

PUBLIC PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP IN UNIVERSITY EDUCATION PROVISION IN NIGERIA: ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES

PATRICK O. YALOKWU

Associate Professor of Management
National University of Lesotho
Lesotho, Southern Africa.

Abstract

One of the most important developments in Nigeria's education system within the past two decades is the establishment of an increasing number of private universities. While many people appear worried about the traces of dichotomy (especially in the nature and number of programmes, location of institutions and so on) between public and private universities, there has emerged a counter argument that the reason private universities came into being, in the first place, is to fill the gap created by the structural deficiencies inherent in the existing public universities. For many people, higher educational institutions and in deed universities are seen as role models of innovation and change in general and are expected to assist in individual social mobility and betterment of quality of life. Over the years, the demand for access to university education in Nigeria has been increasing at an increasing rate and in the face of government inability or unwillingness to fund the expansion of supply, the private university education providers have been compelled to come to the forefront. As we are all aware, the university education subsector is just one of the several such sub-sectors where private practitioners have made significant inroads. In fact, the private sector practitioners have made wonderful contributions as engines of growth in such other sectors as health, telecommunications, utilities (electricity and water supply) and security. The inability of government to provide access to quality university education that is in high demand worldwide is not only confined to Nigeria. It has become a global phenomenon that has attracted the private sector to the rescue. The continued expansion of the number of private universities is therefore inevitable. Against this background, this paper examines the historical context and the points of departure in the understanding of public private partnership. It looks at the factors that influenced public-private partnerships as well as some outstanding issues, the challenges facing public-private partnership in university education and suggests strategies forge out a conducive atmosphere for the development of high quality manpower. The paper concludes that what matters most, is neither the question of who provides university education nor whether there is any dichotomy in the nature and number of programmes offered but meeting the important need of instituting viable infrastructural building blocks and control measures to ensure that both private and public practitioners co-exist symbiotically and unleash their potentials in a competitive fashion and thereby achieve the overall goals and objectives of university education in Nigeria.

Introduction

Twenty-five years ago, there was not any private university worth the name in Nigeria. But within the last two decades, several colleges and universities have sprung up throughout the country. The majority of these universities are concentrated in cities and urban centres. One might ask: why have these universities mushroomed especially in the last ten years. The proliferation of private universities is a logical outcome of a tertiary education system that has serious structural deficiency that created a backlog of hundreds of thousands of potentially able and willing learners who could not get admission places in government-owned universities. In a country where university degrees are fast becoming essential passports towards socio-economic mobility, private university education providers has no other option but to wade in to fill the gap created by the structural deficiencies inherent in the existing public universities. The entry of the private sector into university provision arena is in accord with the *systems theory* view that the contributions of the subsystems are relevant to the long-term survival and effective performance of the entire system. Private sector represents an engine of growth and it is expected that their contributions can complement government efforts and create an essential synergy in sympathy with the functional and holistic educational skills and competencies now demanded by stakeholders.

Against this background, this paper attempts to present a framework for a productive public-private partnership for an efficient and effective provision of university level education in Nigeria. It first examines the historical context and the major points of departure that guide arguments in the paper. It examines the

factors that influenced partnership in university education provision, the outstanding issues in public private university provision, discusses the challenges and suggests strategies for forging out a conducive atmosphere for the development of high quality manpower. Below we continue by giving a brief account of the historical context of university education in Nigeria.

Historical Context of University Education in Nigeria

The first set of universities in Nigeria were established in the 1960s and early 1970s following political independence. They include University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Obayemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, University of Ibadan (which started initially as University College of the University of London in 1948 and later metamorphosed from the colonial status to a full fledged University of Ibadan in 1962), University of Lagos, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria and University of Benin, Benin city. All these and other universities that were established immediately after, were publicly-owned universities. Their primary mission was to train indigenous personnel to replace colonial administrators in the civil service and parastatals. To a large extent, this mission and objectives were achieved as the small university sub-sector was invested with high aspirations and supported from public resources. In most cases, the spread of disciplines and the nature of the curricula closely matched the mission of the universities in that era. University education was accorded high priority in budgetary allocation in the education sector. Later in the 1970s and 1980s the nation was grappling with the increasingly adverse economic environment, hope was placed on universities as the engines of economic growth and development. Universities were now expected to develop a human resource base of cadres who, through research and scholarship, could help develop productive enterprises which would be professionally managed and would contribute to industrial growth and therefore to the improvement of the general socio-economic condition of the nation that created them. Science and technology, arts and social sciences were identified and acknowledged as key to development and many universities invested in programmes in these fields. However, the resources required to establish and maintain a solid foundation were diminishing with the deteriorating performance of the national economy dominated by military oligarchies that held sway in Nigerian political and economic governance between 1966 and 1999. The situation is a bit more problematic today with reduced public funding to a huge expanded and considerably diversified sector and a questioning of the mission and mandate, the character, and the proper place of the university and their products in society. Owing to these constraints, the university environment has changed rapidly. In order to appreciate factors that necessitated these changes, we will turn to some points of departure which are listed below.

Points of Departure

The following would serve as points of departure for the subsequent arguments. The list, however, is by no means exhaustive.

1. Education in general and university education in particular is one of the scarcest services in Nigeria. There is a very high level demand for university education but the supply falls below the demand. The country's competitiveness in the global market place is going to be determined by the extent to which more functional universities capable of producing high skilled manpower for the benefit of all the stakeholders are established. Hence, any effort that contributes towards opening and expanding educational opportunities at all levels must be encouraged.
2. The traditional approach of providing university education has its drawbacks. Public provision of free higher education is neither sustainable nor equitable. Higher education is costly and it cannot be sustained by Federal government. Moreover, it has private returns that may exceed social returns; hence it is increasingly getting difficult to justify financing private benefits through taxpayer's money (public resources).
3. Charging fees for providing higher education to learners is no more the exclusive domain of private providers. Of course evening programmes offered by public universities have always been fee-based. More recently, public higher education institutions are introducing fees (in terms of cost sharing and/or income). However, such a move is externally induced, setting the stage for effectiveness, efficiency, transparency and accountability of provision of services and resource utilization. Private sector organisations, including private universities, have a lot of experience to share with public institutions in this regard.
4. Quality of higher education in Nigeria has been on the decline in general. It could be explained in terms of inputs, processes, the external environment, and outputs. A robust system of quality assurance has been lacking. The existing system of accreditation has a number of problems. Issues of quality and

relevance of higher education should not be viewed in isolation from expansion of access. Expansion of access should not be pursued at the expense of quality and relevance. Otherwise, the whole project loses meaning and purpose.

5. Although, private higher institutions are 'private' in terms of ownership, their product is for 'public consumption'. Private higher institutions are thus playing a big role towards social responsibility and accountability. This needs to be appropriately articulated by both the public and private sectors.
6. There are synergies to be harnessed by promoting public-private partnerships that work. Such partnerships could take on a number of forms (e.g. private institutions could forge partnerships with the government and with public universities. The foundation upon which such a partnership is based should be on convergent vision and this is a challenge for both the public and private operators
7. Provision of quality higher education between public and private operators should be based on the principle of competitive cooperation. Competition enhances quality, it doesn't necessarily lead to zero-sum game solutions; there is always the 'third alternative' to win-win solutions. Cooperation enhances capacity both to enlarge the entire pie as well as the share of each partaker.
8. Private university education is the fastest growing sector in many countries. It has long dominated higher education systems in many Asian countries including Japan, South Korea, Taipei, China, Indonesia and the Philippines. There has been a dramatic shift from public to private university education in Latin Africa. Even in Africa, the rate at which private universities have been established within the last decade in countries as Ghana, Uganda and Ethiopia has far exceeded that of public universities. So the emergence of several private universities in Nigeria is not a strange phenomenon.
9. Private institutions seek to "fit" into the academic system of a nation because their survival depends on being able to attract students and offering "products" that are attractive and appropriate. In most countries, especially in the developing nations such as Uganda, Ghana and Ethiopia, virtually all of the newer private universities rank toward the bottom of the academic hierarchy. This is due in part to the fact that it takes a long time to build up an academic reputation and status, but also because these institutions offer applied programmes and have very limited resources.

Factors Influencing Public Private Partnerships

Several factors have influenced public-private partnership in university education provision. Most of the factors are logical derivatives of changes that have taken place in technology, organisational missions and structures, individual lifestyles and in the national and international environments of which university entities are a part. Below, we examine these factors

1. **Failure of public authorities to meet people's expectations:** One argument derives from the perceived failure of public authority to deliver education at a standard acceptable to the citizens (Caldwell and Keating, 2004). Successive efforts to improve the situation has proved unsuccessful and as a last resort government has relaxed its monopoly of education and related social services provision and allowed non-public entity to wade in to remedy the situation.
2. **Private sector as engine of growth:** The private sector in most developed and developing countries are engines of growth as they are known for their capacity to mobilise resources for development purposes. The private sector and civil society organisations have been popular in their support towards privatisation and commercialisation policies of government. They appear well motivated to do well in university funding and management.
3. Like most social services such as telecommunications, water, electricity and security which have been commercialised or privatised in Nigeria, due to the inability of government to meet demand targets, the education sector including universities have come under the ambit of services, open also to the non-public sector provision. For a long time, the private sector organisations as well as community and religious organisations have made inroads into establishing private primary and secondary schools. All over the country, particularly during the period 1980 to 1990 village communities in what is now Delta, Edo, Ondo, Kwara, Kogi, Benue, Oyo, Ekiti, Imo, Anambra were known to have pooled together their resources to establish their own community secondary schools which were later handed over to their governments. At the same time, many business entrepreneurs had established primary and secondary schools which were even better equipped than public schools. These actions have laid credence to the notion that private sector and civil society players are capable of filling the education gap occasioned by the inability of government to fund education expansion. All these were anchored on the assumption that services provided by non-public entity will be delivered more effectively. It is the same argument that fuelled the quest by private and other non-public university education providers to step in and establish universities.

4. **Securing higher levels of funding states**

Another argument is concerned with the availability of funds. Levels of funds in the public purse have proved insufficient to provide an educational service at the desired level and one or more mechanisms may be employed to secure support from a private entity. Evidence abound of a growing number of arrangements under the privatisation and private finance initiatives that calls for a private investor to build or substantially refurbish social institutions such as schools, hospitals and so on. We believe the private sector is capable of complementing government in better funding of universities.

5. **New ways in delivering services to the public.** Globally there has been ideological calls for a shift in the concepts of public and public good. In educational terms, the concept of public good may be reflected in an unwavering commitment to achieve the highest level of attainment for every student regardless of circumstance, but who owns the educational institution or who provides the resources may be the subject of a more pragmatic outlook, depending on what it takes to deliver this outcome. Such approaches are often framed in terms of absolute adherence to basic values and, in respect to how to get there.

To cite UK Prime Minister Tony Blair: 'we should be infinitely adaptable and imaginative in the means of applying those values. There are no ideological pre-conditions, [and there is] no pre-determined veto on means. What counts is what works' (Blair cited by Midgely, 1998:44).

According to Leadbeater (1999),

Knowledge is our most precious resource: we should organise society to maximise its creation and use. Our aim should not be a third way, to balance the demands of the market against those of the community. Our aim should be to harness the power of both markets and community to the more fundamental goal of creating and spreading knowledge.

Hence, there is no shortcut to improving the quality and quantity of university programmes open to the public, but simply to find new and better supply systems that work for the good of all stakeholders.

6. **The building of social capital.**

Invoking the power of the community leads to the fourth line of argument that is in many respects the most substantive and persuasive. It suggests that partnership with a non-public entity draws on and enhances the social capital of the education system. Interest in the concept of capital has waxed and waned. It has reappeared in recent times with claimants across the political spectrum. Interestingly, the concept dates from 1916 and its first use, according to Putnam (2000) was in the context of education. He defined social capital to be 'those intangible substances [that] count for most in the daily lives of people: namely good will, fellowship, sympathy and social intercourse among the individuals and families that make up a social unit' He believed that 'the community as a whole will benefit by the cooperation of its parts' (Putnam, 2000).

A recent argument along the same lines in the field of education was advanced by Coleman (1988), with the study of Coleman and Hoffer (1987) of public and private schools in the United States concluding that differences in levels of student achievement are largely explained by differences in social capital, as reflected in the strength of mutually supporting relationships among school, community, home, church, and a range of non-profit entities including volunteer organisations. In Africa and other parts of the world several universities owned by missionaries and other private sector players have been established to meet the need for social capital by the concerned groups.

7. **Transformation of public sector services in a knowledge society.**

Another argument in support of public private partnerships lies in the analysis of trends in the transformation of public sector services. The Centre for Research and innovation (CERI) of Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) provides such an analysis in its review:

Education is being transformed, albeit unevenly and at varying pace, from a producer-led, planned system to one more guided by its multiple stakeholders, as are many other public services. It is called upon increasingly to be more responsive to the needs of the knowledge society and partnerships offer one way in which the new demands can be met. Required competencies change, more advanced, specialised skills are called for, learning programmes 'tailor-made' to individuals or groups are in demand. New opportunities and competition are tending to open up in the conventionally public sector, a further driving force for public-private partnerships, and cutbacks in expenditure are also pushing the public sector to search for new (including private) partners. (Istance and Kobayashi, 2003).

Innovation in the governance of education is a noble pursuit, as is made clear in the mission of UNESCO. The mission of OECD includes an intention to 'stimulate experimentation, innovation and policy dialogue'. Its function includes service as a 'laboratory of ideas' so that it 'identifies emerging problems, seeks strategies to solve them, creates space for dialogue, and tests innovative solutions' (UNESCO n.d.). It is evident that public education faces a range of problems as efforts are made to promote education as a fundamental right and to improve its quality. The creation and testing of innovative arrangements, including public-private partnerships, is consistent with these intentions.

8. *Globalisation and the knowledge economy.*

The post second world war period in the developed economies saw a rapid expansion in post secondary education. This knowledge expansion phenomenon spilled over to Nigeria in the last three decades. Consistent with the history of supply led expansion several theorists (such as Dore, 1976) argued that this growth was leading to credentials inflation, where people were gaining levels of education and training that typically exceeded the levels of skills that were needed for their work demands. This growth was related to growing positional competition (Collins, 1979) where education has come to replace family and networks as the main means of accessing high status and paid occupations. This post war change has occurred in Nigeria, and largely explains the increase in the intense competition for university access. There is evidence that this competition is increasing despite the rapid growth in university enrolments over the past 15 years and the introduction of fees in the state-owned universities.

Part of Dore and Collins' thesis was that credentials inflation would weaken the exchange value of education due to oversupply caused by the positional competition. More than two decades after these predictions there is little evidence for the economic devaluation of education. In fact the opposite appears to be the case

Private rates of return for tertiary education, especially university degrees are high in most countries, including Nigeria, South Africa and some other African countries where a relatively large percentage of managerial employees require tertiary qualifications.

9. *Global competition and changing employment patterns.*

Successful economies will be those that can retain high levels of income for the bulk of their workforces.

In an era of increased global competition, price competition for mass-produced industrial products has increased. Low wage countries such as China, Bangladesh, and the Philippines increasingly dominate these markets. Nigeria and the proximate economies need to invest in new and high value added products and constantly innovate both in production methods and products. Much required are the high skilled, flexible and innovative workforces, which typically have high levels of education.

The knowledge economy also is associated with changing employment patterns, contingent employment (part-time, casual) has increased, and Nigeria has appreciable levels of contingent employment. This has contributed to growing gaps in wage and income levels, which in turn correlate strongly with educational levels.

11. *The knowledge economy, governance and city universities.*

The OECD (2001) has pointed out that the differences in the economic performances between regions within European Union countries is greater than those between countries. Globalisation has accelerated gaps in economic performances between regions. Not only are industries able to rapidly relocate to favourable environments, but also workers are increasingly mobile. The most mobile workers, geographically and occupationally, are educated workers. The capacity of regions to attract the knowledge workers is becoming a more important economic asset.

In the global shift of knowledge industries and knowledge workers; the great cities are the winners. The differences in economic performances between these cities and their hinterlands are increasing. This applies whether it is Lagos, Port Harcourt, Ibadan, Abuja, Maseru, New York or London. The 'knowledge worker' is increasingly mobile, both occupationally and geographically, and one factor in this mobility is life style. That is, the knowledge worker is increasingly able and inclined to choose attractive living environments. For this reasons, regions that want to attract knowledge industries including modern universities with industrially and commercially based programmes need to provide lifestyle attractions. Hence many private and new generation universities are finding their niches around cities and urban areas of the country.

Outstanding Issues

In this section, we examine some outstanding issues that must be properly handled in order to achieve a successful partnership in university education provision

1. *Expansion of Access and Assurance of Quality & Relevance*

One way of looking at these would be as if access and quality were either not interrelated or are mutually exclusive. Such a presumption holds that since quality assurance takes time as well as a significant amount of investment, there is an impending risk of losing the market share that exists now. One can only wait until minimum quality is maintained and try to reach as many learners as possible in the short-term as a

preferred strategy. In this case, though desirable, quality is an objective that is hard to be achieved in the short-term because there is a danger of losing the market share now and/or there is lack of necessary capacity to address it now. This approach may succeed in enrolling large numbers in the short-term as a preferred strategy. However, it also runs in the direction of jeopardizing its long-term prospects. Soon, the public will realize the apparent differences in quality among providers of higher education and possibly abandon those institutions that compromise quality administration and training standards and hand out degrees. Such an approach is a shortsighted one and could actually be suicidal.

Quality of higher education provision is not an agenda that can be relegated to some future date. We must understand that in most cases the primary reason for opting to private higher education is because potential learners don't have access to public universities which do not cost much financially, but their credibility is already established. Hence, a certain level of credibility adds to desirability. But, once that choice is made, why would students go to certain private university and not to others? Again credibility is an important criterion, which at the moment is being served through the accreditation mechanism of the National Universities Commission (NUC). However, the existing system of accreditation has a long way to go to appropriately assure total quality. The single most important reason as to why government accreditation is so desired both by students as well as by the private university education providers is that civil service regulations by design focus on the production of the academic credentials, accredited by the NUC rather than on actual performance of the person for such important entitlements as employments, promotion etc. The second reason could be affordability. As long as programmes are accredited by the NUC (no matter how they actually rate on quality scale since there is no mechanism to know that), people would prefer those institutions charging less fees for the same programmes. Accessibility in terms of geographical proximity is another reason since it reduces costs. Those who started early might have certain comparative advantages. Peer pressure (keeping up with the Joneses) could be another factor, etc.

A second way of looking at it is taking hold of quality at the centre of it all from the very beginning no matter how small initial demand looks like. This approach presumes that demonstrated quality provision generates its own demand in the medium-long term. Such institutions take their work rather seriously (student enrolment, investment on facilities, human resources management and development, customer care and handling, etc.) In effect, what the first group of institutions might actually be doing is indirect promotion exercise for the second group and hence in effect lose their market share to the latter on a permanent basis.

2. Sustainability of education

Sustainability is an important aspect of higher education provision. It is linked with social responsibility, quality of services, and viability of the institution. In fact, it could be shown that sustainability is an outcome of a balanced pursuit of quality objectives with expansion of market share. Quality can neither be conceived nor achieved without some minimum size of market share. Pursuing quality objective alone without a minimum enrolment expansion objective might compromise institutional viability. Quality assurance by its very nature is investment intensive (both human and capital) – profits need to be realized however small they might be at the beginning. Similarly, larger market share cannot be sustained for long without ensuring a certain minimum level of quality standards. Hence, chasing an enrolment (and profit) objective without maintaining quality is not sustainable; it backfires on the very objective of expanding market share and on institutional viability. Quality helps to expand the market share in the medium-long term. Similarly, increased market share helps to enhance quality since it reduces unit cost of provision of the service and therefore the competitiveness of the institution. Both objectives should be viewed as complementary to each other in the long-term, if sustainability is to be achieved.

A number of factors determine sustainability. Some of these are demand-side factors such as market share, image, fees, etc. Others are supply-related such as institutional capacity, cost of provision, quality, facilities, etc. Government can influence both demand and supply, hence the sustainability of private sector higher education provision through its policies and support programmes are necessary. Government affects the demand, efficiency and equity of private education through, for example, funding, entry provisions, regulations (e.g. non-profit), indirect barriers to entry (e.g. red tape). Public-private partnership should be aimed at enhancing the sustainability of higher education so as to achieve the stated national higher education goals.

The Nigerian private university education sub-sector has tendencies along the continuum of both types. On one hand, there are some who tend to make little distinction between themselves and the existing deteriorating public universities. On the other hand, there are others who take the responsibility and the challenges quite seriously (e.g. Pan African University and Backcock University) and in some few cases have actually succeeded to demonstrate their competitiveness nationally as well as internationally.

3. The strategic role of the state in public education

As an institution and as an industry, university education has proven to be remarkably durable and conservative (Acher, 1979). Over the last five decades, it has changed very little. Apart from its more recent expansion into new programmes and enrolment expansion of existing programmes, the basic structures, organisational and industrial forms of universities have changed very little. It remains predominantly centrally managed, with many compulsory courses and delivered through relatively standardised classroom modes.

The reasons for this durability and conservativeness of programmes are related to the attachment of public education to the state, and the state's quest for stability, and to its relative detachment from external demands. Universities have been associated with the formation of nation states, and this has central to the development of knowledge, values and loyalties that form the foundation of the liberal democracy. Generally public university education has largely been supply-led rather than demand driven and its attachment to the state through the forms of public education have ensured that the primary drivers of education have been relatively stable. The essential purposes of government in market-based economies are those of ensuring social and economic stability and providing social and economic infrastructure. For this reason, education has been regarded as a key responsibility of the state, and equal access to it has been seen as central to the basic principles of a liberal democracy.

In this paper we argue that the standardised form of education, particularly at university level, faces new pressures for change. These pressures are related to the growing importance of knowledge, learning and innovation. More so, that in any era, there are growing economic demands for and upon education. These demands translate into higher levels of private demand for education.

4. Diversification of university education

University education all the world over is becoming increasingly diversified in the nature of programmes offered as well as in their locations and level of specialisations. Diversification has become imperative due to the greater pressures in terms of private sector demands and changes in technology which even affect both government and non-government organisational operations alike. The exchange value of university qualifications has been boosted by several professional programmes (such as those in Accountancy, Business Administration, Engineering, Law and Medicine) which are greatly demanded by the knowledge economy. The exchange value of qualifications has been strengthened through licensing and control of occupational entry arrangements of occupational labour markets. In recent years many professional bodies such as Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria and Nigerian Institute of Management, are involved in the accreditation of university programmes, and by and large the exchange value of qualifications and rates of return have been maintained or even increased.

These developments suggest that there is increased industry demand for education and training, and this is reinforcing the positional competition that is increasing individual demand for education. In contrast to the pre-1990 era, there is evidence that the industries that are associated with the 'knowledge economy' have a high demand for highly educated labour. The knowledge worker needs high levels of cognitive skills, and the capacity to innovate and develop new knowledge and skills, that is lifelong learning. There also is evidence that the knowledge industries are increasing in developing countries including Nigeria. The issue now is for public and private sector partnership to unleash their potentials towards meeting the diversification imperatives in university education

5. Creating a Mutually Reinforcing and Complementary Partnership.

An important issue that should be taken into consideration by all parties in the public-private partnership is the understanding that each party constitutes a subsystem within the framework or system of higher education provision. While public providers and their private sector counterparts are to pursue a common mission and vision of university education, each may develop its own sub-goals which in the final analysis agree with the central goal of higher education in Nigeria (Yalokwu, 2002). This is not an easy task but with concerted efforts it is possible. While it might be difficult to rule out total overlap in some of the programmes offered by both private and public universities, the partnership could offer grounds for collaboration and co-operation in some areas and also opportunities for doing what each can offer better.

Over the last decade or so what has been observed as a general global tendency is for the government to concentrate its resources and energy on the kind of things that it does better. That is why there has been privatisation of public enterprises and deregulation of the market. Public universities are increasingly demanded to behave 'business-like'.

In the same vein, private universities are expected to run programmes in which they have the resources and the comparative advantages, and thereby free the public universities the burden of being jack-of-all-trades but master-of-none.

6. Equity

In most Nigerian universities, there is a serious under representation of handicapped and female students especially in mathematics, science, engineering and other technological fields. Low female enrolment means that women, who in most cases, constitute approximately 50% of the population, cannot contribute to a large extent to the creation of an effective human resource base for development. There is therefore an urgent need to address the issue of gender imbalance in universities.

Challenges Facing Public Private Partnerships

The following represents challenges which remain but are not surmountable.

1. Financing University Education

Nigerian Universities in general are facing economic crises of varying degrees of severity. The high cost of democratisation of the young civilian administration, the implementation of public policies of industrialisation, commercialisation and privatisation both at the federal and state levels, the provision of socio-economic infrastructures and the continual settlement of foreign debts have taken their own toll on the resources available for the social sector, with education and especially higher education being the most vulnerable. The poor performance of most of the state governments coupled with the impact of the structural adjustment programmes, have resulted in serious reductions in the budgetary allocations to higher educational institutions. As a consequence, many universities have under-resourced libraries, dilapidated physical infrastructure, obsolete and unserviceable laboratory equipment and poor student support facilities – and services. The academic environment is less supportive of quality university education, scholarship and research. This challenge calls for concerted efforts from all stakeholders to assure the sustainability of universities, especially with regard to non-professional programmes that are not very attractive to funding by non-public organisations.

2. Information Communication Technology

Despite developments in the use of information communication technology (ICT) in university environments across the globe, Nigeria and countries of sub-Saharan region still lag behind compared to their Western counterparts. Many Nigerian universities lack ICT for staff and students. The situation is not different in some other African universities as suggested by studies by Rosenberg (1997). According to the 1996 status report on 19 university libraries representing 12 countries in Africa (Rosenberg, 1997), the adoption and use of ICT was found to be quite low. The study revealed that the status of library Internet connectivity is poor at the institutional level. As in Nigeria, most of the libraries rely on their parent organisations to get connected, reflecting the low level of individual library control over decisions regarding Internet connectivity. As indicated by Mutula (2001), there are many institutions in Africa, which have not yet passed beyond the stage of dropping the manual typewriter.

3. For Profit Universities:

There is a growing trend towards establishing for-profit universities in Nigeria. For-profit higher education is a major phenomenon worldwide. In a small number of countries, for-profit higher educational enterprises are permitted by law. In many others, earning profits from educational institutions is not yet accepted culturally or legally and as a result some new schools resort to skirting existing regulations. For-profit higher education will continue to expand, however, and higher education systems will need to. In the United States, a largely ignored "proprietary" profit-making post-secondary education sector has long existed, largely focusing on vocationally oriented fields at the lower end of the prestige hierarchy. These proprietary schools are seldom authorized to offer degrees, but rather give certificates for specialized skills. The Philippines has long had for-profit universities, with several institutions listed for many years on the stock exchange. It is possible to see similar trends in other countries, including South Korea, and Malaysia (Altbach, 2000). Few, if any, for-profit institutions are high prestige. The largest number of these institutions are small, vocationally-oriented institutions, many of which do not have authorization to offer degrees.

Nonetheless, they offer services that are in considerable demand, and it is possible to earn profits from delivering educational products.

4. Accreditation, Coordination and Control: Private universities present special challenges for accreditation, coordination and accountability as many of them run programmes that are not neatly streamlined with mainstream not-for-profit institutions. As we have noticed, in the National Universities Commission (NUC) system of accreditation, universities have been brought into centralized systems that allocate responsibilities and resources. Coordination and control have proved to be difficult and cost, legal and financial, of providing it has been high. For private sector universities, it is envisaged that accreditation and control would be more difficult than the public sector. However, accountability may be spared to many individual and group owners where government neither has ownership stake nor provide any resources, to the private institution

For many private and for-profit universities, especially in developing countries, the challenge of accreditation, co-ordination and control is high. Tight control over the private sector is, for example, part of the South Korean higher education system. Government agencies have the power to impose limits on enrollments, tuition, numbers of teaching staff, salaries, and the like. These regulations have recently been modified, but Korea, and to a lesser extent Japan, are examples of countries with strong government authority over the private sector. The United States has relied on the non-governmental accreditation system to ensure an acceptable level of quality of private institutions.

5. Academic Freedom and Autonomy.

The professorate which usually enjoys academic freedom is a central part of any university, and the relationship of private institutions and the academic profession must be considered. Academic freedom and the autonomy of the professorate are central to the idea of the modern university. But academic freedom and autonomy are sometimes seen to be in conflict with the market orientation of private higher institutions. The professorate traditionally has a central role in designing the curriculum, and there is a commitment to freedom to pursue knowledge in the classroom. Much of the private sector is new, and so it is especially important that these values be instilled into the norms of the institutions and in their faculties at the beginning. Private higher education operates with considerable autonomy in most countries.

But how much autonomy should private university have? Should institutions have total freedom to determine their goals, standards, tuition charges, curriculum, personnel policies, academic standards, and the like? Or should private universities be subject to controls to ensure that national norms of quality and academic practice are observed? Should private universities be considered an integral part of an academic system subject to public direction? How much responsibility does private higher education have to the public good? How accountable should private university be? Should there be differences in accountability based on the federal, state or local environment within which it is situated? Should private universities in Nigeria have the same autonomy as in wealthier nations?

These are central questions that go to the heart of the concept and role of private higher education. At present, countries have given differing answers to them. A few countries have imposed fairly strict controls on private institutions, but most permit them a significant degree of autonomy. The international trend is to permit more leeway to private higher education while insisting that the private sector should be subject to some kinds of accountability especially to provide accurate information to potential students, ensuring a base of quality, and in the management of fiscal affairs.

6. Academic Excellence and Inclusive Education.

In an effort to survive, state-run universities are commercialising some parts of their institutions. It is our contention that this trend will not salvage anything, but only delay the decline of higher education standards in Nigeria.

More and more private universities are being created to meet the demand created over the years by state universities. Some initiatives are positive; others are a hidden way of creating revenue for a few people. The question is how will higher education be put back on the right track and become relevant to the needs of Nigerians. One initiative that should be supported is the effort of some religious organisations (e.g. the Baptist church, Anglican church, and the Apostolic Faith Church, to name a few) to enter the field of university education. A look at the mission of these universities, namely Baptist University Iwo, Crawford University Igbesa, Lagos, Covenant University, Ota, and Samuel Ajayi Crowder Oyo, reveals that all of them

aim at reviving academic excellence and serving the needs of both the qualified poor and rich applicants. Since many of them are less than 5 years it will be too early to judge. Outside Nigeria, similar universities are also promising such laudable missions. For example, the Association of Catholic Universities and Higher Institutions of Africa and Madagascar (ACUHIAM) is one example of an association created to improve higher education in Africa. At their general assembly, held at Uganda Martyrs University ACUHIAM passed some basic resolutions toward creating a common policy in higher education. These steps are simple and attempt to give a clear answer to the real problems of the African continent (Lejuene, 1998):

- Each Catholic university or higher education institute in Africa wants to be a centre of academic excellence;
- In the choice of its curricula and subjects of study, ACUHIAM participants will try to answer the real needs of the country in which they are established;
- ACUHIAM will focus its attention on the poor and underprivileged, so as to give equal opportunity to all; and
- In the pursuit of academic excellence, regional links will be created, leading to broader international cooperation between Catholic universities.

These few clear objectives constitute the basis of ACUHIAM's action programme for the coming four years. Isolated efforts cannot accomplish very much, but in collaboration with others some success may be achieved. Projects of a common nature will be identified and this will be the basis of sense of shared identity among African universities. It is the conviction of ACUHIAM that the poor should be an important target in their endeavours and that it is up to each university to discover the best way to implement this directive.

As a newly established association, ACUHIAM will need support from outside Africa if it wishes to achieve its goals. Member universities are committed to being partners in development, and believe that education is development. The association bases its philosophy on principles drawn from Christianity as the basis for action.

Two priorities of ACUHIAM are academic excellence and service to the poor. As private institutions, these universities offer their students the possibility to work and study in an environment that will foster scholarship. At the same time, they help students understand that their position must be geared to the less privileged in society. This is a challenge not only to ACUHIAM but to Nigerian private universities as a whole.

7. Organisational Expansion and Differentiation.

As higher education expands and student enrollments grow, academic institutions become more differentiated by type, role, and function. This is not a surprising phenomenon as it agrees with the *general systems theory* which holds that as open systems tend towards increased elaboration and differentiation as they grow (Yalokwu, 2002). They tend to become more specialised in their parts and more elaborate in structure, often enlarging their boundaries or creating new subsystems with wider boundaries. Thus in a growing university, we see considerable differentiation and elaboration. More specialised departments are created and elaboration of the system may occur through expansion of programmes.

Traditional universities can no longer absorb the demand for higher education. The student body itself is more differentiated, with a greater array of interests and goals for education, and far more heterogeneous in terms of ability. An institution that served 2 or 3 percent of the university-age population in traditional universities is transformed when it is called on to educate

A quarter or more of the age cohort, and to provide education to "nontraditional" students as well. This expansion and differentiation gives rise to academic systems which aim at providing some rationality and direction to higher education. All this makes private university inevitable part of this higher education system.

The implication is that coordination and control tend to be difficult, and the cost, legal and financial, of providing it are rendered high.

8. Social Responsibility and Scholarship.

The majority of private universities and related institutions worldwide provide training and credentials in their areas of expertise, but little else. With the exception of universities operated by religious organizations, there is little sense of the social responsibility on the part of other private academic institutions. Few private universities are able to serve as research centres or support major libraries.

Private institutions provide access to those who can afford to pay for instruction. Few private universities can afford scholarship programs for students from poor economic backgrounds or can provide academic support programs for under prepared students. As a result, private universities contribute little to social mobility or to

providing educational opportunities for bright but underprivileged students. Letting market forces fully determine those students who study at private universities ensures that only those who can afford the tuition will be able to attend. Hence social responsibility is a challenge to many private universities.

Strategies for Effective Partnerships

The strategies for effective partnerships in university provision are multi-pronged. It involves functions that can be carried jointly by public and private providers and those that are best carried out by private or public authorities. Below are the details

Some Models of Joint Roles in Funding & Related Activities

Effective public-private partnership may involve some joint roles that are best performed by both private sector and public authorities. As is common in most countries, funding is a major area of joint effort. Two of these joint roles are highlighted below.

I. Sources of Financing of University Education

Ideally, financing role must be broad based in all universities.

Universities must improve on internal efficiencies in the utilisation of financial, human and other resources. Diversification of the revenue base through consultancies and commissioned research should be the norm. Cost sharing, where the beneficiaries contribute towards tuition fees and their personal maintenance on campus. Sale of excess capacity that may be available (rental of lecture rooms, seminar rooms and halls etc.). Fund raising through endowments and alumni associations. Establishment of fee-paying continuing education programmes run on a part time basis or during vacations. Establishing independently run and effectively managed joint commercial ventures

It may be useful to present useful models of public-private cooperation in financing university education. They include:

- **Tuition:** There are many examples in diverse nations. The following examples are illustrative.

India

While the large majority of India's students study in private colleges and universities, the bulk of funding for higher education in these institutions comes from public sources. Funds are provided according to formulas established by each state. Students pay for only a portion of the cost of education through tuition. India also provides funding from government sources to innovative academic programmes through the University Grants Commission, a central government agency that funds reform, innovation, and other programs in public and private higher education institutions.

Philippines and Japan.

Other countries such as Japan and Philippines provide government funding directly to private universities. Another model is providing funds, through government grants or loans, directly to students, who may attend any academic institution. It is clear from these examples that a mixture of public and private funding of higher education is quite common in countries of quite different social and economic systems and levels of development.

- **Funding of Research:** Research is one of the most important responsibilities of higher education. There are many models of public-private support for research. Public institutions often accept private funds for research, and produce research products that may be useful to, or even owned by private firms.

Private universities, in contrast, are often given funds by public agencies for basic or applied research. In some cases, the private sector provides funds to public or private institutions for basic research. Increasingly, research is funded through a combination of public and private sources.

- **Science Parks: Related to public-private support for research is the emergence of science parks in many countries. Often, these research and development**

(R and D) facilities are a combination of public and private initiative. One of the most successful models in Asia is the Science-Based Industrial Park at Hsinchu, Taipei, China. This science park was built with a combination of private and government funds adjacent to several major universities near Taipei. It has

attracted many of Taipei, China's major high-tech firms and some multinational corporations as well. There are many other examples in Asia, including in Singapore and Japan.

- **Publishing and Knowledge Networks:** Some universities linking with private sector publishers or other knowledge distribution companies to produce and distribute knowledge products, including books, scientific journals, Web based publications, and others.

- **University Services:** There are many examples of private sector enterprises such as bookstores, retail shops, food services, and many others linking up with universities and operating on campuses e.g. those at the universities of Ibadan and Lagos. In some Asian countries, academic institutions franchise private sector companies for campus operations and earn a royalty on sales.

2. Merit-based Appointments

Universities should provide for the appointments to council only those individuals with expertise and experience to guide the institution. They should establish codes of conduct for council members and provide an opportunity for the orientation of new members to familiarise them with the system of governance in the universities. The appointment of the vice-chancellor and other senior executives must be based on clearly defined criteria and procedures to ensure that only the best are recruited and retained.

✓ The Role of government ✓

1. Creating an Enabling Environment. The provision of education requires huge capital outlay, which government cannot meet alone. Therefore the private sector is to play a complementary role. But government has to provide a conducive enabling environment for both parties to operate efficiently. A legal environment that permits universities to establish relationships with private firms and agencies, whether non-profit or profit making is imperative.

2. Co-ordination and Fiscal Accountability

University education is increasingly a responsibility of both public and private sectors. But, the state continues to have a primary responsibility to both coordinate and direct university education policy. Public and private are inevitably linked. As in most countries, it is only the state that can effectively coordinate university education systems (Altbach, 2000). State initiative is generally responsible for quality control as well as fiscal accountability. Tax regulations that accommodate public-private business or other relations are to be put in place. This too may be complex since it is often difficult to mix public and private as well as for-profit and non-profit agencies.

3. Economic policy of low inflation and low interest: The private sector thrives in an economy of low inflation and low interest rates which reduce uncertainty and risk. Therefore government has to put in place economic policies that favour low interest, reduced risk and high investment opportunities.

4. Initiating, formulating and monitoring policies. As the custodian of the wishes and aspirations of the citizens, government has the primary role of developing policies that optimise the use of limited resources. Such policies should be easy to implement and result-oriented. It should devise practical means of monitoring the standards of education from time to time

But the specific role of government is determined by many factors in each individual state, including historical traditions, the legal structure, and political realities. Thus, it is difficult to posit overarching recommendations concerning public-private partnerships in university education in all states.

5. Encouraging Investment in Private University. There is a realization that whatever the government does to the development of the private sector is not just to help the sector but to improve the country's competitiveness in the global market. Education is the cutting edge! By enhancing university education, the country's competitiveness on global market increases (both directly as in the case of exporting education [or import substituting] and indirectly by making the country more attractive to foreign investment). Hence, the government can enhance investment in private universities through making it attractive financially and less cumbersome procedurally.

6. Healthy Relationships: A set of attitudes on the part of government officials that encourages innovative and perhaps cordial relationships between universities and non-academic organizations, including firms is required. Government officials responsible for supervising the academic system may find it difficult initially to adjust to new and complex relationships between academic institutions and other kinds of entities but it is worth the effort.

7. Stimulate Demand for Private University: Directly induce the demand for private higher education through, for example, providing fellowships to students, outsourcing educational service delivery to the private sector providers, etc. For example, the Ministry of Education wants the active involvement of universities (both public and private) having management development training and consultancy programmes in the implementation of its human development policies. Some of the expectations would include that these institutions redesign (or develop) their curriculum to suit and meet the specific needs of the reform education programme.

University staffing directly influence supply to private institution by increasing staff availability through, for example, allowing joint appointments of professors, lecturers and researchers between public and private universities. The Ministry of Education working through the NUC can assist private universities to enhance management capabilities, staff development ventures also through policies on tax, access to land, loans, and the like.

8. Influence Quality and Equity: Government should influence quality and equity of higher education provision in the private sector through using several policy instruments such as discriminatory treatment of universities that meet certain standards. This can be done through the introduction of a demand side financing that funds students who get admission to certain institutions that demonstrate certain level of quality and relevance

The Role of Private Sector

Considering that provision of higher education is a 'public good' even when it has to be provided by private operators (and this perspective is the cornerstone for effective public-private partnerships), and private universities which have a number of issues to address. The highly contested issue is that of quality to which the other issues are attached (credibility, sustainability, etc.). Hence, some degree of de-emphasizing the business motive in favour of a social motive would be necessary.

(1) Stake in quality higher education: They need to demonstrate that they have a stake in quality higher education. Formulation of an inbuilt regulatory mechanism for quality assurance will be necessary. They need to demonstrate that they have at least equivalent or better existing public institutions.

In this regard, lessons could be drawn from experiences elsewhere as well as from successful professional associations that strictly and rigorously regulate quality products and services based on membership codes of conduct. Most prestigious universities in the world are not necessarily public universities – so, quality education is not necessarily a problem of public providers. Quality assurance is also not necessarily the function of governments. In Israel for example, no college (public or private) can issue diplomas unless it is affiliated with universities. The Council of Higher Education exercises a lot of regulatory mechanism on quality and funds. Similar practical experiences could be cited from other countries.

(2) Organized response: This is necessary. They must demonstrate that what they aim to achieve is consistent with and supportive of the country's vision for higher education and its industrialisation and development policies.

(3) Liaise with public universities: This should be based on mutual benefits in terms of joint programmes as well as with the industry for their practical attachment programmes. This helps them in the long run demonstrating that their products are competitive and highly demanded not only by the private sector but also by the public sector. It is also important to remember that the public sector is still the big employer in the country. With a change in the system of valuations of credentials (e.g., result-based performance management system), this would induce changes in the quality and value of the certificates issued by higher education institutions both public and private.

(4) Taking Entrepreneurial Risk: The private sector is known for their smartness in taking entrepreneurial risks through identifying new opportunities and harnessing them. With the spirit of risk taking and venturing into unknown waters, the private sector investors stand the chance of paying the price required to identify new opportunities for innovative and cost-effective education. A certain entrepreneurial spirit should be

welcomed in academe, and both private authorities and government officials need to understand this, and permit freedom and initiative. Entrepreneurialism for which the private sector is adept, should be accepted but not become the motivating force behind academic institutions.

Conclusion

Public private partnerships can work well, provided that both the government and the private sector work in a trusting and collaborative way to achieve common goals. Both the public and the private model has its strengths and weaknesses, and no model is perfect for all situations. All too often, the private sector and the state distrust one another. A mutually supportive and coordinated relationship must exist between the public and private sectors. Overly tight and bureaucratic control, such as in South Korea, now slowly being weakened, is not the best way of ensuring an effective higher education system. Neither is a totally free market that pays no attention to quality control or the overall societal interest. It is possible to develop a systemic approach to university education coordination that will protect the public interest, ensure appropriate accountability, and avoid unnecessary expenditure. However as demonstrated in many developed and developing countries alike, mutual respect and trust, inclusiveness and integrativeness are key to this partnership.

The Nigerian higher education defies traditional delineation between public and private sectors. The issue cannot be settled solely on the basis of the ownership of an institution, or even on the basis of primary motivation. Instead it is important to recognise a wide range of interventions and types of stakeholders namely government, for-profit organisations, non-governmental organisations (e.g. churches) and private individuals.

As the country is developing technologically and economically new models of universities are bound to be added and this inevitably would emanate from the continual search for new ways to deliver higher education in a cost-effective fashion. Insisting on mono-sectoral approach can be counterproductive. Nonetheless, it is crucial to underscore the fact that the attitude, behaviour, and actions of the private universities' sub-sector could determine the extent to which the lost glories of university education can be regained.

In the final analysis, what matters most is not the question of who provides university education, or whether there is any dichotomy but meeting the important need of instituting viable infrastructural building blocks and control measures to ensure that private and public practitioners perform symbiotically and unleash their potentials in both competitive and co-operative manner and thereby achieve the overall goals of university education in Nigeria.

References

- Altbach, P. G. (2000) *Private Higher Education: The Public Responsibilities and Relationships of Private Post-Secondary Institutions*. Conclusion
- Archer, M. (1979) *Social Origins of Educational Systems* London: Sage Publications.
- Blair, T. (2003a) *Radical Reform is the Route to Social Justice*. Remarks delivered by the Prime Minister at the Official Opening of the Bexley Business Academy, 2003.
- Caldwell, B. & Keating, J. (2004) *Adding value to public education: An examination of the possibilities for public private partnerships*; Discussion Paper. Australian council of Deans of Education.
- Coleman, J. S. (1988) *Social capital in the creation of human capital*. *American Journal of Sociology*, 94: S95 – S120.
- Coleman, J. S., & Hoffer, J. (1987) *Public and Private High Schools: The Impact of Communities*. New York: Basic Books.
- Collins, R. (1975) *Conflict Sociology: Toward an Explanatory Science*. New York: Academic Press.
- Collins, R. (1979) *The Credential Society: An Historical Sociology of Education and Stratification*. New York: Academic Press.
- Dore, R. (1976) *The Diploma Disease: Education, Qualification and Development*. London: Allen and Unwin.
- Fukuyama, F. (1995) *Trust: Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity*. London: Hamish Hamilton.
- Istance, D. & Kobayashi, M., (2003) *Introduction' in OECD Networks of Innovation: Towards New Models for Managing Schools and Systems*. Paris: OECD.
- Leadbeater, C. (1999) *Towards the knowledge society*. *New Statesman*. July 12, pp 25 - 27.
- Lejeune M. (2000) *The Challenges of Catholic Universities in Africa: The Role ACUHIAM, International Higher Education*, Summer.
- Midgley, S. (1998) *Third Way: A challenge for all in Education Times Educational Supplement*. June 26, pp 44-45.
- Mutula, S. M. (2001) *Financing public universities in eastern and southern Africa: implications for information services*. University of Botswana- Working Paper.
- OECD (2001b) *Cities and Regions in the New Learning Economy*. Paris: OECD.
- Putnam, R. D. (2000) *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Touchstone.
- Rosenberg, D. (1997), *University libraries in Africa: a review of their current status*, *International African Institute*, Vol. 1-3.
- Yalokwu, P.O. (2002) *Fundamentals of Management*. Lagos: Peak Publishers