

# DEREGULATION AND PRIVATIZATION OF TECHNICAL/VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IN NORTHEASTERN NIGERIA: IMPACT AND SOLUTIONS

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## **Abstract**

The study addressed deregulation of education in general and technical/vocational education (TYT) in particular in the North-East geopolitical region of Nigeria, with emphasis on the factors that led to the introduction of the policy, the impediments to the realization of its aims and objectives, and its positive and negative implications. The structured questionnaire was administered at random in three States in the sub-region, namely, Adamawa, Bauchi and Borno States. The statistical tool of frequency and percentage was used to analyze the data collected, findings revealed that prior to deregulation and privatization of education, the sector was bedeviled by poor funding, poorly qualified teachers and students, poorly equipped libraries, workshops and laboratories. The study also revealed that, the policy was impeded by such factors as inadequate social engineering and absence of a well planned policy. Though deregulation and privatization of TVH has the tendency to create monopoly by private operators of schools, the policy provides avenue for parents to send their wards to schools of their choice. On the whole, the policy has the capacity to enhance the objective of a free and democratic society, a dynamic economy, and a united, strong and self-reliant nation.

## **Introduction**

The key problem that occupied (lie minds of the Nigerian intelligentsia and the Nigerian nation as a whole is whether education can be deregulated and privatised to the benefit of the citizenry. Before (he 1970s, Government, corporate organizations (communities) and individuals were involved in setting up running schools. From the 1970s, Government seized schools from the missions, communities and individuals and converted them to State schools. Over time however burdened by the demands of the sector, Government began making moves towards deregulating and privatizing the sector.

Deregulation in its real sense, according to Olubadewo (2005), “means minimum involvement by government in the provision, financing and regulation of education in a nation where this is practiced.” Olubadewo, added that, deregulation does not mean Government’s total hands off of education. It simply means Government’s minimal involvement in the sector.

Deregulation, according to Blechi (2006), refers to a policy in which Government “withdraws control over business to allow open markets for the would buyer and seller...It is a range of measures which reduces the slate role as a provider, producer of services and promoter of social welfare.” Applied to education, the author stated that “...deregulation of education means throwing the door open to encourage a wider participation by individuals, groups and non-government organizations in the setting up, ownership and management of educational institutions.”

Deregulation is actually an attempt to eliminate rules, regulations and policies and practices and directives that are not viable (Babalola & Adedeji, 2004). In fact the term deregulation and privatization go hand in hand. On a practical level, “privatization is an economic manipulation where the government withdraws the holdings like shares or assets in part or full from public enterprises to allow investment from (he private sector” (Tabotndip & Tabotndip, 2004).

Deregulation in technical/vocational education (TVE) refers to a situation where government control over the sub sector in terms of policy formulation, funding and management is curtailed in which individuals and corporate bodies are allowed participatory roles in setting up, funding and managing their own technical and vocational schools. The term, arising from government's inability to provide social services like education to all citizens, really attempts to encourage individuals, communities and well meaning Nigerians to join hands with government in its effort to provide education to all and hence move the nation forward.

## **Implications of Deregulating and Privatizing Education**

Deregulating TVE has both positive and negative implications. The merits of deregulation, according to Olubadewo (2005) and Elechi (2006), are increase in parents’ autonomy in which they are free to send their wards to schools of their choice, and more authority to the parents over the types and forms of curriculum offerings. In addition, there will be opportunity for the private sector to establish and manage their own schools. There will also be obvious competition between public and private schools.

In spite of the above positive implications, both Olubadewo (2005) and Elechi (2006), are quick to point out that deregulation (of TVE) has the propensity to create avenues for exploitation of the masses, as the private schools will charge fees which, especially, children from poor backgrounds will be unable to pay. Consequently, education will be far removed from the community it is meant to serve. Elechi, added that, deregulation will discredit the public school system as parents turn to private schools. Deregulation, can lead public schools to be devoid of educational resources. In contrast, private schools will be adequately funded, even though they charge heavily but offer better services.

It is well to state that private schools in this regard lack humanistic considerations. As Nzuluike (2005), pointed out, "...the more competition is introduced in education, the more difficult it is for the disadvantaged groups in the societies to access quality education." This position is buttressed by Cheung (2000) and Tnbolndip and Tabotndip (2004), who qualified deregulation with marketized education, which strives towards profit maximization. The trend fails to address human issues relating to social justice, equal opportunity and the social contract. The implication of this for Government is that when the Government shies away from its responsibility to make education (as a social service) available to all its citizens by deregulating it, then education generally has become, in the words of Elechi (2006), "a commercial enterprise where the factors of monetary gain or loss determine continuous operation."

In spite of the positive merits of deregulation identified above, Onoja (2004). put forth the following arguments against privatization (of social services as education):

- 1) Government intervention influences the distribution of income and wealth in desired fashion especially in the provision of such services as education, health, etc. In these instances, private provision may not only be inequitable but may also be subject to economic inefficiencies.
- 2) Privatization is undesirable because it would enthrone unabashed pursuit of private (or selfish) interests, in place of community, everybody is every one else's keeper.
- 3) ...unemployment will aggravate following consequent retrenchment or lay-offs.
- 4) It results in diminishing sense of national cohesion especially as employment will now be discriminatory hence promoting statism and ethnicity.

### **background and Objectives of (lie Study**

The history of education in Nigeria, as provided by Taiwo (1985), showed that, the provision of education in Nigeria was mainly due to the efforts of communities, missionaries, individuals and other agencies. In time however, after the Nigerian Civil War in 1970, "Private providers of education, including the missions, individuals and other bodies were compelled to hand over their institutions to the government" (Olubadewo, 2005). Education consequently came under Government's sole control. With the advent of military rule however, for over three decades the sector began a steady decline. According to Babalola and Adedeji (2004), the sector experienced crises relating to the quality of teachers, trainee, educational facilities and materials, teaching and funding. Faki (2005), added that, high Government control of education especially in the area of funding of higher institutions led to employment/redeployment, appointment/promotion, and sacking/removal of academic staff as well heads of those institutions.

Even in the power sector, it has been recognized that State ownership and control hinders competition. This consequently leads to inefficiency and corruption (Agbese & Effih, 2000). Obasanjo (1999), conceded this fact when he said, "The enterprises to be privatized suffered fundamental problems such as defective capital,..., gross incompetence and mismanagement, blatant corruption and crippling complacency which monopoly often engenders."

With the development of the above situation, the need to deregulate and privatize TVE became a national necessity. It was against this background that the study set out with the following objectives:

- 1) To find out from respondents the situation with schools after the Government take-over of the 1970s
- 2) To determine the immediate impediments to deregulation of TVE.
- 3) To find out the best advantage for deregulating TVE.
- 4) To determine the worst disadvantage for deregulating TVE.
- 5) To determine if deregulation can enhance overall national objectives.
- 6) To find out the problems of public schools.
- 7) To determine the way or ways deregulation of TVE can yield positive results.

### Research Questions

In order to facilitate the realization of the above objectives, the following research questions have been stated:

- 1) What is the situation of schools generally after government took them over in the 1970s?
- 2) What are the immediate bottlenecks to deregulation of the education sector?
- 3) What is the best advantage for deregulating TVE?
- 4) What is worst disadvantage for deregulating TVE?
- 5) Can deregulation of TVE enhance the overall national objectives of Nigeria?
- 6) What are the problems of public schools in Nigeria?
- 7) What is/are the way(s) deregulation of TVE can yield positive results?

### Methodology

The study covered the North-East geopolitical zone of Nigeria. This zone has six States, namely, Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba and Yobe States. However, three States were selected for the study, i.e., Adamawa, Bauchi and Borno States. The population included students, teachers, educational administrators and all stake holders in the education sector. However, more premium was placed on those involved in technical/vocational education (TVE). In doing so, the researchers visited Technical Colleges, polytechnics and Colleges of Education(Technical), among others.

The structured questionnaire was used as the instrument for collecting data. A sample of one hundred (100) respondents was drawn from the population at random. Consequently, one hundred (100) copies of the structured questionnaire were administered on the sample.

Descriptive statistics of frequency and percentage were used to analyze the data collected. Out of the one hundred copies of the structured questionnaire administered, seventy nine (79) copies were returned. Four (4) were declared invalid. Analysis was done on the remaining seventy five (75) copies of the questionnaire.

### Presentation of Results

**Table 1: Showing Respondents' Views Regarding Schools After Government Take-Over Test**

<u>Item</u>	<u>Fi</u>	<u>eri</u> %
1. What have you noticed with schools after govt, took them over in the 1970s? a) Poor funding		
b) Poorly trained teachers		
c) Poorly qualified students	8	10.7
d) Poorly equipped workshops/laboratories	-	-
e) Poorly equipped libraries	-	-
f) Low quality teaching	15	20.0
g) All of the above	52	69.3
h) None of the above		
<b>Total</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The data of Table 1 deal with the views of respondents on the situation of schools after the government take-over of the 1970s. The Table aims to treat research question 1. In the table, majority of the respondents numbering 52 or 69.3%, view that schools have poor funding, poorly trained teachers, poorly qualified school graduates, and poorly equipped workshops and laboratories. Others are poorly equipped libraries and low quality teachers.

**Table 2: Showing Data on (the Immediate Bottlenecks to Deregulation and Privatization**

<u>Test Item</u>	<u>Freq</u>	<u>%</u>
2. What are the immediate bottlenecks to deregulation and privatization?		
a) Inadequate social awareness	11	14.7
b) Absence of a well planned philosophy and programmes	18	24.0
c) Absence of a conducive environment for deregulation and privatization	5	6.7
d) All of the above	41	54.7
c) None of the above		
<b>Total</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>100.1</b>

In Table 2 are data on the immediate impediments to deregulation of education in Nigeria. The Table deals with research question two. Majority of the respondents (who number 41, representing 54.7%) have chosen the (d) option. This shows that, deregulation can be impeded by factors such as inadequate social awareness, absence of a well-planned philosophy and programme of deregulation and absence of a conducive environment for deregulation.

**Table 3: To Find Out (the Best Advantage for Deregulating TVE**

<u>Test Item</u>	<u>Freq</u>	<u>%</u>
3. What, in your own view, is the best advantage for deregulating TVE?		
a) Choice of access to quality education	10	13.3
b) More parental influence in the choice of curriculum offerings	5	6.7
c) More private sector participation	33	44.0
d) Fostering of competition between private and public schools	27	36.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 3 presents data on the best advantage for deregulating TVE in Nigeria. The table aims to answer research question three. The data show that, majority of the respondents who do not make up half the total held only the strongest view. In the (c) option, 33 of the respondents who constitute 44.0% consider that the best option for deregulating TVE is more private sector participation.

**Table 4: Showing Data on the Worst Disadvantage for Deregulating TVE**

<u>Test Item</u>	<u>Freq</u>	<u>%</u>
4. What, in your own opinion, is the worst disadvantage for deregulating TVE?		
a) Tendency to employ lowly qualified manpower in order to gain cheap labour and save cost	35	46.7
b) Less authority of school over curriculum offerings	15	20.0
c) Avenue for the exploitation of the masses	5	6.7
d) Choice of access to quality education denied	5	6.7
e) The principle of equal educational opportunity breached	15	20.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>100.1</b>

The worst disadvantage for deregulating TVE in Nigeria has been considered by Table 4. The table aims to answer research question four. The data in the table show that 35 respondents (i.e. 46.7%) who are in the majority view that the worst disadvantage for deregulating TVE is the tendency to have

poorly qualified personnel in the system. This is possible as such TVE schools in the hands of private operators will employ poorly qualified manpower in order to gain cheap labour and save cost

**table 5: On Whether Deregulation and Privatization Can Enhance the Following Overall National Objectives**

Test Item	Options					
	YES		NO		HDD	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
5. Can deregulation enhance the following overall national objectives						
a) A free and democratic society	52	69.3	15	24.0	5	6.7
b) A just and egalitarian society	46	61.3	12	16.0		
c) A united, strong and self-reliant nation	40	53.3	17	22.7	15	24.0
d) A great and dynamic economy	43	57.3	26	34.7	6	8.0
e) A land full of bright opportunity for all citizens	33	44.0	25	33.3	14	18.7

Table 5 (which deals with research question five) presents data on whether deregulation can enhance the overall national objectives provided. In the table, majority of the respondents, numbering 52 or 69.3% view that deregulation of education can enhance a free and a democratic society, found in option (a). This position is closely followed by the (b) option, i.e., a just and egalitarian society, as shown by 46 respondents or 61.3%. The (d) option comes third place. That is, deregulation of education can enhance a great and a dynamic economy, as indicated by 43 respondents or 57.3%.

**Table 6: Data on the Problems of Public Schools and the Advocacy for Deregulation and Privatization**

Test Item	Options					
	YES		NO		HDD	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
6. Do you agree that the public schools in which government has high controls are bedevilled by poor funding and infrastructure and corruption and indiscipline?	58	77.3	12	16.0	5	6.7
7. Considering the advantages and limitations of deregulation and privatization, do you personally advocate it?	36	48.0	35	46.7	4	5.3

Table 6 deals with the problems of public schools and the advocacy for deregulation. The table aims to treat research question six. In test item number 6, majority of the respondents, numbering 58 (or 77.3%) agree that the public schools in which Government has high controls are bedevilled by poor funding and infrastructure, and corruption and indiscipline. They have therefore, personally advocated for deregulation in test item 7. This is indicated by majority of the respondents, numbering 36 or 48.0%. This position appears to be keenly contested as 35 of the respondents (i.e. 46.7%) do not personally advocate for deregulation.

Other positive implication of education in general and TVE in particular are those identified by Elechi (2006) in which besides promoting competition, parents are free to send their wards to school of their choice. Similarly, parents will have more authority over the curriculum offerings.

The worst implication for deregulating education, as this study has found, is the tendency of private schools, in their desire to raise more money, to employ less qualified manpower on whom they will pay less. This will undoubtedly save more money for the schools. This will however, only go to show that parents are paying more for their children's education and yet getting less service. Then according to Olubadewo (2005) and Elechi (2006), is exploitation of the masses by the private schools.

But although deregulation can lead to exploitation by private schools, more respondents in this study leave advocated for it. This position of the respondent may be predicated by such considerations as better funding and services by private schools in construct to public schools, which will be devoid of basic educational resources.

It is true that every policy of Government should not aim to promote unity but also enhance the economic, social and democratic structure of Nigeria. The funding of this study show that, deregulation of education in general and TVE in particular has the capacity to enhance overall rational objective of a free and a democratic society. Of high considerations is the fact that deregulation can also enhance the overall national objectives of a great dynamic economy, and a united strong and self-reliant nature.

The implication of the above is that by deregulating the education, Nigeria should be more of a free and a democratic nation. The country should be united in its diversities, its economy improved and the nation as a whole self-sustaining, both in terms of production of manpower and goods and services.

In order to effectively promote deregulation towards the realization of positive results, the finding of this study is worthy of note. When the citizenry wallows in abject poverty and illiteracy, deregulation of education, especially in areas of skills acquisition in TVE, is a nuisance. Therefore, the need for the citizenry to be adequately sensitized cannot be over stressed. In addition, compromise on standards must be dealt with from the word go. For private schools to achieve optimal results, government must not just shy away from assisting them in areas of funding and staff recruitment and training. The private schools on the other hand, must have humanistic considerations, as Cheung (2000) and Tabotndip and Tabolndip (2004), advocated.

## **Conclusion**

Prior to the 1970s, education in Nigeria was provided mainly by communities, the missions, individuals and other agencies. In the 1970s however, those private providers of education were compelled to handover their schools to Government. About three decades later, the education sector had begun a steady decline. The sector experienced crises relating to the quality of teachers, trainees, and facilities and materials. Consequently, Government decided to deregulate it. This study set out to determine among others, the problems of public schools, the best advantage or otherwise for deregulating TVE and whether deregulation could enhance the overall national objective, taking the North-East geopolitical zone as a case study. Data were collected using the structured questionnaire, administered at random in three States in the sub-region, namely: Adamawa, Bauchi and Borno State. The population included students, teachers, educational administrators and other stakeholders in the education sector.

The data collected were analyzed using the statistical tool of frequency and percentage. The findings of the study showed that in actual sense, the education sector experienced crises in areas of funding, staff training and recruitment, facilities and materials, and hence the need for Government to deregulate and privatise it. However, the study indicated that, because Nigerians were used to the public school system for decades, deregulation has been impeded by such factors as inadequate social awareness and lack of an environment conducive for the policy.

Deregulation and privatization of TVE, as this study has found, has positive and negative implications. Positive implications lie in the fact that the policy promotes competition in the sector. There is more private sector participation. More so, parents are free to send their children to schools of their choice and hence, have more authority over the curriculum offerings.

Negative implications of deregulation and privatization of TVE as shown by this study lie in the fact that the policy has the tendency to create monopoly especially in areas of fees charged by private schools. Parents are more likely to be exploited and very brilliant and intelligent children are less likely to access education. On the whole however, deregulation of education in general and TVE in particular, as this study shows, has the capacity to enhance the overall national objective of a free and a democratic society, a dynamic economy and a united, strong and self-reliant nation.

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