

**PHILLIPS OLAYIDE OKUNOLA & SIMEON ADEBAYO OLADIPO****PRIVATIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: CRITICAL ISSUES****Abstract**

The broad intent of any educational reform is premised on the assumption that it is capable of improving educational process and practices, hence, the need for evaluation of the system's process in order to determine the efficiency and effectiveness of resource allocation. Education is capital intensive in terms of human, financial and material resources. Its provision and management determine the quality and functionality of the system. This paper sought to assess the extent to which privatization policy has actually addressed quality improvement and also verify if there is justification for private participation in the provision and management of tertiary institutions in Nigeria in an attempt to suggesting some quality improvement strategies. The rationale for deregulation and privatization of the sector was provided and the challenges in the policy were also highlighted. Based on this, it was concluded that though privatization policy enhances access, it is not a panacea to quality tertiary education. In addition, there must be a strict adherence to globally set criteria for improvement, enhancement of educational agencies, especially those in charge of management and supervision of tertiary institutions as well as regular reforms in the process and practice within the sector.

*Key words:* privatization, deregulation, decentralization, quality assurance

**Introduction**

The agenda of educational reforms of any nation is premised on the assumption that such reforms are capable of improving educational practices and process, and subsequently produce better citizens. This has therefore informed series of educational reforms in Nigeria which were aimed at improving access, quality and perhaps equity. Policies have been made on privatizing and decentralizing education at all levels as promoted by influential business roundtables and industrial advisory councils to education, such as the Council for Business/Higher Education Cooperation in Australia (Berman et al, 2003), as well as conservative think-tanks, such as the Centre for Policy Studies, the Institute of Public Affairs, and the Centre for Independent Studies in Australia; the Hillgate Group and the Institute of Economic Affairs in England; the American Enterprise Institute, and most recently, the Brookings Institute in the United States (Berman et al, 2003). Thus, privatization and decentralization of provision and management of education is a global issue. This paper attempts to assess the extent to which privatization policy has actually addressed the issue of quality assurance in the provision and management of tertiary education in Nigeria in an attempt to suggesting strategies for improvement.

However, functional and qualitative education is viewed as a condition through which development of a nation is attained. The level at which the door of education is opened to the entire citizens does not matter, but the kind of education offered to the recipients does. Education in both developed and developing economies is

capital intensive in terms of human, financial and material resources. Education in Nigeria today is a very big industry (Nwadiani, 2000). In support of this, Psacharopoulos (1985) asserted that, human capital is created and quality of human input in production is significantly improved by spending on education. This is why countries, particularly those with low per capita incomes invest such a large proportion of their budgets on education.

In the light of the foregoing, Ajayi and Ekundayo (2008) observed that Nigeria, which is one of the poorest countries in the world in terms of per capita income, needs to be assisted by the private sector, particularly, in the establishment and management of educational institutions; since the three tiers of government alone cannot cope with all the educational needs (Muhammed and Gbenu, 2007); as the national economic resources dwindled, it became increasingly difficult for government alone to meet adequately the financial obligation of all the sectors of the economy, mostly affected was the education sector (Shobowale, 1999). In support of this, Oshutokun (2006) reiterated that 'underfunding remains the major hindrance to the development of the nation's university sector'. As Utulu (2001) also pointed out, another thorny issue which could account for the decline in the higher education output in Nigeria is lack of physical facilities and the decay of available ones due to inadequate maintenance. Muhammed and Gbenu (2007) also noted that the universities in Nigeria particularly operate in adverse conditions, overcrowding and deteriorating physical facilities, shortage of library books, education materials, laboratory consumables and poor maintenance. In the same vein, Ejiogu (2003) remarked that a visit to the Nigerian universities will reveal the pitiable situation of higher education institutions: overcrowded hostels, classrooms with desks and seats for students, lectures without chalk or duster, cubicles as lecturers' offices, departmental offices without stationery and typewriters, lawns overgrown with weeds, blocked sewage system, as well as facilities and departments without a single toilet, among others.

The above shows that economic factor is one of the reasons why private sector participation in the provision of education is of obvious necessity.

### **Rationale for privatization of the higher education sector**

Nigeria is a nation of 150 million people with 45% school age (primary, secondary and tertiary). Over 1 million candidates apply for admission to Nigerian higher institutions annually with only 13% being offered admission into the available vacancies in the existing institutions (universities, polytechnics and colleges of education). For instance, out of 1,046,940 candidates that applied for admission into Nigerian Universities in 2003/2004, 10.30% were offered admission. In 2004/2005, 838,305 candidates applied, 13.42% gained admission. While in 2005/2006, out of 917,960 applicants, 8.39% were admitted. Out of 912,350 candidates in 2006/2007, 12.94% were offered admission and in 2007/2008, 1,034,083 applied while only 4.59% were offered placement (National Bureau of Statistics, 2009). There are one hundred and seventeen (117) universities, comprising thirty-six Federal, thirty-six state and forty-five private. Specifically, in 2011/2012 academic session, University of Lagos was the most preferred first choice with 99,195 applicants but 6,106 (6.15%) were offered admission. This was followed by Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria with 89,760 applicants which admitted

6,068 (6.76%). University of Nigeria, Nsukka trailed with 88,177 and 5,970 (6.77%) were offered admission. This was the trend in most institutions in Nigeria. There are also 63 Colleges of Education and 75 Polytechnics in all (NUC, 2011). Obviously, the available public institutions are grossly inadequate for the need of the country judging by the demand for higher education in Nigeria. There is explosion in students' population in the existing tertiary institutions and the facilities are over stretched. Ayeni et al. (2005) remarked that poor quality, inadequate supply, distribution and lack of motivation of the teaching workforce are additional problems that the Nigerian education sector is faced with and these problems sometimes perceived to lie outside the scope of the educational system's internal mechanism. Furthermore, the dwindling financial resources, inconsistent educational policies and unstable systems, inadequate and untimely remuneration of the teaching manpower, lack of commitment and the brain drain syndrome are often flagged and noted as issues that affect Nigeria's educational sector, particularly, the tertiary institutions. The trend in the sector has been characterized by increase in enrolment without a corresponding increase in resources, equipment and facilities, frequent closure of schools, campuses and even suspension of classes. Additionally, it has been argued that in many secondary schools, quality has been sacrificed for quantity and the British Council (2004) claimed that such is affecting the university system.

Olaniyan and Adedeji (2001) affirmed that the main source of other problems facing education sector has been traced to the drastic reduction in both the actual and proportion of government's funds allocated to the sector, despite the UNESCO's recommendation of allocation of 26% of a nation's national income to the sector. It should further be noted that in as much as the education sector supplies trained manpower in form of accountants, teachers, doctors (medical, academic, veterinary etc.), lawyers, secretaries, etc, to the economy, there should be a reciprocal action from the economy to the education sector in form of provision and supply of enough financial resources.

Owing to the numerous problems being encountered as a result of underfunding of education sector which were stated above, the World Bank Report on Education Sector Strategy (1999) suggested three major ways of enlisting private sector participation in education so as to alleviate the burden of provision and management of higher education by the federal government. This is to enable the federal government cater for other social amenities. These ways are: First, selectively encouraging management and/or ownership of institution by Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), Communities or Religious group and entrepreneurs. Second, allowing students and their parents to choose among different options. The principle of choice implies taking a decision out of the so many available opportunities. Finally, requiring some levels of private financing of post basic educational levels, the private sector should be encouraged to finance education to any level they are opportune to do such.

### **Private institutions as alternative to public institutions in Nigeria**

The word 'private' is a broad concept which includes religious, non-governmental organization-run, community-financed and/or for-profit institutions. In fact, large private school system exists in many developed and developing

countries, Nigeria inclusive. There are a number of institutions across the different levels of education ranging from pre-primary, primary, secondary to tertiary institutions that are run and managed by the private sector all over the world. The issue of private involvement in provision of education is not new at the primary and secondary school levels particularly in Nigeria. But it is only at the tertiary level that this is recent, with the emergence of Igbinedion University, Edo state, Covenant University, Ota, Ogun State and Babcock University, Illishan-Remo in the past ten years. However, one could conveniently say that the Nigerian educational system needs private participation in the provision and management of educational institutions because of the dynamic nature of education exacerbated by its inherent enormous resources required for the realization of national goals and objectives.

That aside, it is imperative to consider the constitutional base of private sector participation in the provision and management of Nigerian educational system. The constitutional base of the 1887 Education Ordinance which formed a milestone in the provision and management of education in Nigeria became pronounced in 1979, Section 36 sub sections 2 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 1979, 1989 and 1999). It asserts that, every person shall be entitled to own, establish and operate any medium for the dissemination of information, ideas and opinions... This shows that any Nigerian or group of Nigerians could establish and manage educational institutions, provided the requirements are satisfied.

According to Okojie (2010), the statutory framework laid down by the Federal Government of Nigeria for the regulation of private providers of tertiary education is fully encapsulated in Education (Minimum Standard and Establishment of Institutions) Act Cap E3 Laws of Federation of Nigeria 2004. Section 21 (1) & (3) of this Act provides that:

- Application for the establishment of an institution of higher learning shall be made to the Minister;
- In case of a University, through the national Universities Commission;
- In case of a Polytechnic or College of Agriculture, through the National Board for Technical Education;
- In the case of a College of Education, through the National Commission for Colleges of Education; and
- In any other case, through the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education, in accordance with guidelines prescribed for making the application.

No person shall be granted approval to establish an institution of higher education unless the criteria set out in the schedule has been satisfied. At the schedule of this Act are the clearly set criteria that intending proprietors should meet before they can be granted approval to operate. These include:

- proper, well-spread and relevant academic structure; evidence of adequate current and capital funding; evidence of sufficient and adequate academic and support staff;
- full compliance of the staffing guidelines particularly the staff-student ratios prescribed for the various courses by the three regulatory bodies (NUC, NBTE, NCCE as the case may be); demonstrated sources of sustainable funding of the proposed institution with minimum prescription of

N200million for University, N100million for Polytechnic or Monotechnic and N50million for Colleges of Education;

- a well-laid out master plan for infrastructural and programme development; laws and statutes that shall not conflict with the conventional responsibilities in academic or interfere with avowed traditional institutional autonomy; well articulated mission and set objectives; and a credible administrative and academic structure; and
- the library, laboratory and workshop facilities, including instructional and consumables shall be adequate and there shall be long-range plans for sustaining them and proposed acceptable plans for linkages with similar institutions that can assist the proposed institutions to achieve its objective.

In order to properly implement the above criteria for approving tertiary institutions, the NUC as the appropriate authority vested with powers to process and consider applications for establishment of universities and degree-awarding institutions, set up and institutionalized 14 steps for processing applications for private universities. This is to ensure that institutions are provided and managed in accordance with the global trend.

Be that as it may, the pith and substance of the intention of the Federal Government is very clear, to the effect that private individuals or corporate bodies intending to establish private tertiary institutions must meet certain criteria that would translate to guaranteed quality assurance and sustenance of minimum standards (Okojie, 2010). He explained that despite the criteria set by the Federal Government of Nigeria, there are quite a number of illegal tertiary institutions. Okojie also pointed out that some of these providers did not establish their institutions through the established regulatory agencies, most and all the essential indices of academic standards are non-existent in their institutions.

The Executive Secretary of the National Universities Commission (2010) pointed out that four factors are responsible for the recent upsurge in the number of illegal providers of tertiary institutions in Nigeria. These include:

- The greed, fraud and the endemic rate of corruption in the society. The major motivational issue here is to corrupt the education system by providing substandard institutions in return for the fees they charge their students. These illegal providers are mainly driven by the greed to make quick money, without any desire to comply with the required prescribed regulations, which ordinarily demands more investment in the academic and human resources, together with infrastructural facilities.
- There exist the problems of insufficient access for the large pool of qualified candidates that sit for the yearly Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examinations (UTME) organized by Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB). As a result, these providers take undue advantage of desperate but unqualified candidates to attract them to their illegal institutions where entry requirements are usually less demanding.
- It has been discovered that a major factor that makes the illegal tertiary education, especially the universities, thrive is that they have no set standard for anybody that can pay their fees. The NUC has therefore discovered that majority of their students are not qualified for entry into university or tertiary institutions.

- The non-existence of specific sanction for operating illegal tertiary institution without approval or licence has also contributed to escalation in the phenomenon of illegal provider of tertiary education, particularly the illegal degree mills. However, the National Universities Commission has proposed a bill to National Assembly through the supervising ministry, that is, Federal Ministry of Education, to criminalise and punish promoters and operators of illegal degree mills so as to deter potential violators (Okojie, 2010).

### **Ensuring quality assurance in higher education in Nigeria**

Since higher education in Nigeria has not produced a critical mass of persons with the requisite genetic skills highlighted in the National Policy on Education through the domineering control of the Federal government, the following fundamental factors, which bedevilled the public institutions need to be addressed: unplanned expansion leading to a very rapid increase in the number of institutions since 1975; duplication of courses and programmes; poor state of infrastructure; inadequate teaching-learning and research facilities; overstretching of teaching, research and managerial capacities; over blotted student enrolment far above carrying capacity; an upsurge of various forms of unwholesome behaviours, such as examination malpractices, falsification of certificates, cultism, commercialization syndrome; internal and external brain drain among the intellectuals; and absolute loss of faith in the entire system by all stakeholders (see, for example, Ojo, 2007; World Bank, 2000; Okojie, 2010 and Oladipo, 2010).

Thus, privatization does not on its own provide qualitative education without requisite consideration for a total reform in the sector. According to Babalola (2007), five policy areas need further attention in Nigeria's tertiary education.

First, there is a dire need to review the philosophy, academic culture and purpose of tertiary education to include:

- i. making targeted investments in strategic areas of training and research,
- ii. expanding the production of qualified professionals most required by local organizations and industries, and
- iii. building capacity for managing and improving basic and secondary education.

Second, in an attempt to achieve the above objectives, all Nigerian tertiary institutions should focus on

- i. strengthening of governance by establishing boards with external representation
- ii. formulation of strategic vision based on the above
- iii. embarking on curricular diversification
- iv. emphasizing science and technological development
- v. embarking on quality and relevance improvement
- vi. concentrating on expansion of equity mechanisms
- vii. ensuring a sustainable financing, and
- viii. development of ICT.

Third policy thrust concerns complimentary measures in order to ensure that tertiary institutions enjoy an environment that is conducive to teaching, learning, creativity and innovation.

Fourth, addressing unification of tertiary education structure in order to eliminate the distinction between the systems (university and polytechnic) in terms of input, (including finance and control), process (including type of research, curriculum orientation and assessment), output and how their graduates are being rewarded. To this end, all other tertiary institutions should strive to attain university status.

Lastly, re-engineering of the departmental approach to teaching and research, that is, shifting towards a problem-based mode of knowledge creation and away from the classic discipline-led approach, and the blurring of the distinction between basic and applied research. With the above review in mind, tertiary education in Nigeria will accomplish its goals irrespective of the ownership.

That aside, there is the need for review of the existing and development of sound/realistic National Policy on Education; establishment of reinforced supervisory/monitoring agencies; strict compliance with minimum qualification for teaching and non-teaching staff in the institutions; and increased allocation to the tertiary institutions among others.

## **Conclusion**

Privatization and deregulation are the issues in vogue across the world today seeking to erode, eliminate or reduce government services with the goal of giving over as much as possible of the public services to private individuals, religious bodies, corporate organizations, foundations and other interested bodies. This involves the reduction of government authority and guidance (in the provision and management of education) and efforts to increase the autonomy of individual parents to control their children's schooling. It is evident that public institutions in Nigeria are losing their value at a fast rate as a result of poor funding, rising population, influence of politics, insufficient and deteriorating facilities, brain drain, among others, all of which have led to a decline in the quality of graduates of Nigerian tertiary institutions. In the light of this, the Federal Government of Nigeria has encouraged the participation of the private sector in the provision and management of tertiary education, first, to increase access, second, to improve quality and lastly to reduce the government involvement especially at this time of global economic recession. However, evidences abound that there is proliferation of illegal and substandard institutions across the country, all taking advantage of the opportunities of providing tertiary institutions.

Thus, as lofty as the benefits of privatization would have been in Nigeria, greed, fraud, corruption, misplaced priority, wrong value – orientation, inconsistent government policies, poor monitoring strategies and other vices that pervert the nation, have not made the policy to accomplish its goals just as the public institutions. Therefore, ownership of institutions is, though important, but fundamental factors which could enhance quality and relevance need to be seriously addressed. The National Universities Commission which is the main regulatory body of university education in the country should be reinforced for effective monitoring of the institutions and compliance with established standards. Similarly, the Federal Ministry of Education must be responsive to its statutory roles to achieve the goal of the policy.

## References

- Adamu, A.U. (2011). Motionless points in chaos: Education reforms, innovations and the challenges for higher education in Nigeria. *Africa-Asia University Dialogue for Educational Development: Report of the International Experience sharing seminar* (1), Centre for the Study of International Cooperation in Education, Hiroshima University, Japan. Series 4, 87-107.
- Adiotomre, J.E. (2005). Beyond deregulation of education. In Akpa, G.O., Udoh, S.U. and Fagbamiye, E.O. (eds.) *Deregulating the provision and management of education in Nigeria*. The Nigerian Association for Educational Administration and Planning. 87-90.
- Ajayi, I.A. and Ekundayo, H.T. (2008). The deregulation of University education in Nigeria: Implications for quality assurance. *NEBULA*, 5 (4), 212-224.
- Anderson, S. (ed.) (2002). *School improvement through teacher development: Case studies of the Aga Khan Foundation Projects in East Africa*. The Netherlands, Swets & Zetlinger. Lisse.
- Ayeni, A.O., Atanda, A.I. and Akinsolu, A.O. (2005). The need for private sector participation in the provision and management of education of Nigeria. In Akpa, G.O., Udoh, S.U. and Fagbamiye, E.O. (eds.) *Deregulating the provision and management of education in Nigeria*. The Nigerian Association for Educational Administration and Planning. 130-133.
- Babalola, J.B. (2007). Reform and development in Nigeria's tertiary education: Focus on the Obsanjo's administration. In Babalola, J.B., Akpa, G.O., Ayeni, A.O. and Adedeji, S.O. *Access, Equity and Quality in Higher education*. Nigerian Association for Educational Administration and Planning. Awemmark Industrial.
- Belfield, C.R. (2002). Modeling school choice: A comparison of public, private and home schooled students. *Occasional paper*. No. 49. National Centre for the privatization of education.
- Berman, E.A. et al (2003). The political economy of educational reform in Australia, England, and United States. In Arnove, R.F. and Torres, C.A. (eds.), *Comparative Education: The dialectic of the global and local*. Boulder: Rowman & Littlefield. 252-291.
- British Council (2004). *Education Counseling Service: Education in UK*. Exhibition. Lagos. October 29 – November 2.
- Chanvanich, A., Chantavanich, S. and Fry, G.W. (1990). *Evaluating primary education: Quantitative and qualitative studies in Thailand*. Ottawa.
- Ejiogu, A. (2003). Decentralization as panacea for Nigeria's education misadventure. A paper presented at the annual conference of Nigerian Association for Educational Administration and Planning at the University of Ibadan. 29-31 October.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria (1979, 1989 & 1999). *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria*. Lagos. Federal Government of Nigeria.
- Glewwe, P. (2000). Schools and Skills in developing countries: Education policies and socio-economic outcomes. *Journal of Economic Literature*, 40 (2).
- Ibadin, V.O., Shofoyeke, A.D. and Ilusanya, G. (2005). The history of private sector participation in the provision and management of education in Nigeria. In Akpa, G.O., Udoh, S.U. and Fagbamiye, E.O. (eds.) *Deregulating the provision and management of education in Nigeria*. The Nigerian Association for Educational Administration and Planning. 113-116.
- Jaiyeoba, A.O. and Atanda, A.I. (2005). Quality sustenance in Nigerian educational system: Challenges in government. In Akpa, G.O., Udoh, S.U. and Fagbamiye, E.O. (eds.)



- Deregulating the provision and management of education in Nigeria*. The Nigerian Association for Educational Administration and Planning. 98-103.
- Mabogunje, A.L. (2001). How to restore quality to Varsities. *Vanguard*. Thursday, July 5.
- Muhammed, M.O.B. and Gbenu, J.P. (2007). Public Universities on the brink of collapse in Nigeria: Private sector participation as a way out. In Babalola, J.B., Akpa, G.O., Ayeni, A.O. and Adedeji, S.O. *Access, equity and quality in higher education*. Nigerian Association for Educational Administration and Planning. Ibadan: Awemark.
- Nwadiani, M. (2000). *Economic Dimension of Educational planning in Nigeria: Theory and practice*. Benin City. Monose Amalgamates.
- Okojie, J.A. (2010). Identifying illegal private providers of tertiary education: A challenge for State and regulatory bodies. A paper presented at a forum organised by the Lagos State Ministry of Education, Ikeja, Lagos. August 17.
- Olabisi, I.A. (2002). Alternative modes of financing education in Nigeria and the implications for University governance. In *Africa development*, 27 (1&2). Dakar. CODESRIA.
- Oladipo, A., Adeosun, O. and Oni, A. (2011). *Quality assurance and sustainable university education in Nigeria. Africa-Asia University Dialogue for Educational Development: Report of the International Experience sharing seminar (1)*. Centre for the Study of International Cooperation in Education, Hiroshima University, Japan. Series 4. 109-125.
- Oladipo, S.A. (2005). Privatization: A tool for enhancing quality in Nigerian educational system. In Akpa, G.O., Udoh, S.U. and Fagbamiye, E.O. (eds.) *Deregulating the provision and management of education in Nigeria*. The Nigerian Association for Educational Administration and Planning. 211-217.
- Oshuntokun, A. (2006). How I got N16,000 for research in 33 years. *The Punch*. March 28.
- Olaniyan, D.O. and Adedeji, S.O. (2001). Is there a trade-off between military burden and public education expenditure? Evidence from Nigeria. *AJEPPS*, 2(2). 123.
- Population Reference Bureau (2003). *World population data sheet: Demographic data and estimates for the countries and regions of the world*. Connecticut Avenue, Washington, DC.
- Psacharopoulos, G. (1985). *Education for development: An analysis of investment choices*. New York: Oxford University for the World Bank.
- Shobowale, S.M.O. (1999). Sustaining higher education through private sector participation. In Oderinde, B.B. and Okunneye, R.O. (Eds.) *Enhancing quality education in Nigeria*. Ibadan: Gabester Educational.
- Sifuna, D.N. and Sawamura, N. (2011). *Challenges of quality education in Sub-Saharan Africa: some key issues. Africa-Asia University Dialogue for Educational Development: Report of the International Experience sharing seminar (1)*. Centre for the Study of International Cooperation in Education, Hiroshima University, Japan. Series 4, 1-12.
- UNESCO (2004). *EFA Global Report 2005. Education For All: The quality imperative*. Paris.
- Utulu, C.C. (2001). Quality of University education in Nigeria: Problems and solutions. *Journal of the Commonwealth Council for Educational Administration and Management*, 29(1).

Dr. Philips Olayide Okunola  
Dr. Simeon Adebayo Oladipo  
bayoladipo2000@yahoo.com  
Department of Educational Administration  
Faculty of Education, University of Lagos  
Akoka-Lagos, Nigeria