

Politics and Private Sector Participation in University Education: Nigeria's Historical Peculiarities, 1983-2017

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ABSTRACT

Traditionally, politics is guided by the traits of interests and intrigues. This paper historically examines whether the political intrigues that beclouded the establishment of private universities in Nigeria in any way distorted educational and national interests. The paper submits that the development of private universities suffered a setback owing to the kind of politics that circumvented the initial efforts. It therefore advocates that government and the political class must eschew self-serving political interest in order to realize the potentials in private-sector participation for the development of university education in Nigeria.

Keywords: Politics, Private Participation, University Education, Historical Rendition

INTRODUCTION

Generally, the Nigerian government has recognized educational provision as one of her capital intensive social services which its funding is a responsibility falling on the shoulders of federal, state and local governments. This therefore is a big task for only government to bear. The Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004), facing the reality; maintains that "...in this connection, government welcomes and encourages the participation of local communities, individuals and other organizations." In his submission on this, Abdulrahman (2008) recounts that it is now clear and evident that educational provision, administration, funding and management are too enormous and too far above what the government alone can venture. Specifically, university education remains a critical sector for the production of highly skilled manpower for nation's growth.

From the foregoing and concerning university education in Nigeria, National Policy on Education (NPE) has been so explicit on the need for private sector participation in the development of university education. Thus, it provides that voluntary agencies, individuals and groups be allowed to establish universities (FRN, 2004). However, much as government appeared disposed to private-sector participation in university education; the critical questions that should arise from this are: (i) did it actually or deliberately put in place any known political machinery to facilitate the actualization of this policy goal? (ii) did it on the contrary, use such machinery to impede the goal? The instrumentality of state powers determines to a large extent how private interest can be well-accommodated in an education sector that has been principally perceived to be the core business of government.

The brand of politics that is deployed by government on matters that affected the establishment and sustenance of private universities in the country is worth examining so as to ascertain whether government got it wrong or right. But more importantly, it will be apt to situate the consequences or otherwise of such politics on the development of university education. Thus, politics which is a major element that expresses government's interest in the process of decision-making becomes a subject of focus in this discourse.

Conceptual Review

If there are any two sectors that have been traditionally and inextricably linked to each other, they are politics and education. Politics in education has its historical conceptions and foundations. According to Sherman and Kirschner (1976), part of the functional conceptions of history of education is that it is not limited to studying the origins and evolution of public education but also the interplay of politics in education. Thus, within the frame of history of education, as a field of study, politics in education is historical cum conceptual.

To be retrospective, Uchendu (1995) notes that politics in education started in ancient Greece. Shortly after the ancient Greeks discovered education as a self-conscious activity, they also discovered that politics presented some complex problems to education. Uchendu further observes that politics in education, within a common frame of history or philosophy, was uniquely symbolized by the figure Socrates being the first person who designated politics and education as a distinct and above all, inter-related subject of systematic inquiry. Also in Anuna (2008), one of the fundamental themes of Plato's Republic was to answer some questions, among which was: how can government influence individuals to accept their appropriate roles in society? He remarks that whatever there is as an intellectual reaction to such question clearly will not be able to ignore the intrinsic implications of politics for

education in any given society; bearing in mind that in any simple society, it is the fundamental function of the nation-state to ensure that its members are educated.

In Nigeria, Nwagwu (2002) particularly observes that State and hence political intervention in modern education in Nigeria dates back to the West African Education Ordinance of 1882 and the first education law exclusively for Nigeria through the 1887 Education Ordinance to allow for partnership between voluntary agencies and government in the provision of education for the populace. In addition, the 1925 Education Memorandum provided for Government to assist all voluntary agencies that are running schools. Hence, Okeke (1997) asserts that, historically, the concept of politics in modern education is not a recent phenomenon.

The concept of politics in education, as it affects the contemporary Nigerian educational system, is perhaps better mirrored from the expositions by Hans Weiler who in his work on Education and Politics in Nigeria presented a random survey of the various ways the relationship between education and politics do take shape. Weiler (1964) posits that the underlying thesis in the relationship between the two institutions (education and politics) helps to provide a clearer understanding of some complex ways by which the structure, organization, legislation, policies, and other issues that touch on education have been meshed with political interests, intrigues, manipulations, desires, decisions, antics, etc.

Suffice it to say that "Conflict of Interests" is a major phenomenon between politics and education. Spring (1998) asserts that politics in education is deeply characterized by complex interests between politicians, teachers' unions, etc... and the knowledge industry. Of course, politics in itself is about the maneuvering and intriguing when the interest of the individual or a group of individual is to be secured (Okorosaye-Orubite, 1998). It therefore follows that those in political positions are

prone to manipulating and infusing their interests into education. In other words, political power holders in leading areas of the society, even without significant expertise or experience in education matters, do enjoy injecting into education, the various interests they represent.

The state of university education in today's Nigeria in terms of quality is somewhat questionable. With only governments (federal and state) in the provision of university education from the beginning, it would be expected that enough resources at the disposal of government could provide a good university system. Though, it must be mentioned objectively that the disposition of government to university education was impressive from that beginning, but gradually; a play of politics started with the university education, leaving us with increment in number, that is, in quantity and not in quality. Characterising and plaguing the system are inadequate or obsolete equipment and facilities, dearth of personnel, paucity of funds and many more. This also corresponds with an exposé of Enemuó in Abdulrahman (2008) revealing that:

our educational system over the years has experienced phenomenal expansion in terms of enrolment figures without a corresponding increase in funding and provision of facilities. Consequently, be it at the primary, secondary or tertiary levels, our educational system is characterized by problems of dilapidated or non-existent infrastructures, poorly stocked library, inadequate laboratories and equipment, poor condition of service, prompting brain drain, poor quality of teaching and poor quality of graduates, especially in science and technology.

Abubakar in Nyewusira and Abdulrahman (2017:6) further corroborates this by capturing the situation, where it was noted that:

With the emergence of the first generation Universities, Nigeria was already on the

road to harnessing the potentials of University education, because Nigerian Universities then were undoubtedly world class institutions, producing first class-rate graduates who left their footprints on all fields of learning. That was the outstanding testimony of the development pattern of University education in Nigeria in the past. Therefore, had the Nigerian university education continued to flourish that way; Nigerians will not be talking about the current seemingly appalling quality of 4th generation Universities. So, for us to understand and assess the present state of the Universities, we will have to re-evaluate the University system. This way, we can identify what informed the marked difference between Nigerian universities of the past and those of the present, in order to better the future of our university system in Nigeria.

The lamentation above calls for remedying the situation with those considered to possess enormous resources and zeal, particularly the private persons, religious bodies and corporate establishment; to join in the provision of quality university education. Having realized that university system has become a huge venture that only government can sustain. Today, the best of facilities and state-of-the-art equipment that can enhance quality education are found in Nigerian private universities.

The Ingress of Politics in the Establishment of Private Universities

Prior to 1983, the establishment of universities in Nigeria had become the preserve of the Federal and State Governments much as government, at any level, did not deliberately encourage private establishment of universities. Initially, since the Nigerian law had not set up minimum standards for establishing private universities, the permission to open or operate them became clearly and heavily dependent on political patronage (Fafunwa, 1974).

Besides that, a picture of political intrigue was also observable in the initial emergence of private universities in Nigeria. This was most evident in the antecedents to the famous Supreme Court decision on 30th March, 1983 in favour of Dr. Basil Nnanna Ukaegbu, the proprietor of the Imo Technical University, in a case against the Imo State government that had declared Imo Technical University illegal. Dr. Sam Mbakwe, the then Imo State Governor and a political opponent to Dr. Ukaegbu who was his NPN governorship challenger, had declared the university illegal and consequently closed it, citing poor standards of the university as the reason for his actions. Governor Mbakwe was quoted as saying:

The whole thing was becoming a huge joke. The whole affair became dangerously confusing as people started establishing kiosks which they called Universities. Honestly, if we don't do something fast to arrest this situation, we might end up producing graduates that cannot qualify as bus drivers.... The proprietors are contractors charging exorbitant fees (Toye, 2010:20).

Suffice it to note that Dr. Ukaegbu differed with the above claims. He sensed political ill-treatment and consequently challenged Governor Mbakwe and the Imo State government first at the Owerri High Court, then at the Federal Court of Appeal and finally at the Supreme Court where the apex court ruled in his favour, asserting that only the National Assembly or State Assemblies could legislate on the quality of such institutions and not the Governor. The Supreme Court decision also made a landmark pronouncement that private agencies and individuals were free under the Nigerian constitution to establish Universities (Toye, 2010; Osagie, 2009). Hence, it was Nigeria's Supreme Court that first established the legality of private universities via the suit in *Dr. Basil Ukaegbu v Attorney-General of Imo State*, [1983] NSCC160 (Odinkalu, 2007).

Abdulrahman (2017) further portrayed the picture with additional information in connection with Suit No: SC.83/1982 (iLAW, 2016 and All N.L.R., 1792 (1983) 9 S.C 59, in the Supreme Court of Nigeria before their Lordships Justices of the Supreme Court of Nigeria - Chukwuweike Idigbe, Ayo Gabriel Irikefe, Mohammed Bello, Kayode Eso, Augustine Nnamani, Muhammadu Lawal Uwais and Atanda Fatayi-Williams. This singular Supreme Court judgment therefore strengthened and gave more protection to private individuals who desired to own and run universities in Nigeria.

Following the Supreme Court ruling, Osagie (2009) identified that a total number of 26 private universities emerged in the country. However, the resurgence of the military truncated this evolution. Table 1 below shows the list of these defunct private universities:

However, it did not appear that the number of private universities were about to reduce if the military had not scrapped them by 1984. Okorosaye-Orubite (2007) corroborated this when he noted that there was the emergence of some private universities during the second republic, but that the Buhari/Idiagbon regime, after it came on board in 1983, ordered their immediate closure and banned the opening of new ones via the instrumentality of the Private University (Abolition and Prohibition) Decree No.19 of 1984. Akpochafo in Ogunu (1990) berates this military crackdown on the private universities; if not, a few of them would have probably become enviable because of the big financial strength of those behind them. This Decree therefore effectively terminated whatever there was as the initial trial on the growth of private universities. This military action of General Buhari could not be immediately established whether it was informed by public interest because the way and manner in which the closure of these universities was approached by the interested parties was, to say the least, very ridiculous (Osagie, 2009).

Table 1: 26 Truncated and Defunct Private Universities in Nigeria

S/N	Universities	Locations
1.	Afendomifok University	Ikot-Ekpene, Akwa Ibom State (in the then Cross River State)
2.	Afom Middle Belt University	Ibadan, Oyo State.
3.	Afro-American University	Orogun, Delta State (in the then, Bendel State).
4.	Akoko Christian University	Akungba, Ondo State.
5.	Ekpoma University	Illeh, Edo State (in the then, Bendel State) – Distinct from the one, now known as Ambrose Ali University.
6.	Epe Graduate Teachers University	Epe, Lagos State.
7.	Ezena University	Owerri, Imo State.
8.	Feyon University	Ijebu-Ode, Ogun State.
9.	God's University	Anambra State (multi campuses).
10.	Imo Technical University	Owerri, Imo State.
11.	Institute of Open Cast Mining and Technology,	Auchi, Edo State (in the then, Bendel State).
12.	Islamic University of Nigeria	Alabatan, Ogun State
13.	Laity School of African Thought	Nembe, Bayelsa State (in the then, Rivers State).
14.	National College of Advanced Studies	Aba, Abia State (in the then, Imo State).
15.	Nnamdi Azikiwe University	Onitsha, Anambra State – Distinct from the one, now in Awka
16.	Ogodagu University,	Abuja.
17.	Open University College	Kaduna, Kaduna State.
18.	Pope John Paul University	Aba, Abia State (in the then, Imo State).
19.	Technical University	Imo State (multi campuses).
20.	Theological Colleges by Christian Association of Nigeria	Different States in Nigeria.
21.	Trinity University	Awo-Omamma, Oru, Imo State.
22.	University Course of College	Port Harcourt, Rivers State.
23.	University of Akoko	Ideato, Imo State.
24.	Uzoma University	Afowa Akoko, Edo State.
25.	West African University	Nkwerre, Imo State
26.	World University	Owerri, Imo State.

Source: Adapted from Abdulrahman (2017). Historical-chronological emergence of universities in Nigeria

Resurgence of Private Universities in Nigeria

Nonetheless, the second and the enduring phase of private universities started in 1991 when the quest for private universities was resurrected through the Report of the Commission on the Review of Higher Education in Nigeria. This Commission was set up by the Federal Government under Gen. Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida, to rekindle the dampened morale of prospective private participants and headed by Chief Gray Longe and popularly called “the Longe’s Commission (Abdulrahman, 2017). Report of this Commission recommended that “sponsorship/proprietorship (of institution of higher education in future) should be by the Federal or State Government, a corporate body or any group of Nigerian citizens of high repute” (Okorosaye-Orubite, 2007:180).

The report which also recommended guidelines for the establishment of private institutions of higher learning was accepted by the Federal Government, leading to the promulgation of the Education (National

Minimum Standards and Establishment of Institutions) Decree 1993, No 9, which effectively repealed the Private Universities (Abolition and prohibition) Decree of 1984 and empowered incorporated companies, an individual or association of individuals to establish higher institutions if they satisfy the criteria to do so (Okorosaye-Orubite 2007). Anikpo (2000), however remarks that it was under political pressure that the government was able to reverse itself and repeal the Private Universities Abolition and Prohibition Decree. This could not be otherwise considering that at this period the neo-liberal politics of the World Bank was also used to pressure most regimes in Africa to lift the moratorium on private-sector participation in higher education (Caffentzis in Federici et. al, 2000).

The foregoing thus illustrates that private universities could have gained roots from the 1983 but for their long time exclusion by the military, arising from the Private University (Abolition and Prohibition) Decree No.19 of 1984. Without doubt, the interest represented by this Decree could only be said to be detrimental

to the system. Government therefore inadvertently stifled the initial attempts towards private-sector participation in university education.

After the repeal of the decree in 1993, private universities as we have today were not effectively in place until 1999 when the likes of Madonna University, Okija; Igbinedion University, Okada and Babcock University, Ilesha-Remo began operations. Between 1999 and 2010, 41 private universities have been established in Nigeria (Okojie, 2011). The obvious implication was that public universities had a near monopoly in providing university education in Nigeria until 1999 (Olugbenga, 2010). Today, the country can boast of over 74 private universities with the approval of 6 new private universities in December 2017.

Suffice to say that one other emerging trend in the establishment and ownership of private universities is that the political class has evidently got involved in the ownership of such universities. Topnotch politicians like Atiku Abubarka (AUN), Ibrahim Babangida (Heritage), Olusegun Obasanjo (BELLS), Senator Datiti Baba-Ahmed (Baze University, Abuja), Dr Pat Utomi (PAU), Bola Ajibola,

Afe Babalola and Edwin Clark, are linked to the proprietorship of some private universities in the country. One would actually doubt that if their involvement is borne out of the altruism for better university education or their personal interest to sustain pecuniary status.

Whatever it is in Nigeria, private universities is a product of politics. Many of the faith-based private universities from both the Christian and Islamic arenas are politically connected. Members of the Federal Executive Council who will ultimately approve the proposal for establishment of private universities are affiliated to one religion or the other. Senators, Representatives; even the NUC and its personnel who license the universities are adherents of any named religion. Corporate bodies in the private participation in the establishment of universities are politically linked or directly involved in politics, so also, the first thought of prospective individuals interested in venturing into private university is always the politics involved – who to connect with and what to prepare for and which package to get ready with; all amounting to the consciousness of the associated politics.

Table 2: List of Approved Private Universities in Nigeria

Private Universities				
S/N	Institution	Abbreviation	Location	Founded
1.	Babcock University	BABCOCK	Ilesha-Remo, OG	1999
2.	Igbinedion University	IGBINEDION	Okada, ED	1999
3.	Madonna University	MADONNA	Okija, AN	1999
4.	Bowen University	BOWEN	Iwo, OS	2001
5.	Benson Idahosa University	BIU	Benin-City, ED	2002
6.	Covenant University	COVENANT	Ota, OG	2002
7.	Pan Atlantic University	PANU	Lagos	2002
8.	American University of Nigeria	AUN	Yola, AD	2003
9.	Al-Hikmah University	AL-HIKMAH	Ilorin, KW	2005
10.	Ajayi Crowther University	AJAYI	Oyo, OY	2005
11.	Bingham University	BINGHAM	Karu NS	2005
12.	Bells University of Technology	BELLS	Ota, OG	2005
13.	Caritas University	CARITAS	Amorji-Nke, EN	2005
14.	Crawford University	CRAWFORD	Igbesa, OG	2005
15.	Crescent University	CRESCENT	Abeokuta, OG	2005
16.	Al-Qalam University	AL-QALAM	Katsina, KT	2005
17.	Novena University	NOVENA	Ogume, DT	2005
18.	Redeemer's University	REDEEMERS	Mowe, OG	2005
19.	Renaissance University	RENAISSANCE	Eungu, EN	2005
20.	Kwararafa University (Formerly, Wukari Jubilee)	WUKARI	Wukari, TR	2005
21.	Lead-City University	LEADS	Ibadan	2005
22.	University of Mkar	MKAR	Mkar	2005
23.	Joseph Ayo Babalola University	JABU	Ikeji-Arakeji, O	2006
24.	Caleb University	CALEB	Lagos	2007

Table 2 to be continued...

25.	Fountain University	FOUNTAIN	Oshogbo	2007
26.	Obon University	OBONG	Obong Ntak	2007
27.	Salem University	SALEM	Lokoja	2007
28.	Tansian University	TANSIAN	Umunya	2007
29.	Veritas University	VERITAS	Abuja	2007
30.	Wealely University of Sci. & Tech	WUST	Ondo	2007
31.	The Achiever;s University	ACHIEVRS	Owo	2007
32.	Western Delta University	WEDU	Oghara	2007
33.	African University of Sci.. & Tech	AUST	Abuja	2007
34.	Afe Babalola University	ABUAD	Ado-Ekiti	2009
35.	Godfrey Okoye University	GOU	Ugwumu-Nike EN	2009
36.	Nigerian Turkish Nile University	NITNU	Abuja	2009
37.	Oduduwa University	ODUDUWA	Ipetu-Modu OS	2009
38.	Paul University	PAU	Awka	2009
39.	Rhema University	RHEMA	Obeama	2009
40.	Wellspring University	WU	Evbuobanosa ED	2009
41.	Adeleke University	AU	Ede OS	2011
42.	Baze University	BAZE	Abuja	2011
43.	Landmark University	LANDMARK	Omu-Aran KW	2011
44.	Samuel Adegboyega University	SAU	Ogwu ED	2011
45.	Elizade University	EU	Iaramokin OD	2012
46.	Evangel University	EVANGEL	Akaeze EB	2012
47.	Gregory University	GU	Uturu AB	2012
48.	MacPherson University	MACPU	Ajebo OG	2012
49.	Southwestern University	SWU	Okunwa OG	2012
50.	Augustine University	AUI	Ilara, LG	2015
51.	Christland University	CUO	Owode, OG	2015
52.	Christopher University	CUM	Mowe, OG	2015
53.	Hallmark University	HUII	Ijebu-Itede, OG	2015
54.	Kings University	KUOD	Ode-Omu, OS	2015
55.	Michael & Cecilia Ibru University	MCIU	Owgrode, DT	2015
56.	Mountain Top University	MTU	Ogun State	2015
57.	Ritman University	RITMAN	Ikot-Ekpene, AK	2015
58.	Summit University	SUMMIT	Offa, KW	2015
59.	Edwin Clark University,	ECU	Kiagbodo, Delta State	2015
60.	Hezekiah University,	HU	Umudi, Imo State	2015
61.	Anchor University,	AU	Ayobo, Lagos State	2016
62.	Arthur Jarvis University,	AJU	Akpabuyo, Cross River State	2016
63.	Clifford University,	CU	Owerrinta, Abia State	2016
64.	Coal City University,	COCU	Enugu, Enugu State	2016
65.	Crown Hill University,	CHU	Eiyenkorin, Kwara State	2016
66.	Dominican University,	DU	Ibadan, Oyo State	2016
67.	Koladaisi University,	KUI	Ibadan, Oyo State	2016
68.	Legacy University,	LU	Okija, Anambra State	2016
69.	Admiralty University,	AUI	Ibusa, Delta State	2017
70.	Spiritn University,	SU	Nneochi, Abia State	2017
71.	Precious Cornerstone University,	PCU	Ibadan, Oyo State	2017
72.	PAMO University of Medical Sciences,	PUMS	Port Harcourt, River State	2017
73.	Atiba University,	ATUO	Oyo, Oyo State	2017
74	Eko University of Medical Sciences,	EKUMS	Ijanikin, Lagos State	2017

Source: Abdulrahman (2014), NUC Monday Bulletin (2017).

Another flex of politics is the on-going agitation that private universities should be allowed to benefit from grants coming through the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund), because it is funded by the private sector. Most proprietors as proponents of this campaign argue that government grants to private universities will not only be reminiscence of how government aided private mission schools in time past, but will rather make government see private education operators as worthy partners in the development of university

education. This is a move that government has not subscribed to and has been interpreted as lack of support or recognition from the government by the proprietors (Adedoyin, 2014 and Akanji, 2015).

CONCLUSION

Apparently, the protracted years of military in politics circumvented the development of private universities. Private universities effectively found their footings in Nigeria only with the return of civil rule in 1999, that is, 39 years after political

independence. In view of this, something ought to be done to ensure that politics does not in any way and in the future hamper educational development particularly as it did in initial stage of the development of private universities. Again, the increasing involvement of the political class in owning universities has to be checked so as not allow their personal interest in this business override public good and interest in the development of university education.

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