

Managing University Education in Nigeria: The Imperativeness of Deregulating Government Control

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The paper examined the imperativeness of deregulating government monopoly in the control of university management in Nigeria. The exigencies that necessitated the dismantling of the monopolistic control were identified and discussed. It was concluded that for the universities to be effective and efficient in service delivery, particularly in selecting student for placement and the capacity to internally generate fund, the sole control by government has to be deregulated. On the basis of this conclusion, it was recommended that universities be allowed to enjoy autonomy.

Keywords: University Education, Management , Government and Deregulation

Introduction

Human capital formation is a pre-condition for the success of any production enterprise. One important institution that entrepreneurs in both public and private sectors of the economy rely on for the production of high level manpower is the university. Thus, the recognition of the importance of university education in facilitating national development underscores why its supply and management is legendary. In Nigeria, the provision and management of university education started with the establishment of university college, Ibadan in 1948 which later metamorphosed into university of Ibadan and is today celebrated as the Nigerian premier university. The report of the Eric Ashby Commission which was set up in 1959 later led to the establishment of regional universities in the then four regions of Nigeria. In the East, the university of Nigeria, Nsukka (1960); in the West, the then University of Ife and now, the Obafemi Awolowo university, Ile-Ife in 1962 and; Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria in the North (1962). The same year, 1962, the University College, Ibadan was granted a full-fledged university status. The need to have a university in Lagos, the federal capital at that time led to the establishment of University of Lagos also in 1962. The University of Benin, originally established as the Midwest Institute of Science and Technology was not given full accreditation as a university until 1972 to serve the interest of the people in the Mid-Western region. These six universities according to Okebukola (2002) are today celebrated as the first generation universities in Nigeria. The subsequent democratic and geopolitical re-structuring of Nigeria into 36 federating States; led to the copious demands for additional universities in all the states in the country. Government has graciously acceded to these requests and between 1975 and 2015 the number of universities in Nigeria has increased from 6 to 128 (NUC, 2015 Report). It is instructive to know that 34 out of this number are owned by the federal government while State governments and private investors own 36 and 58 respectively. There was an urgent need to reconstruct, rehabilitate and reintegrate the Nigerian nation after the painful 3-years civil war that ended in 1970. Education was readily identified in the Third National Development Plan deliberately designed then as the only auspicious and veritable instrument that could meet this need. Consequent upon this, the supply, control and management of university education was taking over from the regional governments and placed in the hands of the federal government. Another reason given in the development plan for transferring the control of university education to the federal government was to unitarily rectify what was identified in the development plan as differential standards among various universities in the country (Alemika, 2004). Soon after this mandate was given, the federal government took over all the regionally owned universities in the country with the establishment of two bureaucracies, the National Universities Commission (NUC) and the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB). The National Universities Commission empowered by Decree No. 1 of 1974 (and now an Act of Parliament) enjoys the monopoly of funding and maintaining quality in all existing universities in the country from that time till date. Similarly, JAMB established by

Decree No. 2 of 1978 (now an act of Parliament) from that time till now is vested with the sole responsibility of conducting common entrance examinations and placement of qualified applicants in universities anywhere in the country. The activities of these two bureaucracies over the years in the observation of Afianmagbon, Igbineweka and Nwokocha (2010), Undie, Essien and Edemenang (2010), Ejiogu (2003), Fagbamiye (2003) and Akpa (2015) have however stifled the efforts of universities to expand and adjust programmes on a continuous basis to meet the ever-changing needs of the Nigerian society. For instance, the control of admission processes by government makes it impossible for the universities to freely choose candidates of their choice for admission. The result is that several qualified persons that apply for admissions do not get placement (Saint, Harriet and Strassner, 2003). The number of applications and admission into Nigerian universities in the recent past 10 years as shown in Table 1 confirms the worrisome situation.

Table 1: Applications and Admissions into Nigerian Universities, (2005-2015)

Year	Applications	Admissions	% Admissions
2005/2006	1,273,016	208774	16.4
2006/2007	1,324,156	246293	18.6
2007/2008	1,348,523	265659	19.7
2008/2009	1,387,029	241343	17.4
2009/2010	1,408,280	162129	11.5
2010/2011	1,372,362	222322	16.2
2011/2012	1,319,807	228326	17.3
2012/2013	1,437,226	171029	11.9
2013/2014	1,401,424	197600	14.1
2014/2015	1,450,399	159,543	11.0
Mean Total	13,722,272	2,031,018	14.8

Source: Compiled from JAMB Applications and Placements for Various Years

According to the data in Table 1, only 2,031,018 (or 14.8 percent) out of 13,722,272 persons that demanded university education got placement. The remaining 11,691,254 persons representing 85.2 percent were denied access for the period. The situation was so bad in 2009/2010, 2012/2013 and 2014/2015 and school years as only about 11 percent got admission compared to the 265,659 candidates or (19.7 percent) that got placement, the highest in the period under investigation. On why the university system is not able to absorb all qualified applicants, Diejomaoh (1985), Aminu (1986), Durojaiye (1987), Oni (1999), Obanya (1999), Awe (2000), Ade-Ajayi (2001) blamed the situation on the unbridled monopoly of government (that at the moment lacks) the requisite capacity to supply and manage quality university education in the country. Similarly, NUC is the only body empowered by law to maintain minimum academic standards in all Nigerian universities. According to the legislation, the functions of NUC among others shall be *...to prepare, periodic master plans for balanced and co-ordinated development of universities in Nigeria and such plans shall include - the general programmes to be pursued by the universities in order to ensure that they are fully adequate to national needs and objectives...*

It is however unfortunate that the NUC in executing this mandate has been observed to abuse this monopoly over the years. This is because NUC does not seem to carry the critical stakeholders such as the State governments, the national manpower board, professional bodies, along in overlooking the maintenance of quality assurance in the universities. It is even worse as ad hoc membership of NUC accreditation teams is often seen to comprise friends and family members of NUC officials.

It is therefore not surprising that the activities of JAMB and NUC have come under public condemnation in the recent past. According to Onyeonoru (2004:8).

... If we accept that one of the most important functions of any university is to seek the truth, any constraint on that search reduces the value of the university. If also we agree that a university has a duty constantly to reduce the area of the unknown socially and" physically, a university is excellent to the degree that it is not only free but also empowered to do so.

On the basis of this, Onyeonoru (2004) and supported by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU, 2012) argued

strongly for the deregulation of these parastatals through which government controls the management of Universities in Nigeria. There is no doubt from the foregoing discourse therefore that the control government exerts on university education in Nigeria has become counter productive. It is the objective of this paper in the circumstance to discuss the need for government control of university education to be deregulated. Specifically, the paper will attempt to discuss:

- * Deregulating government control of universities for access expansion;
- * Deregulating government control of universities for enhanced internal revenue generation capacity and;
- * The need to deregulate government control of universities for enhanced quality assurance.

Deregulating Government Control for Access Expansion

One universally acclaimed feature of a profession according to Tukumbo (1991) is its ability or autonomy to recruit its member through series of examinations. On the basis of this, it is important that professional bodies such as the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), Nigerian Medical Association (NMA), Council of Registered Engineers of Nigeria (COREN) and several others be allowed to partner with universities in setting minimum standards. In addition, the university matriculation examinations (UME) hitherto developed and administered by JAMB should be carried out by professional bodies. This, no doubt has implications for encouraging access to such professional courses. For instance, several applicants that were before now, denied access will have the opportunity to study professional courses of interest. There is also the likelihood that more people will pass university-based entrance examinations as such examinations will be conducted in partnership with such professional bodies with proven integrity. The Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria (ICAN) is already providing leadership in this direction. Apart from deciding the number of new members for induction, it has never been reported that the conduct of its examinations suffers any irregularities. Where non-professional courses are taught, the universities should be allowed to use whatever preferred means to select candidates that apply to them for admission as practised in universities elsewhere in America, England, Canada etc (Moehlman, 1951). Ejiogu (2003:12) supports this assertion when he argued that universities be allowed to handle the admission process for its applicants so long as they are adjudged to effectively teach, evaluate and graduate their students. There is no doubt that events have overtaken the current admission policies such as the "catchments area and educationally less developed states" (ELDS) admission policies formulated for the purpose of promoting national integration. Liberalising the space by giving the universities free hand to select their applicants for placement will no doubt open the doors of many universities to many more qualified Nigerians.

Deregulating Government Control for Enhanced Revenue Generation Capacity

Frantic efforts have been made by government to increase available funds in the universities. For instance, actual total grants by government to the universities that was ₦286.03 million in 1970/71 session skyrocketed to ₦748,345,040:00 in 1989, and by 2013/2014 session, it has increased unprecedentedly to ₦30,143,004,497.91 (NUC Report, 2005). Despite this increase in the provision of grants, personal visits to some universities in the country show that the fund provided by government is still grossly inadequate, the result of which manifests in inadequate teaching and learning facilities cases of dilapidated and abandoned projects; irregular payment of salaries etc. Worse still, staff in the universities are stagnated and not because there is money to effect promotion resulting in low morale amongst staff. What makes the situation more worrisome is that the universities do not even get up to half of the requested funds to manage their activities. The statistics provided by NUC in Table 2 sheds light. TABLE 2

Table 2 Level of Funding in the Nigerian University System, 2004- 2014

School Year	Budget Estimates (in naira)	Amount Received (in Naira)	Amount Received as % of Budget estimate
2003/2004	1,516,601,329.00	734,770,950.00	48.4
2004/2005	1,753,291,051.00	783,816,895.00	44.7
2005/2006	4,596,212,945	2,062,304,346.00	44.1
2006/2007	7,375,859,925.00	3,801,529,278.00	42.0
2007/2008	9,642,861,713.00	4,370,880,770.00	45.3
2008/2009	13,628,520,905.00	6,056,784,806.00	44.4
2009/2010	15,742,699,358.00	7,535,594,529.00	47.9
2010/2011	16,820,155,501.00	5,348,173,942.00	31.8
2011/2012	23,067,530,158.00	8,974,631,294.62	38.9
2012/2013	40,884,109,125.00	1 1,831,930,271.93	28.9
2013/2014	65,579,997,692.00	30,143,004,497.91	45.9
Total	200,304,849,702	70,896,130,378	35.4

Sources: Compiled from National University Commission Estimates for Various Years

According to the data in Table 2, only N70.896 billion, that is, 35.4 percent of N200.3 billion budget estimate for the 10 year period was received by the universities. By school year analysis, it was only in the 2003/2004 academic session the universities receive 48.4 percent and the lowest receipt 28.9 percent in 2012/2013 session.

The enormity of the problem of inadequate funding is better appreciated when actual unit cost per student is compared with the minimum US\$1000, the benchmark recommended by UNESCO and adopted by ASUU for the funding of universities. Table 3 sheds light.

Table 3: Unit Cost Per Student in Nigerian Public Universities, 2005/2006 – 2014/2015 School Years.

School Year	Admission	Received Grant	Unit Cost per Student (₦)	Benchmark (\$)	Remarks
2005/2006	208,774	734,770,950.00	3519.46	17.69	Grossly inadequate
2006/2007	246,293	783,814,895.00	3182.49	15.99	Grossly inadequate
2007/2008	265,659	2,985,237,346.00	11,237.10	56.47	Grossly inadequate
2008/2009	241,343	3,801,529,278.00	15,751.56	79.15	Grossly inadequate
2009/2010	90,129	4,370,880,770.00	48,495.83	243.69	Grossly inadequate
2010/2011	222,322	6,056,784,806.00	27,243.29	136.90	Grossly inadequate
2011/2012	228,426	7,535,594,529.00	33,003.66	165.85	Grossly inadequate
2012/2013	171,029	5,348,173,942.00	31,003.56	157.14	Grossly inadequate
2013/2014	197,600	8,974,631,294.62	45,418.17	228.23	Grossly inadequate
2014/2015	159,543	11,831,930,271.93	74,161.38	372.67	Grossly inadequate
Average Unit Cost	2,031,018	52,223,338,072.55	25,712.89	129.21	Grossly inadequate

Sources: Compiled from NUC Fiscal Allocation to Universities for Various Years

From the data in Table 3, the mean unit cost the universities received for the period to finance expenditures per student in ₦25,712.89 or \$129.21 USD, an amount that is far below the benchmark. It is only in 2014/2015 session that ₦74,161.38 that is \$372.67 USD was received, the highest during the period under review. Worse days are likely to be ahead with the crash in the country's revenue profile following the free fall of the prices of crude oil in the recent past.

For this reason, the need to deregulate government control of fund inflow into the university has become urgent. The universities are likely to boost their capacity to generate funds internally if given freedom to select their students and charge reasonable school fees. According to Ejiogu (2003), government should relinquish its control in the management of the university system on account of its failure to adequately provide funds and pave way for professional groups and multinational organizations that have the resources to adequately fund and manage the delivery of quality university education.

The Need to Deregulate Government Control for Enhanced Quality Assurance

There is no generally accepted definition of accreditation in higher education, and in many cases the term is used also to indicate procedures of recognition of institutions, or *quite* authorization or licensing new providers, and approval of nationally controlled curricula among others. A pragmatic definition of accreditation, namely the formal and public statement by an external body, from a quality assurance procedure, that Agreed standards of quality are met by an institution or programme. An accredited status can have specific consequences, for example regarding the degree awarding capacity, the recognition of those degrees, funding, credit-transfer, and access to postgraduate programmes. In Nigeria, the National Universities Commission (NUC), as a co-ordinating body for university education, is charged by law, with the responsibility of assuring quality in the universities. These achievements notwithstanding, graduates from the universities are observed to be of poor quality. The situation appears to be so bad as graduates are re-trained by employer of labour (particularly cooperate organizations) before they are employed. The government on its part has since established the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) to among other functions re-train university graduates acquire entrepreneurial skills. In addition, the allegation by several persons that graduates from Nigerian universities are denied admission into post-graduate programmes in international universities across the world has become a source of

worry to many. Therefore, the practice of having the NUC as the sole monitoring and accreditation body for all the universities and their programmes in Nigeria has become a source of worry to many.

Conclusion

The need to use education to rehabilitate, reconstruct and reintegrate Nigeria to be united great dynamic goaded the Federal Government to take over the control and management of education in Nigeria. At the university level, two parastatals, NUC and JAMB were established to accomplish this mission. Experience has however shown that these Government bureaucracies over the years have been counterproductive to the effective performance of the universities. It has therefore become imperative if the universities must be able to offer relevant academic programmes, expand access and capacity to generate fund that its control and management be deregulated.

Recommendations

On the basis of this conclusion, it is recommended that JAMB and NUC be reorganized in line with current realities. Every university should be empowered to freely conduct university-based entrance examinations to select desired number of students for admission. Similarly, employers of labour, the Nigerian Manpower Board and Professional Bodies (like ICAN, NBA, NMA etc) should be given opportunity to collaborate with relevant agencies in the accreditation of academic programmes in the University. This no doubt, will ensure that only needed manpower in the economy is produced by the universities.

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