

REDRESSING THE PROBLEM OF ACCESS: THE RELEVANCE OF PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The article examines the gap between the demand for and supply of university places in Nigeria. It points out the fact that the emergence of private universities on the Nigerian educational scene was targeted at providing more spaces for applicants and also to meet the demand for quality and content in education. The article argues that the establishment and operation of private universities have, however, raised other issues that can limit access to university education. These, among others, include the high fees charged by the institutions and the religious inclination of some of the universities. The article then identifies some policy implications of their existence to ensure that they serve national interest.

Introduction

For a very long time, government was the only provider of university education in Nigeria. The University College of Ibadan, an affiliate of the University of London and the first institution to provide university education in the country, was established in 1948 by the federal government. It became a full – fledged university in 1962. Up till 1979, there were 13 federal universities. But on the advent of a civilian administration in 1979, the Constitution that was promulgated that year placed university education on the Concurrent Legislative list. This implied that state governments had the power to establish universities and this constitutional provision has remained in force till now (2004). Since that time, a number of state governments have founded universities. The federal government also established some universities after 1979. At present, there are 25 federal universities, including the Nigerian Defence Academy, Kaduna and 18 state universities. Ten Colleges of Education and one Polytechnic have also been granted degree-awarding status. The present civilian administration has also resuscitated the National Open University that was closed down by the military government in 1984. This entire attempt was made to widen access to university education. In spite of the upsurge in the number of universities and other degree – awarding institutions, there is still a wide gap between the demand for and supply of university education in Nigeria. Hence, the need to give more opportunities to qualified candidates has remained a topical issue. The establishment of private universities is an attempt to encourage private initiatives in creating more access to tertiary education.

In the early 1980s, some private universities were established to tackle the problem of access to university education. However, the federal military government abolished these institutions through Private Universities (Abolition and Prohibition) Decree No. 19 of 1984. As a result of

the persistence of the problem, the federal military government again enacted the National Minimum Standards and Establishment of Institutions Decree No. 9 of 1993. This decree allowed individuals and corporate bodies to establish tertiary educational institutions, including universities, once they satisfy the laid down regulations. Today (2004), there are seven private universities operating in the country. These include: Igbinedion University, Okada and Benson Idahosa University, Benin City, Edo State; Madonna University, Okija, Anambra State; Babcock University, Ilishan – Remo and Covenant University, Ota, Ogun State; Bowen University, Iwo, Osun State; and Pan African University, Lagos, Lagos State, all in the southern part of the country. Some applications for the opening of private universities are being processed by the National Universities Commission for necessary approval to be granted.

This article, therefore, examines the need for private universities in the country. It also highlights some issues that the emergence of private universities on the Nigerian educational scene has raised. The paper then states some policy implications of their existence for them to serve national interest.

The need for private universities in Nigeria

The following factors have made the establishment of private universities pertinent in the country.

a. Unequal access to university education

Every year, there is always a wide gap between the demand for and supply of university education. A considerable number of applicants fail to secure admission into the existing universities. Table 1 shows the size of the unsatisfied demand for university education in Nigeria for some years. The table shows that an insignificant percentage of qualified candidates gained admission each year. The situation has not changed for the better. Table 2 shows the number of applications and admissions by faculties in Nigerian universities. At a glance, the Table shows that the unsatisfied demand was high in Faculties of Administration, Engineering/ Environmental Sciences, Law, Social Sciences and College/Faculty of Medicine. The demand for courses in the Faculties of Agriculture, Arts and Sciences was not too high probably because of insufficient job opportunities for graduates of those disciplines. The situation was also poor in the Faculty of Education might be because of the general disdain for the teaching job.

Table 3 shows the number of applications and admissions by universities and other degree awarding institutions in Nigeria. In some cases, the number of admissions surpassed the number of applications. This is because candidates can select two universities in their application forms. The applications are, however, counted in the university of first choice. They can change to the university of second choice or any other one if they fail to secure admission in the university of first choice. On the average, universities in the southern part of the country (Serial numbers 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 11, 12, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 30, 31, 32, 33, 35, 36, 39 and 40 in Table 3) had more applicants than those in the northern states

Table 1

Extent of unsatisfied demand for university education in Nigeria by academic sessions.

Academic Year	Number of Applicants	Number Admitted	Percentage Admitted	Unsatisfied Demand (%)
1991/92	298270	61479	15.44	84.56
1992/93	357950	57685	16.12	83.88
1993/94	420681	59378	14.12	85.88
1994/95	NA	NA	---	---
1995/96	512797	37498	7.31	92.69
1996/97	376827	56055	14.88	85.12
1997/98	419807	72791	17.34	82.66
1998/99	321368	78560	24.45	75.55
1999/2000	418928	78550	18.75	81.25
2000/2001	467490	50277	10.75	89.25

Key

N.A = Not Available

Sources: (1) Oyebadé, S. A (2001). The gap between the demand and supply of university education in Nigeria: Some crucial issues and suggestions. Paper presented at the Annual Conference of The Nigerian Association for Educational Administration and Planning at the University of Benin, Benin, Nigeria, p.10.

Education Section Analysis (2003). Pre-diagnostic bibliography collation on studies proposed for the Nigerian Education Sector Analysis (ESA). Abuja: Author, Appendix 4.

Table 2

Number of Applications and Admissions into Universities in Nigeria by Faculties (1996/97 – 2000 / 2001)

Faculty/ College	1996/97		1998/99		1999/2000		2000/2001	
	Applications	Admissions	Applications	Admissions	Applications	Admissions	Applications	Admissions
Administration	108374	7132 (6.58)	88613	11659(13.16)	113286	11659(10.29)	116906	7807(6.68)
Agriculture	3994	2569(64.32)	2891	3069(106.15)	3542	3069(86.65)	3200	1540(48.13)
Arts	18115	6397(35.31)	13309	7898(59.34)	18640	7898(42.37)	18841	4868(25.84)
Education	5560	4276(76.91)	2547	5461(214.41)	3020	5461(180.83)	3236	2822(87.21)
Engineering/Environ								
Health Science	58689	5233(14.03)	55907	11786(21.8)	72518	11786(16.25)	83065	9090(10.40)
Law	40617	4255(8.01)	34180	3950(11.56)	44274	3950(8.92)	48385	2754(5.69)
Medicine	61019	4843(7.94)	54879	6134(11.18)	67938	6134(9.03)	80840	4392(5.43)
Science	18998	9696(51.04)	16686	12864(77.10)	22185	12864(57.99)	24743	8516(34.42)
Social Sciences	61461	9654(15.71)	52356	15739(30.06)	73525	15729(21.39)	88274	8488(9.62)
Total	376827	56055(14.88)	321368	78560(24.45)	418928	78550(18.75)	467490	50277(10.76)
Key								

Figures in parentheses are the percentages of applicants admitted.

Source:

Education Sector Analysis (2003). *Pre-diagnostic bibliography collation on studies proposed for the Nigerian Education Sector Analysis (ESA)*. Abuja: Author, Appendix 4.

Number of Applications and Admissions in some Government-owned Universities in Nigeria (1999/2000 - 2000/2001)

University	1998/99		1999/2000		2000/2001	
	Applications	Admissions	Applications	Admissions	Applications	Admissions
1. Ahmadu Bello University	12914	3135	23709	3135	21157	2080
2. Bayero University, Kano	3924	NA	4913	NA	6047	220
3. University of Benin	32665	4417	41277	4417	46476	2772
4. University of Calabar	10131	3099	12679	3099	16119	1873
5. University of Ibadan	31766	5308	42277	5308	33662	874
6. Obafemi Awolowo University	28641	5266	36323	5266	36549	653
7. University of Ilorin	20658	2730	22545	2730	22316	683
8. University of Jos	6491	NA	1785	NA	8105	1286
9. University of Lagos	39549	7138	57585	7138	60698	3874
10. University of Maiduguri	3341	444	5314	444	5211	1425
11. University of Nigeria	29296	5587	37259	5587	44382	5092
12. University of Port-Harcourt	17041	3078	20995	3096	23305	1869
13. Usmanu Danfodio University	1780	924	2552	924	3317	1124
14. A/Tafawa Balewa University	623	826	1188	47	1782	980
15. University of Agric. Makurdi	316	47	294	47	287	37
16. Federal Univ. of Tech. Owerri	8626	2230	11392	2230	14760	2711
17. Abia State University	3567	2402	NA	NA	4084	2726
18. Federal Univ. Tech. Akure	4111	1081	NA	NA	5020	953
19. Edo State University	2784	2254	2761	2254	4374	173
20. Ondo State University	2831	3222	3617	3222	98	432

21.	Federal Univ. of Tech. Yola	229	NA	255	NA	347	218
22.	Federal Univ. of Agric. Abeokuta	603	567	706	567	752	171
23.	Federal Univ. of Tech. Minna	1681	1100	3042	1100	3284	1001
24.	University of Uyo	9181	1895	11368	1895	11352	956
25.	Olabisi Onabanjo University	4444	2050	4303	2050	5635	817
26.	Lagos State University	5997	5465	13210	5465	20642	1499
27.	River St. Univ. of Sc. & Tech.	10544	1932	13062	1932	14585	1753
28.	Ladoke Akintola Univ. of Tech.	718	991	924	991	1354	31
29.	Federal University of Abuja	6254	798	8472	798	9472	791
30.	Nnamdi Azikwe University	8734	2266	13145	2266	18081	3444
31.	Enugu State Univ. Sc. & Tech.	3406	1702	4390	1702	4679	1178
32.	Delta State University	3339	1549	3475	1549	3527	1507
33.	Imo State University	3989	3565	5133	3565	7068	1170
34.	Benue State University	838	235	1797	235	1821	548
35.	M. Okpara University of Agric.	4	NA	249	293	327	338
36.	Ebonyi State University	NA	NA	NA	NA	230	524
37.	Kogi State University	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	346
38.	Kano State University	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	194
39.	Anambra Univ. of Tech.	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	718
40.	University of Ado-Ekiti	NA	NA	NA	NA	5798	410

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This is because most of the southern states: Abia, Anambra, Delta, Edo, Ekiti, Enugu, Imo, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun and Oyo are regarded as 'educationally advanced'. Others: Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, Ebonyi, Cross Rivers and Rivers, have joined the list of 'educationally less advantaged' states. All the states in the North: Adamawa, Bauchi, Benue, Borno, Gombe, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Kogi, Kwara, Nassarawa, Niger, Plateau, Sokoto, Taraba, Yobe and Zamfara, are tagged as 'educationally less advantaged'. Also, the federal universities especially those in the southern part of the country (Serial Numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 18, 21, 22, 23, 24, 29, 30 and 35 in Table 3) attracted more applicants than those owned by the state governments. This might be because the former are tuition-free, and that they also provide hostel accommodation for students.

The above discussion shows that the supply of university places has not matched the demand for university education. There is therefore, the need to provide more opportunities for candidates especially in those disciplines that are highly demanded. This is one of the reasons why the establishment of private universities became pertinent. These private universities have broadened access to university education, even if the annual increase in enrolment realised through them is marginal. The excess demand is higher in the southern states than those in the north. This perhaps is the reason why the existing private universities are all located in the South.

b. Demand for high quality education

There is apprehension about the quality of education in Nigeria. The decay in the system was caused by unavailability of adequately qualified staff and resources (Okebukola, 1998). Critics have also reasoned that incessant closure of government – owned universities due to student demonstration and strikes embarked upon by employees impact negatively on the quality of graduates. The inadequate physical and material resources in public universities (Education Sector Analysis, 2003), which is a consequence of insufficient funding, cannot but have adverse effect on the quality of instruction. It has also been remarked that most university graduates have been unable to meet the manpower requirements of the critical sectors of the Nigerian economy because of the lack – luster preparation (Federal Ministry of Education, 2003). This results partly from inadequate resources. Private universities are therefore expected to give publicly – owned ones stiff competition in the provision of quality education.

c. Quest for different content in education

Many societies have accepted education as an agent for promoting moral upbringing among youths. Nigerians have, therefore, advocated the need for the universities to help train law – abiding citizens and people who are morally sound. Unfortunately, most government – owned universities in Nigeria have had cause to tackle the problem of cultism among students. This monster is a major problem to grapple with in some universities (Alani, 2001). Apart from the problem of cultism, university campuses are also noted for indecent dressing especially among female students. Prostitution, rape, armed robbery and other vices are now perpetrated by university students. Parents and guardians now patronise private universities because of the absence of the afore – mentioned vices in their campuses due to strict rules and regulations adopted by the proprietors. For instance, some of these universities have dress codes for students. Student and staff unionism is also alien to the private universities. One of the universities, Covenant University, has a department of Ministerial Arts that offer courses in Christian Education, Mission Administration, Christian Leadership, Biblical Studies, Church

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Growth Strategies, Mission Resource and Project Management, and Guidance and Counselling to satisfy the demand for religious education.

d. Inadequate funding of education by government

This is one of the major predicaments faced by the education system in Nigeria. The federal government's allocation to education as a percentage of the total budget has been declining in recent years. For instance, 7.83, 12.96, 12.32, 11.59, 10.27, 11.12, 8.36, 7.0, 5.6 and 4.7% of the total budget were allocated to education in 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002 and 2003 respectively by the federal government (Alani, 2001; Academic Staff Union of Universities, 2003). As a result of inadequate funding, many capital projects have been put at hold in the universities. There is dearth of physical, material and human resources in these universities. For example, the Federal Ministry of Education (2003: 88) reports that 68, 33, 7, 14, 69, 42, 50, 56, 29, 46, 49 and 4% of the staff in the Faculties of Administration, Agriculture, Arts, Education, Engineering/ Technology, Environmental Science, Law, Medicine, Pharmacy, Sciences, Social Sciences, and Veterinary Medicine respectively were needed in year 2000 to ensure adequacy. The situation with physical and material resources was not better than that of human resources. This explains why most universities undergraduate programmes were not accredited or given interim accreditation in the last Accreditation exercise conducted by the National Universities Commission (NUC) in 1999/2000. On July 31 2004, the Saturday Punch news paper reported that the NUC had directed the Delta State University, Abraka; University of Ado – Ekiti, Ado – Ekiti; University of Ibadan, Ibadan; University of Jos, Jos; University of Abuja, Abuja; Abia State University, Uturu; Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Enugu; and University of Calabar, Calabar to stop admitting students into some undergraduate programmes that were denied accreditation until the lapses identified were corrected. The federal and some state governments own these universities. In the face of competing demand for the nation's resources and growing social demand for higher education, government had to license private universities to divest herself of some responsibilities in the area of provision of educational opportunities for the citizens. Privatisation of higher education has therefore increased the contributions of the private sector to education financing.

Issues in the privatization of university education in Nigeria

a. High fees charged by private universities

Desirable as the private universities are, one major flaw that has to be addressed is the high fees charged by them. Tables 4 and 5 show the fees payable by undergraduate students at Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago – Iwoye (a state – owned university) and University of Lagos, Lagos (a federal university) respectively in 2003/2004 academic year. In the same session, undergraduate students in all the Colleges at Covenant University, a private university, paid ₦170,000.00 or \$ 1,231.84 (at the exchange rate of \$1 to ₦138). This amount was slightly more than six times the money (₦26,870.00) paid by a fresh non-indigene student in the Faculties of Clinical Sciences and Pharmacy at Olabisi Onabanjo University, and about seven times the fees (₦24,500.00) or \$177.536 paid by new students who enrolled for science courses at the University of Lagos, which were the highest amounts paid by undergraduate students in the two government – owned institutions during that academic session. In a letter addressed to parents/guardians on payable fees in 2004/2005 Session, undergraduate students in the Colleges of Human Development, Business & Social Sciences, and Science & Technology of Covenant University are to pay ₦220,000; (or \$ 1,594.203). ₦230,000 (or \$ 1,666.667 (and ₦250,000 (or \$ 1,811.594) respectively. In some of the private universities, fees are even higher than those charged by Covenant University. These high fees have limited the access to private universities

to children from affluent homes and the professional class. This situation might further worsen the problem of inequality in the Nigerian society, since the masses of the people do not have access to private universities. Tilak (1991:230) supports this assertion when he states that "a private system of higher education is ... insensitive to distributional considerations and in fact to socio - economic inequalities".

Table 4 Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye, Nigeria.

Scheduled of Fees for 2003/2004 Session

Faculty/Programme	Returning Students		Freshers	
	Indigene (N)	Non-Indigene (N)	Indigene (N)	Non-Indigene Acceptance (N)
Arts	10,710.00	11,460.00	11,340.00	12,090.00
Degree in Mass Communication	10,000.00			10,000.00
Law	10,710.00	11,460.00	11,340.00	12,090.00
Colleges of Agricultural Science	10,795.00	11,545.00	11,430.00	12,180.00
Sciences	13,005.00	13,755.00	13,770.00	14,520.00
Basic Medical Sciences	13,515.00	14,265.00	14,310.00	15,060.00
Clinical Sciences	14,280.00	15,030.00	15,120.00	15,870.00
Pharmacy	14,280.00	15,030.00	15,120.00	15,870.00
Management Sciences	10,710.00	11,460.00	11,340.00	12,090.00
Social Sciences	10,710.00	11,460.00	11,340.00	12,090.00
Education	10,710.00	11,460.00	11,340.00	12,090.00
B.Sc. Education (Management)	10,000.00			5,000.00
Engineering & Technology		15,120.00	15,870.00	10,000.00

Source: News Bulletin: Weekly Publication of Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye, Nigeria. No. 3, January, 16, 2004.

Table 5 University of Lagos, Lagos, Nigeria.
Schedule of Service Charges for new and returning Undergraduate Students, 2003/2004 Session (#)

Details	S/N	Item	New Students		Returning Students	
			Science	Non-Science	Science	Non-Science
	1.	Acceptance	5,000.00	5,000.00	---	---
	2.	Registration	5,000.00	5,000.00	750.00	750.00
	3.	I. D. Card	1,000.00	1,000.00	500.00	500.00
	4.	Result Verification	5,000.00	5,000.00	---	---
	5.	Examination	2,500.00	2,500.00	1,000.00	1,000.00
	6.	Sports	1,000.00	1,000.00	500.00	500.00
	7.	Medical Services	2,500.00	2,500.00	750.00	750.00
	8.	Lab. Services (not refundable)	2,000.00	---	500.00	---
	9.	Students' Handbook	500.00	500.00	---	---
		Total	24,500.00	22,500.00	4,000.00	3,500.00
* Lab. Caution is to be paid by:						
	(a)	All Science Students		(c)	All Engineering Students	
	(b)	All Science Education Students	(d)	All Language Students (Arts and Education)		
* Late Registration Fee -N10,000.00						
Loss of I. D. Card - N2,000.00						

Source: Bursary Department, University of Lagos.

b. Religious inclination of some private universities

Four of the existing private universities in Nigeria – Babcock, Bowen, Covenant and Benson Idahosa – were established by Christian organisations. Some other Christian bodies such as the Redeemed Christian Church of God, Evangelical Churches of West Africa (ECWA) Methodist Church, Anglican Church, among others, have also made concrete efforts to establish private universities. Although, they are not supposed to discriminate against any applicant on the basis of religion, time may tell whether or not the core Muslims would be willing to patronise universities founded by Christian organisations. Fafunwa (1974:100), for instance, reports that “Christian-oriented or evangelical education slowed down the progress of *secular* education in the northern part of Nigeria and among the Muslims in the southern part”. The Muslims rebuffed the Missionary groups that introduced western education because they believed that the major goal of that education was to convert their children and young adults to Christianity. That was why Muslims especially in the North refused to patronise Christian schools. They already had a well-established education system based on the Holy Qur’an. The Muslim north was therefore less enthusiastic about “the adoption of a new education system which was identified with a different religion and a completely new way of life” (Adesina, 1977:14).

In order not to be outwitted by the Christian groups, plans are afoot to establish private universities by Islamic/Muslims organisations. For example, three of such universities if granted approval, would be sited in Katsina, Katsina State; Ilorin, Kwara State and Oshogbo, Osun State. It is hoped that religious crises and disharmony will not be further aggravated in the country by this competition between the adherents of the two major religions: Islam and Christianity.

c. Geographical disparity in the location of private universities

It has been remarked earlier that all the seven private universities are located in the southern part of the country. Also, the majority of the proposed ones if given approval would be sited in the south. There is no doubt about the fact that there is more awareness for western education in the Southern than the northern Nigeria. The gap between the north and south in educational development arose because of the rejection of Christian education by the Muslim north during the colonial days, universalisation of education in the South in the 1950s, early marriage among females in the north, to mention a few. In spite of the bold steps taken to close the gap, all the northern States are still officially regarded as ‘educationally less advantaged’. Proprietors would normally be expected to site their institutions in areas where there would be appreciable patronage. This accounts for the concentration of these universities in the south. The problem therefore is how to ensure that the educational gap between the north and south is not further widened by the concentration of private universities in the latter.

d. Unemployment problem

The maladjusted, developing Nigerian economy and its educational system have been implicated as some of the factors that are responsible for graduate unemployment in the country (Ajayi, 1992; Umo, 1998). In order to solve the problem of graduate unemployment, the Coordinating Agencies of Tertiary Education – the National Universities Commission, National Board for Technical Education and National Commission for Colleges of Education that oversee the activities of universities, polytechnics and colleges of education respectively – are expected to collaborate with other agencies involved in manpower planning to ensure that tertiary

institutions produce graduates that are required in the country. The tertiary institutions are also expected to give functional education and impart entrepreneurial skills in (to) their clients. One therefore expects private universities to introduce courses that are critically needed so that they do not accentuate a worsening problem. Unfortunately, the private universities have neglected these innovations in curriculum development. Courses in political science, banking and finance, public administration, marketing, philosophy, Christian religious studies and a host of others, are in the academic programmes of some of these universities, when most graduates of these disciplines produced by older universities are not gainfully employed. Even in the disciplines that are highly demanded, graduates of private universities would need to demonstrate scholarship for them to command the respect of employers of labour. Older universities such as the University of Ibadan, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ife Ife University of Lagos, University of Nigeria, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, to mention a few, have established a reputation for academic excellence. Graduates of private universities must demonstrate academic prowess for them to secure rewarding job opportunities in the public and private sectors, and for them to be admissible for post-graduate programmes in universities at home and abroad. This observation is plausible if one considers the fact that some candidates opt for private universities because they could not secure admission into government-owned universities due to low performance in the Universities Matriculation Examinations conducted yearly by a government agency: the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB), established in 1978.

e. Unsatisfactory state of publicly owned universities

The emergence of private universities on the tertiary education scene has raised suspicion among stakeholders that government might pay insufficient attention to publicly owned universities. This fear may be justified if one is guided by the experience with public primary and secondary schools. Since political leaders have a choice to send their children to private universities in Nigeria and universities abroad, interest groups such as students, university staff, employers of labour, civil society groups, and so on, might need to intensify their efforts to ensure that government-owned universities are not allowed to decay, more so that the share of the education sector as a percentage of the total budget has been declining in recent years.

Some policy implications

Since private universities are not grant-aided by the government, any suggestion that the universities should reduce payable fees from the current levels would seem unrealistic. Yet, policy makers need to adopt measures that can encourage children from poor backgrounds to attend private universities. Though, private universities can source for international assistance on their own, the federal government might need to direct the National Universities Commission (NUC) to include these universities as beneficiaries of external aids obtained by government to promote university education. Private universities should also benefit from funds disbursed by the Education Tax Fund, which was established under Act No. 7 of 1993 and as amended by Act No. 40 of 1998. At least, no part of the enabling law forbids private universities from benefiting from this funding arrangement. The rationale for the above recommendations is that private universities also contribute to national development and have indeed helped to reduce the pressure on public universities. Bursary awards and targeted scholarship can be instituted in private universities to enable candidates from poor backgrounds patronise them. This type of subsidy has been introduced in private schools in Bangladesh, Brazil, China and a host of others (Belfield and Levin, 2002).

The NUC and Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) should ensure that private universities, especially those ones established by the religious organisations, do not discriminate against any candidate on religious grounds. This would demand constant monitoring of the admission processes of the institutions so that they do not compound the volatile religious competition between the Muslims and the Christians in the country. Any institution that violates the laid down rules should be severely sanctioned.

There is the need to step up activities directed at encouraging children in the northern part of the country to attend school. The approval by the federal government of the bill on Universal Basic Education that makes the primary and junior secondary education compulsory is therefore laudable. This will create more awareness for western education and ensure that universities enroll more students from that part of the country in the future. The opinion leaders, elite and religious organisations should also complement the efforts of the government in promoting awareness for education in the north. Once all school-age children are attracted to school at the lower levels, more candidates would be available to attend institutions of higher learning. Philanthropists and men/women of affluence would then show interest in establishing universities to reduce geographical disparity in the location of tertiary educational institutions.

There would be the need for regular accreditation of academic programmes of private universities to make sure that they do not depart from their missions and visions. The NUC must constantly monitor their academic programmes, staff strength and facilities to guarantee quality education and to ensure that they do not worsen the unemployment situation in the country. These universities should also be guided by the manpower development plans formulated by government agencies. There is danger in leaving them to operate without proper supervision. After all, it is the responsibility of government to regulate all educational practices in the country. All universities in the country should introduce entrepreneurship education in their curricular. The over-dependence on government for jobs by university graduates is not in the best interest of the Nigeria. This is because when there are no gainful job opportunities, the attendant social vices (prostitution, drug peddling, armed robbery, etc.) would threaten the moral fabrics of the nation.

Finally, all stakeholders should ensure that the proprietors of public universities do not neglect them. The tendency to believe that the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASSU) is over-reacting on the issues concerning the state of the nation's universities should be discouraged. Rather, the civil society groups, professional associations, employers of labour and so on, should co-operate with the university community to encourage government to shoulder its responsibilities toward the education of her citizens.

Conclusion

The emergence of private universities will, no doubt, strengthen democratic governance in Nigeria. After all, genuine democratic rule allows individuals the freedom of choice, including the rights of parents/guardians to decide on the institutions that their children or wards would attend. It is also apparent that the government alone cannot bear the burden of meeting the educational aspirations of the citizens, hence the need to encourage more private universities to co-exist with the ones funded by government. However, government must design appropriate

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policy instruments to ensure that private universities genuinely contribute their quota to national development.

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