

PARADIGM FOR BEST PRACTICES IN NIGERIAN PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES

Dr. Mrs. Norah Omoregie

Abstract

This paper examined paradigm for best practices in Nigerian Private Universities. The Federal Government has Fully accepted Private Universities in the country which at the moment, are up to fifteen. The paper contends that if the Private Universities toe along the discussed guide lines for best practices, the universities will maintain high standards over the years after overcoming their present weaknesses and will not fall into the errors of the older Universities. The guide lines include matching enrollment with resources, right admission procedures, recruiting and retention of high calibre of teachers, monitoring of teaching processes etc. Recommendations include: inclusion of Private Universities in the sharing of Education Tax Fund by the Federal Government, pegging enrollment by NUC for Private Universities, specialization of programmes in the Private Universities and tapping support from University Alumni.

Introduction

Private Universities have come to stay in Nigeria. As at September 2004, there were eight of such universities but by January 2005, the number has risen to fifteen. The Federal Minister of Education has seen the approval of these Universities as bold steps toward increasing and liberalizing access to University education (Osuji, 2004). In a nation of about 150 million and over a million applicants seeking for admission into the Universities yearly, (he Federal Government must be commended for decisions taken so far to reduce the number of these wandering applicants. The other forty-nine Federal and State Universities are doing their best in terms of admission but can no longer cope with the teaming population. In short, over-population is the major cause of dilemma in these older Universities today. Nzemeke and Hrhagbe (2002:96) saw “uncontrolled students intake resulting in student population outstripping available facilities,” as the major challenge facing Nigerian Universities. Other problems of the older Universities include inadequate funding, unstable academic calendar due to incessant strikes either from staff or students, aging and inadequate infrastures, unconducive environment for learning and researches, lack of commitment to lecturing on the part of lecturers, bunch of students not competent for university education yet with more than five credits and high JAMB scores, and of course cultism.

The new private Universities are not grappling with all of these problems now and if there are some of the problems, they are not glaring yet. From the 2003 and 2004 National Universities Commission reports on State of Private Universities in Nigeria, all the first eight Private Universities appear to be doing well. All the Universities have been commended for conscientious regulation of students growth, stable academic calendar and cult free campuses, high standards of staff and students discipline, good accommodation of students within the campuses, infrastructural development, and anticipated production of quality graduates that are disciplined, having the fear of God. possessing leadership qualities, and who will be job creators and not job seekers. The Universities were also commended for not going off their academic briefs (Daniyan. 2004). All these commendations show that the private Universities are toeing in the right direction and it is expected that the newly seven licensed private Universities will follow suit with the monitoring of the National Universities Commission especially with the creation of new department of quality Assurance (Okebukola. 2004).

However, the older Universities in Nigeria had good take-off testimonies and standards which they maintained for years before they began to appear like “soured grapes” in the hands of a hungry man and yet presently is not meeting the needs of the man. The Universities are the tools for the national development but at the moment are not meeting the needs of the nation. From the summary findings of national survey on labour market expectations of Nigerian graduates (NUC, 2004:23). It is stated that “University education in

Nigeria does not adequately prepare graduates for work. This is manifested in a number of deficiencies the graduates exhibit in the workplace". University of Ibadan for instance started in 1948 as University College of the University of London and become a full- *The Nigerian Academic Forum, Volume 9 No. 4, November, 2005*

Hedged University in 1962. It was then seen as a high tower and citadel of learning. It attracted students both from within and outside the country, for the infrastructures were of high reputation and the laboratories were conducive for researches (Fafunwa, 1975). Today, University of Ibadan is standing like "broken China in the sun"; struggling with over population of students and obsolete infrastructure. The aim of this paper is to state the paradigm for best practices in the Private Universities so that they too will not fall into the errors of the older Universities and become "sour grapes" also. It is the desire of this paper to highlight those points that made Private Universities like Harvard, Oxford, Cambridge, Stanford, Yale to stand out among the first 10 in the top 200 world University ranking (NUC, 2004). These Private Universities have existed for more than 300 years and they have remained with their vision and mission unchanged at least academically. It means it is possible for Nigerian Private Universities to maintain high standards over the years and produce graduates that will turn event around while the Universities remain centres for researches and community development. The paper will examine the current weak features of Nigerian Private Universities and discuss the suggested best practices.

Current Weak Features of Nigerian Private Universities

From the 2003 and 2004 report of States of Private Universities in Nigeria, certain weak features that are almost peculiar to all the Private Universities have been identified. These include lack of high qualified lecturers, funds, undeveloped laboratories, studios and Research Farms facilities and tools, developing library, absence of researches and inadequate information and communication technology centre. These inadequacies are discussed below.

- **Lack of highly Qualified Lecturers:** The Private Universities are battling with inadequacy of academic staff both in number and quality. In the Minimum Academic Standards (MAS) documents (1989), which provided the bench mark for operation in all Nigerian Universities, the stipulated staff — mix is 25: 30: 45 for Professors: Readers/Senior Lecturer: Lecturer 1 and below. The Private Universities have no professors. The few professors are either on Sabbatical or associate lecturers from sister universities. These are seen as passer-bys and have no time to settle down for meaningful impartation or researches. Their commitment is shallow. The same with rank of Readers or senior lecturers. The staff-mix in these universities could best be described as heavy at the bottom. There are few Ph.D. holders with many Assistant lecturers and Graduate Assistants who are given courses to teach. If nothing is done, this will definitely affect the quality of University products.

Funding

If there are Universities that need adequate funding, it is the private universities. They are faced with provision of physical facilities such as lecture halls and seminar rooms, laboratories, clinic and studios, staff offices and quarters, cafeteria, library space and stock, student halls of residence. Information technology equipment and every thing that ensures conducive environment for teaching and learning. The most unfortunate thing is that as at the time of this paper, the Federal Government has not deemed it fit to include the private universities in the share of Education Tax Fund (ETF) which the federal and State universities are enjoying. The proprietors of the private universities are left to fund their universities. This has resulted in exorbitant school fees ranging from N220,000.00 excluding feeding to N357,730.00 per student (2004 report). However, the fees charged depended on the course of study. School fees are used for capital projects and lecturers remuneration. This has resulted in slow development of infrastructures and lectures packages lower than that of their colleagues in Federal and State Universities even with the same qualifications and academic outputs. Consequently, staff stability is affected as there is drifting to greener pasture at the slightest opportunity.

Underdeveloped Laboratories/Studios /Research Farms

While the older universities are suffering from obsolete and dilapidated laboratories, Studios and Research Farms, the private universities either do not have or have undeveloped

ones. Each Universities expected to have Biological Science Laboratory, Physics/Electronics Laboratory, Chemistry laboratory. Physiology and Anatomy laboratories (for those offering medicine), Computer laboratory, Mechanical Engineering workshop. Mass Communication Studios. Language Laboratory. Biochemistry Laboratory and Agricultural research farm. Some of the private Universities have 3-5 small laboratories with the defence that students are yet few and most of these laboratories are not properly equipped with consumables. Another excuse of the private Universities is that they are yet (Mi their temporary sites. Where studios and language laboratories are present, they are yet to be sound proofed and well equipped.

Inadequate Facilities and Tools

Of course, the available funds determine the number of facilities and tools. The private universities from their missions and objectives are determined to offer the best to their students but are largely constrained by funds. Lecture rooms are shared by different courses to the extent that some have not been able to demarcate blocks and tag them appropriately by courses. Some Faculties are sharing the same block. Lecturers are sharing offices as it is found in the secondary schools and some offices have no electric fans and air-conditioners. The older Universities have an office to a lecturer and even some lecturers have two offices attached to them. One as a personal offices and the other for administrative purposes such as the Heads of Departments and Deans. Laboratory equipment and Agricultural tools are shared among students during practical and in some cases, students are taken to borrowed workshops or studios for learning.

Developing Library

The library is centre for learning and resources. No University can rise in knowledge above the standard of its library. The seating capacity of main private Universities is small to the extent that some have 38 and some 150 (2004 Report: p. 25. 46). Some of the libraries have no adequate reading tables and chairs. Some have poor lighting system, improper shelving of books and poor condition of the University Librarian office. The volumes of books and journals inadequate, obsolete and not current. Their latest journals are in the year 2002 (2004 report: page 66). Even the books are not catalogued to make easy for students and lecturers to access them. Most of these libraries are not also 'computerized and not all subject areas have their books in the Library. So the libraries can be concluded to be in their developing stages.

Absence of Researches

Research findings of Universities are what give them reputation and names, but, many private Universities are yet to come up with policy on researches. As was earlier mentioned, the professors in these Universities are either on sabbatical or associateship and so can not settle down to pursue rigorous researches. Other few professors are on contract appointment which are renewed yearly in some cases and so are not too sure of their future in the Universities let alone pursuing a determined research. The bonifide staff of these young Universities are under going postgraduate studies in neighbouring older Universities and so have no time to pursue any research that the findings could be published. At a close observation, researches are not going on in these Universities. To worsen the issue is lack of grants for researches as the proprietors are busy with expansions of physical facilities and provision of equipments.

Inadequate Information and Communication Technology Centre

Some of the private universities are yet to construct adequate computer centres and those that have constructed have few personal computers. Only few had up to 20 computers and the buildings are not net worked, so there are no internet facilities to enhance teaching and research. Only few have installed VSA T. Some of the new universities are already having problems with their PC as computer maintenance unit had not been created to ensure that systems are maintained and upgraded when the need arises.

Paradigm for Best Practices

Handicaps of the private universities are well recognized especially in the area of

funding but certain parameters have been identified and if followed, will not only prevent them from falling into the errors of the older public Universities but will keep them on top during University ranking, if private Universities abroad could achieve it, why not Nigerian private Universities? The suggested paradigm include matching enrolment with resources, recruiting and retention of high calibre of lecturers, monitoring of teaching process, evaluation of lecturers by students, extra sources of funding, sound research, policy, digitization of libraries, good community development culture and conscious external examiners system. These are discussed below.

Matching Enrolment With Resources

In the 2004 world university ranking, Harvard University secured the top place of the first 200. The university was established 368 years ago and its total student enrolment for 2003 /2004 stands at 10.638 with teaching staff of 11.000 (NUC. 2004). That is staff: student ratio of 1:2 approximately. It means that over the years, Harvard University (Private) has maintained carrying capacity standard, matching their enrolment with staffing resources. It is pertinent to mention that some Nigerian Universities established barely 50 years ago have student enrolment of above 30.000 with teaching staff strength of 6.000.

There is the tendency for the private Universities to admit numerous students since the bulk of their capital is from that source. The private Universities must consistently make sure their student populations match their staff strength, their physical resources including lecture theatres, laboratories and other teaching instruments. Besides, outrageous student population keep the students far away from lectures touch, make continuous assessment cumbersome and may end up in high drop out rate and cultism.

Right Admission Procedures

Nearly all the private Universities as at now give their University entrance examination in addition to students performance in University Matriculation Examination (UME) and West African School Certificate with this system, the right caliber of students ready to learn are admitted. In Nigeria today there are many candidates carrying certificates with distinctions yet they cannot pass the junior WASC'E (JSS 3 examination). These candidates are still able to find their way through the University Matriculation Examination with high scores. When these students enter the university, they discover that they are not proper for University academic work. After two semester examinations, they either drop out or remain in the campus to ferment and formulate all acts of indiscipline. If the private Universities must maintain internal efficiency over the years, they must not succumb to the temptation of packing students along the street. They must also put into cognizance the science: Arts ratio of 60:40 since science and technology are needed to build the nation.

Recruiting and Retention of High Calibre of Lecturers

Any lecturer without a Ph.D. has no business going to lecture in the University but today Ph.D. holders are very few in the nation and even these few are constantly grabbed by the older Universities with better pay so that the private Universities are filled with Assistant lecturers and Graduate Assistants. The private Universities must make their pay packages attractive to attract lecturers I and above at all cost. These must be Lecturers reach' to stay with the Universities and carry out researches. Even the present crop of Assistant lecturers and Graduate assistants could be made adequate through sound staff development policy whereby higher degrees could be obtained at the expense of the Universities with minimum bond. There should also be concrete retirement benefit arrangements for workers. When this is put in place, lecturers will be reach to settle down in the private Universities instead of using them as stepping stones to the government universities.

Monitoring of Teaching Process

Private Universities must set up machinery for monitoring of teaching processes for quality assurance. A culture of quality connotes a scenario in which all members of the academic community recognize and accept the need to set and attain defined levels of performance and scholastic achievement in an environment of continuous monitoring and improvement. Quality must be built into the design of teaching and learning processes and this must be monitored. The academic staff must be monitored on what they teach, how they teach and when to teach. There is much laxity in teaching processes of the older Universities that is affecting the quality of their products. Some lecturers will not attend to their lectures, only to cover up with compulsory handouts at the tail end of the semester. The students pay for it and there will be no explanation. The Heads of Departments and

Deans are too busy to monitor ill commitment of the teaching staff. According to Trow (1995). Internal reviews and assessments are more accurate and fruitful than those done by outsiders.

Evaluation of Lecturers by Students

This is another means of ensuring quality assurance. The private universities must imbibe the culture where students are given opportunity to assess the performance of their course lecturers. Content coverage, course objective achievements, mode of delivery and level of impartation are better assessed by students. This assessment must be analyzed and put into use for purpose of improvement. Best teacher Award should be established at departmental levels and even Faculty and University' levels. Assessment forms should be designed and adopted by the senate for this purpose. Assessment should be carried out at the end of every course; if the culture is sustained, the commitment of academic staff will be assured.

Extra Sources of Funding

The private Universities depend solely on their proprietor's appropriation and self-generated income to run their institutions. Additional source is students' school fees. These Universities must diversify their revenue base and create extra sources of funding if they must survive over the years. Endowment fund is good but not many are ready to subscribe to endowment fund when the proprietor is well and alive. Osuji (2003), while addressing the issue of generating more sources of revenue by universities said it was clear that for the education sector to thrive, there must be an opening up of channels of funding. First, the private universities must form a formidable union that will influence the Federal Government to include the private universities in the sharing of Education Tax Fund since their universities are training Nigerian Citizens and also raising up high level manpower for the nation. They should not sleep over their right because in 1926 Educational memorandum which is the blue print for educational operation today in the nation, it was stated that voluntary agencies and private proprietors could be allowed to run schools and must be assisted by the government (Bab I afunvva. 1975). If they must successfully build their hostels, adequate lecture theaters, offices, staff accommodation and purchase facilities for teaching, they need allocation from the Educational Fax Fund. Secondly every private University must have sustainable project that will generate funds through consultancy Unit. Bakeries, water facilities, factories for production of soap and detergents, fisheries and poultries could be great sources of income if well managed. Cyber cafes could generate internal revenues. Thirdly, the private Universities must be able to collect their school fees at least 90% every session if they must remain in business. Easily, private Universities must establish linkages with external donors for giants and materials such as computers, books, journals and laboratory equipments.

Sound Research Policies

The private Universities must determine to make positive impact on the society through short, medium and long term researches as these are what distinguish one University from the other. A good University is known and judged by the quality of the out put of her researches according to Bidapo-Obe (2005). A good University must create a class of intelligentsia for research purposes. Every full professor in the University should have an on going research project at any time with a group of lecturers to assist. Every lecturer must be made to engage in at least one research per session. The private Universities must equip their libraries and laboratories for researches and of course there must be good Information Communication Technology facilities to facilitate efficiency and processes. These Universities must also set aside appreciable amount for research funding. The lecturers should have seminars on how to write for grants for researches and there should be establishment of Central Research laboratories to enhance the quality of academic research findings and

publications in both local and oversea journals. There should be a reward system for stimulating researchers such as Faculty or University Best Researcher Award. Private Universities should pride themselves on focused researches rather than on copy technology or recycling of people's research findings.

Digitalization of Libraries

Private Universities should not only be concerned with increase in library holdings, volumes of books, copies of journals and periodicals, but be concerned with networking, collaboration and exchange without which they will remain islands of self-isolation. When this happens, the individual universities will never be able to realize their potentials no matter how innovative they may think they are (Wamahiu and Bunyi. 2001). Digital library basically store materials in electronic format that will allow a university manipulate large collections of materials that were not part of its own collection.

A good Community Development Culture

Private Universities from onset should begin to exert their influence on their community through counseling services, public lectures on matters that affect the people such as juvenile delinquency rehabilitation, gender equality, HIV/AIDS, examination malpractices, adult education, management of stress etc. The Universities should carry out researches of the needs of the environment and make the findings known. Every private University should develop a strong and vibrant consultancy unit.

External Examiners System

The external examiners system as a peer evaluation system must be recognized as an internal part of the quality assurance process by these new universities. There is the need to appoint external examiners to provide external view of the University's academic processes and standards of programmes. Inter-University external examiners system is encouraged using the NUC minimum academic standard, and Benchmark. This will enhance growth and development and will also broaden the acceptability of degrees and other awards of such universities.

Recommendations

Recommendations include:

- The federal Government should as a matter of urgency include the private Universities in the sharing of the Education Tax fund. NUC should be an instrument to facilitate this recommendation.
- There should be a limit in enrolment pegged by NUC. They should not exceed ten thousand at any point so that enrolment will always match resources.
- Any lecturer without Master's degree should not be employed.
- Private Universities should identify areas of their best and specialize in them and must not be jack of all trades like the older universities.
- Finally, private Universities should tap support from alumni.

Conclusion

This paper has examined paradigm for best practices in Nigerian Private Universities. It is contending that Private Universities can maintain high standards over the years if certain guide lines are followed, these guide lines will prevent the younger Universities from falling into the errors of the older Universities. University education is the hope of the nation for national development. The prevailing situations in the older universities are preventing them from meeting this national goal for University education. Now that private universities are on board, it is expedient that the principles for best practices be imbibed.

References

- Bidapo - Obe, O. (2005). *Paradigm For Best Practices in Nigerian University System*. A Lecture delivered to Directors of Academic Planning In Nigerian Universities, NUC Secretariat Abuja.
- Daniyan, M. A. (2004). *State of Private Universities in Nigeria*. Report of the 2004 Annual monitoring And Quality Assurance. NUC. Abuja.
- Babs Fafunwa, A. (1975). *History of Education in Nigeria*. Clarke, Doble and Brendon Ltd.,

Paradigm for Post Practices in Nigerian Private Universities

Britain.

Herbert, Hi'O. et a I (2004). *Lahottr Market Expectations of Nigerian Graduates*. Report of national needs assessment surveys. National Universities Commission. Abuja.

Nzemeke and Erhagbe (2002). *Nigerian People and Culture*. Mindex Publishing Company Ltd. Benin - City.

Okebukola, P. (2004). 2004 World University Ranking: Seven Imperatives For the Nigerian University System, in Monday memo: Vol. 3 No. 52. NUC. Abuja.

Osuji, F. (2003). Generate more Sources of Revenue. Varsities told. *The Guarding*, Thursday, November 20.

Osuji, F. (2004). Seven New Universities Approved by Federal Government. *Nigerian University System ('hroniie*. Vol. 12. No. 2. NUC ISSN 0795 -9931.

Trow (1995). Quality Assurance in Nigerian Universities in *Nigerian University System Chronicle* Vol. 12. No. 1 P. 5. NUC ISSN 0795 -9931

Wamahiu & Bunyi (2001). *Innovation In African Higher Education*. Windsor Golf and Country Club: Nairobi, Kenya.