
Innovation in Deregulating University Education in Nigeria: Issues and Prospects

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the deregulation of University education in Nigeria, its problems, prospects and made suggestions for effective management of deregulated Universities. The paper commences with the recognition given to education all over the world, especially higher education. Nigeria as a country gives much credence to higher education as the means for social and economic mobility, social transformation, and as a major platform for higher level workforce development, managerial and technological. To achieve these laudable objectives, government has given approval to private individuals and organizations to own and manage private higher institutions of learning. This paper examines some of the problems that accompany privatization policy of higher education such as higher costs, inequality and circumvention standards in the name of profits, among s others. The prospect of this noble idea was also examined. Equally suggestions made for improvement includes encouragement of private participation, creation and nurturing of an academic integrity climate where the principles of honesty, trust, fairness, research and scholarship, respect and responsibility would be promoted.

Key Words: Deregulation, Privatization, Public Universities, Private Universities

The role of education as an instrument for promoting the socio-economic, political and cultural development of any nation can never be over-emphasised. According to Abdulkareem (2001), a nation's growth and development is determined by its human resources. The provision of the much needed manpower to accelerate the growth and development of the economy has been said to be the main relevance of University education in Nigeria (Ibukun, 1997).

The importance of university education to the individual in particular and the society in general has made the demand for university education increase astronomically in the last twenty years resulting in a high percentage of unsatisfied demand every year.

The demand for university education in the last twenty years is far greater than the supply. This is in spite of the phenomenal expansion in the privately-owned universities in Nigeria from 1 in 1948 to 56 in 2007. It is evident that the government alone cannot provide much needed university education to the teeming applicants seeking places yearly-hence the need for deregulation.

Deregulation started with decreasing government oversight of industries with a view of creating more competitive markets that provide services at lower costs to consumers. Nigeria, like other parts of the globe has witnessed the deregulation of the down-stream oil sector, telecommunication, airlines, electricity and recently the banking sector. Deregulation has also been extended to education. The emergence of deregulation of the education sector in the last few years could be seen as a response to increased needs and demands on education by population growth and economic and societal necessities. The major focus of deregulating education in developing countries, Nigeria inclusive, is on tuition and other fees. In Nigerian Universities for instance, the 2003/ 2004 session witnessed an appreciable increase in fees and charges across the board. The major issues of deregulation, bordering on the effectiveness of the education system and derivable from appropriate curricula, discipline and excellence are downplayed.

The significance of this paper lies in the fact that deregulation of Nigerian University education has focused on levies and fees. This paper, viewing deregulation of university education as probably inevitable, emphasized measures towards improved standards rather than reduced government funding of universities.

Hopefully, this approach would stimulate national educational innovation and prepare Nigerian universities and their products for global integration and relevance.

The Concept of Deregulation

The concept of deregulation is synonymous with private enterprise. In economics and industries, deregulation means non-intervention by government in an individual or industrial monetary affair. In essence, deregulation implies the removal of

governmental interference over running of a system in order for the system to decide the optimum level of the operation through the market forces of demand and supply.

Deregulation as applicable to education, means government divesting its interest in it and encouraging private sector participation in the ownership and management of the educational system for effective achievement of the objectives and goals of education. At the primary and secondary levels of education in Nigeria, deregulation has been on since 1980s. This deregulation has manifested in springing up of fee-paying private primary and secondary schools. This private schools assist in ensuring that parents of children at this levels has better opportunities to choose their children's school based on some factors bordering on financial capabilities.

At the university level, deregulation has been linked with privatization on university autonomy, where the university will be self-regulated and controlled. In effect, the determining operation in terms of intakes, financing and other important decisions relevant to its operations. Among the manifestations of university deregulation is the establishment of private universities. Another manifestation of deregulation of university education borders on increased fees and levies.

Initiatives for deregulation of education have been taken by developed and developing countries of the world (Tsai, 2001). In United States of America, the main focus of education deregulation is in the area of parental freedom to control their children's schooling. In Britain, too, deregulation has brought about autonomous schools, with greater responsibility placed on schools to determine their own destinies In Nigerian education system, deregulation policies primarily emphasize privatization bordering on funding (Denise, 2002 & Alabi, 2005).

Reasons for Deregulation of University Education

It has being argued that standards of University Education has fallen over the years following the myriad of bedeviling the system which have created the need for deregulation. Specifically university is deregulated so as to:

1. **Increase access to university educational resources:** Following the perennial acute shortage of places in the public universities and the need to increase the number of enrolments, private hands are called upon to create opportunities for the teeming number of youths seeking tertiary education. According to Oyebede (2005), the licence given to private investors in university education is meant to address the problem of excess demand over supply. Although, success in this case provided for those who can't afford the high fee charged.
2. **Address the problem of scarce educational resources:** Akangbo (1992) asserts that national educational systems have seemed to be tied to a life of crisis. Most universities in the country have consistently inadequate resources, which invariably affects the quality of output they produce. Besides, as Utulu (2001) points out, another

factor that accounts for the decline in the quality of university output in Nigeria is the lack of physical facilities. The universities in Nigeria operates in adverse conditions; overcrowding and deteriorating physical facilities, lack of library books, educational material and so on. Addressing this problems calls for the involvement of the private sector.

3. **Raise alternative ways for funding University:** Apart from the poor quality of graduate as a result poor physical facilities, another reason for the involvement of the private hands in the provision and maintenance of university education is the under-funding of education sector. Over the years, this problem has been generating a lot of strife between the ASSU and the government. However, the presence of private hands in the university education is considered an alternative means of funding university education in Nigeria.

4. **Improve the Quality of University Education:** The government is of the view that the growth of private universities in the country will allow competition between the public and the private universities in terms of instructional delivery and other activities put in place to produce quality graduates for the economy. Competition brings improved quality of educational inputs and output. (Ibadin, Shofoyeke, and Ilusanya, 2005).

5. **Enhance efficiency:** Akpochafor (1987) posits that pro-university deregulatory schools of thought define deregulating the system will enhance efficiency. According to the author, with more players in the university system, there would be more rational and efficient allocation of resources in the short term. The long-term effect is to stabilize the cost of operation, with an attendant increase in and improved quality of product.

6. **Align with practices in other parts of the World:** It has been observe that in the more advanced countries of the world, both public and private sectors of the economy are involved in the provision and management of university education, and Nigeria cannot be an exemption,-hence the need for private in the provision and management of university education in Nigeria.

7. **Irregular academic calendar:** The varying crisis in the university sector which had been paralyzing the academic calendars over the years constitutes a source of worry to the stakeholders in the sector. Therefore, there is need for the establishment of private universities, which are less prone to disruption in their academic calendars.

From the foregoing, it could be said that Nigerian educational system needs private participation in the provision and management of educational institutions especially at the university level. This is because of the dynamic nature of education, exacerbated by the enormous resources required for the realisation of national goals.

The Global Practice of Practices of Deregulation of Education

Initiatives for deregulation of education have been taken by developed and developing countries of the world. In Taiwan for instance, the end of the 40-year long

martial law has resulted in the revised university law which reduced the power of the Ministry of Education over higher educational institutions (ISO, 2001). Consequently, in line with more academic freedom, co-operations have become more flexible. The flexibility is seen especially in the areas of the tuition each campus charge, the courses offered, the students admitted and the appointment of each college president.

In recent years, Australia has also focused on the deregulation of the tuition fees. Coleman (2003) reported that when Australian Government introduced Higher Education contribution scheme (HECS) in 1989, it reduced participation by students by Students from poorer families in the university education by 12%. With HECS, students are expected to pay back about a third of the cost of their degree through a non-interest bearing loan indexed to the consumer prices.

By 1980, in United States of America, the government discovered that regulation was becoming stifling, so to bring about initiatives towards improvement, deregulation came about.

The main focus of Education deregulation is in the area of parental freedom to control their children's schooling. The most obvious example is that of school voucher programmes. School voucher programmes distribute public money earmarked for education directly to individual parents to help them send their children to the parochial or secular schools of choice. Another example of education Deregulation is home schooling which eliminates virtually all government involvement in education thereby greatly increasing parental autonomy (Derise, 2002).

As far back as 1995, the Indiana General Assembly passed several education bills towards education deregulation (Beuchler, 1995). One of this is the Senate Enrolled Act (SEA) 274 that established the free school programme. Under this programme, a school co-operation can sign a contract with the state board of Education that enables that co-operation (or a school with the co-operation) to receive waivers from a number of the state laws and rules. Area covered include curriculum, high school graduation time, school construction requirements, pupils-teacher ratio, along with the performance based accreditation system and financial transfers and individual teachers and principals within the school are held more accountable for student performance. If the schools fail to perform as expected, the contract is rendered void, and the co-operation can put the school under academic receivership. Any school placed under academic receivership by the superintendent and school board may face sanctions. These sanctions includes removing principals and teachers, contracting with a non-profit organization to manage the school and closing the school completely among other options.

In Britain, too, deregulation has brought about autonomous schools, with greater responsibility placed on the schools to determine their own destinies.

A very important factor that occur in all deregulation exercises is money in form of higher bills. In education, tuition deregulation is the visual focus, and the resultant

high school fees have always been met with some resistance by students and their parents but widely accepted by the government and institutional authorities.

For instance, the proposed tuition deregulation for all university of Texas which would save between \$300 and \$500 billion is seen by university authorities as a move needed to cover the rising cost not budgeted by the state for higher education, if quality education is to be maintained (Castledon,2004). The students however saw the move as forcing them to get more loans with interests and or spending more time to graduate. The young conservatives of Texas (YCT), the state watchdog for higher education, therefore vehemently opposed the move.

In Nigeria, deregulation is practised in the form of granting licence to private individuals to open and run universities. This is as a result of the few public universities in the country. Therefore the government saw the need to grant licence to private individuals to open more private universities so as to accommodate those looking for university admission. In Nigeria both tuition and fees are so high and standard is being compromised.

Problems of Deregulation of University Education

Despite the immense benefits of private involvement in University Education., the move have been criticized on various grounds, among which are:

- **Private universities are profit- making ventures:** private universities have been criticized on the basis that they are profit making ventures. According to Etuk (2005). Private Universities charge high school fees. However, not many Nigerians can afford pay these fees.
- **It widens the social gap:** It has often be said that the deregulation of the university system will bring about great inequality and widen the gap between the haves and have-not.
- **Quality may be sacrificed for profit:** the private universities have again been criticized because potentially, they may not produced the expected quality of education as the proprietors are business owners who want big returns on their investments. Hence, cost and recovery plan may jeopardize the quality of education.

Similarly the deregulation of university system seems to be a veritable tool to create inequalities among Nigerian students. While it is obvious that most public universities in Nigeria operate in adverse conditions-overcrowding and deteriorating physical facilities, private universities enjoy the splendor of small class size and adequate modern facilities (Utulu, 2001). This situation in turn could provide half-baked graduates at the public universities and a well trained graduate at the private universities. The inequalities created by deregulation against the dictates of the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004), which stipulates “the provision of equal access to educational opportunities for all citizens of the country at the primary, secondary and tertiary

levels''. Also where funding of universities depends on the sale of services, the resources available will depend on the entrepreneurial success of institutions rather than on equal distribution of public resources.

This problem of inequalities is in consonance with some of the reasons why Jacques (1996) asserted that deregulation of education must be rejected because:

- Children rights are our collective responsibility and public education sits at the heart of democratic public policy.
- Public education contributes to the reduction of inequality, supports social cohesion and national progress and;
- A neo-liberal economic policy that dictates privatization or semi-privatization of education and reduces the statistics financing of or investment in public education marginalizes those students and adults living in poverty and reduces the quality of public education. Individuals are not equal in background and it is for this reason that educational equality at the university level should be given a central role in the philosophy of egalitarianism.

Suggestions for Effective Management of Deregulated University Education

Deregulation which provides the major hope of school effectiveness must be concerned not with government handing off the funding of universities but with curriculum innovation, accountability, effective management and academic integrity. However while an increase Federal Government budgetary allocation to university education is suggested, total reliance on public funding insight be a single strategy too remote to be pursued as a single public policy option for the running of Nigeria Universities. It is therefore suggested that sources of internally generated funds should be pursued by each university administration. Such sources should include investments such as consultancy services, guest houses, internet cafes, renting of built up shops, spaces and recreational facilities, transportation services and Alumni donations. Other services includes donations by friends of the university, putting university research reports and findings on the internet for sale and collaborative curriculum and research organizations. Nigerian universities should take advantage of the on-on-going academic globalization to improve standards to international levels as well as generate foreign exchange earnings. Besides the Federal Government, the roles of the other two ties of government namely the state and the local and other stakeholders such as parents, Almond association and business organizations, in finding university education also need t be specified.

To complement government efforts, private individuals and organizations should take up the challenge of adequate provision of university education to qualified and willing Nigerian citizens. With an absorptive capacity of one 16.25% by the existing

73 Nigeria universities, private involvement in university education is a welcome form of deregulation provided that quality and relevance are not compromised.

To increase the access of the low-income group within the society who cannot afford public universities should be expanded and better equipped. University autonomy as another form of deregulation, which is under consideration by that federal government at the institution level, autonomy should emphasize improved standards in terms of improved curricula, and academic excellence by all and sundry with the system. As important as fund generation is, education is about values, so the academic life should not be reduced purely to money making ventures. Rather, high academic standard and teacher quality in terms of professionalism should be persisted the current effort of registering university teacher, by The teachers' Registration Council is a right step. With time professional qualification would be required before registration.

To have the full gain of deregulation, a climate of academic integrity should be enshrined in the operation of the university system. Under this climate, the five fundamental principles of honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility should be persisted among all members of the academic community for each other, for scholarship and research and for the education process as a whole. Deregulation has leadership implementations, behoves the vice challenges to be an inside and have a clear understanding of the unique requirement of university government.

Prospect of Deregulation Universities System

The possibility of increasing numbers of private investors or corporations establishment and managing their own universities is grown. The adaptation of university education to the emerging demands of the global market can only be achieved by the private involvement in university education in Nigeria (Utulu,2001) in Nigeria, the private university system represent a Unique experiment that with enhance human capital development in the society. Furthermore, the purpose of public - private partnership in education is aimed at providing opportunity or access to many individuals while simultaneously maintaining educational quality. Public-private sector initiatives are preferable to cost – bloating in the provision of university education and lowering the government's sole burden of funding education.

In the area of maintaining standard, there is no doubt that private universities will adhere strictly to the minimum Academic standard stipulated by the National University Commission (NUC). The deregulation of the higher education sector would not in any way lead to a situation where educational standard will be compromised. The role of the National University Commission is to ensure that academic standard is maintained (Okorosaye-Orisbote,2003).

Conclusion

Nigeria is currently witnessing a period during which education and professional development at the university level are in increasing demand and the cost of providing this education has continued to rise astronomically, costs that the government cannot bear alone (Oyebade,2005). Coupled with deregulatory practices in countries of the world over, deregulation of Nigerian education, especially at the higher level, seems inevitable. However, while more private individuals or organizations are encouraged to establish, finance and manage private universities, educational planners and administrators, as well as federal and state governments, should through appropriate channels, ensure that educational standards are not compromised and that citizens are not exploited. As such, Nigeria must have a focus on how to educate their citizens, not for manpower development alone, but also socially, culturally and politically.

Thus, certain policies should be evolved on how to accommodate students, mobilize staff and resources, device curricula and teaching procedures as well as meeting rising costs of university education.

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