



## Private Universities in Nigeria: Contributions, Problems and Way Forward

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### ABSTRACT

This paper discussed the contributions and problems militating against the development of Private universities in Nigeria. Adopting content analysis and elimination methods that were used for data selection. The paper used secondary data that were collected from print and online publications. The paper identified increment in access to university education, manpower development and production, development of research, community services, creation of employment opportunities and improvement in international ranking as contributions of private universities to the Nigerian economy. Problems of funding, shortage of modern infrastructure facilities, lack of access to funds and government support, low student enrolment, inadequate academic staff and insecurity problems are the problems militating against the development of Private universities in Nigeria. Based on this, the paper hereby recommended that the federal government should establish special intervention financial institutions for private universities across the country where they can secure long and short-term facilities with low interest. Private university managers should utilize their Alumni association to raise more funds and technical support. Private universities should explore the option of public-private partnerships to develop their infrastructure facilities.

## INTRODUCTION

Private universities are universities owned and controlled by private individuals for profit making. For Belfield and Lerin in Ajadi (2010), private universities are nonpublic or independent universities that do not receive government funding and are usually administered by denominational or secular boards; others are universities operated for profit. Private universities are those universities that are solely owned, financed and managed by private individuals to recover costs in a short time and make a profit (Olaniyan in Ajadi, 2010). A "private" university is essentially a university whose financing originates from educational costs, 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 costs are lower at state-funded universities (Sherwani & Singh 2018). The genuine expense of participation is financed. All things considered, just a small 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).

From the above, a 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; On the features of private universities and uniqueness, Punch (2023) quoted Nwachukwu who notes that private universities 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.

Highlighting the symbiotic relationship between private universities and the business sector, Punch (2023) quoted Nwachukwu observing that these institutions often foster strong industry collaborations and partnerships. Such collaborations allow for the exchange of knowledge, the commercialisation of research, and the creation of job opportunities, ultimately fueling economic progress. Private universities act as incubators for innovation, nurturing the next generation of entrepreneurs, and providing a fertile ground for startups to flourish, leading to increased job creation and economic diversification. The crucial role of private institutions in promoting social mobility and inclusivity.

## **METHODOLOGY**

It is a systematic literature review-based report. It has collected and reviewed the related previous literature from various online sources. It has collected secondary information to generate knowledge on this topic. It has followed the qualitative narrative design. The researcher has visited different online sites to collect the previous literature and analyze the effect of noise pollution on human health. The previous findings are critically analyzed and presented in different themes as the effect of noise pollution is reported by previous findings.

### *Inclusion and exclusion criteria*

This research article presents the results of an in-depth study that included conference and article. It excludes information from edited books, preprints, monographs, and book chapters.

## **RESEARCH RESULT**

### **Reasons for the Establishment of Private Universities in Nigeria**

Okebukola (2002); NUC (2004) and Okoro & Okoro, (2014) outline the following as reasons for the establishment of private tertiary institutions is justifiable because of the numerous benefits accrued to it. Some of its benefits are:

#### **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 in Okoro and Okoro, (2014) disclose that 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.

#### **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 costs, fasten programme delivery and enhance the capacity of these institutions to reach students in distant places and larger numbers (Okoro and Okoro, 2014).

### **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.

### **Enhance Efficiency**

Internal efficiency in terms of graduating students at record time with very few or drop-outs 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 operating licenses to private universities in Nigeria by the National University Commission (NUC).

### **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; Okoro and Okoro, 2014). What happens to the remaining 95%? Following the perennially acute showplaces that 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.

### **Stable academic**

The varying crises in the university sector, which have been paralyzing the academic calendars over the years constitute a source of worry for the stakeholders in the sector. However, there is a 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 and Okoro, 2014).

## **Discussion**

### **Contributions of private Universities to Social, Economic and Technological Development**

There are many contributions of private universities to the Nigerian economy. Some economic contributions include; access to university education, manpower production, development of research, community services, creation of employment opportunities and improvement in international ranking.

#### **Increment in access to university education**

Private universities in Nigeria have increased access to education in Nigeria was low before. Since the inception of the first private university in Nigeria in 1999, there has been an additional in the number of young Nigerians that have accessed university education. Annually, private universities are increasing the number of youths seeking universities in the country. Punch (2023) quoted Nwachukwu who concludes that private universities provide accessible education for talented students from diverse backgrounds, empowering them to break the cycle of poverty and achieve their aspirations. Private institutions promoted cross-cultural understanding, tolerance, and the exchange of ideas, which were essential for fostering a vibrant and inclusive society. Okoro and Okoro (2014) maintain that private universities contribution includes enrolment of students into the university, employment generation, and manpower development. Sunnews (2024) reports that some University has 7,000 male and female students on campus and has recorded steady growth in academic programmes of study. From 5 Colleges in 1999, the University has expanded to 7 Colleges and 3 Schools. The academic departments/programmes have witnessed an exponential increase from 7 at inception to 85, made up of 34 undergraduate and 51 postgraduate programmes. The licensing of private universities has improved access to universities university aided economic development. Also, Covenant University (20University that The matriculation ceremony of Covenant University witnessed 2,153 undergraduates and 198 postgraduate students taking the matriculation oath for the 2023/2024 admission exercise, thus making it the largest number of undergraduates to ever matriculate at once in the University's history.

#### **Manpower Development and production**

Manpower production is one of the mandates of universities. Private Universities in Nigeria has helped to increase the number of manpower being produced. Every year Nigerian universities graduate people which contributed to the economic advancement of the Nation. For, instance University, Prof. Lawrence Ikechukwu Ezemonye, while addressing a World Press conference as

part of activities to mark the institution's 25th anniversary, affirmed this position when he said "Since inception the university has achieved remarkable successes in teaching, research, capacity building, innovative studies and per Commonwealth significantly, the production of exceptional graduates in diverse fields of human endeavour who are contributing their quota to national and global development. Speaking about the value and sign the infant milestones the university has achieved in its 25 years of existence, Prof. Ezemonye said Igbinedion University is the first private university in Nigeria to produce Medical Doctors, Pharmacy and Law graduates; the first to produce First Class law graduate who repeated the feat at the Nigerian Law School and went on to become a Professor of Law, Deputy Vice Chancellor of a university and the youngest Senior Advocate of Nigeria (SAN). The University has produced 16,000 graduates across disciplines spread across the globe, with records of stellar performances in their respective fields of endeavour as endeavour (Sureported024).

Ogunode and Idris (2023) observe observations in Nigeria have mounted academic programmes that have led to an increment in tan management across the country. James, and Botimi-Slaboh (2016) notes that the contribution includes enrolment of students into the university, employment generation, and manpower development. Development of research Private universities in Nigeria are contributing immensely to the development of research in their respective situations. Ogunode and Abubakar (2020) note that resonates is the second cardinal programme of higher institutions. Research is very important to the development of the society. Research is conducted mostly in the higher institutions environment with the objective of problems saddled with the responsibilities of carrying out research in research sites. Conducting research is one criterion for measuring their performance.

Paul (2015) observes that the conduct of research is one of the basic functions of tertiary institutions, which comprise university polytechnics Monothechnics and Colleges of Education. The academic staff of these institutions are compulsorily required to carry out research activities as their promotions are primarily based on their research outputs. Okebukola (2018) submits that private universities extracted for the summary indicated that a significant number of their academic staff have been sponsored for both local and international seminars, workshops and conferences, while a few others have received support for PhD in both indigenous and foreign universities. Several professionals appeared to be breaking boundaries in research and some have progressed as far as patenting their research findings. Some of the research projects reported are:

- 1) Research in materials for diagnosis and treatment of cancer and drug delivery.
- 2) Research on perovskite solar cells has also recorded significant progress in solar cell technology, particularly in super capacitosupercapacitorsorage.
- 3) Alternative sustainable building materials, using natural products, reinforced with natural fibres.

4) The Mineral and Geochemical Appraisal of Clay Deposits in Papalanto and its Environs in Ogun State, Southwestern Nigeria.

5) Rethinking the Nigerian Social Policy and the Care of the Elderly, targeted at addressing the prevalence of elder abuse in Nigeria, the study recommended the need for urgent reforms to address the state of social policy on income maintenance in old age and old age social security. In the area of Research and Scholarship, Sunnews (2024) reports that Igbinedion University has commenced Drug manufacturing and Methylated Spirit production by the College of Pharmacy, just as it has carried out the design and development of EV prototype by the University's College of Engineering, as well as design and development of 500VA Hybrid Power Station by the institution's Creative Hub.

### **Community services**

Private universities in Nigeria have been actively involved in and contributing to community service development in their respective communities where they are sited. Ogunodesituatedbode and Olatunde-Aiyedun (2022) observed that the Community service programme is the third cardinal programme of tertiary institutions. A community service programme is an organized and planned service programme of higher institutions for the benefit and betterment of their host communities. Community service programmes of higher institutions are community-inclined services initiated by the institutions to develop the communities. Community service of higher institutions is service provided by institutions to benefit the community people. Community service programmes are done near the area where the institutions are located so that the host community can enjoy the benefits of the institutions. Community service in higher institutions includes all kinds of services that are meant to improve the well-being of the people and society in general. It is an essential service designed by institutions to provide socio-economic development to the community. For instance, as part of the week-long celebration of its 25th anniversary, Igbinedion University has commissioned two Legacy Projects, IUO Palm Oil Processing Mill and IUO Hotel at their respective sites at Okada, just as it carried out a Free Medical Outreach to communities in Okada and environs among other activities lined up for the celebration (Sunnews 2024).

### **Creation of employment opportunities and boost of economic activities**

Private universities in Nigeria have helped the rate of unemployment across the country by employing youth in Nigeria to fill various positions in the various private universities across the country. Peter (2019) identified employment generation as one of the positive contributions of private universities. The contribution includes the enrolment of students into the university, employment

generation, and manpower development. Similarly, results indicate that the challenges connected to the university include non-access to external funds and inconsistent government policy among others. Also, Osokoya (2007) establishment of private universities has also brought about employment opportunities to Nigerians. This implies that the private universities has employed a large number of young Nigerians into their various institutions hereby reducing the rate of unemployment in the country. Also, private universities have increase economic activities of host communities. Isuku (nd) submitted that the establishment of private universities led to the development of local economy activities. Through the various economic activities due from the citing of university in a particular locality, employment and income is generated thereby helping to improve the purchasing power of the local residents and its environs and hence the overall social-economic wellbeing of the people. The location of university in an area could spring up other forms of allied or even non-allied businesses. For instance, such business as food vendor, books and stationeries sales, research activities, building and construction and mechanized farming etc could develop due to the presence of a university in a particular locality (Isuku & Emunemu, 2012)

## **Improvement in universities international ranking**

The private universities in Nigeria has reposition the images of Nigerian universities globally by featuring annually in globally ranking and becoming top. Covenant University has been ranked above the University of Ibadan and the Federal University of Technology, Akure, as the best university in Nigeria for the second time, according to Time Higher Education 2024 rating. Analysis of the latest ranking on Thursday showed that the university based in Ota, Ogun State, is among the top 1,000 universities in the world. The 801st-ranked university in the world first gained prominence in 2018 after it got the prize for the best university in Nigeria and the sixth-best university overall. The University of Ibadan followed Covenant as the second-best university in the country, while the Federal University of Technology, Akure clinched third. Also, Edurank (2024) report that Covenant University ranked 7th in Nigeria, 2295th in the global 2024 rating, and scored in the TOP 50% across 83 research topics. Covenant University ranking is based on 3 factors: research output (EduRank's index has 8,297 academic publications and 58,116 citations attributed to the university), non-academic reputation, and the impact of 13 notable alumni.

## **Problems Militating Against Private Universities Development in Nigeria**

There are many problems militating against private universities development in Nigeria. Some of these problems includes; problem of funding, shortage modern infrastructure facilities, lack of access to funds and government support, low students enrolment, inadequate academic staff and insecurity problems.

### **Problem of funding**

Funding challenge is a major problem militating against development of private universities in Nigeria. University management and administration is very extensive projects that requires huge financial investment annually. Many founders of private universities except for few do not have such large capital to run and operate the universities. Onuoha (2012) and Peter, F. (2019) added minor sources of funding as proprietors subvention, fund raising, industries as well as capital campaign. Nevertheless he said that for most capital funding, his university – Babcock – has depended in “long term facilities from developers and Banks”. There is no gain saying the fact that running a private University is a capital intensive venture that the return on investment (ROI) takes years. It is also noteworthy that to run a university is not a tea cup affair and unfortunately many private universities owners in Nigeria appear not to have the financial muscle to

bear the financial burdens of these institutions. Isuku (nd) observed that the problem of insufficient finance for effective education service delivery is obvious in both public and private institutions in Nigeria. The rising cost of education provision has made both the public and private university system to seek ways of managing the school system more efficiently in an effort to achieve the mandate of university education. Most private universities lack the financial strength to effectively carry out their full obligations as the running of university education is highly capital-intensive. However, in Nigeria, the financing of university education by government is mainly limited to public universities as the private university is fully responsible for providing the needed funds to run their universities while government role to private universities is restricted to quality control. Since operating university education is a capital intensive service, most private universities are unable to generate sufficient funds to guarantee a more suitable university education for the growing number of eligible population.

### **Shortage modern infrastructure facilities**

Private universities in Nigeria are faced with the challenge of adequate modern infrastructure facilities except some. Many private universities across the country operate in facilities that are inadequate considering the academic programme and students in the respective institutions. James, and Botimi-Slaboh (2016) opines that another challenge to private universities is inadequate facilities. Many private universities seem to be groaning under the yoke of inadequate or low standard facilities which is closely related to inadequate funding. High cost facilities such as building for classrooms, offices, hostels, furniture items for students and staff, laboratory equipment, well-resourced libraries in terms of relevant books and journals constitute a very serious impediment to total quality management. Development and research opportunities are limited, thereby reducing the quality of education in private universities in Nigeria (Amponsah and Onuoha in Olawore and Ajayi 2016). The problem of inadequate facilities in most of the private universities in the country is another major challenge plaguing private university development in Nigeria. Most of the private universities (except for some few ones), do not have the type of facilities that are needed for modern university education. The author's personal experience as a former employee of a typical private university in the country confirms this argument. For instance, some of the universities in most cases do not have the required chemicals in laboratories where science courses are offered, while some offering engineering and related courses lack the basic equipment to guarantee quality knowledge of the course (Isuku nd).

### **Lack of access to funds and government support**

The lack of access to funds from financial institutions as of when due and poor government support has also hampered the development of private universities in Nigeria. 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.

### **Low students enrolment**

Another problem facing private universities in Nigeria is low enrolment. Many of the private universities in Nigeria do have problem of getting adequate students to fill the quota. Peter (2019) disclosed that low students' enrolment is another crucial challenge private universities are faced with due to high school fees. Study indicates that about 47% (15) of the institutions surveyed complained about their inability to attract students for the following reasons:

- 1) relatively exorbitant fees when compared with government institutions.
- 2) Delays in the admission process occasioned by perceived bureaucracy involved with the introduction of the Central Admission Processing System (CAPS) by the Joint Admission Matriculation Board (JAMB).
- 3) Constraints of the BMAS in the evolution of each institution's curriculum which hampers adaptation to ensure student courses are tailored to industry needs.
- 4) Increased competition for student enrolment due to overconcentration of private universities in some states such as Ogun state.
- 5) Non-approval of courses by the NUC leading to inability to attract students.

### **Inadequate academic staff**

Many private universities in Nigeria are facing the problem of shortage of academic staff for the implementation of teaching, research and provision of community services. The shortage of academic staff in these private universities affects smooth implementation of teaching and learning. Olawore and Ajayi (2010) concludes that many Nigerian private universities are in dire need of adequate human capital, without which one cannot run and manage an ideal university that is globally competitive and locally relevant. Robinson and Nwaham (2007) and Nyarko (2012) also laments that many of the lecturers in the private universities lack both technical and personal competences required in teaching because they are not professionally qualified. The needed or required manpower are not available to many of the private universities and majority of their staff, especially academic staff are bottom heavy in terms of mix (Abidum - Oyebanji 2011). Many equally rely on lecturers from public universities for a part time job or those on sabbatical to meet the accreditation requirement. Those on regular appointment on private universities are mostly young graduates who are not Ph.D holders as prescribed by NUC to be the minimum requirement. Of course unqualified or inexperienced lecturers cannot be said to be contributing much to quality university education (James, & Botimi-Slaboh 2016). Isuku (nd) noted that one of the greatest challenges facing most private universities in Nigeria as a country today is that of inadequate qualified teaching manpower.

Most private universities are dependent on adjunct or retired professors with little or no strength to be productive. In addition to this, most of the few lecturers available in these private universities are either first degree holders of at best postgraduate students with little or no knowledge of teaching and research. This has grave consequence for the quality of students being produced from these private universities. Although some national dailies have reported the increased number of “first class graduates” from some of these institutions, it is however ironic that most academic programmes of these universities hardly meet the NUC quality control measure in terms of human, physical and material resources in the universities. Hence many of the universities most times fail to meet the NUC accreditation criteria (NUC, Monday Bulletin, 2010).

### **Insecurity problems**

Insecurity in educational institution implies the human resources within the educational institutions are in the state of fear or threat and lack peace to carry out their respective function. It is a situation where both school administrators, teachers, non-teaching staff and students are in the state of fear. 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, non-teaching staff and students have been kidnapped and many infrastructure facilities destroyed by Boko Haram members, bandits and criminal element. For example, Policy and legal advocacy (2021) report 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. 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).

### **ORIGINAL CONTRIBUTION**

This literature review makes a noteworthy contribution by comprehensively synthesizing existing knowledge on the diverse and far-reaching contribution of private universities in Nigeria. This paper disclosed that increment in access to university education, manpower development and production, development of research, community services, creation of employment opportunities and improvement in international ranking are the contributions of private universities to the Nigerian economy. The paper also lists; problem of funding, shortage modern infrastructure facilities, lack of access to funds and government support, low students enrolment, inadequate academic staff and insecurity problems as the problems militating against development of Private universities in Nigeria.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper explored the various contributions and problems militating against development of Private universities in Nigeria. The paper concluded that increment in access to university education, manpower development and production, development of research, community services, creation of employment opportunities and improvement in international ranking are the contributions of private universities to the Nigerian economy. The paper also lists; problem of funding, shortage modern infrastructure facilities, lack of access to funds and government support, low students enrolment, inadequate academic staff and insecurity problems as the problems militating against development of Private universities in Nigeria.

Based on this, the paper hereby recommends that federal government should establish a special intervention financial institutions for private universities across the country where they can secure long and short term facilities with low interest. Private universities managers should utilize their Alumni association to raise more funds and technical support. Private universities should explore the option of public private partnership to develop their infrastructure facilities.

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