

Public Policy and Enhancement of Access in Private Universities in Nigeria

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Abstract

The licensing of private universities in Nigeria in 1999 was a milestone in the development of higher education in Nigeria. Prior to that, public policy gave the federal and state governments the monopoly to establish and run higher education institutions. During this period also, enrollment into the existing public universities was very low accounting for not more than an average of 15% of the total number of those who applied for admission into the universities each academic session. Consequently, one of the major reasons for the liberalization of ownership of higher education institutions and the eventual licensing of private universities in 1999, was to expand access into the universities. However, evidence does not seem to suggest that this important policy goal has been achieved. For example, during the first decade (1999-2009), the enrollment data from 30 private universities which had enrolled students (by 2007), suggests that public policy failed to effectively use private universities to expand access as private universities contributed only 3.4% of total enrollment into the universities, and this rose to 5% in 2009 with 41 private universities. However, in the first half of the second decade (2010-2013) the enrollment contribution of 50 private universities increased reasonably as they accounted for 10.4% of total enrollment. But even with this increased contribution, existing public policy enablers have failed to serve as catalyst for rapid enhancement of access in private universities. Based on this therefore, new critical policy enablers for expanding access are identified and recommended.

Key Words: Public policy, public policy enablers, higher education access, private universities in Nigeria.

1. Introduction

A critical review of the first decade of public policy experiment to expand access in higher education *through private universities* in Nigeria reveals a mixed bag of limited success, missed opportunities and continuing challenges. Although public policy in the last decade promoted the development and growth of private universities (unlike previous decades when it was out-rightly hostile to their establishment), yet the opportunities from this remarkable policy development were not fully harnessed. A rapid quantitative growth of private universities from 3 in 1999 to 34 in 2007, then 41 in October 2009 to 45 in March 2011, and 50 in 2013 is a monumental record. However, their small enrollment figures (merely 3.4% of total enrollment in 2007), are very insignificant (Obasi, 2008). Again in 2009, total enrollment (41,884) in 30 private universities which accounted for only 5% of total enrollment (Okogie, 2009) is about the same enrollment in one large federal university such as Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria with 39,219 students or University of Maiduguri with 38,514 students. One inescapable conclusion from this data is that public policy has failed to use private universities to expand access in the first decade of the operation of private universities. The situation is however improving in the first half of the second decade, as enrollment in 50 private universities has significantly increased to 10.4% of total enrollment (Ruqayyatu, 2013).

This paper therefore explores new policy options for expanding access (through private universities) as policy measures in the last decade had proved inadequate and lacked enough critical enablers for rapid expansion of access. The purpose of the paper is to influence public policy towards expanding access to a higher level using (still) the instrumentality of private universities. In order to achieve this, the paper is divided into five sections (inclusive of this introduction). Section two provides a global historical overview of enrollment statistics of private higher education institutions across the world. Thereafter, section three provides an analysis of application and admission statistics in Nigerian Universities over the years. Section four explores further, the current enrollment situation in private universities in relation to their public counterparts. Finally, section five focuses on public policy implications through a recommendation of a mixture of policy interventions that can help to expand access in private universities in particular, and public universities in general.

2. Global Historical Overview of Enrollment in Private Higher Education Institutions

All over the world, access into higher education institutions (particularly into the university sub-sector) is a big

issue. While many countries favour the enhancement of access into the universities, few other countries restrict access on the ground that university education is a privilege as many prospective candidates are encouraged to enter into tertiary institutions other than the universities. But even at this, enrollment statistics in such few countries are encouraging as access into the universities still remains high.

A review of enrollment statistics across the world reveals four basic facts or trends. First, total enrollments in public higher education institutions (Public HEIs) are on the average higher than those in private higher education institutions (Private HEIs). Secondly, in two regions of the world (notably Asia and Latin America), total enrollment in Private HEIs (in some countries) is higher than total enrollment in Public HEIs. Thirdly, higher enrollment figure in Private HEIs is not necessarily a function of the total number of Private HEIs in relation to the total number of Public HEIs. Fourthly, the State in many countries of the world has usually provided policy enablers (through a mixture of policy instruments) to encourage the expansion of access in both the public and private higher education institutions.

The data in tables 1 to 4 provide an overview of total enrollment statistics in selected countries across geographical regions of the world. These statistics have varied over the years hence we have captured their trends from 1990s and beyond.

Table 1: Enrollment Statistics in Selected Countries in Eastern Europe (1990s & beyond)

Country	% of Total Enrollment in Private HEIs	% of Total Enrollment in Public HEIs
Hungary	13.9	86.1
Poland	24.5	75.5
Romania	26.6	73.4

Sources: Giesecke (1999); Obasi (2008)

It is important to note that one remarkable feature of enrollment development in this region is that there was ‘virtually 0 percent in private HEIs before the private revolution’ (Levy, 2005) in the 1990s and beyond. In fact, there was virtually no culture of private higher education institutions before the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe. Europe generally has no supportive culture of private higher education even when it is promoting a competitive higher education system under capitalist globalization within the framework of the Bologna Process which has been its prevailing platform for higher education reforms. Europe has through the Bologna Process, jettisoned the commercialization thrust of neo-liberal higher education reforms as it declared higher education a public good to be made equally accessible to their citizens. It openly declared that higher education will remain a public responsibility (see Obasi & Olutayo, 2009).

Table 2: Enrollment Statistics in Selected Countries in Asia (1990s & beyond)

Country	% of Total Enrollment in Private HEIs	% of Total Enrollment in Public HEIs
India	11	89
Japan South Korea Indonesia Philippines	Varying between 70-80	Ranges from 20-30

Sources: Altbach (1999); Gupta (2007); Obasi (2005, 2008)

One significant feature of enrollment in Private HEIs in Asia (in a sizeable number of countries) is that more students are enrolled in them than in Public HEIs. Again in some of the countries, the number of Private HEIs is higher than the Public HEIs.

Table 3: Enrollment Statistics in Selected Countries in North America and Latin America (1990s & beyond)

Country	% of Total Enrollment in Private HEIs	% of Total Enrollment in Public HEIs
USA	23 (had a share of around 50 in mid-twentieth century)	77
Chile	71	29
Brazil	61	39
Columbia	Over 50	Less than 50
Dominican Republic	Over 50	Less than 50
Other Latin American Countries (except Cuba)	Ranges from 10 to over 40	Ranges from 60-90

Source: Levy (2002, 2005); Bernasconi (2003); Obasi 2006, 2008)

One important conclusion on enrollment patterns in these two regions is that in quantitative terms, Latin America is one of the leading regions in private higher education development in the world.

Table 4: Enrollment Statistics in Selected African Countries (1990s & beyond)

Country	% of Total Enrollment in Private HEIs	% of Total Enrollment in Public HEIs
Botswana	26	74
Tanzania	19	79
Uganda	15	85
Ghana	11	89
Kenya	11	89
Senegal	11	89
South Africa	10	90
Zimbabwe	5	95
Nigeria	5 (1st decade 2007-2009).	95

Source: Obasi (2008); Mabizela (2007); Varghese (2004).

Table 4 shows that Botswana and Tanzania have been clear leaders in private higher education provision in Africa. A startling revelation from table 4 is the dismal statistics from Nigeria. The table shows that Nigeria was not properly utilizing private universities as a veritable instrument for expanding access. It is unfortunate that in its first decade of operation, private universities in Nigeria were not even ahead of Zimbabwe in spite of the latter's well known political and economic problems over the years. The next section provides further insight into the dynamics of the enrollment statistics and the problem of access in Nigeria.

3. Application and Admission Statistics in Nigerian Universities

Although on paper, Nigeria is among the group of countries that appears not to restrict access into the universities, but in practice, access is a big issue as the hope of many of her citizens aspiring to gain admission into the universities yearly, continues to be dashed. A close look at the application and admission statistics from the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) before and after the establishment of private universities demonstrates this fact. Tables 5 and 6 provide evidence of public policy failure of using private universities to expand access.

Table 5: Percentage of Candidates Admitted into Nigerian Public Universities before the establishment of Private Universities in 1999

Academic Session	% of Candidates Admitted
1999	10.8
1998	24.4
1997	17.6
1996	14.9
1995	6.4
1994	13
1993	NA
1992	17
1991	NA
1990	20

Sources: JAMB Annual Report for Different Years, See also Yaqub (2002); Okebukola (2002); Obasi (2002 & 2008)

Table 6: University Matriculation Examination (UME) Application and Admission Statistics after the establishment of Private Universities (2000-2008)

Academic Session	Application Statistics	Admission Statistics	% of Candidates Admitted
2008/2009	1,054,060	NA	NA
2007/2008	911,653	107,370	12
2006/2007	803,472	88524	11
2005/2006	916,371	76,984	8.4*
2004/2005	841,878	122,492	15
2003/2004	1,046,950	105,157	10
2002/2003	994,380	51,845	5.2
2 001/2002	-	-	11 (Sourced differently)
2000/2001	-	-	10.8 (Sourced differently)

Source: Analyzed by the authors from JAMB website (see http://www.jambng.com/appl_ume.php)

* The National Universities Commission (NUC) Admission quota for that session was actually 147,323 which gave room that about 16.35% were proposed for admission.

Table 6 reveals the extent of the prevailing admission crisis into Nigerian universities (both public and private). It shows that even with the establishment of many private universities, the percentage of candidates admitted falls far short of application statistics. The fact is that there is a public policy failure in using private universities to expand access within the first decade of its operation. And when compared with admission statistics before the establishment of private universities (see table 5), the public policy failure becomes more evident.

4. Comparison of Enrollments in Private and Public Universities

Statistical evidence demonstrates that a comparison of enrollments in both private and public universities reveals further the extent of failure of private universities to serve as a veritable instrument for expanding access in the last 15 years of their existence. This thesis is further discussed under three sub-headings namely (a) total enrollment in private universities from 1999 to 2009 (the first decade); (b) total enrollment in private universities from 2010 to 2013 (the first half of the second decade), and (c) total enrolment in selected federal universities.

4.1. Total Enrollment in Private Universities (1999-2009)

The data on enrollment in private universities during the first decade of their operation are presented as follows:

Table 7a: Enrollments Private Universities*

University	Enrollment in 2007	Enrollment in 2009
Igbinedion	5235	6071
Madonna	7561	NA
Babcock	4046	4468
Bowen	3901	4185
Benson Idahosa	2212	2568
Pan African University	207	312
Covenant	6807	7282
ABTI-American Univ	497	955
Ajayi Crowther	822	2016
Al-Hikmah	167	586
Bingham	269	583
CARITAS	1625	2668
Redeemers	625	1882
Leads City	1572	1950
Bells	176	580
Crawford	311	930
Wukari Jubilee	117	353
Crescent	66	469
Novena	236	719
Renaissance	-	30
Mkar	566	487
Joseph Ayo Babalola	246	946
Tansian	No students then	598
Caleb	::	140
Fountain	::	200
Obong	::	33
Veritas	::	225
Western Delta	::	149
The Achievers	::	146
Total	37,636 (This was 3.4% of total enrollment then)	41,884 (this was about 5% of total enrollment)

Source: Compiled by the Authors from NUC 2009 Enrollment Statistics, unpublished.

* The figures include both full and part time students. Note that some universities were yet to submit their enrollment figures to NUC as at December 2009 and that only those with available statistics were included here.

Table 7a reveals that in 2009 the total enrollment figure in private universities (where data was available) was 41884 students. This shows some progress no doubt but the statistics presents a shocking picture when it is realized that compared to federal universities, this figure is very insignificant as will be demonstrated in table 8 later..

4.2. Total Enrollment in Private Universities (2010-2013)

The data on enrollment in private universities during the first half of the second decade of their operation are presented as follows:

Table 7b Total Enrollment in Private Universities (2010-2013)

Year	No. of Private Universities	% Contribution to total Enrollment
2007	34	3.4%*
2009	41+	5%**
2013	50	10.4%***

* Obasi (2008), ** Okojie (2009), & ***Ruqayyatu (2013)

+ The enrollment contribution of 41 private universities might be slightly higher than 5% because not all private universities submitted correct enrollment figures to NUC for fear of sanction for violating its Carrying Capacity Policy. This was properly the reason why their contribution increased rapidly to 10.4% in 2013.

Table 7b reveals a steady but a slow increase in student enrollment in private universities. As we observed earlier in section 2 of the paper, higher enrollment figure in Private HEIs is not necessarily a function of the total number of Private HEIs in relation to the total number of Public HEIs. This is true of Nigeria. Although, the total number of private universities (i.e.50) is higher than those of federal universities (40), or state-owned universities (39), its contribution to total enrollment was only 10.4% as at 2013. Federal universities contributed 68.7% of total enrollment, while state-owned universities contributed approximately 21%. (Note that percentage calculation of enrollments in both federal and private universities was based on Ruqayyatu, 2013 data which was presented in absolute figures).

4.3. Total Enrollment in Selected Federal Universities

The data on enrollment in selected federal universities are presented as follows:

Table 8: Total Enrollment in Selected Federal Universities

University	Total Enrollment in 2009
Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria	39,219
University of Maiduguri	38,514
National Open University of Nigeria	36,487
Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife	34,962
Bayero University, Kano	30,830
University of Jos	29,215
University of Benin	28,064
University of Nigeria, Nsukka	27,703
University of Lagos	27,130
University of Ibadan	24,473

Source: Analyzed in present form by the Authors from NUC 2009 Statistics, Unpublished.

Table 8 shows that the Ahmadu Bello University alone had a total enrollment figure of 39,219 students which was about the figure for about 30 private universities in 2007. Table 8 also shows that the University of Maiduguri had a total enrollment figure of 38,514 students, while the National Open University had 36,487 students. These figures have some policy implications which are examined in the next section.

5. Conclusion

In Nigeria, some of the reasons advanced for the low enrollment figures in private universities are (a) exorbitant fees which scare prospective candidates away, (b) inadequate facilities to accommodate increased enrollment figures due to constraint of funds, and (c) dearth of academic staff to teach in some highly specialized disciplines due to inability of private universities to hire and retain such caliber of staff because of lack of funds. All these constitute part of the reasons for the low carrying capacity of the institutions. Given this situation therefore, what policy options can the government adopt to increase enrollment significantly?

We recommend a mixture of critical public policy enablers to radically address the problem. It is important to emphasize that our recommendations are based on best practices in North America, Asia, Latin America, Africa as well as Europe. For constraints of space, our recommendations will be fourfold:

5.1 Use of Public Funds to Support Private Universities (Public Policy Enabler No. 1): This support can appear in a mixture of public policy interventions such as (a) direct allocation of fixed percentage of the budgets of the Private HEIs by the government; (b) through the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) by providing physical infrastructure and facilities such as libraries, hostels, classrooms, laboratories and equipment etc, (c) Occasional Grants and Loans for execution of specific projects, (d) sponsoring of research activities, and (e) purchase and donation of books to the library. One good illustrative case in this regard is Japan. Three decades

ago, the Japanese National Parliament passed a law authorizing the use of public funds to support private institutions. For example, private universities were receiving about 10% of their funds from the government. Secondly, they were getting the lion share of their research funds from the government. (see Yonezawa (1998). Thirdly, students in private universities receive government assistance in the form of scholarship or getting other assistance from their local governments (see Dolan and Worden, 1994).

In varying degrees, countries that provide support to private universities among others, are USA, Brazil, New Zealand, Ghana, Uganda, and Botswana. The case of some African countries such as Uganda, Ghana and Botswana is inspiring. The Ugandan State Minister for Higher Education Gabriel Opio announced in 2007 that the Government would 'fund private universities' given the important role they play in promotion of higher education (see Mubiru, 2007). The Ghanaian Government in 2009 took the decision to link private universities to the national education fund through the GETFund programme (see Atenkah, 2009). In Botswana, private higher education institutions are 'prospering' simply because the government sponsors almost all the students admitted into them (see Obasi, 2008).

5.2 Adoption of Ten Year Human Capital Development Programme in Private Universities (Public Policy Enabler No. 2): The federal government through the NUC can assist the private universities by sponsoring their academic staff in first and second generation universities for postgraduate studies. This can be done for a period of ten years through either a scholarship scheme directly offered to the academic staff of private universities or through a grant to the host postgraduate training institutions. The ten year period should be used to train a critical mass of academic staff in private universities who with time can mount postgraduate programmes in their own institutions.

5.3 Direct Non-Financial Support in the Provision of Critical Infrastructure (Public Policy Enabler No. 3): The three tiers of government can assist in providing critical infrastructure and municipal services (such as access and campus feeder roads, water, electricity etc) to private universities. For example, the Karu Local Government in Nassarawa State (near Abuja) which is the immediate beneficiary of the multiplier effects of Bingham University (a private university), can assist *inter alia* in providing access road to the premises of the institution. Everything should not be left to the federal or state government. It is important to point out that some Municipal governments in Japan are running private universities while some local governments are assisting students in private universities through a scholarship scheme. We therefore recommend that federal, state and local governments in Nigeria should as a matter of corporate social responsibility develop a package of policy support to private universities located in their vicinity. The provision of municipal services to private universities should be a target of such policy support. These may sound idealistic, but it is a very good example of a distributive type of policy which can help to reduce the cost of running private universities. This reduction will in turn help to reduce high level of tuition fees thereby attracting more students who would have otherwise been excluded. This will no doubt help to make a huge difference towards enhancing the carrying capacity of private universities.

5.4 Creation of New Public Universities and Expansion of Enrollment in Existing Public Universities (Public Policy Enabler No. 4): It should be recalled, that a major finding of our study is that a single federal university has almost the same enrollment with about 30 private universities put together. The Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, the University of Maiduguri, and the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) singly have nearly as many students as 30 private universities put together during the first decade of private universities. One major implication therefore is that public policy interventions by the federal government should favour the establishment of new public universities as well as expand access in existing federal universities. We are glad to observe that this particular recommendation which we first made in January 2010, has been implemented by the federal government through the establishment of 12 new federal universities in states which hitherto had no federal university. The NOUN should now be the major area of attention and intervention in this regard given its prevailing and encouraging absorptive capacity of over 180,000 students as at 2013 (Tenebe, 2013). Lastly, we recall that table 8 also reveals that some first generation federal universities (for example, University of Ibadan, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, and University of Lagos) have lower enrollment figures compared to their second generation counterparts such as University of Maiduguri, University of Jos, and Bayero University Kano. The cause of this anomaly should be identified by the NUC and dealt with, as there are many high level scholars in such first generation universities.

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