated, the report expressed satisfaction over the

standard of laboratories and quantum of equipment acquired as well as the availability and well furnished classrooms, workshops, studios and ICT facilities. The report revealed that three quarter of the programmes taught at the Covenant University for example, were provided with well-equipped computer laboratories. It however expressed dissatisfaction over few other facilities in some universities. For instance, (a) it noted that staff offices were inadequate in Igbinedion University; and (b) quality of the buildings and fittings at the two campuses of Madonna University, needs to be upgraded.

With respect to the maintenance of academic standards in the private universities, the most objective and reliable available evidence on the ground are the results of the accreditation exercises carried out by the NUC. It is necessary to place this discussion within a global national overview of the accreditation exercise. The results of two accreditation exercises released in 2005 and in early 2006 would be used for discussion. The 2005 revealed that out of the 1,415 academic programmes offered by universities in the country, only 13.8 per cent were fully accredited, with about 81.2 per cent of them having interim accreditation status (news report by Chiahemen, 2005). This report said that the NUC had ordered the closure of programmes that failed the accreditation test describing them as 'fake factories for producing half-baked graduates'. The report also revealed that none of the programmes evaluated in five private universities failed accreditation exercise as they were all either in the Full or Interim accreditation categories. It was on this ground that the founder of Covenant University proudly announced that the university 'was moving from accreditation success to Distinction' (Covenant University 2005e).

The report of another accreditation exercise released in early 2006 confirmed the positive rating of private universities in the 2005 report. In this exercise, two additional private universities (in addition to the five evaluated in 2005) were evaluated. Without going into specifics for constraints of space, the NUC made the following observations: 'It was found that those private universities that have enrolled/graduated students are well on course towards producing quality graduates that are disciplined, have the fear of God, possess leadership qualities and are job creators rather than job seekers'. It also went on to say that these 'universities exhibited characteristics such as insistence on good quality teaching by the academic staff; maintaining stable academic calendar; maintaining cult-free campuses; engaging in large-scale infrastructural development; insistence on and enforcing discipline and attitudinal change on students' (news report by Oyekanmi 2006).

On the quality of students admitted, the private universities get their students from the same matriculation body - the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board

(JAMB) – that admits students into public universities. The minimum entry qualification requirements remain the same. In addition, many of them conduct a post-JAMB screening test to filter more, the quality of the students. This available evidence therefore demonstrates that currently private universities in Nigeria do not reflect experience in some Latin American countries where there were weak admission standard, inadequate infrastructure, poor libraries and programmes concentrated in inexpensive fields, as revealed by Bernasconi (2003).

Quality of Academic Staff

This is one area where some controversies do exist. Sofola (2005) posited that most if not all private universities in Nigeria have ‘a lower proportion of seasoned and experienced teachers’. But the verdict of the NUC accreditation exercise reported earlier contradicts this observation. In more specific terms, as at 2002 Madonna University for instance, had 80 full time academic staff and 35 part time staff. Those with doctorate degrees were 30 in number. Then at the Benson Idahosa University, there were 56 full time academic staff and 30 part time staff with 40 staff having doctorate degrees. The Igbinedion University had 78 staff while Bowen University had 80 (Okebukola 2002). This statistics is not disappointing at all given the relatively young age of private universities in Nigeria. This evidence does not reflect the view that ‘the pool of qualified staff working full time in the private institutions is small’ (Thaver 2004). Evidence suggests that there is a trend of drawing academic staff from older public universities to complement full time staff in private universities. The practice of ‘moonlighting’ however has its own problems as pointed out by Thaver (2004). For instance, its unreliable nature can disrupt a teaching schedule in the middle of a semester.

There is however strong indication that with time, the staffing condition would improve. For example, the number of fresh Ph.Ds produced in the older public universities, gives one hope that this would be so. The statistics released by the NUC reveal that in 2005 alone all the six first generation universities produced a staggering number of 461 fresh Ph.Ds while the rest produced 386 thereby bringing the total figure to 847 (NUC Memo 2006). Also as Sofola (2005) rightly observed, it may be a matter of time for them to catch up since the incentive of gratuity and pension previously enjoyed in the public universities is being replaced with the contributory scheme under the new Pension Act. This may cause ‘internal brain drain’ from public to private universities. Incidentally this has started happening in the first quarter of 2006, as it was reported that the new pension scheme was forcing professors out of public universities (see news report by Adenipekun 2006).

The Issues of Regulation, Control and Quality Assurance

Judging by the enforcement of the guidelines on the establishment and operation of private universities so far, one can say that although the private universities are granted the necessary operational autonomy, they are strongly within the regulatory ambit of the Federal Government through the NUC. So far the NUC appears to be carrying out its accreditation functions with some measure of seriousness. It has closed many academic programmes in public universities that failed to meet the required minimum standards. Furthermore, the NUC has repeatedly warned that it would sanction universities that exceed their admission quota based on national manpower requirements and the resources and facilities available in each university (news report by Omunu 2005). And in its 2006 accreditation report, the NUC withdrew accreditation from 102 programmes (representing 7.6 percent) out of the 1,343 programmes it evaluated. One of the highlights of the report was the denial of accreditation to law programmes in three first generation universities to the shock of many (Taiwo 2006; Oyekanmi 2006).

In anticipation of the enormous regulatory work involved with the granting of licenses to many private universities, the NUC itself has undergone some structural re-organization to enable it to cope with the demands of monitoring and evaluation of private universities. For example, it has established a Department of Quality Assurance headed by one of its experienced Directors and former Vice-chancellor who would be assisted by 35 other professors. Its major assignment is to conduct rigorous monitoring and evaluation activities of all universities in Nigeria. It will demand compliance with NUC's Benchmarks and Minimum Academic Standards and would recommend, for immediate sanction any university whose operation falls below the standards. And according to the NUC Executive Secretary the thrust of the work of the Department is to guarantee Nigerians that in spite of the quantitative increase in universities, the quality of the Nigerian university graduate will not be compromised (Oyekanmi 2005).

Governance Structures

Many private universities in Nigeria have not departed substantially from the conventional governance structures of public universities. The nomenclatural designation of their governance structures remain substantially the same as stipulated in the government guidelines on their establishment. Their Principal Officers go by the same names like their counterparts in public universities and organs of governance go by the same conventional names such as Colleges, Faculties, Schools, Departments, etc. However, some adopt different governance structure. For example, the ABTI-American University, Yola adopts the American nomenclature of calling its Vice-chancellor a President, and Vice-

President for three of the Deputies. However, it still retains the names Deans for heads of the Faculties (ABTI-American University 2006). Also private universities have Board of Trustees instead of Governing Councils as found in the public universities. There are some innovations in programme administration. The dominant tendency is for all of them to have a collegial structure that combines many cognate courses into one department and faculties thereby saving costs. However, some of the universities operate non-flexible working hours for their lecturers from 8a.m to official close of work. This is considered strange in a university system especially against the background that one lecturer is known to have left a private university on account of this, in spite of the salary differential between the two. This is an area that requires closer investigation in the future because of its human resource management implications.

The Success Story of Private Universities as a Challenge to Public Universities

So far, the private universities have proved to be a big challenge to the public universities in some areas they have made remarkable success. Babalola's (2002) description of the Babcock University as a success story in the short period of its existence is an example of the differentiated functions that all the first three private universities have actually provided. And these functions constitute part of the contexts explaining the thriving of private universities in Nigeria. Perhaps the relevant question is: what do people pay for when they go to private universities? From evidence in Nigeria, they do not just pay for the anticipated quality of instructions in the classrooms. Some of the attractions (in comparison with public universities) are stable academic calendar; absence of frequent strikes by staff and demonstrations by students (that often lead to loss of many lives); relatively secure and peaceful learning environment characterized by near absence of secret cults (another major source of loss of lives); clean hostel environment; among many others. As a result of space constraints, the discussion that follows would briefly focus on few achievements.

Increased Female Enrolment: Private universities have been able to add value in the area of female gender enrolment. During the 2001/2002 session for instance, Igbinedion University recorded the highest percentage of female enrolment in both public and private universities with its 60 percent female enrolment. This was followed by Madonna University with 54.6 percent.

Achievement of Optimum Balance between Academic-Nonacademic Staff Ratio: The private universities have been able to set a pace in striking a reasonable balance in academic-non-academic staff mix. This has long been a big problem

in public universities in the form of heavy wage bill on non-academic staff. The worst case for instance is the University Abuja, which has only 19 percent of its total staff strength as academics as against 81 percent non-academic staff (Okebukola 2002; Obasi 2002).

Effective Check on, and Reduction of the Menace of Secret Cult Activities: The effective check of the menace of social ills most especially secret cult phenomenon, is also another area of contributions of private universities. Those who are familiar with the wanton killings by campus cults in Nigeria, and their associated social ills such as armed robbery and rape, are in a better position to understand its menace (see for instance, Jason 1998; Obasi 2004b&c). This is where the provision of differentiated education by private universities through their emphasis on moral and spiritual training has been a great value to the society.

Restoration of the Badly Eroded Dignity and Welfare of Student Life: Public universities are known for their over-congested hostels and its inhuman and intolerable living conditions (Obasi 2005e). As Sofola (2005), rightly observed, most of the private universities offer full boarding facilities and have smaller classes with fairly adequate infrastructure even though at relatively high cost.

Maintenance of Stable Academic Calendar: This has remained one of the greatest achievements of private universities. In the past two decades, public universities ran an unstable academic calendar, which led to a prolonged stay of students. In many universities for instance, students spent six to eight years in programmes meant to be completed in four or five years. The presence of private universities has brought a big challenge to public universities. They are now under serious pressure by the government to restore their academic calendar from October to June.

Conclusion

The experience of private provision of higher education in Nigeria in only a little over half a decade (1999–2006), provides a ray of hope that given appropriate supportive public policy environment, the entire Nigerian higher education system could undergo considerable and robust amount of growth and diversification in the future. Presently, the success story of some private universities so far, has been a great challenge to the public universities in Nigeria. This remains the greatest value added function of private universities in Nigeria. It is hoped that these modest achievements of private universities would be maintained and improved upon in the future. This remains one of the challenges that

the National Universities Commission (NUC) should face for the future sustainability of private higher education in Nigeria.

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Appendix

Eligibility Criteria for the Establishment of Private Universities by the Longe Report (1991:180-181)

- (i) Sponsorship/proprietorship should be by the Federal or State Government, a corporate body or any legal Nigerian citizen or group of citizens of high repute.
- (ii) Licensure must be sought from the Federal Government by sponsors.
- (iii) The name of the institution should, as far as possible, reflect the philosophy and objectives for which it would be established. It is considered more desirable to name universities after the towns/areas in which they are located rather than after persons.
- (iv) A well articulated mission and set of objectives is mandatory. Such objectives may be original and innovative but must be seen to be in consonance with the nation's socio-economic and political aspirations.

- (v) It is highly desirable that such institutions in their administrative structure should not depart too radically from established norms to create and sustain credibility and confidence from the start.
- (vi) Ideally a new institution should cater for areas of felt needs in its academic structure and spread of disciplines; it must have an eye on the impact of its future products on the nation's economy.
- (vii) Adequate funding (capital and recurrent) by the sponsoring body is a *sine qua no*, and these should be available on approval to open. Sources of funding need to be diversified to make for resilience. A new institution can set up income-generating enterprises to encourage the spirit of self-reliance from the earliest stage.
- (viii) Fixed, enabling assets (funds, land, movable and immovable assets) for establishing a new institution should be ascertained by the Federal Government or its accredited agency, and deemed adequate based on such factors as type of institution envisaged, its philosophy and objectives, cost of goods and services prevailing at the time, etc.
- (ix) A proposed institutions should have a clearly spelt-out master plan for infrastructural and programmes development for 20-25 years. Such plans should make adequate provision for land space, aesthetic beauty and fixed financial assets. A minimum land area of 100 hectares or more in a salutory site is essential. The site's distance from an urban complex should take into consideration the availability or otherwise of municipal services: water, transportation, private accommodation and consequential difficulties in its community (i.e. town and gown).
- (x) A new institution should have an adequate enrolment base and should be open to all Nigerians irrespective of ethnic derivation, social status, religious or political persuasion. In line with the foregoing, its laws and statutes should not conflict with conventional responsibilities in academia nor interfere with traditional institutional autonomy.
- (xi) There should be clear policy on student and staff accommodation, and catering facilities to pre-empt problems of inadequate municipal facilities.
- (xii) A new institution should guarantee adequate academic and support staff from the beginning. Staffing guidelines should meet the NUC/NBTE/NCCE staff/student ratio based on the courses contemplated.
- (xiii) Library, laboratory and workshop facilities should be adequate and long-range plans should be put in place for sustaining them. Accreditation should depend on the adequacy of instructional tools and consumables.
- (xiv) Part of its planning or feasibility report should include proposed contacts and affiliation with existing similar institutions and plans for cooperation and interaction.

