

TO BE OR NOT TO BE: SHOULD GOVERNMENT FUND PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES IN NIGERIA?

Abimbola O. Adesoji
Bowen University, Iwo, Nigeria
aadesoji2@yahoo.com
abimbola.adesoji@bowen.edu.ng

Olusegun O. Olaniyi, Ph.D
Bowen University, Iwo, Nigeria
olusegun.olaniyi@bowen.edu.ng
olusegunolaniyi2020@gmail.com

Abstract

The issue of funding has been critical and fundamental in the discourse on the operation of Nigeria's university system. Indeed, over the years, the issue has generated a lot of furor, with some calling for the government's sole funding of the university system, while others believe the government has no business running and funding universities. To address the issue, several strategies have been adopted by successive governments in Nigeria, starting with the establishment of the Education Tax fund (ETF), which later metamorphosed into the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund). Despite these efforts, the issue has remained contentious as private universities that have been excluded from the TETFund funding have also joined the fray, also calling for inclusion in the TETFund funding. This study, therefore, examined the issue of funding as central to the discussion of the university system in Nigeria, the desirability or otherwise of the calls by private universities in the country for inclusion in the TETFund disbursed funds. In doing this, the study made use of secondary data sources, interpreting already existing works on the subject matter. The study argued that funding of university education should not be seen as the sole duty of government; rather, public and private universities alike should adopt the acceptable best practices worldwide where universities source funds independently of government through chair endowments from individuals and corporate organizations in order to ensure total autonomy of the university system.

Keywords: Education, TETFund, funding, university, government

Introduction

Funding university education in Nigeria remains one of the contentious issues in the Nigerian educational system, which has seen successive governments in Nigeria set up several commissions to look into the issue and establish various funds to meet the ever-growing needs of universities across Nigeria. With the

establishment of new Universities run by private individuals and organizations in the country, there has been a new twist to the agitations for funding of Universities as these new private Universities want to be included in the funding through the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) set up by the government as a successor to the Education Trust Fund (ETF) set up in 1993 by the Military government of General Ibrahim Babangida for the funding of government Universities in the country.

This paper traces the various efforts to fund University education in Nigeria by successive governments in Nigeria and the clamor by newly established private universities for inclusion in these funds as a means of engendering qualitative education delivery in the country. However, a proper understanding of the funding situation's genesis is pertinent in order to understand and place in proper perspective the centrality of funding to the nature (growth or otherwise), functionality, and trajectory of university education in the country. Hence, the paper first attempts to chronicle the development of university education, starting with the narrative of various commissions such as the Elliot and Asquith Commissions, which established the University College, Ibadan, and the Ashby commission, which recommended the increase in the number of universities in the country in the wake of Nigeria's independence in 1960.

Methodology

The paper relies mostly on secondary sources of data such as books, journal articles and internet sources analyzing already existing materials on related subject matter to the study. Data collected from these secondary sources are then analysed using the content analysis method. Since many of the materials used are in public domain, there is no need to secure permission from the authors of such materials.

Theoretical Framework: The General System Theory

The theory upon which the study is based is known as the general system theory. The theory was popularized by Von Bertelaffy. The theory is based on the shift in attention from the part to the whole (Weinberg, 2001, Jackson, 2003). It is an interdisciplinary theory about every system in nature, in society and in many scientific domains as well as a framework with which phenomena can be investigated from a holistic perspective (Capra, 1997).

The argument by systemic theorists is that it will be impossible to fully comprehend a phenomenon simply by breaking it up into elementary parts and then reforming it, rather, it will be better if a global view is applied in order to fully comprehend its functioning even if we commence from the analysis of the elementary components of a phenomenon in order to fully comprehend the phenomenon in its entirety, yet, we must also observe it from a holistic perspective (Mele et al., 2010, Van Bertelaffy, 1969).

As it relates to the university system, the theory examines how external pressures have come to intrude into the management and governance of universities. (Clarke et al., 1984) observes that government tend to be introducing public policies in times of economic recession to achieve rationalisation of human, physical and financial resources in higher education and to foster initiatives that shape university teaching and research to serve the needs of society and assist in national economic recovery. Systems theory therefore provides insights into some of these external pressures which have resulted in intrusions into the

autonomy of university governance and management thereby affecting or disrupting their operations (Clarke et al., 1984).

However, to some family therapists, systems theory is not able to adequately describe an individual's responsibility (Spronck and Compennolle, 1997). To (Merkel and Searight, 1992) responsibility is irrelevant to systems theory. (Cottone and Greenwell, 1992) in their own assessment of Mackinnon and Miller have suggested that the principle of holism, that is the principle of a whole being greater than the parts can lead to a situation where one does not bother anymore with an individual but only with families.

The Era of University Education in Nigeria: The Elliot Commission

University education in Nigeria came late, considering that there were clamors for the establishment of a university three decades before the first University was established at Ibadan in 1948. While waiting for a university to be established in the country, some Nigerians, especially of Yoruba stock, had undergone some form of training in universities abroad. These include Dr. Nathaniel King, the first Medical Doctor in Nigeria (1876), Sapara Williams (1880), Rev. T.B. Macaulay, Otunba Payne, Obadiah Johnson, Dr. Mojola Agbebi, Dr. Henry Carr, Herbert Macaulay, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, Dr. Nwafor Orizu and many others (Ayandele, 1973).

It will be fruitless to trace the trajectory of the agitation for university education on the West African coast. But we need to remind ourselves that the desire and demands of West Africans for higher education predate the annexation of Lagos as a crown colony in 1861 or the arrival of the European missionaries in Nigeria in 1840. The belief by the colonial government that the educated elite was the problem of colonial Nigeria in the first half of the decade following the establishment of colonialism informed the suppression of education in the colony. In particular, the agitation by the nationalists, which climaxed in the petition by the National Congress of British West Africa to King George V, among other similar agitations, led to the closure of 902 out of 3,578 primary schools in Southern Nigeria under the 1926 Education Ordinance. In addition, only a handful of elite secondary schools, such as the King's College, Lagos, founded in 1909, existed (Ayandele, 1973). Through this act, it became apparent to the few educated elite in the country that the British government's reluctance to sustain the provision of formal education to the higher school or university level. By the 1920s, this prompted the departure of small but privileged sets of Nigerians to the United Kingdom to attend universities in London. These privileged Nigerians contributed to the formation of the West African Students Union (WASU) in 1925 (Adi, 1998). Led by Ladipo Solanke and Herbert Bankole-Bright, the Union sought to secure better Higher education for African students both at home and abroad, among other things (Adi, 1998).

With the assistance of a few educated elite in the Legislative council, these ambitious Nigerians helped to drive the establishment of the Yaba Higher College in 1934 by the Colonial authority. Unlike the first Secondary school in the country, which was founded by an African, Rev. T. B. Macaulay, the College was founded by the colonial government in response to the agitation by the educated elite for higher education in the country (Livsey, 2017).

It should be noted that from 1908 to 1928, the colonial government attempted to train Nigerians for the lower cadre in various government departments such as the survey, railway, post and telegraph, agriculture, and veterinary departments. Even in the 1930s, when the nationalists intensified their agitation for colonial reforms in the area of education, the colonial government's response was to establish the Yaba Higher College in 1934, which was no more than a post-secondary institution and not comparable to a university in London. According to Osoba and Fajana (1980), "the Yaba Higher College was established to produce only well-trained assistants to Europeans in their various departments in the nearest future" (p. 21). There was a serious backlash by the Nigerian nationalists because its graduates were considered inferior, and its certificates were not recognized beyond Nigeria. Members of the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) were vocal in their criticism of the College and insisted on the establishment of a full-fledged university offering degrees that would be universally recognized or affiliated with universities in the United Kingdom; if nothing else, the colonial government should provide scholarship for students being trained at home. In spite of all these criticisms, the status of the College remained unchanged throughout the colonial period, although a new college of Technology was established in its stead in 1947 (Osoba & Fajana, 1980).

The end of the Second World War in 1945 brought significant changes to the development and funding of university education in Nigeria. The war created conditions that brought about changes which included the creation of universities. There arose widespread demand for the Africanisation of key institutions, which could not be achieved without a university education. Here, mention should be made of the efforts of nationalists and journalists such as Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe and Ernest Ikoli. Indeed, Ikoli was so infuriated with the status and funding of the Yaba Higher College that at its inauguration, he remarked to a neighbor that the college was "a calculated attempt to stunt African personality" (Livsey, 2017). This statement generated an argument between him and a British chemistry lecturer at the Yaba Higher College, which nearly led to a brawl (Livsey, 2017). However, by the 1940s, through renewed and vigorous agitations, the British government began looking into the demand for the establishment of universities in British West African colonies. Hence, on June 13, 1943, Secretary of States for the Colonies Oliver Stanley announced in the House of Commons the desire of her Majesty's government to set up a commission on Higher Education in West Africa with the following terms of reference: "To report on the organization and facilities of the existing center of higher education in British West Africa and to make recommendations regarding future university development in the area (Osoba & Fajana, 1980).

The Commission, which was headed by Sir Walter Elliot, had thirteen other members. The Commission came up with two reports: Majority and Minority Reports. The Majority Report recommended the establishment of two universities in Nigeria and Ghana and to upgrade the Fourah Bay College, Sierra Leone, to a full-fledged university, while the Minority Report recommended the establishment of only one university in Ibadan to serve the whole of West Africa. The Majority Report was accepted in June 1945, subject to the approval of the West African government. But the British general election of July 1945 changed the whole scenario as the Labour Party was defeated by the Conservative Party, and Arthur Creech Jones, the leader of the committee that submitted the Minority

Report, replaced Oliver Stanley as the Secretary of State. On becoming the Secretary of State, Jones quickly reversed his predecessor's decision and approved the Minority Report, which favored the establishment of only one university for the whole of West Africa, apparently to spite the defeated Labour party. Consequently, on November 17, 1948, Sir Arthur Creech Jones, then Secretary of State for the Colonies and an influential member of the Elliot Commission, turned the first sod at the permanent site of the University College Ibadan, a day which has become recognized as the founding date of the University (U. I. at 60, 2008).

Thus, by January 1948, some former Yaba Higher College students resumed their studies as the first set of undergraduates of the University College, Ibadan (UCI), which officially opened in October 1948 with 106 students. With the admission of more undergraduates to join the former students of Yaba Higher College, the total population of UCI became 210 founding students (Fafunwa, 1970).

Becoming Oliver Twist: The Birth of the First-Generation Nigerian Universities, 1948–1962

Rather than being an end in itself, the birth of the University College, Ibadan became a means to an end as its establishment ushered in a new wave of agitation for the establishment of more universities to cater to the growing needs of Nigerians in the area of university education, especially with the introduction of internal self-government and independence approaches.

The establishment of University College, Ibadan brought hopes to many Nigerians as their future appeared certain. It offered opportunities to Nigerian youths, especially the middle class, who could not afford the cost of traveling abroad for university education (Ogunyemi, 2010). Nonetheless, its establishment did not totally solve the problems of university education in Nigeria. These problems arose from the need to indigenize the senior cadre of the Nigerian civil service, occasioned partly by an acute shortage of European personnel in the civil service caused by the Second World War, which had taken its toll on the supply of European personnel in the civil service.

These problems continued until 1959, owing to the slow pace at which the university grew and the modest scale on which it was operated. Admission became highly competitive while the yearly enrolment in its formative years was below 200. Curriculum was deficient because it was designed more to meet European rather than Nigerian development needs. Also, the intellectual agenda of colonial era did not allow for the establishment of all conventional Departments such as law, philosophy, education, and economics. Consequently, in 1959, the Nigerian Prime Minister set up a commission headed by Sir Eric Ashby meant "to conduct an investigation into Nigeria's needs in the field of post-school certificate and higher education for the next twenty years" (Fafunwa, 1971, p. 151).

In 1955, prior to the inauguration of the Ashby Commission, the Eastern Legislative Assembly passed a bill into law for the establishment of a university in the Eastern Region of Nigeria, and in 1958, the Eastern Region government invited an inter-university council of experts to submit a recommendation for the establishment of a university in the Region and to suggest possible strategies for its achievement. Immediately after the Ashby Commission submitted its recommendations, the government of the Eastern Region set up a six-man provisional council in April 1959. These men were those who laid the foundation

of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, just about the same time that the Prime Minister was setting up the Ashby Commission (Fafunwa, 1971). The Ashby Commission's findings were submitted on September 2, 1960. The Commission recommended, among other things, the establishment of three universities—the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, and the University of Lagos—and the establishment of a National Universities Commission to coordinate the orderly development of these universities. This gave birth to the National University Commission as a coordinating body for university education in Nigeria.

The Western Nigeria government and its Legislative Assembly realized that the proposal submitted by the Ashby commission only made a recommendation for the establishment of three universities, implying the exclusion of the region, given the argument by the Federal government that the region already had the University College, Ibadan and another one being proposed in Lagos. This made the government of Western Nigeria regard these universities as Federal government universities, thus necessitating the need for the region to establish its own university just like the Eastern region established the University at Nsukka. Hence, the Western regional government began to make arrangements for the establishment of its own university located at Ile-Ife. The university admitted its first set of 244 students on September 22, 1962.

In a bold move in 1962, the Federal Government established three universities as recommended by the Ashby Commission, namely Nsukka, Zaria, and Lagos, prompting the Western region government to establish its own University at Ife, thereby increasing the total number of universities in Nigeria to five. The University of Nigeria, Nsukka, which was established on October 7, 1960, before the release of the Ashby Commission's report, enrolled its first set of students on the same day it opened with 220 students. The school was patterned after the American land grant university. The Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, was established on October 4, 1962, with 426 students. Lastly, the University of Lagos was also formally opened on October 4, 1962 (Fafunwa, 1971). Therefore, by the end of 1962, the total number of universities in Nigeria had increased to five.

With the creation of states after the collapse of the First Republic, many of these state governments also established Universities to cater to the needs of Nigerians in the area of university education and particularly placed emphasis on the admission of indigenes of such states. The old Bendel state was the first to establish a university, known then as the University of Benin in 1970 (Adeyemi, 2018). Even at that, these efforts failed to completely solve the problem and demands for university education by Nigerians. The increased demand for university education, coupled with the inability of government (both federal and states) to singlehandedly provide university education, particularly given the growing population, necessitated the approval and licensing of some private sector participants to augment the efforts of the government.

Funding of University Education in Nigeria

Until recently, the general belief among Nigerians was that funding education from primary to university level is the duty and prerogative of government. Successive governments have given the people the wrong

impression about whose responsibility the funding of education is, especially university education. By placing the funding of university education under the exclusive list in the 1979 constitution, Nigeria's government made it clear that it was the government's responsibility to wholly fund university education (FGN, 1979).

However, adopting the general systems theory, (Clarke, 1984, p.24) observes thus:

The university system of a nation functions within and interacts with a supra system, that is, the society which comprises that nation. Such a university also operates within the international system of universities and adheres to the general role of universities in pressuring, transmitting and extending knowledge through their teaching and research functions. In attempting to carry out this role and those functions, each university operates as an interdependent and interrelated part of those social and academic systems. In itself, each university is an open human system in that there is a continual process of dynamic interaction between the system and its environment which results in readjustment in an attempt to achieve equilibrium in the system.

It is obvious that funding university education is not as easy as envisaged, as huge recurrent expenditures are required to run it. For instance, in the 2017 Nigerian budget, about N455 billion was allocated for education (Babalola, 2017). Out of this amount, only 50 billion was earmarked for capital expenditure while the remaining was to be spent on recurrent expenditure, which included salaries and overhead expenses—contrasted with 140 Billion nairas earmarked for capital projects under Defence in the same budget (Babalola, 2017). The result is that over the years, facilities in most Nigerian universities have experienced decay. This poor funding negates the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) recommendation that 26% of national budgets should be spent on education. Despite this directive by UNESCO, the government of Nigeria allocated about 7% of its budget to education, which is low compared with what other developed countries spend on education. In fact, Nigeria's spending on education is the lowest in Africa (Callaway, 1968; Ekundayo, 2019).

In comparing the federal Government of Nigeria's budgetary allocation to education to that of North California State University in 2012, Babalola (2019) posits:

North California State University budgetary expenditure in 2012 was \$7,130,137,243 which translates to #1,212,123,331,310. The Federal Government of Nigeria's budget for 50 Federal Universities and the Universal Basic Education (UBE) is \$495,456,130,065 which translates to 40.88% of the budget allocation of California State University.

Explaining further, he maintains that:

In 2014, the total allocation of 89 federal higher institutions was #336,570,071, 309. If converted to dollars at #199 it would come to \$1,691,306,891 which would still be far below the annual revenue of only one private university in the USA (Babalola, 2017).

The implication of this poor funding is that universities over the years have performed below expectations. They have not been able to carry out their functions as citadels of learning and effective research as a result of a lack of capacity. This has led to incessant strikes by members of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) for much of the academic calendar, disrupting the academic calendar in many universities and forcing students to spend longer periods of time on programs.

To address this problem of poor university funding in the country, there have been calls for alternative funding of university education. This is in line with best practices all over the world, where university funding is not seen as the prerogative of government alone, but universities evolve various means of sourcing funds through donations, endowments, gifts, and grants, among others. In the case of Nigeria, the first attempt at such alternative funding was in 1993, when the Education Tax Fund (ETF) was established. This is in line with the proposition of the general system theory.

The Education Tax Fund was created via the Education Tax Decree, 1993 (or Act No.7 of 1993 as amended by Act No.40 of 1998) and provided that 2% of profits of companies registered in the country should be collected by the government and deposited into a fund called the Education Tax Fund (ETF), which later became known as the Education Trust Fund (Iruonagbe & Egharevba, 2015). The fund was a homegrown solution to address issues of funding, rehabilitate decaying infrastructures and facilities, and restore the lost glory of education and confidence in the system, as well as consolidate gains, build the capacity of teachers and lecturers, enhance teacher development, and develop prototype design, among other important functions (Iruonagbe & Egharevba, 2015). This invariably ensured that funding increased from over 11 billion nairas in 1999 to over 90 billion nairas in 2008. Despite this increase, funding still remains a major problem in the Nigerian higher education system (Dawodu, 2000).

The ETF intervention notwithstanding, funding continued to be a challenge, particularly at the tertiary level of education. Some of the inherent lapses and challenges noticed in the operation of the ETF included: (a) The ETF was overburdened and overstretched and could only render palliative support to all levels of public educational institutions in Nigeria; (b) there was duplication of functions and mandates of other agencies set up after the ETF, including the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) and Millennium Development Goal (MDG); and (c) the decay, rot, and dilapidation of facilities in the tertiary education continued to be irritating as funds were only thinly spread. These challenges informed the repeal of the ETF Act and its replacement with the Tertiary Education Trust Fund in 2011. Specifically, TETFund was set up as an intervention agency to provide supplementary support to all levels of public tertiary institutions, with the main objective of using funding alongside project management for the rehabilitation of tertiary education in Nigeria (TETFund, 2011).

Given its mandate, TETFund has sought to improve the provision and maintenance of infrastructural facilities in public tertiary institutions while supporting quality research through the provision of funds (Udu & Okwesili, 2014; Shuaibu, 2017). However, lethargy on the part of public tertiary institutions, as well as the inability to diligently follow through due process, has limited institutions' access to the fund. Essentially, the overall effect of the funding problem in Nigerian public universities was that by the beginning of the new millennium, the access rate to education had fallen to less than 13% (Okebukola, 2002). In the words of Aluede, Idogho, and Imonikhe (2012), "of the number

of candidates applying for admission every year in Nigeria, only about 5.2% to 15.3% get admitted every year, implying that about 84.7% to 94.8% of the candidates don't get admitted" (p. 7). Thus, the government considered the option of establishing private universities to augment the shortfall in the admission of qualified candidates into universities in the country. This is without prejudice to the establishment of twelve new Federal universities and their location in different parts of Nigeria (Erinosho, 2008).

Emergence of Private Universities in Nigeria

The emergence of private higher institutions of learning in Nigeria began with the commencement of the Fourth Republic under the leadership of President Olusegun Obasanjo. In 1999, the National Universities Commission (NUC) was given permission to "receive application, examine and validate the facilities of serious applicants of private universities across the country" (Iruonagbe & Egharevba, 2015). Thus in 1999, with the approval of the NUC, three private universities—Igbinedion University, Okada, Edo State; Babcock University, Illishan-Remo, Ogun State; and Madonna University, Okija, Anambra State—emerged as the first set of private universities in Nigeria (Iruonagbe & Egharevba, 2015). In 2001, Bowen University, Iwo, Osun State was established, and in 2002, Covenant University, Ota, Ogun State followed suit (Iruonagbe & Egharevba, 2015). At present, there are about 41 private universities operating in the country, with the NUC reportedly considering applications of another 292 applicants (Obu, 2014, Parr, 2018).

To Whom Less is Given: Making A Case for Government funding of Private Universities in Nigeria

One recurring decimal since the establishment of private universities in Nigeria is the clamor by these private universities for inclusion in the disbursement of funds that accrue from TETFund. It is an incontrovertible fact that private universities, just like their public counterparts, are partners in the delivery of higher education in the country, as these private universities complement government efforts to address the problems of inadequate space in Nigerian universities and lack of access to higher education by Nigerian youths. Inherent in the establishment and the consequent proliferation of private universities was the desire to expand student enrolment in Nigerian universities, given the limited carrying capacity of public universities. Private universities were expected to be able to contribute to the manpower needs of the country, in which case every support that could be mustered, including support from the government, is needed to actualize this, which perhaps is one area where the General system theory may become inadequate or insufficient in justifying the autonomy of universities. The situation was more serious given the derelict state and limited infrastructure (classrooms, laboratories, hostels) available in public universities, which the establishment of private universities was meant to address from the beginning. Indeed, if these private universities produce graduates who are also mandated to participate in the mandatory one-year national youth service programme, there may perhaps be no reason why such private universities should not be included in the Trust fund, more so than the private companies who are

the major contributors to this fund also engage and enjoy the services of products of these private universities.

Novel as these ideas may sound, the reality is that the carrying capacity and enrolment of all the licensed and operating private universities is still small compared with public universities. Looking at the figures released by the National University Commission in the table below, it is clear that due to lack of funding, the private universities are not being maximized in terms of provision of university education in Nigeria, while the public ones are overstretched.

Table 1

Carrying Capacity, Enrolment, and Difference in Enrolment of Nigerian Universities as of 2005

S/N	Type of Univ.	Carrying Capacity	Current Enrolment	Difference
1	Federal Universities	342,049	442,834	+109,785
2	State Universities	163,586	265,166	+101,580
3	Private Universities	28,548	19,740	-8,808
	TOTAL	534,183	727,740	-192,557

Source: Omomia & al. (2014).

From the table above, while the public universities admitted students in excess of their carrying capacity due to the fact that their fees are cheap because of their relative accessibility to funding, private universities admitted far less than their carrying capacity, thereby creating a huge shortfall in annual university enrolment in the country. A five-year trend of enrolment in Nigerian Universities from 2006–2010 shows that the situation remained the same as shown in Table 2 below:

Table 2

Student Enrolment in Nigerian Universities, 2006–2010

Year	University Type	Enrolment (In Thousands) Approximation
2006	Federal	420,000
	State	240,000
	Private	10,000
2007	Federal	580,000
	State	420,000
	Private	15,000
2008	Federal	420,000
	State	180,000
	Private	20,000
2009	Federal	380,000
	State	180,000
	Private	10,000

2010	Federal	380,000
	State	220,000
	Private	10,000

Source: Nigerian Education Fact Sheet (2012).

Note that each year, private universities admit far fewer students than public ones admitted. While it may be argued that for the period compared, the numbers of private universities in Nigeria were fewer than that of federal or state universities, this argument does not justify the huge gap.

Noticeably, the same set of issues affected the output of graduates turned out from these universities. Whereas inadequate or limited facilities and manpower, limited course offerings, and seemingly exorbitant fees charged by private universities could explain their limited capacity, it is clear that the inability of many of them to vigorously compete with public universities has almost rendered irrelevant or grossly unnecessary the purpose for establishing them in the first place. Perhaps the situation would have been different if the government had invested in the expansion of facilities in the existing public universities and strengthened their admission and accommodation capacity while at the same time empowering other tertiary institutions in affiliation with universities to run degree programmes in their areas of competence.

One major concern in the encouragement given to the establishment of private universities was borne out of the need to curtail the incessant union strikes in Nigerian universities, which in the past has led to the cancellation or undue prolongation of academic calendars, and, in the process, checkmating the growing influence of staff unions, particularly the Academic Staff Unions of Universities. Although private universities have not stopped strikes in public universities, their existence has provided an alternative for students who desire to complete their university education quickly, providing their parents can afford it. Also pertinent is the need to observe a moratorium on union activities for a number of years in these new universities that is for those that will allow unionism at all. But in addressing these concerns, others have been raised. These include excessive dependence on the established universities for manpower, particularly at the senior level, for approval and accreditation of programmes, and, ultimately, the validation of the degrees awarded by the new private universities. This is without prejudice to the number of First class turned out from these private universities, whose ratio in most cases is not commensurate with total student enrolment or total graduate output. There is also concern about the high fees charged by these universities, whereas this is justified on the basis of the cost estimate required to train the students and provide quality education. The claim that these fees are being subsidized notwithstanding, a major contention is that only a few Nigerians earn a legitimate income to train their children in such schools. There is also the argument in public circles and among interest groups that such institutions should not be supported with government funds, having been set up to generate income by investors. Even when the impression is given that many of the private universities are not breaking even or are barely surviving, public opinions weighed largely on the side that as organizations set up largely as business concerns or with the intent of making a profit, it will not be plausible and would be largely unfair to public universities to support them with public funds purposely set apart to improve the fortunes of

public universities, and thus in a way empower them to compete favorably with public universities which some believe they were set up to challenge, rival or keep on their toes.

But by far the major argument against government support of private universities is the argument that these universities are set up as private concerns meant to promote the lofty ideas of their proprietors, project their persons or organizations, and, more importantly, make a profit. As relatively young organizations still struggling to survive, will these universities share their profit with the government when they begin to make profits? Another dimension is that if the government begins to fund these institutions, what immediate gain will accrue to the government more so that these institutions as private businesses are supposed to pay taxes to the government and carry out other corporate responsibilities. Rather than diluting ownership, funding these institutions will only strengthen them and their ownership and enhance their capacity and marketability and, by extension, their ability to compete more vigorously with public institutions; this, then, becomes a case of empowering the institutions to become better transferable and competitive. These arguments in a way support the premise canvassed and supported by the proponents of the general system theory.

Like the general system theorists proposed, rather than clamour for public funding, it is expected that private Nigerian universities will follow the standard and acceptable practices all over the world, where private and even public universities source funds independently from private organizations through various means. The suggestion by Afe Babalola that they should enlist “the interest of the rich and selfless Nigerians” among others, is apt (Babalola, 2017). Citing the examples of selected nine leading private universities in the United States of America, he observes that “the staggering revenue of the universities was due to the generous donations, endowment, and gifts from selfless Americans” (Babalola, 2017). He therefore opines that private universities in Nigeria can also generate additional funds to run their universities through various means such as donations, endowments, professional chairs, gifts, and grants, among others (Babalola, 2017). Through this he believes that private universities in Nigeria will be able to generate enough funds to run their schools without relying on the government, a practice which is no longer popular even among public universities all over the world. However, a serious re-orientation on the part of Nigerian businessmen and philanthropists and a deeper convincing are needed to bring about a change of attitude and a positive disposition to selfless giving for this to work. What private universities must also not overlook is the need to sensitize people to let them understand why contributing to educational development is important for national growth. Rather than spend billions on promoting events that add little or nothing to national growth and development, such monies should be used to support teaching and research in the education sector. This will invariably engender national growth and development.

In compliance with the system-oriented proposal or the general system theory, perhaps what private institutions should clamour for rather than government funding is the strengthening of the regulatory role of government via such regulatory bodies as the National Universities Commission (NUC) and the Ministry of Education. This, if properly done, will provide a level playing field for both private and public universities and ensure the application of the same standard for all. One example of an uneven policy is the ease with which private universities get their courses accredited or re-accredited by the NUC,

while established public universities sometimes fail accreditation. Whereas laxity on the part of public universities could explain this, it is also obvious that the regulatory roles of the NUC have been continually circumvented or compromised, given the roles played by Senior Academics mostly drawn from public universities and supervising/overseeing NUC staff in the exercise and the unwholesome practices often engaged in by some of the private universities.

Conclusion

Funding university education should not be seen as the duty of the government alone. In fact, in some developed countries, rather than wholly funding university education, government duty is mostly limited to providing an enabling environment that supports and assists private organizations in supporting education while also making funds available in the form of grants, scholarships, or loans to indigent students who cannot afford a university education. Developing countries like Nigeria have many lessons to learn from the developed countries of the world. Indeed, adequate arrangements should be put in place in the management of such funds such that acceptable best practices all over the world are followed.

Private universities should be encouraged to source funds from corporate organizations and individuals through the various means highlighted above. With these, the problem of limited access to university education would be addressed. Therefore, the narrative about funding university education, especially at the level of a private university, would change in the country.

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