

An Examination of Challenges Militating Against Development of Private Universities in Nigeria

Eliphaletphebe Chinyere Amaewhule, PhD.

*Department of Educational management, Faculty of Education,
Rivers State University, Port Harcourt, Nigeria
chinyere.amaewhule@ust.edu.ng*

Ayodele Ebunolu Nwisagbo, PhD.

*Department of Educational management, Faculty of Education,
Rivers State University, Port Harcourt, Nigeria
ebunolu.nwisagbo@ust.edu.ng*

Eke, Ben Ethel, PhD.

*Department of Educational Psychology, Guidance and Counselling, Faculty of Education,
Rivers State University, Port Harcourt*

Abstract: *This study aims to examine the major challenges facing private universities in Nigeria. Through a thorough analysis of existing secondary literatures and utilizing data obtained from print and online publications, this study examines the various challenges faced by private universities in Nigeria. The paper identified; inadequate funding, shortage of infrastructure facilities, inadequate academic staff, poor support from the government, insecurity and high cost of energy are the challenges militating against development of private universities in Nigeria. By identifying these challenges, the study recommended that a private university should diversify their revenue generation by partnering with more private institutions and international organization to raise fund and develop their infrastructure facilities. More academic staff should be employed in respective private universities across the country by the administrators. Government should subsidize electricity for all the universities operating in Nigeria and private universities in Nigeria should seek alternative energy generation and build their power plants. Government should address all issue bleeding insecurities in Nigeria such as employment generation for the youths. Government should include private universities as part of NELFUND and TETFund programme in Nigeria.*

Keywords: *Private universities, Universities.*

1.0 Introduction

According to the NPE (FRN, 2004), university education is expected to make optimum contribution to national development through the intensification and diversification of its programs for the development of high level human resources base within the context of the needs of the nation; make professional course contents to reflect Nigeria's national requirements; make all students, part of the general program of all-round improvement and to offer general study courses such as history of ideas, philosophy of knowledge and nationalism. Universities are expected to encourage and disseminate their research results to both government and industries. Universities are expected to inculcate community spirit in their students through projects and action research. They are expected to ensure that faculty in their professional fields have relevant industrial and specialized experience. Agwaranze in Ogunode

(2020) maintained that, Universities have the basic responsibility to provide good educational opportunities through a well-developed curriculum that aids students to obtain academic and professional competences in selected fields, fulfill appropriate standards of academic conduct, explore cultural interest and the enhancement of cultural skills.

Universities in Nigeria are grouped in public universities and private universities. Adediran and Gbadosi in James, and Botimi-Slaboh, (2016) attempted classifying ownership of private universities in Nigeria into three categories; namely sole proprietorship, religious, and hybrid. The sole proprietorship as the name implies is a one man enterprise established by individuals, operating as a person or as a corporation. This type of university, they continued, possesses all the paraphernalia of a university such as Governing Council, Board of Regents etc; yet the university depends on the financier who exercises a complete control over his business. The likes of Igbinedion University, Afe Babalola University, Lead University, among others belong to this category.

The duo of Adeiran and Gbadosi in James, and Botimi-Slaboh, (2016) further stated that the mission or „Religions Universities“ are another category of private universities ownership. According to them, these universities deemed to belong to the churches as a whole had been founded by the orthodox religious groups. The allocation or donation of major responsibilities reflects the culture, diversity and spread of the church.

In this type of ownership, they posited that although the financial support for these comes from the church, the day to day running of the institutions is in the hands of council and management in terms of control. The likes of Babcock University – owned by the Seventh Day Adventist; Wesley University of Science and Technology – owned by the Methodist Church; Bowen University – owned by the Baptist Convention; and Ajayi Crowther University – owned by the Anglican Communion are some of the private universities in Nigeria that belong to this category.

The next category of private universities identified in the categorization is „Hybrid Universities“. These are mission oriented universities but are personally driven. Here the owners not only found the mission but also established the universities. In other words, the universities are the extension of the churches. Although these universities also have Boards of Regents, the founder of the church is the „supreme“ in terms of control. The example cited in this category include, Madonna University, Benson Idahosa University, Covenant University, and Redeemer University, among others (James, et al 2016).

Recently, the NUC issued provisional licenses to 11 new private universities at the NUC auditorium. The eleven new private universities will get their licenses from the National Universities Commission, bringing the total number of licensed private universities in the country to 159. These private universities are spread across Nigeria (Tolu-Kalawole, 2025). The private universities system is faced with lot of draw back and these problems that affect system performance. It is based on this that this paper seeks to examine the challenges militating against development of private universities in Nigeria

2.0 Literature Review

A "private" university is essentially a university whose financing originates from educational cost, investors, and private benefactors, not from citizens. The real distinction between state funded universities and private lies in their financial arrangement. This negatively influences students because educational cost is tied to subsidizing. This influx of government capital is the reason educational cost is lower at state funded universities (Sherwani & Singh 2018). Private universities are nonpublic or independent universities who do not receive government funding and are usually administered by denominational or secular boards; others are universities operated for profit. Some refer to private universities as those universities that are solely owned, financed and managed by private individuals with intention to recover cost in short time and make profit (Olaniyan in Ajadi, 2010).

All things considered, just a little bunch of universities on the planet are genuinely autonomous of legislative help, for some, advanced education programs are bolstered by the administration, and universities will in general get critical tax cuts in light of their non-profit status (Khan & Mohsinuddin 2018). The term private university passes on various implications to various partners, since what establishes such organizations to a great extent relies upon factors received by a specific nation (Mabizela, 2007). Private universities according to Punch (2023) who quoted Nwachukwu possess the agility and flexibility to respond swiftly to the ever-evolving needs of the labour market, ensuring graduates are well-prepared to tackle the challenges of the modern world. Private institutions are unburdened by bureaucratic constraints, allowing them to introduce innovative programmes, cutting-edge research initiatives, and specialised training modules tailored to industry requirements. Private universities, driven by a strong commitment to excellence, often attract top-tier faculty members and researchers who are renowned in their respective fields. Private universities played a pivotal role in fostering an environment of intellectual curiosity, empowering students to reach their full potential.

Private university can be seen in this paper as a higher institution established by private individuals or institutions to carry out teaching, research and provision of community services and for maximizing profit. Private universities are institutions of high learning established by private institutions or individuals to provide academic services of teaching, research community service and profit making. The objectives of private universities include; increasing university enrolment and access to quality university education, reducing the high rate of international education among young Nigeria by providing more access and quality education providing ng academic vices that include teaching, research and community service (Ogunode, Ukozor, & Olowonefa 2024). Private universities are characterized as degree giving establishments that are established by private business visionaries and associations and don't get open financing for activity and upkeep, yet do work inside the limits of the guidelines of MHESR of KRI (Ahmad and Shah 2016).

Justification for the Establishment of Private Universities in Nigeria

According to Okebukola and NUC in Okoro and Okoro, (2014), the establishment of private tertiary institutions is justifiable because of the numerous benefits accrued to it. Some of its benefits are:

Raise Alternative Ways of Funding the University

Apart from the poor quality of graduates, as a result of poor physical facilities in the federal and state universities, another reason for the involvement of private hands in the provision and maintenance of university education is the underfunding of the education sector. Over the years, this problem has been generating a lot of strife between the ASUU and the government. However, the presence of private hands in university education is considered an alternative means of funding university education in the country. In addition, the provision of technology by the private sector will bring down cost, fasten programme delivery and enhance the capacity of these institutions to reach student in distant places and larger number.

Improve the Quality of University Education

The government is of the view that the growth of private universities in the country will allow for competition between the public and the private universities, in terms of instructional delivery and other activities put in place to produce quality graduates for the economy. Competition brings improved quality of educational inputs and outputs.

Widening Access to Tertiary Education

In America for instance, the demand for higher education is so high that the gross enrolment ratio is about 100% while that of Nigeria is 5%, Adiotomre (2007). What happens to the remaining 95%? Following the perennially acute shortage of places in the public universities and the need to increase the

number of enrolments, private hands were called upon to create opportunities for the teeming number of youths seeking tertiary education. Hence, the license given to private investors in university education is meant to address the problem of excessive demand over supply. However, access is in this case provided for those who can afford the high fees charged.

Provision of Enough and Adequate Teaching and Learning Materials

Most universities in the country have consistently inadequate resources, which invariably affects the quality of output they produce. Besides, as Utulu (2001) points out, another factor that accounts for the decline in the quality of university output in Nigeria is the lack of physical facilities. The universities in Nigeria operate in adverse conditions; overcrowding and deteriorating physical facilities, lack of library books, educational materials and so on. Addressing this problem calls for the involvement of the private sector.

Enhance Efficiency

Internal efficiency in terms of graduating students at record time with very few or no drop-out at all and external efficiency in terms of producing what the market would absorb on graduation to reduce to the barest minimum or eliminate unemployment. Also with more players in the university system, there would be more rational and efficient allocation of resources in the short term. The long-term effect is to stabilise the cost of operation, with an attendant increase in, and improved quality of production. These among others could be responsible for granting of operating license to private universities in Nigeria by National University Commission (NUC).

Provision of Stable Academic Calendar

The varying crises in the university sector, which had been paralyzing the academic calendars over the years constitute a source of worry to the stakeholders in the sector. However, there is need for the establishment of private universities, which are less prone to disruption in their academic calendars. From the foregoing, it can be said that the Nigerian educational system needs private participation in the provision and management of educational institutions, especially at the university level. This is because of the dynamic nature of education, exacerbated by the enormous resources required for the realisation of national goals (Okoro et al 2014).

3.0 Method

This paper critically examined the challenges militating against development of private universities in Nigeria. The paper depends on secondary source of data which relied on secondary evidences inform of published books, journal articles, newspapers, government official documents, seminar papers, conference papers as well as related information from the internet.

4.0 Result and Discussion of Challenges Militating Against Development of Private Universities in Nigeria

Inadequate funding

Inadequate funding is one of the major problems militating against the development of private universities in Nigeria. The revenue generated through the schools fees and other sources are not adequate to implement the programme of the private universities in Nigeria. The university system requires a lot of funds for effective management and administration. Ogunode, et al (2024) noted that the major issue in management of private universities in Nigeria is shortage of funds. One of the most serious problems threatening the development of private educational institutions in Nigeria is that of dwindling level of funding in the face of rising cost of educational management. This shortage of funds in the management of private educational institutions has affected the job performance and the growth of the institution. Private institutions cannot perform optimally without funding. Private universities are

facing the challenge of inadequate funding according to Ahunanya, and Osakwe (2012) and Ajadi, (2010).

Shortage of infrastructure facilities

Shortage of modern infrastructural facilities is a very big problem facing the militating against the development of private universities in Nigeria. Private universities in Nigeria do not have adequate infrastructural facilities to support teaching, research and community service provision. Infrastructural facilities according Ogunode (2020) refers to those facilities aiding delivery of academic and non-academic services in educational institutions. Infrastructural facilities include; libraries, laboratories, halls, offices, administrative blocks, hostels, roads facilities, water, electricity, internet etc. The availability of the infrastructural facilities in adequate quantities support effective administration of educational institutions and the inadequacies prevents effective administration of educational institutions (Ogunode, 2020). Ahmad, and Shah. (2016) and James, and Botimi-Slaboh, (2016) concluded that private universities in Nigeria are facing serious problems of facilities shortage. This has affected their development in national ranking.

Inadequate academic staff

Inadequate academic staff is another major challenge militating against the development of private universities in Nigeria. Many private universities in Nigeria are understaffed and lack the financial capacity to employ adequate staff. The private universities are faced with the problem of shortage of lecturers in many departments and faculties especially in programme like the sciences. The shortage of lecturers in these departments and faculties is responsible for high student-lecturer ratio in the private universities across the country. Ogunode, and Adamu, (2021) and Ogunode, and Ohiosumua, (2022) acknowledged that most private and public universities are facing the problems of shortage of academic staff.

Lack of government support

The lack of access funds from financial institutions as of when due and poor government support has also hampered the development of private universities in Nigeria (Ogunode, et al 2024). Study (2018) indicates that 37.5% (12) of the institutions stated the lack of support from the Government through TETFund as a major setback in financing the development of infrastructure in their universities and similarly complained of multiple taxation by government agencies (local and state), pleading for tax exempt status to be extended to private universities. Dada (2023) reported that the Vice-Chancellor of Westley University, Ondo State, Prof. Obeka Samuel has reiterated the call for the inclusion of private universities as beneficiaries of the Tertiary Education Trust Fund in the country. He said it had been a disservice to the nation as the private varsities were not included in the TETFund scheme. We have discussed this matter time without number at our national and international meetings. One of the disservices a nation can do to its tertiary institutions is to segregate against institutions that are not owned by the federal or state government. “ The TETFund concentrates only on the university that is established by the federal and state governments, neglecting those that are established by voluntary organisations and faith-based like this. It is my earnest appeal to the federal government to extend and expand the frontier of TETFund towards the development of faith-based institutions like WESLEY University, Ondo.”. Also, Idowu (2025) reported that The Vice-Chancellor of McPherson University, Ajebo, Ogun State, Professor Francis Igbasan, has urged the Federal Government to include students of private universities across the country in the Nigerian Education Loan Fund. Igbasan also called on the government to grant private institutions access to the Tertiary Education Trust Fund to support academic development in private universities. He made the call during a press conference held at the institution’s conference hall on Monday to commemorate the 8th and 9th combined convocation,

scheduled for Friday. The Vice-Chancellor described the exclusion of private universities from NELFUND and TETFund as an injustice to private institutions.

Insecurity

Insecurity challenge is another major problem facing the private universities in Nigeria especially in the Northern part of the country. Insecurity have prevent effective administration of school programme in the country (Ogunode, Ayeni, & Olorundare, 2024). Many universities administrators, lecturers, non-teaching staff and students have been killed. Some school administrators, lecturers, nonteaching staff and students have been kidnapped and many infrastructure facilities destroyed by Boko Haram members, bandits and criminal element. Also study indicates that 6% (2) of the institutions expressed worries about insecurity occasioned by insurgencies in the North East and communal clashes in their environs (Okebukola, 2018; Ogunode, Kasimu, & Ibrahim, 2023). Also, Policy and legal advocacy (2021) reported that in the space of only a few days, two Nigerian universities experienced terrorism at its worst. In an unprecedented event, terrorists invaded a private university, Greenfield University in Kaduna State and abducted yet to be confirmed number of students, making ransom demands of N800 million for their release. Reports in the last few days indicate that five of the students kidnapped from Greenfield University and the abductors stating that they would keep killing the hostages if the ransom is not paid. Across the country, multiple stories of kidnappings, killings and general insecurity prevail. It would appear that the entire country may have slipped into what is generally regarded as ‘ungoverned spaces. Insecurities problems in Nigeria has affected smooth operation of private universities in Nigeria (Ogunode, Umeora, & Olatunde-Aiyedun, 2022).

High cost of energy

Private and public universities across Nigeria have grappled with the debilitating effects of skyrocketing electricity tariffs, leaving teaching, research, and campus life in jeopardy. Despite hosting faculties of engineering that produce graduates skilled in energy solutions, these institutions remain dependent on erratic grid electricity, unable to self-generate power on the scale required to sustain their operations. For months, cries of despair have echoed from both private and public university management, staff, and students, as electricity bills have soared to unsustainable levels. Laboratories, libraries, lecture halls, and even residential hostels have been plunged into semi-darkness, compromising teaching, learning, and research activities. Ogunode, and Olugbenga, (2023) and Ogunode, Amos, Bitrus, and Kauna, (2024) noted that high electricity tariff paid by both private and public universities in Nigeria is affecting their revenue generation because a lot are used to settle electricity bills monthly. For instance Edena (2024) reported that the Vice-Chancellor, Babcock University, Prof. Ademola Tayo, noted that the high electricity tariff is a great threat to quality education in Nigeria. Speaking on Sunday at the Babcock University 22nd undergraduate and 13th postgraduate convocation, Tayo observed the Babcock University paid N300m as electricity tariff in the month of May, 2024. “I hereby call on the government to reduce electricity tariff. High electricity tariff is a threat to quality education in Nigeria. University education needs support for the development of the country. Our university paid N300m in May after the increase in tariff of electricity consumers on Band A.”The vice-chancellor pleaded with the government to “review the electricity tariff of education institutions.” The management of Babcock of University, Ilishan-Remo, Ogun State, has cried out over the “exorbitant” monthly electricity expenses charged by the Ibadan Electricity Distribution Company (IBEDC).

4.1 Findings

The paper revealed that inadequate funding, shortage of infrastructure facilities, inadequate academic staff, poor support from the government, insecurity and high cost of energy are the challenges militating against development of private universities in Nigeria

4.2 Conclusion and Recommendations

This study discussed the major challenges facing private universities in Nigeria. Inadequate funding, shortage of infrastructure facilities, inadequate academic staff, poor support from the government, insecurity and high cost of energy were identified as the challenges militating against development of private universities in Nigeria.

Based on the findings, the paper recommends that private universities should diversify their revenue generation by partnering with more private institutions and international organization to raise fund and develop their infrastructure facilities. More academic staff should be employed in respective private universities across the country by the administrators. Government should subsidize electricity for all the universities operating in Nigeria and private universities in Nigeria should seek alternative energy generation and build their power plants. Government should address all issue bleeding insecurities in Nigeria such as employment generation for the youths. Government should include private universities as part of NELFUND and TETFund programme in Nigeria.

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