The Quality of Nigeria’s Private Universities

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This paper examines the quality of private universities in Nigeria. Three private universities were studied — two mission-sponsored and one privately-owned — using six indicators of quality assurance as outlined by Ekhaguere (2001) in a similar work on African universities. Collected data indicate that: the institutions offer academic programmes in the sciences, humanities, and most especially, in the social and management sciences; while there is gender parity among students, there is disparity among staff; the mission-established institutions are better positioned to provide quality education. These mission-established universities however, need to strengthen their staff and improve on access to information and communication technologies. There is also room for improvement in the provision of physical facilities. The study concludes that while it may be worthwhile to encourage private investors in higher education, this should not be done at the expense of public universities because the latter’s academic programmes are more diversified than those which are offered by the private universities.

Key words: Private universities, public universities, SAP, quality, gender parity, Nigeria and Africa

Introduction
The mid-1980s witnessed a major transformation in most parts of Africa which had an overarching effect on all sectors including the education. The adoption of the structural adjustment programme (SAP) led to the devaluation of national currencies which in turn undermined the capacity of Africa’s institutions in achieving their set goals. Infrastructures at schools and hospitals literally collapsed following the adoption of SAP. Furthermore, the conditions of service of public sector personnel in the countries that adopted SAP plummeted while the standard of their institutions declined rapidly. This situation exacer-bated the phenomenon of brain drain, with skilled workers leaving Africa in droves for high-income countries in search of better conditions of service and professional fulfilment. A key element of SAP was the withdrawal of state support from social-sector programmes like health and education. African governments embraced the notion that education should be regarded as a private, rather than a public good (Sawyerr, 2002) even though most of their citizens were living in abject poverty according to successive UNDP annual reports.

African universities have responded to the crisis by devising various strategies for generating the much-needed funds. This has included rapid expansion in student enrolment without corresponding increase in the number of quality staff and improvement on infrastructures. Also, universities began to offer various ‘attractive’, market-driven professional degrees or diploma courses in order to attract students who could afford the high fees that were being charged for these programmes.

Various schemes have also been introduced which has made it possible for institutions to admit students into fee-paying and subsidized programmes. Those who could pay but could not be admitted through the usual admission process were offered admission under the fee-paying regime, thereby making it possible for the institutions to generate huge sums of money. Institutions that have...
implemented such schemes include: Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda, and in Nigeria: Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ogun State; Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Edo State; Lagos State University and University of Lagos.

One significant step taken by the authorities in Africa is the privatization of education. African countries have responded to the demand for higher education in the face of declining resources by opening the sub-sector to private investors. Various governments have begun to issue licenses to private organizations/individuals that have the resources to establish private universities. New private universities are springing up all over Africa to provide education for the yearning masses at fees that are much higher than those of public universities.

The landscape of the higher education sub-sector has changed dramatically within the last decade because of the shift toward a neoliberal macro-economic framework. African universities that were originally conceived as developmental institutions to produce high-level manpower with government funding have embraced a neoliberal philosophy in order to survive and also meet the demand for education. Unfortunately, they began to enrol more students than their resources and infrastructure could cater for effectively. Consequently, lecturers began to spend more hours teaching and less time on research. Campuses became overcrowded amidst limited facilities. The various institutions witnessed a precipitous decline in the commitment of staff to knowledge production and quality teaching that is informed by research. A general malaise towards scholarship crept into these institutions. Above all, the pursuit of material rewards has replaced the presumably hallowed mission of Africa’s developmental universities.

Overview of Studies on Higher Education in Africa

There has been a perceptible interest in higher education in Africa as reflected in the body of literature on its scope, place, mission, quality, and performance over the past two decades. The reason for this could be linked to the widely-shared concern among scholars, and bilateral, and multilateral organizations on the declining standard of higher education all over Africa with the exception of South Africa. As a result, nearly all aspects of university education, such as funding, access, equity, gender mainstreaming, infrastructural decay, the impact of information and communication technology (ICT), to name some, have been addressed.

Available literature contains studies on the paradigm shift on financing of higher education in developing countries, most especially in Africa (Obasi, 2002). The reports on funding explore the benefits of cost sharing and/or how to generate the much-needed resources for public universities in Africa (Johnstone, 2004; Ishengoma, 2004; Bloom et al., 2005).

Various other reports/studies address the impact of information and communication technology (Adam, 2003); the challenges of capacity building (Sawyerr, 2004); academic freedom (Zeleza, 2003); attributes of university students including tracers studies on how well they are doing in the job market (Mayanja et al., 2001). There are also far-sighted proposals on how to restore the lost glory of African universities in the literature.

Further attempts have been made to examine the merits and demerits of cross-border higher education (Knight, 2004) including the consequences of brain drain in Africa (Dovlo, 2004). Similarly, other scholars have undertaken a critical appraisal of the World Bank’s prescription for higher education in Africa (Hoebink et al., 2004; Jibril, 2004), or the possible consequences of the massification of university education on knowledge acquisition and production (Bature, 2004). There is also a genuine concern for the quality of higher education as attempts are being made to expand enrolment, prompting Ekhaguere (2001) to outline a set of quality assurance indicators.

One other major area of interest is the impact and response of higher institutions to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. There is evidence (Kelly, 2001) that most institutions have responded slowly

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1 Only four universities in Africa: Cape Town, Witwatersrand, KwaZulu-Natal, Pretoria are among the top five hundred in the world and even then, they are listed among the last one hundred.
to the epidemic and it is still doubtful if the situation has changed their authorities bury their 'heads in the sand like ostriches'. Kelly argued further that:

*The most striking feature of the university response to HIV/AIDS is what can only be described as the awe-inspiring silence that surrounds the disease at institutional, academic, and personal levels. Notwithstanding some qualifications, for all practical purposes both individuals and institutions conduct themselves as if the disease did not exist.*

The ominous silence on such a virulent disease prompted a number of scholars and agencies to study the response of higher institutions in Africa to the epidemic (Chetty, 2006; Kelly 2001; Stremlau and Nkosi, 2001; Otaala. 2006; Ayim, 2002; Africa-America Institute, 2003; Association of African Universities, 2006. A few others have organized meetings to underscore the need to tackle the epidemic with all the zeal that is required in these institutions (Ayim, 2002; Association of Commonwealth Universities, 2001; Otaala, 2006; Kelly, 2001; World Bank, 2001).

Although the emergence and proliferation of private universities is also of critical interest to scholars, studies on these institutions are still relatively few and far between. A study by the Association of African Universities (2000) provides an overview of their number, mission statement, and proprietors. Another describes the scope, programme, size, staffing situation, governance structure, financial environment, and regulations of such institutions in six African countries (Thaver, 2004). Another scholar, Useem (1999a; 1999b) examined the emergence of Muslim institutions of higher learning in East Africa and the gap that they fill while others (Ruth, 2005 and Oanda, 2005) explored gender-related issues. Overall, a cursory survey of available literature suggests that much more could still be learned if in-depth studies of Africa's private universities are conducted.

**Rationale and the Objective of the Study**

This study was conceived against the backdrop of the dearth of studies on private universities in Africa, using Nigeria as a reference point. Private universities are novel institutions because most of Africa's universities are publicly owned. They have multiplied considerably over the past decades (tables 1 and 2) and it is vital to appraise their quality and potential contributions to development.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Private higher educational institutions and universities in Africa</th>
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<td>9</td>
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</table>

++ The government has since approved 32 universities
Source: Policy Forum on Private Higher Education, 2004; (HEP, ADEA and AAU)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2. Total enrolment in private universities for selected African countries (2002)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Africa</td>
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<td>Zimbabwe</td>
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<td>Uganda</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ghana</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tanzania</td>
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<td>Nigeria</td>
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Source: Policy Forum on Private Higher Education, 2004; (HEP, ADEA and AAU)
Note: Current enrolment must be above the figures in this table in view of the fact that more private universities have been licensed.

Various stakeholders are now concerned about a number of issues on the emergence/proliferation of private universities in Africa. Of significance is the worry in some quarters about the capacity of Africa's private universities to meet the needs of the society more effectively than public universities. Much more important in this context is the feeling about the capacity of these institutions to provide quality education or education that is at par with the standard in public universities before the latter slipped into disrepute and decay.

Quality assurance now occupies the centre stage in higher education because of the proliferation of higher institutions of learning and programmes that
are established in response to markets. Institutions are either being rated by external agencies or are inclined to initiate self-appraisal of their programmes in order to show their worth, attract students, and meet the expectations of their founders or the public at large. Like the marketplace, universities’ rating has become the selling point for higher institutions.

The annual rating of universities within nations states and across international boundaries and within nations is therefore the vogue today. The institutions that are highly rated attract more applicants. In addition, the products of such institutions are likely to secure lucrative jobs much more easily and quickly than the lowly-rated ones. Consequently, there is now a shift from the notion that quality could be presumed once a higher institution is granted the license to operate by the responsible national authorities. Various countries have now established a continuous evaluation regime by self-appraisal, peer review, and/or assessment of some other independent external agencies.

This study provided an opportunity to assess the quality of Nigeria’s private universities. Even though the National Universities Commission (NUC) has established a Quality Assurance Unit, it is vital for the agency to appreciate the fact that accreditation of an institution is not synonymous with quality assurance. Quality incorporates more indicators – such as governance of an institution, gender mainstreaming, the scope of access to information and communication technologies etc; than those that are taken into consideration during accreditation.

The aim of the study would nigh be met if quality is recognized as an important issue by the NUC as well as given the necessary boost in the research agenda. Both public and private institutions should be subjected to critical appraisal on a continuous basis in order to restore the confidence of the consumers, their founders and the international community in the degrees.

**History of University Education in Nigeria**

Prior to the establishment of the first full-fledged university in the country in 1948, Nigerians travelled far and wide around the globe in search of university education. Nigeria recorded its first batch of graduates of Nigerian origin with university degrees in the middle of the eighteenth century.

The first tertiary institution in the country was the Yaba Higher College which was established in 1934 (Clark, 2004). The dropout rate was high and Nigerian nationalists criticized the college for what they believed was its sub-standard level of education. The Yaba College soon slipped into disrepute, forcing the colonial authorities to constitute a commission that examined the feasibility of university education for the country.

The government subsequently established the first university in Nigeria (University College, Ibadan) in 1948, shortly after the recommendation of the commission was adopted. It began as a college of the University of London. The examiners came from London University and the senate of the university granted the degrees of the pioneer students of the Ibadan college.

Later on, the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife (formerly the University of Ife), Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, and the University of Nigeria, Nsukka were established by the governments of the Western, Northern and Eastern regions respectively. The federal government added the University of Lagos to its list of institutions in 1962. By and large, the quality of these pioneer institutions was not only beyond reproach (Adedeji, 2001) but also at par with that of universities in the United Kingdom.

University education in Nigeria has grown significantly. There are eighty-eight universities in Nigeria today (The Nation, May 15, 2007) —

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3 This was the famous Sir Ashby Commission which recommended the establishment of University College, Ibadan.
twenty-eight federal, twenty-eight state-owned, and thirty-two private. One of the principal reasons for the rapid expansion of university education in Nigeria is the rising demand. Nigerians believe that university education will provide them with opportunities, hence their insatiable demand for it. Not less than a million Nigerians annually seek admission into all the degree-awarding institutions in the country. Yet, all the institutions in the country can barely accommodate 2 to 3 per cent of the qualified candidates (National Universities Commission, 2004).

Rapid expansion of universities is at a price to the nation. Universities face serious challenges in all respects. The physical facilities of the public universities that offer most of the places to students, the institutions are in a complete state of disrepair. Their libraries are bereft of leading international journals and new books while the quality and quantity of teachers have declined. Most of them also lack information and communication technologies. Finally, most of the public institutions have become havens for cultism, sexual harassment, and other unsavoury practices.

One of the reasons for the deplorable state of Nigeria’s public universities is uncontrolled expansion. Banjo (2004), a former vice-chancellor of Nigeria’s premier university, the University of Ibadan – observed that:

Ibadan is the first degree-awarding institution in the country . . . Then followed the big explosions: seven new universities in the seventies and eighties. Clearly, other motivations than excellence were behind this proliferation. Not expectedly, the new universities found it hard to keep up with the older ones, and what is worse, they have had the effect of dragging these older ones down with them into the quagmire of under-funding and a welter of attendant problems, not least of which is compromised quality.

Prolonged military rule affected all departments of life in Nigeria including universities (Alubo, 1999; Adesina et al., 2004). Successive military regimes eroded the autonomy of these institutions and most of the vice-chancellors gradually became dignified agents of the government of the day. Military rule also affected management style, as well as subverted the due process that was customary in universities (Ekong, 2002). The academics, and the capacity of their institutions to play their traditional role in the society have also diminished.

The final assault on universities came with the implementation of SAP in 1986. SAP, as was observed earlier, had deleterious impact on the funding of these institutions (Obikoya, 2002). Also, salaries were low and facilities poor, resulting in low morale. Rather than seek ways to mitigate the effects of SAP, the Nigerian authorities searched for solution elsewhere. The government looked towards the private sector and opened the gate for these entrepreneurs and other bodies to establish universities. The proliferation of these institutions has thrown up unanticipated challenges. Some observers are inclined to argue that the approval of private universities was without consideration of their capacity to provide quality education. Others are of the view that they can only fill certain gaps and would therefore not be in a position to offer wide-ranging courses like the public universities. Be that as it may, the emergence of private universities offers an opportunity to appraise their potential benefits and the possible risks.

Studies on Higher/University Education in Nigeria

Studies on Nigeria’s universities are relatively few and far between since the establishment of the first university in the country nearly fifty-nine years ago. Early reports on university education consist of commentaries in national newspapers and the reports of commissions/panels that were set up to provide justification for higher education in the colonies. Among the early reports was that of the Sir Eric Ashby Commission (1960) which recommended the establishment of the University College, Ibadan.

The establishment of the University College, Ibadan stimulated studies on higher education and a few reports were trickled into the literature by the 1960s. Among the baseline work on higher education was the monograph by Yesufu (1973) which was the first systematic attempt to appraise the role of universities in Africa, including Nigeria. van den Berghe et al. (1969) conducted a study on
the social characteristics of Nigerian university students. The lead author of the studies also published a monograph on campus politics in a Nigerian university in the late 1960s. An excellent critique of the educated elite by Ayandele (1974) was to follow.

But the past two decades have witnessed a plethora of reports and studies that describe the factors that account for the collapse of universities. Among such reports are those by the Social Science Academy of Nigeria (SSAN) (2001; 2003), Ford Foundation (2001) including eight projects that were sponsored by a consortium of four US foundations.*

Adalemo (2001) concluded that institutional inadequacies have affected the performance of Nigeria’s universities. His assertions are borne out of the fact that facilities are in a complete state of disrepair. Adalemo’s findings were extensively corroborated in the case studies of four Nigerian universities by SSAN. The reports found decay of physical facilities; underdeveloped information and communication technology; and outdated academic programmes in these institutions.

Scholars like Ade-Ajayi (2001) traced the problem of Nigeria’s universities to the adoption of SAP at the instance of the Bretton Wood Institutions. According to him, the World Bank plays a palpable role in education in Africa as amply demonstrated by the influence of its vision on the thinking of African policy makers. Ade-Ajayi (2001) asserts:

The confusion about Universal Basic Education persists because, although we usually deny it, our policies are, to a large extent, teleguided by the World Bank/IMF who use the debt burden to extract compliance even on policies about which there are serious doubts among our policy makers. Since the 1970s, the World Bank has been pushing the heretical idea that the return to the state compared with the return to the individual beneficiary is highest in elementary education and lowest in higher education and, therefore, the state must, in the name of structural adjustment, increase the allocation of resources to elementary education at the expense of higher education.

Available reports also contain suggestions on how to generate funds for university education. Perhaps, the most articulate paper on financing options is by Ukeje (2002). It outlines the following as important sources of funds for running universities: education tax fund, fees, loans to students, transfer of municipal services to government, private sector contributions, funds from alumni, and rationalization of programmes including scholarships for brilliant and/or poor students. While agreeing, Obikoya (2002) outlined the effects of underfunding on university education.

The universities have also contributed to the crisis in a number of ways. In the first place, the universities responded to the dearth of funds by devising various ingenious means of mobilizing funds. First, they have launched numerous mouth-watering degree programmes in order to attract students who are in turn charged outrageous fees. Programmes in labour and industrial relations, banking and finance, counselling, personnel, including managerial psychology, secretarial studies, etc., that are ostensibly dubbed professional courses, have been launched in various universities. Lecturers are now forced to grade hundreds or thousands of scripts. Little wonder that quite a number of lecturers are reported not to bother with properly grading scripts, but merely supply marks to the departmental examination officers. There are stories that 'money changes hands' for marks. Results are not released on time and students that need transcripts for admission or for some other purposes have a hard time obtaining them (Erinosho, 2004).

Ethics also looms large in works on higher education in Nigeria. There are reports on cultism, sexual harassment, and other nefarious acts that undermine the quality of education. Self-sponsored publications and books have overtaken the practice of peer review of scholarly publications while the leadership at the departmental and university levels is notorious for corruption and unethical behaviour patterns. The scope of the problems facing universities is amply documented in a study on

*Seven studies were commissioned: four of them on universities while three others address cross-cutting issues like gender, information and communication technology as well as governance.
university governance as well as in the proceedings of the Academy’s 13th General Assembly at the Social Sciences Academy of Nigeria (2001:2003). Government has set up education sector analysis working groups to conduct studies on the cost of training an undergraduate student in any discipline in Nigeria. Following from this is how this cost can be shared among the stakeholders. This is to relieve government of the burden of having to fund university education alone. Through cost sharing, more funds will be available to the universities to improve facilities. The studies have shown that inadequate funding is one of the major problems of university education delivery in Nigeria.

Significance of the Study
This study is about the quality of Nigeria’s private universities. Although the government is determined to grant licences to as many of these institutions as meet the set conditions, it is doubtful whether private universities have the capacity to fill the gap that is being created by the poor state of public universities. While competition between the private and public is desirable, there is need to ascertain whether these private universities are in a position to meet minimum set of standards, before being considered as the solution to the crises in the higher education in the country.

Religious organizations, especially the Christian missions have been active in the education sector from the colonial times. It is therefore not surprising that they are in the forefront of establishing higher institutions in Nigeria now that the authorities have decided to encourage the private sector to establish such institutions. Overall, private universities in Nigeria can be grouped based on the funding organizations:

a. Orthodox or Pentecostal Christian organizations;
b. Muslim bodies;
c. Entrepreneurs who work alone or in partnership with other entrepreneurs;
d. Nigerians who are in partnership with foreigners/bodies.

The key providers of private higher education in the country today are the Seventh Day Adventists, Pentecostals such as the Living Faith Church, otherwise known as Winners Chapel; the Redeemed Christian Church of God, the Church of God Mission; the Baptist Church, Anglican Communion, and Muslim organizations. The Catholic Church and Methodists are about to establish their own institutions.

One of the reasons for the positive response from the missions is the rot in the public universities. These institutions are caught in the web of various unethical and antisocial practices. This response is also attributed to the incessant strike actions by academic and non-academic staff unions in the public universities, resulting in students spending more years than the time stipulated for their degrees/diplomas. Consequently, the private sector especially the missions are determined to restore the lost glory of higher education in the country. They are concerned about bringing morality back into higher education as amply shown in the mission statements of two of the three that were studied.

Setting of the Study
This study involved three private universities in Nigeria, namely: Babcock University, Ilishan, Ogun State; Bowen University, Iwo, Osun State; and Igbinedion University, Okada, Benin City, Edo State. These institutions were selected based on certain distinctive attributes that would provide the basis for comparative analysis.

Babcock University was established by the Seventh Day Adventist Church of Nigeria in 1999 with the aim of:

- Building people for leadership through quality Christian education; transforming lives; and impacting society for positive change through the prevailing influence of its graduates in service to humanity.

Babcock University is a residential institution which runs academic programmes leading to the award of Bachelors first degrees in the humanities, social and management sciences, nursing, public health, education, and agriculture, which is mandatory for all private universities in the country. The student population is expected to rise to 5000 in the next five years, from its current level of 3551. Finally, the institution plans to establish degree programmes.
in law, security services, and medicine in the near future.

The Nigerian Baptist Convention established Bowen University as a residential institution in 2001 in order to provide:

High quality, morally sound and socially relevant education in the most cost-effective manner to all students irrespective of gender, race, colour, ethnicity or religion.

The student population of the university, which is 3447, is expected to rise to 5200 over the next five years. Bowen runs degree programmes in the physical sciences, social and management sciences and agriculture as required by the Nigerian authorities. It plans to introduce degree programmes in nursing, physiology, optometry, and medicine within the next five years.

The third institution, Igbinedion University, was founded by Gabriel Ighinedion, a Bini chief and entrepreneur, in 1999, with the aim of:

Pursuing excellence in teaching, research, and scholarship through the provision of world class facilities and opportunities for education, training, and employment to all those who are able to benefit without discrimination.

This residential institution runs a fairly ambitious academic programme that leads to the award of degrees in engineering (mechanical, civil, electrical, petroleum, chemical), law, medicine, the health sciences, and agriculture. It also runs degree programmes in accounting, banking and finance, international relations, business administration, marketing, public relations, advertising and in the humanities (i.e., English, theatre arts). The student population is expected to rise from the present 5100 to 10,000 in the next five years.

Two of the universities are owned by Christian organizations. A businessman is the proprietor of the third. However, Babcock stands out among the three institutions because the parent international wing of the Seventh Day Adventist exercises a supervisory role over its programmes.

Data Collection and Analysis

Three instruments were designed to gather data. The first, the institutional questionnaire, was designed to gather the following information from each of the institutions:

1. mission statement;
2. year of establishment
3. history of institution
4. number of staff and students
5. gender of staff and students
6. academic qualifications of teaching staff
7. current and projected student population
8. range of available facilities (including physical and information and communication technology), and access to these facilities

Each institution was also requested to indicate the format for assessing its students whether it incorporates term papers and continuous assessment and whether it organizes tutorials for them.

The second questionnaire was targeted at the academic staff of each of the institutions. Academic staff members were requested to provide information on academic qualifications, working experience, areas of specialization, the thrust of their research work, and whether they have access to ICT in their offices. It also provided the opportunity to corroborate the information provided by each of the institutions concerning their pedagogy (organization of tutorials, etc.) and the mode of assessment of their students (term papers, continuous assessment, etc.). The instruments also sought to gather information on whether these institutions run staff development programmes.

The third questionnaire was administered to students using the purposive sampling technique. The questionnaire was designed to gather information about the students’ social background — age, gender, religion, etc. — including parents’ social background — income, education etc.; reasons for enrolling in the institutions, attitudes to academic programmes, aspirations and aspects of pedagogy at the institution etc.

Data was obtained from the academic staff and students in order to corroborate the information supplied by the authorities of the institutions on aspects of quality, which was the principal goal of the study. Ekhuaguer (2001) hitherto outlined thirteen indicators for measuring quality in universities in Africa:

i. vision, mission and goals
ii. teaching and learning process
iii. assessment
Only six of these indicators, listed as follows, were used in this study to assess quality:

1. mission statement
2. assessment
3. teaching facilities
4. gender equity
5. information and communication technology
6. physical facilities

The data collected was coded, entered into a computer, and processed, using a variety of statistical techniques. The qualitative data was extracted and reviewed before inclusion in this paper.

Outcomes

All the authorities of the universities studied completed the institutional questionnaire. One hundred and seventy academic staff completed the questionnaire — 22 from Igbinedion, 75 from Bowen and 79 from Babcock universities, while one thousand, eight hundred and forty-six students — 855 from Igbinedion, 714 from Bowen and 277 from Babcock — completed the questionnaire. The staff and students questionnaires were self-administered.

The three institutions proclaim laudable mission and vision which underscore their commitment to morals and quality education with the exception of Igbinedion which is not as concerned about morality as the mission-owned institutions.

The foci of the degree programmes in these institutions are indicated in Table 3. The table shows that emphasis is on social and management sciences; followed by the sciences. The majority of students in these institutions are therefore enrolled in market-driven courses such as banking and finance, accounting, and business administration. Igbinedion university runs more diversified degree programmes than Babcock and Bowen. By and large, the courses that are offered in private institutions are not as diversified as those in the public universities. Table 4 indicates that there are slightly more female than male students but more male than female academic staff in all the institutions. Furthermore, the ratio of academic staff to students is better at Babcock and Bowen than at Igbinedion (1:17 at Babcock; 1:22 at Bowen and 1:32 at Igbinedion). The mission institutions also have more PhD degree holders among their academic staff than Igbinedion and presumably a higher calibre of teachers than the latter (Igbinedion) if this is judged by the number of staff with doctorate and masters degrees. There is one doctorate degree holder to 46 students at Babcock; 1 to 49 at Bowen and 1 to 134 at Igbinedion.

Table 3. Current enrolment by disciplines in selected universities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disciplines</th>
<th>Babcock University</th>
<th>Bowen University</th>
<th>Igbinedion University</th>
<th>Total</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>1.66</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>4.11</td>
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<tr>
<td>Education &amp; Info. Mgt</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>2.73</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
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<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
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<tr>
<td>Health Sciences</td>
<td>397</td>
<td>8.36</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
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<tr>
<td>Humanities</td>
<td>293</td>
<td>6.25</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
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<tr>
<td>Law</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
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<tr>
<td>Medicine</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>993</td>
<td>27.96</td>
<td>955</td>
<td>27.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social &amp; Mgt. Sciences</td>
<td>1812</td>
<td>51.02</td>
<td>2350</td>
<td>68.18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3551</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>3447</td>
<td>100</td>
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</table>
Table 4. Gender of staff and students in the selected universities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Universities</th>
<th>Male Staff</th>
<th>Female Staff</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Male Students</th>
<th>Female Students</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Babcock</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>82.4</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>48.0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bowen</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>82.6</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>45.9</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Igbinedion</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>37.7</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>48.6</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>424</td>
<td>82.5</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>514</td>
<td>47.7</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The mission-based institutions are better equipped than Igbinedion University, judging by access to space and vital facilities like common rooms and reading rooms as well as ICT facilities. The facilities are poorer at Igbinedion than at the two mission institutions, but, the average number of students per room is comparable across the institutions (table 4).

The indicators rank Babcock very high in the area of capacity enhancement of staff and students, followed by Bowen, and finally Igbinedion (table 5). Also, tutorials, term papers, handouts, and continuous assessment are incorporated into pedagogy at Babcock and Bowen with the exception of term papers in context of the latter. Igbinedion University differed greatly in this respect, where only continuous assessment is reported.

Faculty and departmental seminars are organized at Babcock but not at Bowen and Igbinedion universities. Moreover, Babcock University is committed to staff development in contrast to Igbinedion which has no programme for sponsoring its staff for higher education. Bowen seems to be making some effort in this regard.

Table 6 shows that Babcock has more books per students than the two other institutions. There are about 12.6 books per student in the main library at Babcock in contrast to 2.56 per student at Bowen and 5.34 books per student at Igbinedion. In sitting capacity, the mission universities are better placed than Igbinedion in sitting capacity in their respective libraries. There are 10 students to a seat at Babcock; 4.3 students to a seat at Bowen and 46 students to a seat at Igbinedion. Overall, the table shows 10.4 students to a seat at Babcock; 6 staff/students to a seat at Bowen and 47.4 staff/students to a seat at Igbinedion.

Most of the staff members indicated that they would not like to spend the rest of their career in these institutions. The staff at Bowen and Igbinedion were particularly anxious to move to other institutions due to unsatisfactory conditions of service and quality of education being provided. About 60 per cent of the staff that were surveyed in Igbinedion; 56 per cent at Bowen and 27 per cent at Babcock would not like to work for the rest of their academic life at these institutions. Between 60 per cent and 86 per cent of the staff members who completed the questionnaire indicated that their remuneration is not competitive while between 50 per cent and 84 per cent of the students who completed our instrument in the three institutions were dissatisfied with their hostel accommodations but pleased with the way they were being taught.

Discussion

The mission statements of the institutions examined proclaim their commitment to quality education and morality with the exception of Igbinedion which does not focus on moral education. They provide avenue for female education in view of the fact that they enrol more female and male students. However, there is gross gender imbalance among their academic staff in favour of male members.

The academic programmes of these institutions are driven by the market rather than by a commitment to particular disciplines. Consequently, these institutions offer degree programmes in the social and management sciences — accounting, banking and finance, marketing, public relations, and business administration. Only Igbinedion offers courses in engineering and medicine. This notwithstanding, most of Igbinedion students are also enrolled in the market-driven courses like banking and finance, advertising, etc.
Table 5. Qualifications of academic staff by universities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Universities</th>
<th>No of PhD holders</th>
<th>No of Masters</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Babcock University</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>1:46</td>
<td>38.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Student pop=3551)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bowen University</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>1:49</td>
<td>45.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Student pop=3441)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Igbinedion University</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>1:134</td>
<td>24.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Student pop=5110)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Ratio of PhDs to Total Number of Students
**Ratio of Total Academic Staff to Students

Table 6. Physical and ICT facilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Common room</th>
<th>Staff access</th>
<th>Students' access</th>
<th>Networking</th>
<th>Internet connectivity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Babcock</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bowen</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Igbinedion</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7. Staff/students' capacity enhancement indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Faculty seminars</th>
<th>Departmental seminars</th>
<th>Tutorials</th>
<th>Term paper</th>
<th>Continuous assessment</th>
<th>Handouts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Babcock</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bowen</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Slightly Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Igbinedion</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8. Library facilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Library stock</th>
<th>Sitting capacity of library</th>
<th>Sitting capacity per staff/students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Ratio of books per student</td>
<td>No of seats per student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Babcock</td>
<td>44740</td>
<td>1:2.69</td>
<td>360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bowen</td>
<td>8838</td>
<td>1:2.56</td>
<td>800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Igbinedion</td>
<td>27,000</td>
<td>1:5.34</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The physical and academic facilities in the mission institutions are of higher grade than those at Igbinedion. There are more books per students at Babcock and Bowen than at Igbinedion and also a higher ratio of seats to staff/students at the former than the latter. Igbinedion seems to have expanded its students' population beyond its capacity while the students' hostels at all the three institutions are overcrowded (4 to 6 or 8 students per room). This situation is by no means different from what currently obtains in many public universities in Nigeria whose hostels are notoriously overcrowded. But Babcock and Bowen universities, despite their overcrowded hostels, have made provision for common and reading rooms, facilities that are not available at Igbinedion.

Information communication technology (ICT) is fairly developed at Babcock, followed by Bowen, in contrast to the situation at Igbinedion, where the case is not the same. Overall, the staffs and students do not freely access the Internet because hostels and offices have not been connected to the network.

One of the remarkable differences between Babcock and the other two university is the fact that the former attaches importance to staff development and also utilizes the appropriate strategies like term paper and tutorials to develop the capacity of its students in contrast to Bowen and Igbinedion. Igbinedion is perhaps worse off when compared to Bowen in this regard. Babcock also shows appreciation for departmental and faculty seminars.
Bowen currently organizes departmental seminars while Igbinedion is yet to appreciate the importance of both the faculty and departmental seminars.

All the three institutions have hired more masters degree holders than doctorate degree holders as teachers. Overall, Igbinedion is worse off when compare to the other two institutions. This explains why Igbinedion is unable to utilize various strategies like term papers and tutorials to develop the capacity of its students. The staff-students ratio is higher at Igbinedion and the institution would need several hours and small rooms for tutorials while its limited number of staff will be forced to spend hours reviewing the students’ term papers. In any case, Babcock seems to be more committed to quality in this regard than any of the other two while Bowen is a shade better than Igbinedion. It is unlikely that Igbinedion will be able to improve on these factors as long as it continue to admit number of students larger in number than available infrastructure into its programmes.

Concluding Remarks

The government of Nigeria is determined to deregulate the higher education sub-sector. Consequently, the sector is now open to private investors who are drawn from the Christian/Muslim missions as well as solo and group entrepreneurs. The aim of government is to widen access to higher education as well as promote quality education. Private universities are now springing up all over the country due to the new policy on higher education. It is reported that hundreds of applications are under consideration while the NUC is likely to approve all those that satisfy the presumably stringent conditions.

While the privatization of university education is in consonance with the trends in other parts of Africa, it seems there is a need for the authorities to exercise great caution over the implementation of this policy. The data paint a dismal picture of the quality of private universities which are expected to fill the niche created by the deteriorating situation in the public institutions.

The academic programmes of private universities are circumscribed. The founders are inclined to mount courses that will attract students or money or both and they may also be inclined to sacrifice quality. The courses are mainly in the social and management sciences eg., banking and finance, business administration, accounting and economics.

The outcomes of this study inevitably lead a crucial question concerning the place of private universities in Nigeria. Can such institutions replace the publicly-funded universities? Certainly no, as amply indicated in data on the range of degree programmes that are being offered in the private universities compared to public institutions. Thus, any thinking in government circles that private can replace the public would be missing the point. It therefore stands to reason that it is in the national interest of low-income countries like Nigeria to invest in public universities while encouraging the private ones. The data indicate that the assumption that the private can fill the gap that is created by the collapse of the public or meet national needs in an effective way may not be valid after all.

It is important for the Nigerian authorities to appreciate the fact that high income countries like the United Kingdom, Canada and Australia still invest in their public universities while giving room to the private investors in higher education. Similarly, the governments of Ghana, also a low-income country, and South Africa are still striving to keep their public universities in a remarkably excellent shape while also encouraging private investors in higher education because they still regard education as a public good. More important, countries like Canada, Australia, South Africa, and Ghana, to name a few, have shown appreciation to the fact that private universities are unlikely to meet their countries’ needs in such expensive academic programmes like engineering, medicine, agriculture, land management etc. The promotion of private universities should not be at the expense of the public because of their circumscribed academic programmes. Consequently, investment in public universities is not only wise but necessary if the much-desired socioeconomic development is to be achieved.

More specifically, it is vital to focus on quality in the emerging private universities. Even though
the private universities are doing extremely well by engendering higher education in view of the male-female students ratio, they are still a long way to ensure gender parity on staffing. The academic staff members in the three institutions are largely male. Besides, they need to attract more qualified teachers because they are short of holders of doctorate degrees. Private universities are also inclined to depend on part-time teachers and those who are on sabbatical leave who are mostly drawn from the public institutions that are being vilified by the Nigerian authorities.

Although the mission institutions (Babcock and Bowen) are striving to maintain a high standard, this does not appear to be the case at Igbinedion which is founded by an entrepreneur. This is a significant point that should be noted by policy makers who are now inclined to license the applications of solo or group proprietors/investors in higher education. Establishment of universities for the sole aim of making profit cannot do the country any good. The situation at Igbinedion clearly indicates that the proprietor is much more interested in making money from higher education than in quality. Already, a private university that is founded by a group of entrepreneurs in Nigeria has fallen on bad times. In other words, it seems that missions/religious bodies are, perhaps, much more likely to be concerned with quality and also motivated by altruistic reasons than entrepreneurs who are out to make money from higher education.

It may be advisable to exercise a bit of caution at this point in time in view of the outcomes of this study. A moratorium on new private universities is necessary in order to allow those currently operating to go through a maturation process. Adequate time is required to monitor quality in terms of the strengths and weaknesses of these new institutions. It is undeniable that the knowledge that is gained through an effective monitoring regime could be used for setting the benchmark for eliminating the applications of prospective private investors into higher education whose motives might not be entirely altruistic. The Nigerian Authorities should avoid the mistakes that they encountered in the banking sector which forced them to take drastic measures to force merger and closure of innumerable non-performing banks that had been defrauding the public. As can be seen in the study, the motive to establish a university might not necessarily be altruistic but driven by the desire to make money off the unsuspecting public, while lacking in required standard.

References


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Biographical Note


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