
Do We Really Need More Universities in Nigeria?

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Abstract

The multifarious establishment of university in Nigeria is alarming. The trend has insinuated controversial debates to all and sundry. The justification for this development is compounded with variegated opinions ranging from creating more access to university education opportunity, palpable conditions of existing universities, competition, improve quality, awareness, accountability etc. The universities whose main job is turning out the most highly qualified professionals must be guided with passion. Against this background, this paper discussed the proliferation of Nigerian universities generally. The paper also examined the benefits and problems of university proliferation in Nigeria. Then, recommendations were made on what should be done to save the image of universities in Nigeria

Introduction

The rate at which universities sprang up in Nigeria has been an issue of serious concern to all those who have regard for education. There are controversial debates among scholars as to ascertain the justification for establishment of more universities to the already existing ones. Rhetoric questions such as the following were upheld; is the standard of the existing universities low? Is the existing universities overpopulated? Are the existing universities not producing the required manpower needed? The above questions portray that there must be an underlying force for the emergence of many more universities in Nigeria. Ekpo and Anuna (2005:1) posited that government is supposed to provide favourable environment for the participation of individuals in the education system. Ihebereme (2009) observed possible lack of uniformity of standard of the new universities to commensurate with the old universities. Nwadiani (1992) opined that the universities are currently being starved of funds at the time when the existing facilities are ageing fast and are operating in adverse conditions of overcrowded classrooms, pitiable hostels and deteriorating physical facilities.

In contribution, Aguh (2007) documented that there are general decay in our institutions of higher learning which are characterized by indiscipline, immorality, truancy, violence, drug abuse, cult activities various forms of examination malpractice etc. In a nutshell, numerous statements abound to justify university proliferation in

Nigeria. Be it as it may, higher education of which university is inclusive, is a significant level of education that must not be toyed with. In this regard, all those who have concern for quality university education are bothered toward the recent trend on university proliferation in Nigeria. The writer is not exonerated from well meaning and interested persons hence the theme of this paper.

Proliferation of Universities in Nigeria: An Overview

Proliferation of universities is on its rampage in Nigeria. However, different scholars have their view on its meaning. Nwafor (2008) asserted that proliferation of universities refers to expansion of universities in a shortest period of time. In a similar manner, Adekinle (2008) opined that proliferation of universities denotes indiscriminate establishment of universities either by the government, private, non-governmental organization or mission. Aguh (2007) was of the opinion that when universities are opened and operated as if it is competition, then, university institution can be said to be proliferated. In the context of this paper, proliferation of universities denotes sudden increase in the establishment of universities in Nigeria.

In the past, the establishment and operation of tertiary institutions in Nigeria were the exclusive reserve of Nigeria's government either federal or state. Of recent, the demand for privatization of university institutions has become a global phenomenon. Both individuals and mission now establish and operate university institutions examples of such universities as recorded by Emeobi (2007) are:

1. Obong University, Obong-Inta, Akwa Ibom State
2. Calab University, Ikoyi, Lagos
3. Fountain University, Oke-Osun
4. Saleem University, Lokoja, Kogi State
5. Tansian University, Oba, Anambra State
6. Caritas University, Enugu
7. Western Delta University, Oghara, Delta State
8. Wesley University of Science and Technology, Ondo, Ondo State.

According to Nwabueze (1995) licenses were given to the first set of private universities by the National Universities Commission (NUC) which include

1. Igbinedion University, Okada
2. Babcock University, Ilisha-Reno, Ikeja
3. Madonna University, Okija
4. Benson Idahosa University, Benin City
5. Pan-African University, Lagos
6. Covenant University, Ota

Other private/ mission universities include

1. Abti-American University of Nigeria Yola
2. Ai-Haikima University, Ilorin
3. Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo.
4. Bingham University, Karu

5. Bells University of Technology, Ota
6. Bowen University, Imo
7. Caleb University, Lagos
8. Lead City University, Ibadan
9. Crawford University of the Apostolic Faith Mission Igbesa
10. Crescent University, Abeokuta

The following are Federal and State Universities

1. Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria
2. University of Abuja, Gwagwalada
3. Bayero University, Kano
4. University of Benin, Benin City
5. University of Ibadan, Ibadan
6. University of Ilorin, Ilorin
7. University of Jos, Jos
8. University of Lagos, Akoka
9. University of Maiduguri, Maiduguri
10. Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka
11. Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife
12. University of Port-Harcourt, Port-Harcourt
13. Usama Danfodio University, Sokoto
14. University of Nigeria, Nsukka
15. University of Uyo, Uyo
16. University of Adao-Ekiti
17. Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University, Bauchi
18. Federal University of Technology, Akure
19. Federal University of Technology, Owerri
20. Federal University of Minna
21. Federal University of Technology, Yola
22. Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko
23. Ambrose Alli University Ekpoma
24. Abia State University, Uturn
25. Adamawa State University, Mubi
26. Benue State University, Makurdi
27. Cross River University of Technology, Calabar
28. Delta State University, Abraka
29. Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki
30. Gombe State University, Tudun Wada
31. Imo State University, Owerri

32. Kaduna State University, Kaduna
33. Kogi State University, Anyigba
34. Katsina State University, Katsina
35. Kano University of Science and Technology, Wudil
36. Lagos State University, Ojo
37. Ibrahim Babangida University, Lapai
38. Nasarawa State University, Keffi
39. Niger Delta University, Wilberforce Island
40. Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye
41. Plateau State University, Bokkos
42. Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijagun
43. Anambra State University of Science and Technology, Uli.
44. Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Enugu
45. Kebbi State University of Science and Technology, Aliero
46. Ladoke Atintola University of Technology, Ogbomoso
47. Rivers State University of Science and Technology Port-Harcourt

The proliferation of universities in Nigeria reflected the policy statement that ‘voluntary agencies, individuals and groups shall be allowed to establish universities provide they comply with minimum standards laid down by the federal government’ (FRN, 2004:38) in the same vein, the 1979 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria chapter IV section 38 gave right to every citizen to own, establish and operate any school or institution for imparting information, ideas and opinions. In another dimension, Opiah (2007) posited that if the government is serious about eradicating illiteracy and providing equal opportunities, it must forget completely any idea of returning any school to its original founder rather it should think of establishing new schools. This has encouraged the establishment and corresponding growth of private and mission universities in Nigeria. Today, there are more than seventy two (72) Universities in Nigeria.

The Benefits of Proliferation of Nigeria Universities

The benefits of establishing many universities are multi-faceted. They are:

1 Opportunity for Choices

Proliferation of universities would offer alternative to citizens. This is a way of breaking monopoly of the existing institutions. Candidates for admission into universities would be provided with opportunities to make the choice of university that appeal to their taste.

2. High Level of Efficiency

The existing universities battle with one crisis or the other such as poor condition of facilities. Poor remuneration, incessant strike action, uncontrolled examination misbehavior etc. Most of our graduates are ill-prepared due to

these problems. World Bank (2002) therefore, envisaged high level of efficiency that has saddled the system as with more universities in the country.

3. Increase in Potential for Innovation

The country has witnessed innovative trend in all aspects of activities. Universities are not an exception; new universities were erected to incorporate technological revolution. Osuji (2008) asserted that the new era schools established seem to be technological integrated. This situation is still a mirage in most old institutions.

4. Quest for Quality Assurance

Quality education seems to be the watchword in education in the present dispensation. Every educational institution in Nigeria faces the challenges of improving quality of education. Ciwar (2005) opined that quality assurance in education has to do with setting standard for the various processes and activities that lead to the production of graduates by the training institutions. Proliferation of universities focused its framework on revitalizing academic standards for undergraduate programmes in Nigeria universities. As further observed by Tawari (2002), what students learn is the most crucial element of educational quality.

5. Widening the Access to University

Nigerian citizens now have adequate access to university education. Candidates who could not gain admission into state or federal universities can be offered admission in private or mission universities. This has greatly helped in actualizing the policy statement of ensuring that citizens have access to higher education. Ehiamentor (2005) argued that there seems to be a general perception among the Nigeria people that only university education can promise a good future. To buttress this, Oyedepo (2002) said that Covenant University admitted 1,530 students within seven months as pioneers.

Problems of Proliferation of Nigeria Universities

There are problems associated to the issue of proliferation of universities in Nigeria. They include:

1. Encourages Education Inequality

Inequity here means discrimination. Some of the new generation universities discriminate vehemently on the pattern of admission process. They often lay emphasis on the religion, ethnic group social status of the candidate seeking admission into their institution. This has negated the policy statement on provision of equal educational opportunity to all citizens. That, according to Ocho (1988) is why educational provision is a sensitive subject in the country. It is believed that if equal educational opportunities are provided disparities of all sorts would disappear.

2. Diversified Curriculum Provision

There is disparity in the curriculum provision in the universities newly established. It should be recalled that every educational set up worldwide is anchored on a strong curriculum that is to be taught and learnt in the system. The worth of a curriculum can only be appreciated when it is implemented. In contribution, Ugodulu (2008) stated that a diversified curriculum does not provide systemized information required of a quality graduate. It is stated in the National Policy of Education Section 3, Sub-section 16 that the specific goals of basic education shall be the same as the goals of the levels of education to which it applies (FRN, 2004).

3. Poor Quality Academic Staff

At present the minimum qualification for lecturing in a university is doctor of Philosophy in Education (Ph.D). It is surprising that with the proliferation of universities, individuals with masters' degree and even bachelors degree are employed as lecturers. For quality assurance to prevail, lecturers in universities must possess professional qualification. This is necessary for pedagogical skills needed for effective teaching in their discipline or area of specialization. In confirmation of the above exposition, FRN (2004) posited that no education system can rise above the quality of its teachers. Obviously, the quality of academic staff is that mainstay of university education

4. Encourages Certificated Forgery

Certificate forgery seems to be on rampage due to proliferation of universities. Unintelligent students now have alternative institutions where they can carry out their evil intention on certificate forgery. The irony is that the labour force is not familiar with most of these new universities. Therefore students can carefully forge certificates with their logo. Ekene (2008) in his study on certificate forgery among university students revealed that there is significant difference in the genuineness of certificate before and after university proliferation. In addition, the authenticity of university certificates is often questioned outside the country. This is a sad and does not portray a good image of the nation

5. Confusion Syndrome among Parents

There is problem of confusion often observed among parents in terms of making decision of the best university they will send their children. At times, some parents conclude that with the proliferation of universities the quality of education provided may not be guaranteed. This situation has prompted some well to do parents to decide sending their ward outside the country for quality education. Ihebereme (2009) elucidated that parents to some extent should not be blamed for their decision to send their children abroad to obtain university education. However, they are in doubt of the quality of education provided in view of flexible mode of university expansion.

Do We Really Need More Universities in Nigeria

The writer decries the asininity of setting up new universities when the old ones are simply glorified elementary schools. As we say in Igbo, if your healthy child is yet to start walking, it is stupidity to expect the second child to start running. Universities are neither cars nor elementary schools. And they are not just building and other infrastructure. Universities are centres of learning. You site universities to power knowledge base of the nation and to solve problems.

Universities are part of the communities in which they are located. They lift up the communities or create new communities around their specialties. There may be the chicken and the egg argument but the idea is that every university worth its salt must positively impact and capture the community. For those who do not know, Silicon Valley is powered by Stanford University in United States of America. The University of California at Berkeley has all the major pharmaceutical companies in less than 30 miles radius

The University of California at Davies is the Research Centre for Agriculture and is involved in the California's Middle Valley Food Production especially the Winery Industry at Napa/Sonoma County. MIT powers Boston's Route 128; check out the companies around the area. Yes, Princeton University powers those pharmaceutical companies in New Jersey. For New York Financial District you have Columbia, Cornell and so no and for San Francisco, you have Berkeley, Santa Clara etc. North Carolina has Duke and the Head Quarters of Bank of America.

Which university in Nigeria has taken charge of our oil industry? How many pharmacy companies are located at Nsukka or Ife? And both towns have Universities with Faculty of Pharmacy. Which university is in charge of our agriculture? Which teaching hospital in Nigeria is self-sustaining, even with fee-paying students and patients? What does Bayero University project? What national or international problems has any Nigerian university solved. University of Lagos, University of Jos and University of Port-Harcourt are not different from UNIPETROL to an average Nigeria. University of Ibadan set up an entre book publishing system, University of Lagos MBA programme used to be the hot bed of investment managers back in the late 80's and early 90's. They have all lost focus and started doing everything.

We do not need new university. What we need to do is refurbish existing ones, design production parks around them with private sector support and create self-sustaining communities and jobs for our youth. The fund set aside for creating new universities should be used to refurbish the existing ones. Universities are centres of excellence, centre and citadel of learning, not political chess pawns.

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