

Original Paper

Liberalization Policy and Spread of Private University in Nigeria: The North-South Dichotomy in Perspective

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Abstract

Contemporary Nigeria provides an excellent example of a society in the labyrinth of the era of mass education. This era is particularly underscored by the quantum leap in the demand for higher education. Scholars of development studies have predicted this social change, referring to it as a significant attribute of societies in transition. Thus, in the last three decades or so, the increasing demand for higher education has been met with the liberalization of tertiary education by the federal government. Liberalization which seeks to unbundle government monopoly in the provision of tertiary education has equally been received with an impressive intervention by the private sector. Today, there are 111 private universities in Nigeria and the list is likely to grow considering the spate of applications by prospective investors. The paper seeks to examine this spectacular development in terms of the spread of investment in private university across regions. In specific terms, the paper undertakes a comparative study of southern and northern regional responses to the liberalization policy. It argues that the spread of private universities across regional divide leaves much to be desired, the implication being that a preponderance of the gains of liberalization of tertiary education is skewed against the northern region of Nigeria. This is predictably so in the light of the historical predisposing factors for western education in Southern Nigeria when compared to the north dating back to the colonial time. The paper established that apart from the historic poor reception of the north to western education, the equally poor private investment in tertiary education in the region, are some of the factors that extenuate spread. Moreover, the higher incidence of poverty in the north when compared to the south is partly responsible for the poor investment in the region, considering that the return on investment may not be attractive to sustain the enterprise. The paper concludes that though, the withdrawal of state monopoly in the provision of higher education is a welcomed development, the policy cannot be pursued at the expense of even spread that can contribute to improved access among the constituent regions. Therefore, it recommends among other that, the

federal government should adopt an incremental approach towards meeting the UNESCO minimum benchmark of 26% budgetary allocation for education and that, while encouraging private participation in the provision of higher education, a deliberate policy to encourage even spread in investment in private university should be implemented.

Keywords

Development, Education, Liberalization, North, South, Spread, University

1. Introduction

Education is unarguably fundamental to economic growth and development of any society. The progress of a society is hampered if majority of its citizens lack access to qualitative and functional education. Thus, in Nigeria, investment in education at all levels came out of the realization of the usefulness of education to the development of the nation. Such investment especially in tertiary education has become the subject of public policy debates in developing countries. In the ensuing conversations, the clarion call for increase in budgetary allocation to the education sector has been underpinned by a policy of deregulation of tertiary education. Higher education as it is also called, describes the type and quality of education that is received in universities, polytechnics, colleges of education and mono-technics inclusive of those that offer correspondence courses (National Policy on Education, 2004). Tertiary education has the overall objective of producing highly skilled manpower that can impact meaningfully on national development. It is that level of education that produces middle level and top-level manpower that are required to realize the objectives of national development. To this end, nations are expected to prioritize investment in higher education. The predictable returns on investment are evident in the development experience of advanced economies.

According to uniRank (2021) data base, there are currently 1,225 officially recognized universities in Africa, out of which 586 are public (i.e., owned and managed by the government) while 601 are private. This number is a far cry from the ones in developing and advanced economies of Asia and America respectively. For example, there are over 5,984 officially recognized universities in Asia. In the United States of America with a population of 329 million people, there are approximately 5,300 colleges and universities (educationunlimited, 2019). These universities which are owned by the government and private individuals are well funded to provide qualitative education that will cater for the manpower need of their respective economies. In Nigeria, the desire to expand access to higher education among citizens led to the withdrawal of state monopoly in the provision of this vital service. The collapsing of state monopoly is commonly referred to as liberalization or deregulation of tertiary education. Whereas access seeks to provide opportunity for citizens of a country mainly on the basis of merit (UNESCO, 2003), achieving tertiary education spread (which is the focus of this paper) has to do with the number of officially recognized (licensed) private universities in the northern and southern parts of Nigeria relative to their population size. Therefore, the liberalization of tertiary education which commenced in 1985 has opened the floodgate for the flourishing of private universities in Nigeria. In a recent presentation of

operational licenses to 12 new private universities, the minister of education noted that “the need for the establishment of more universities in Nigeria has never been more compelling as Nigeria, with a population of over 200 million has only 111 private universities and 221 in total” (Blueprint Newspaper, 2023).

Although, she is reputed to have the highest number of universities in Africa, Nigeria requires more investment in higher education to commensurate with her growing population. Closely related to this requirement is the question of spread for the purpose of access and inclusive development of the constituent regions of the federation. Out of the 111 officially recognized private universities in Nigeria, the south has 73 representing 65.8% while the north has 38 representing 34.2%. There are obvious implications for this disproportionate distribution. However, the explanation for this skewed regional response to the liberalization policy is rooted in history. Whereas Southern Nigeria has demonstrated tremendous enthusiasm for western education dating back to the colonial era, the lackluster reception of the north to western education at the same time is one of the explanations for the current trend. It is against this background that the paper seeks to undertake a comparative study of the level at which liberalization has helped to provide spread in investment and by implication, access to university education in Northern and Southern Nigeria respectively. To realize this objective, the paper adopts a methodology that is both descriptive and analytical. This approach relies on official records and a considerable volume of related literature. In respect of official records, the study examines: (i) the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999, (ii) the National Policy on Education, (iii) Nigerian University System Ranking 2021, and (iv) the African Agenda 2063: First Ten-year Implementation Plan. The foregoing documents speak volume about the primacy of education in the development process of the nation. Whereas the constitution considers education as one of the foremost responsibilities of the state under the Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy, the National Policy on Education articulates the objectives and implementation framework of education at all levels. The Nigeria University Ranking System is an initiative of the National Universities Commission to among other objectives; provide a well-researched ranking report on the basis of which the government can regulate academic programs in the universities to address projected human resource needs of the country. The Africa Agenda 2063 has seven aspirations on cross-cutting issues of peace and unity, good governance and development. Aspiration five which ultimately connect to a strong and virile education sector is “...an Africa, whose development is people-driven, relying on the potential of African people especially its youth” (African Union Commission 2015, p. 37). The review of literature considers a wide range of scholarly perspectives on the subject matter of study. The paper is organized into eight sections. Section one is the introduction which is already undertaken here. Section two articulates the research problem. Section three offers a conceptual disquisition of liberalization policy. Section four provides a brief historical background to the development of western education in Nigeria. Section five reviews the establishment and subsequent proliferation of private universities in Nigeria and issues arising there from. Section six discusses the findings in terms of the implications of the current state of affairs on the vexed

issue of spread contributing to improved access and even development. Sections seven and eight conclude the study and provide some recommendations respectively.

2. Statement of the Problem

Nigeria is often referred to as the giant of Africa on account of her population size and abundant natural resources. With a population estimated at over 200 million people, Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa and the most populous black nation on earth. Of this estimated figure, the population of the youth is put at 33.6 million representing 16.8% of the total population size of the country (Vanguard Newspaper, 2022). In terms of natural resources, Nigeria is “the prodigal son”. With a maximum crude oil production capacity put at 2.5 million barrels per day, Nigeria ranks as Africa’s largest oil producing country in the world. She is also blessed with other natural resources of various descriptions. The list (which is by no means exhaustive) includes iron ore, cocoa bean, limestone, coal, tin, wood and arable land. With these strong economic fundamentals, Nigeria should be on the threshold to greatness. Although her population size indicates a comparative advantage, Nigeria needs a vibrant and resourceful manpower to mobilize knowledge and skills for development of the nation. In other words, the large number of the youthful population requires quality education that will impact meaningfully in creating a productive economy. However, the bad news is that Nigeria does not have sufficient number and quality of institutions of higher learning (especially universities) to underpin this process.

The limited number of universities has thrown up the intractable problem of lack of access for the teeming number of young men and women who desire to have university education. To address this problem, the liberalization of tertiary education is being implemented to encourage the private sector to invest in the provision of education at tertiary level so as to compliment government effort. While the number of admission seekers has continued to increase in considerable terms, the carrying capacity of public universities has been on steady decline. According to report, out of the total number of 1,949,983 candidates who registered for the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) in particular the (UTME) Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination in 2020, only 422, 445 candidates representing 21.7% were granted admission into Nigerian universities (Premium Times Newspaper, 2021). In the 2022 UTME, 1,837,011 candidates enrolled for the UTME/DE (Direct Entry) (nigerianscholars.com). The strike action embarked upon by the Academic Staff Union of Universities in February, 2022, stalled the admission process. However, experience has shown that it is not likely that JAMB would be able to absorb one-third of this figure into the nation’s universities. This limited capacity has led to the undesirable admission policy of catchment areas and the vexed criterion of educationally disadvantaged states. The former refers to the locality which in most cases is the geographical or socio-cultural area contiguous to the institution. To this end, the NUC stipulates that 35% of admitted students should be selected based on catchment area. The later has to do with a deliberate admission quota in each university to favor those states that are considered educationally disadvantaged.

Since 1999 to date, the policy of liberalization has produced an impressive intervention from investors resulting in the establishment of 111 private universities, and the list is likely to grow considering the spate of applications by prospective promoters. However, looking at this development from the point of view of spread among the constituent regions of the country, it is regrettable to note that the gains of liberalization are disproportionately skewed against the northern region. The situation is made worse by the large population size of Northern Nigeria relative to the south. Based on 2016 estimate by the (NBS) National Bureau of Statistics, Northern Nigeria with 19 states has a population of 100,894,453, while Southern Nigeria with 17 states has a population of 89,041,961. The (FCT) Federal Capital Territory has 3,564,126 people (NBS, 2016). Given the annual population growth rate of 2.5% as at 2020 (World Bank, 2021), it is certain that Northern Nigeria's share of the annual increase in the last six years is proportionate to the 2016 estimate. Without sufficient institutions of higher learning to support this growing population, northern Nigeria will inevitably take the back seat in manpower development.

3. Liberalization Policy: A Conceptual Disquisition

Liberalization is derived from liberalism as an ideology of development. Therefore, in clarifying liberalization policy, it is helpful to first understand the term liberalism. On a general note, liberalism is an ideology committed to the pursuit of individual freedom in a society. The core values of liberal ideology which have been espoused by scholars in the literature are: (i) individualism—which emphasizes the primacy of the individual over collective or social group, (ii) rationalism—which acknowledges that the world has a rational structure underpinned by the exercise of human reason, (iii) freedom—which is concerned with the ability to think or act as one wishes consistent with self-determination, (iv) responsibility—which focuses on responsibility to one self and social circumstances, (v) justice—the requirement that rewards and punishment are morally justified, and (vi) tolerance—which emphasizes a willingness to accept the views and actions of others (Teehankee, 2005). Liberal democracy and free market economy emerged from these core ideological values of liberalism. A major attribute of ideology is that it proposes a manifesto on the basis of which a society should proceed to achieve a desired goal in the future. Therefore, ideology constitutes a major discourse in the quest for development. In fact, Ake (2003, p. 77) posited that "...the theory of political development was born in the context of the struggle for ideological hegemony". The political and economic persuasions of this struggle have contributed significantly to the literature on the political economy of development. Thus, according to O'Sullivan and Sheffrin (2003), liberalization is the reduction of government regulations or restrictions on private businesses. It is usually promoted by advocates of free market and free trade whose ideology is also called economic liberalism.

The ideological rivalry between market and state-planned economies during the infamous Cold War Era was anchored on contending approaches to development and social progress and their consequences on the society. Whereas the capitalist bloc favors a market economy capable of optimal allocation of resources, the communist bloc advocates a state-planned economy that acknowledges the government as

the sole authority to allocate resources (Ozohu-Suleiman & Liberty, 2020). Thus, liberalization policy is the reduction of the control and restrictions that are imposed by government on certain activities that are undertaken in a country (Oluleye, 2005). The policy comprises of those principles which guide present and future actions of government in the area of private sector involvement in the economy. Accordingly, following the onset of the third wave democratization in Africa, the policy debates on economic development have favored a market economy consistent with liberal political ideology. This policy choice was made largely in the light of the dwindling capacity of the state to address citizens' demands in public service provisioning. In the circumstance, states in Africa began to unbundle the economy through privatization and other variants of liberalization policy.

In Nigeria, liberalization of tertiary education is borne out of the realization that government alone cannot fund tertiary education in the country. Thus, for tertiary education to be effectively funded in the country, there is the need to allow private individuals or organizations to take part in the ownership of tertiary institutions in the country (Horrold, 2000). To this end, the NUC has been saddled with the mandate to articulate the requirements and oversee the due process for the establishment of private universities. Although private in the economic sense, such universities constitute a significant intervention in the pursuit of the common good of the society. This ideological orientation suggests that private tertiary education is an inter-generational investment with significant impact on the development process.

In the order of education that exists in a society, tertiary education is the last. As at 2021, there were 591 tertiary or higher education institutions in Nigeria. The breakdown of this figure showed that 198 universities (federal government, state government and private individuals universities); 152 polytechnics (federal, state and private); 205 colleges of education (federal, state and private); and 36 mono-technics exist in the country (Odunsi, 2021; National Board for Technical Education (NBTE), 2022; National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE), 2022). The recent provisional operating licenses granted to 12 new private universities bring the total number of universities in Nigeria to 219. According to the (Education National Minimum Standards & Establishment of Institutions Act, 2004), the objectives of tertiary education are many and laudable, the most instructive in this study are to: (i) Train higher level manpower that will make optimum contributions to national development; (ii) Inculcate and develop proper value-orientation in individuals in order for them to survive, and for the society at large to survive; (iii) Promote national unity by ensuring that admission of students and recruitment of staff into universities and other institutions of higher learning shall, as far as possible, be on a broad national basis; and (iv) Promote and encourage scholarship and research.

4. Historical Development of University Education in Nigeria

The origin of tertiary education is traceable to 1948 when the (UCI) University College Ibadan, an affiliate of the University of London was established by the British Colonial Government (Salihu et al., 2015). In April 1959, the British Colonial Government set up the Ashby Commission to look into higher education needs of Nigeria for its first two decades. Before the Ashby Commission submits its report,

the Eastern Regional Government established its own university—University of Nigeria at Nsukka in 1960. The implementation of the Commission's report by the Government led to the establishment of University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife) in 1962; Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria in 1962; and University of Lagos in 1962. In the same year, the University College, Ibadan which later became known as University of Ibadan, was upgraded into a full-fledge university (Otonko, 2012). Thus, the University College, Ibadan and University of Lagos became the first two federal universities while the remaining three remained regional universities. In 1970, University of Benin was created as a result of increased demand made by the then Mid-Western Region for the creation of a university in the Region. These six universities which were established during the period of 1960-1970 are till date called first generation universities. However, it is instructive to note that universities in Nigeria during the period were not insulated from undue political influence as appointments of lay members of universities' council and vice chancellors were politically motivated (Babalola et al., 2007).

The Third National Development Plan which captured the period 1975-1980, led to the establishment of seven additional universities. These universities which were all created in 1975 include: University of Calabar; University of Ilorin; University of Jos; University of Maiduguri; University of Port Harcourt; Bayero University, Kano; and Usman Dan-Fodio University, Sokoto. These seven universities are now referred to as second generation universities. In the same year, the federal government took over the four regional universities (Babalola et al., 2007). After the creation of second-generation universities, the federal government realized the need to establish technical and agriculture universities. This discovery led to the creation of more universities that are till today called third generation universities (1980-1992). These universities include: Federal University of Technology, Owerri; Modibbo Adama University of Technology, Yola; Federal University of Technology, Akure; Federal University of Technology, Minna; Nigeria Defense Academy, Kaduna; University of Abuja; Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University, Bauchi; University of Agriculture, Makurdi; University of Agriculture, Abeokuta; University of Uyo; Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike in Imo State; and Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Akwa. State universities during the period of 1980-1992 were also established in states like Rivers, Imo, Ondo, Ogun, Cross River, Akwa Ibom and Lagos (Nwangwu, 2003).

The universities established between the periods 1992-2011 are known as fourth generation universities. The universities are the (NOUN) National Open University of Nigeria established in 2002 and Federal University of Petroleum Resources, Efurun in Delta State which was created in 2007. Other universities in this category include: Federal Universities Dutse in Jigawa State; Dutsin-Ma in Kastina State; Kasere in Gombe State; Lafia in Nassarawa State; Lokoja in Kogi State; Ndufu-Alike in Ebonyi State; Otuoke in Bayelsa State; Oye-Ekiti in Ekiti State; and Wukari in Taraba State. These federal universities were established in 2011. State universities were also created by some state governments between the periods of 1992-2011. The universities created from 2012—date are called fifth generation or new generation universities. The universities include: Federal Universities Birin-Kebbi in Kebbi State, Gusau in Zamfara State, and Gashua in Yobe State all established in 2013; and the Nigerian Police Academy, Wudil in Kano

State created in 2012. Other new generation universities are Nigerian Maritime University, Okerenkoko in Delta State established in 2018; Air Force Institute of Technology (2018); Nigerian Army University (2018); Federal University of Health Sciences; Otukpo in Benue State (2020); Federal University of Agriculture; Zuru in Kebbi State (2020); Federal University of Technology, Babura, Jigawa State (2021); Federal University of Technology, Ikot Abasi, Akwa Ibom State (2021); Federal University of Health Sciences, Azare, Bauchi State (2021); and Federal University of Health Sciences, Ila Orangun, Osun State. At present, there are 49 federal universities and 61 state universities (NUC Bulletin, 2022), bringing the total number of public universities in the country to 110.

5. Evolution of Private Universities in Nigeria

The idea of the creation of private universities in Nigeria was first mooted during the civilian administration of late President Shehu Shagari (1979-1983). During this period, private investors were given the go ahead by the Supreme Court of Nigeria through its judgment to establish universities subject to the approval of the federal government (Obasi, 2007). This led to the establishment of 26 private universities. The newly established universities lacked the infrastructure required of a functional learning environment. In addition, proper planning was not carried out before the universities were established (Obasi, 2007). The poor infrastructure and poor planning issues of the universities established, made General Muhammadu Buhari on taking over power from late President Shagari to cancel the approval granted to private investors to establish universities. The cancellation was done through Decree No. 19 of 1984.

On taking over power General Babangida in 1985, amended Decree No. 19 of 1984 to allow both the federal government and state government inclusive of private individuals who are Nigerians to establish universities. General Babangida in 1991 set up a commission (Longe Commission) on the review of higher education. One of the terms of reference of Longe Commission was to “propose eligibility criteria for the establishment of future universities in Nigeria” (Longe Report, 1991). The Commission in its report identified stringent conditions and measures under which new universities can be establish. The Commission using criteria such as financial resources, educational standards, clear mission and geographical distribution (emphasis ours) of related institutions, identified some eligibility criteria for the establishment of private universities. Some of the eligibility criteria include the compulsory sourcing of license from the federal government before establishing university, the proprietor/sponsor of the university to be established being a legal citizen of Nigeria, etc. The recommendations of the Longe Commission later became the foundation upon which today’s guidelines on the establishment of private universities are based (Obasi, 2007).

In 1999 under the leadership of former President Obasanjo, tertiary education in particular university education was further liberalized. The year marked the beginning of the operation of private universities in Nigeria. President Obasanjo in 1999 empowered the NUC to receive the applications of private individuals or organizations that wants to establish private universities in Nigeria, inspect the

infrastructures that these persons have on ground and verify their infrastructures (Obasi, 2007). In May, 1999 the federal government gave approval for the establishment of the first three private universities in Nigeria. These private universities include: Igbinedion University, Okada, Edo State whose founder/proprietor is Chief Gabriel Igbinedion; Babcock University, Ilishan-Remo, Ogun State founded by Seventh-Day Adventist Church; and Madonna University, Okija, Anambra State founded by Very Rev. Prof. Emmanuel Ede of Catholic Religious Holy Ghost Ministry (Obasi, 2007; NUC Bulletin, 2009). In 2001 approval was given by the federal government and license issued by NUC for the establishment of another private university known as Bowen University, Iwo, Oyo State. This university is founded by Baptist Convention. In 2002, approval was given for the creation of three additional private universities. These universities include: Covenant University, Ota, Ogun State founded by Bishop David Oyedepo of Living Faith Church Worldwide Inc.; Pan-African University, Lagos State founded by Lagos Business School; and Benson Idahosa University, Benin City, Edo State founded by Late Bishop Benson Idahosa of Church of God Mission International (Obasi, 2007; NUC Bulletin, 2009). In the year 2003, license for the establishment of American University of Nigeria, Yola, Adamawa State was granted by NUC. The university is founded by the former Vice-President of Nigeria—Alhaji Atiku Abubakar. Two years later in 2005, two private universities namely: Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, Kwara State founded by Abdur-Rahim Oladimeji (Islamic Foundation); and Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo State founded by The Church of Nigeria, Anglican Communion were established (Obasi, 2007; NUC Bulletin, 2009). From the time approval was given for the establishment of the first three private universities in Nigeria, the proliferation of private universities in the country has not ceased. It has continued mainly because of the need to provide access to university education for many young Nigerians who are turned out every year from secondary schools. Presently, the number of private universities in the country inclusive of the ones that were granted approval by the federal government in 2022, stands at 111 (NUC Bulletin, 2022).

6. Discussion

We have observed earlier that some of the factors responsible for the unequal rise in early education and by extension, higher education between the north and the south are historical. Other factors can be gleaned from the investment climate in the two regions. The writers observed further that, whereas this historically established enthusiasm of the south also partly explains the robust investment in higher education, the hangover of the lackluster reception of the north during the colonial days largely accounts for the unimpressive state of affairs as far as higher education is concerned. Historically, the southern part of Nigeria has religion, mercantilism and proximity to the coast line as primary predisposing factors that fueled its enthusiasm for western education. In terms of religion, the spread of the Christian faith during colonial era was undertaken with the instrument of western education. Thus, the coming of the Christian missionaries who established most of the early schools gave the earliest converts the opportunity to embrace western education. The northern part of Nigeria before British imperial rule had a well-rooted practice of Islamic education. This factor is coupled with the suspicion of northern leaders

who saw western education as alien and capable of supplanting Islam and all it represents (Ibenegbu, 2017). For these reasons, there was a deliberate policy of discouraging western education in preference for Islamic education. Proximity to the coastline and the attendant mercantilism are intertwined factors that fueled the rise of western education in the south. The early contact between the European merchants and southern traders made possible by the sea also encouraged the major ethnic groups of Southern Nigeria (i.e. Igbo and Yoruba traders) to see western education in English as a significant requirement to do business with the European merchants. On the other hand, the disadvantaged environment in which northerners operate made them to settle for traditional way of life. We shall return to this later.

The first private university in Northern Nigeria is American University of Nigeria in Yola, Adamawa State established in May 28th, 2003. Years later, additional private universities were established in North, such that, as at November, 2021, 30 private universities were established in Northern Nigeria (Odunsi, 2021). In Southern Nigeria, the first three private universities which were created in May, 1999 are: Igbinedion University Okada, Edo State; Babcock University, Ilishan-Remo, Ogun State; and Madonna University, Okija, Anambra State. After some years, more private universities were created in the region. As at November, 2021, Southern Nigeria has a total of 69 private universities. Given that the south already had three at the inception of liberalization policy before the north had one four years later, is an obvious indication of the disparity of regional reception that greeted liberalization policy. Tables 1 and 2 below provide the current list of private universities in northern and southern Nigeria.

Table 1. Private Universities in Northern Nigeria

S/N	Name of University	Date Estab.
1	African University of Sc. & Tech., Abuja	2007
2	Al-Hikmah University, Kwara State	2005
3	Al-Qalam University, Katsina State	2005
4	American University of Nigeria, Adamawa State	2003
5	Baze University, Abuja	2011
6	Bingham University, Nasarawa State	2005
7	Kwararafa University, Taraba State	2005
8	Landmark University, Kwara State	2011
9	Nile University of Nigeria, Abuja	2009
10	Salem University, Kogi State	2007
11	Summit University, Kwara State	2015
12	University of Mkar, Benue State	2005
13	Veritas University, Abuja	2007
14	Crown-Hill University, Kwara State	2016
15	Skyline University, Kano State	2018

16	Greenfield University, Kaduna State,	2019
17	Thomas Adewumi University, Kwara State	2021
18	Ave Maria University, Nasarawa State	2021
19	Al-Istiqama University, Kano State	2021
20	NOK University, Kaduna State	2021
21	Karl-Kumm University, Plateau State	2021
22	Maryam Abacha American University, Kano State	2021
23	Capital City University, Kano State	2021
24	Ahman Pategi University, Kwara State	2021
25	University of Offa, Kwara State	2021
26	Mewar University, Nasarawa State	2021
27	Edusoko University, Niger State	2021
28	Philomath University, Abuja	2021
29	Khadija University, Jigawa State	2021
30	ANAN University, Plateau State	2021
31	Pen Resource University, Gombe State	2022
32	Al-Ansar University, Borno State	2022
33	Khalifa Isyaku Rabi University, Kano State	2022
34	Baba-Ahmed University, Kano State	2022
35	SAISA University of Med. Sc. & Tech., Sokoto State	2022
36	Newgate University, Niger State	2022
37	European University of Nigeria, Abuja, FCT	2022
38	Northwest University, Sokoto State	2022

Source: (NUC Bulletin, 2022)

Table 2. Private Universities in Southern Nigeria

S/N	Name of University	Date Estab.
1	Achievers University, Ondo State	2007
2	Adeleke University, Osun State	2011
3	Afe Babalola University, Ekiti State	2009
4	Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo State	2005
5	Augustine University, Lagos State	2015
6	Babcock University, Ogun State	1999
7	Bells University of Technology, Ogun State	2005
8	Benson Idahosa University, Edo State	2002
9	Bowen University, Oyo State	2001

10	Caleb University, Lagos State	2007
11	Caritas University, Enugu State	2005
12	Chrisland University, Ogun State	2015
13	Covenant University, Ogun State	2002
14	Crawford University, Ogun State	2005
15	Crescent University, Ogun State	2005
16	Edwin Clark University, Delta State	2015
17	Elizade University, Ondo State	2012
18	Evangel University, Ebonyi State	2012
19	Fountain University, Osun State	2007
20	Godfrey Okoye University, Enugu State	2009
21	Gregory University, Enugu State	2012
22	Hallmark University, Ogun State	2015
23	Hezekiah University, Imo State	2015
24	Igbinedion University, Edo State	1999
25	Joseph Ayo Babalola University, Osun State	2006
26	Kings University, Osun State	2015
27	Lead City University, Oyo State	2005
28	Madonna University, Anambra State	1999
29	McPherson University, Ogun State	2012
30	Michael & Cecilia Ibru University, Delta State	2015
31	Mountain Top University, Ogun State	2015
32	Novena University, Delta State	2005
33	Obong University, Akwa-Ibom State	2007
34	Oduduwa University, Osun State	2009
35	Pan-Atlantic University, Lagos State	2002
36	Paul University, Anambra State	2009
37	Redeemer's University, Osun State	2005
38	Renaissance University, Enugu State	2005
39	Rhema University, Rivers State	2009
40	Ritman University, Akwa-Ibom State	2015
41	Samuel Adegboyega University, Ogun State	2011
42	Southwestern University, Ogun State	2012
43	Tansian University, Anambra State	2007
44	Wellspring University, Edo State	2009
45	Wesley University of Sc. & Tech., Ondo State	2007

46	Western Delta University, Delta State	2007
47	Christopher University, Ogun State	2015
48	Kola Daisi University, Oyo State	2016
49	Anchor University, Lagos State	2016
50	Dominican University, Oyo State	2016
51	Legacy University, Anambra State	2016
52	Arthur Javis University, Cross River State	2016
53	Coal City University, Enugu State	2016
54	Clifford University, Abia State	2016
55	Admiralty University, Delta State	2017
56	Spiritan University, Abia State	2017
57	Precious Cornerstone University, Oyo State	2017
58	PAMO University of Med. Sc., Rivers State	2017
59	Atiba University, Oyo State	2017
60	Eko University of Med. Sc., Lagos State	2017
61	Dominion University, Oyo State	2019
62	Trinity University, Ogun State	2019
63	Westland University, Osun State	2019
64	Topfaith University, Akwa Ibom State	2021
65	Maranatha University, Imo State	2021
66	Mudiame University, Edo State	2021
67	Havilla University, Cross River State	2021
68	Claretian University of Nigeria, Imo State	2021
69	James Hope University, Lagos State	2021
70	Margaret Lawrence University, Delta State	2022
71	Sports University, Delta State	2022
72	Nigerian British University, Abia State	2022
73	Peter University, Anambra State	2022

Source: (NUC Bulletin, 2022)

Table 3. Distribution of Private Universities among Geo-political Zones

Parts of Nigeria	Geo-political Zones			Percentage
Northern Nigeria	North West	12		
	North Central	22	38	34.2
	North East	4		
Southern Nigeria	South West	38		
	South South	18	73	65.8
	South East	17		
Total			111	100

Source: Adapted from (NUC Bulletin, 2022) and updated by the authors

Table 3 above further disaggregates the distribution of private universities among the six geo-political zones in order to provide a clearer picture of how the policy has devolved to sub-regional levels. It is instructive to note that whereas the south-west has the highest number of private universities; north-east has the least number. This is predictably so because, apart from the respective presence and lack of the predisposing factors earlier mentioned, the north-east is particularly challenged by internal contradiction exacerbated by *boko haram* (western education is forbidden or not permissible) campaign against western education. This has made the environment unsafe for a capital-intensive investment like private university. Closely related to this internal contradiction is the crippling level of poverty in Northern Nigeria. As at 2020, it was reported that 83 million Nigerians representing 40% of the population live in poverty. According to the World Bank estimate, the number of poor people in Nigeria has increased to 95.1 million in 2022 (World Bank, 2022). As at 2016, the World Bank Report estimated that 87% of all poor people in Nigeria are in the north while the south has 12%. In a study undertaken to determine the geo-political zone distribution of poverty incidence in Northern Nigeria, Jaiyeola (2021) established that north-east and north-west zones have 77.7% and 76.3% respectively, and 67.5% in the north-central. It is therefore obvious that based on the current projection of Nigeria population, the poverty situation in the north is certainly worse than previously estimated.

In a recent collaborative survey (2022) by the NBS, the National Social Safety-Nets Coordinating Office (NASSCO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI), there are over 133 million multidimensionally poor Nigerians. Sixty five percent (65%) of this figure (86 million people) live in the north, while 35% (about 47 million) live in the south. The implication of this frightening poverty data is obvious. Investment is known to chase after people of relative prosperity where reasonable returns that can guarantee the going concern of enterprises are assured. In a region where a preponderance of households are poor, it is not likely that investment in private university (with fairly long gestation period)

will generate reasonable returns. Although private sector investment in tertiary education is understood as a form of intervention in government social responsibility, such investment is expected to make returns for their promoters at least, in the long run. In the light of this development, it will take much more than liberalization of tertiary education to integrate northern Nigeria into the development process.

Given the high tuition in the few available private universities in the north, a preponderance of prospective students from the region are left with only the option of public universities which are saddled with their own limitations of quota system ranging from carrying capacity, catchment areas and educationally disadvantaged states. The quota system stipulates that admission into public universities in Nigeria should be carried out by JAMB on the basis of; academic merit (45%), catchment areas (25%), educationally disadvantaged states (20%), and discretion of vice-chancellors (10%). These criteria in determining those who deserve to be admitted into the nation's public universities have generated debates. While the justifications for the application of these criteria have been touted by JAMB and its parent's Federal Ministry of Education, there is a growing disapproval of these criteria by citizens, many of whom have argued that, instead of the predominance of academic merit-based admission practice in university admission, the practice of quota-based system of non-academic considerations has compromised standards (Obilade, 1992). Apart from the issue of standards, there is the concern that the quota system is fast leading to over localization and indigenization of the nation's public universities. The constitution under fundamental objectives and directive principles of state policy provides that: The state is to ensure equal and adequate educational opportunities at all level for all citizens; and strive to eradicate illiteracy. Consequently, the government shall as and when practicable, provide free, compulsory and universal primary education; free university education; and free adult literacy program (Nyewusira & Nweke, 2015 p. 60).

It is on account of the foregoing constitutional provisions that in 2020, the federal government abolished quota system and directed the JAMB and NUC to ensure compliance (Vanguard Newspaper, 2020). It is regrettable to note that until its abolition, quota system may have done more harm than the good for which it was intended. For example, national unity in a country of complex diversity cannot be promoted in an environment of subjective and unequal access. The practice of discriminatory admission policy is itself a sad commentary on the state of Nigeria's public university system. The message that can be gleaned from the desirability or otherwise of quota system is that there is urgent need for improved funding of university in Nigeria. The funding gap that currently exists is unacceptable, and it is for this reason that the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) has consistently engaged the federal government to draw attention to university revitalization through massive funding. The annual budgetary allocation to the education sector is still far below the minimum standard of 26% set by the UNESCO. The total national budget in 2021 was 13.58 trillion. The education sector had ₦771.5 billion representing 5.68% of the total budget size. The ₦771.5 billion was inclusive of N70.05 billion Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) allocation; and exclusive of ₦323.3 billion of the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) allocation (Budget Office, 2021). In 2022, the federal government approved

₦17.13 trillion for the fiscal year. Out of this figure, the education sector received ₦865.2 billion representing 5.4% of the total budget size. The 2022 education sector budget is again inclusive of ₦112.29 billion UBEC allocation; and exclusive of TETFund allocation (Budget Office, 2022).

Poor funding inevitably affect the carrying capacity of existing public universities in Northern Nigeria such that in every admission season, prospective students who could not make the limited list of admitted candidates are frustrated by the narrow range of option of seeking admission in private universities in the region with its attendant high tuition and limited number of courses of study. Although the criterion of carrying capacity was targeted at ensuring quality of teaching in universities (Oduwaiye, 2008), it has become an obstacle to increased access to university education. In a region with poor attitude to western education which has not significantly abated, ambitious young men and women who desire to acquire higher education are frustrated by limited access especially in public university.

7. Conclusion

Scholars in the development literature are in consensus that education especially higher education remains the bedrock of human capital development. The progress that the advanced economies of the northern hemisphere have recorded today was made possible by a functional and well-funded education sector. Even the recent development experience of the Asian Tigers has been largely influenced by huge investment in human capital development. Thus, lessons of experience in other climes should provide the needed guide to those who are concerned about promoting development in less endowed nations. In Nigeria, the demand for higher education represents a significant attribute of a society in transition to development. The dynamics of this transformation have been captured by scholars in the literature. Thus, the era of mass education which has been the preoccupation of classical scholars is a familiar terrain to contemporary policy makers and practitioners. The liberalization policy is acknowledged as a predictable response by government to the dynamics of the development process in the education sector. The paper concludes that, checks in the implementation of the liberalization policy for over two decades now, indicate a commitment to driving this process of social change to its logical conclusion. However, the implementation process must accommodate feedback in order to identify and close gaps.

8. Recommendations

In the light of arguments advanced, observations made and issues discussed, the following recommendations are put forward:

- i. The university system represents an institutionalized form of human capital development that requires regular and improved funding. For a country as Nigeria with a large number of youths that constitute the population coupled with an annual population growth rate of 2.5%, manpower development should be in the priority list of public expenditure. Such expenditure in relation to the national economy is an inter-generational investment that is crucial to sustainable development. To this end, the federal government should commit to funding education as a

matter of priority. Although the national economy is constrained by paucity of fund, there should be an incremental approach towards meeting the UNESCO minimum benchmark of 26% budgetary allocation for education. Improved funding will address capacity gaps especially in providing access for the teaming number of young men and women who desire to have university education anywhere in the country.

- ii. It is unarguable that the liberalization policy has helped to improve access to university education. What is arguable is the extent to which the policy has devolved to the six geo-political zones. Therefore, while encouraging private participation in the provision of higher education, a deliberate policy to encourage even spread in investment in private university should be implemented. The federal government through the federal ministry of education and the NUC should work out an incentive system to make investment in private university an attractive one. This could be done in the form of providing guarantee to investors to secure loans from banks for the development of infrastructure which is critical for the takeoff of university. Procurement of this credit facility can also be facilitated through a deliberate policy of special interest rate; and favorable terms of payment by the Central Bank of Nigeria.
- iii. The fact that education is in the concurrent legislative list, make the task of providing university education to citizens in every part of the country the business of the federal and state governments. Be that as it may, it is instructive to note that the question of spread can be better addressed by the state government. Therefore, while inviting the state governments especially in the north to prioritize funding of university education, the states should also replicate recommendation (ii) above in order to encourage spread of private university in the region.
- iv. While access to university education is fundamental to manpower development, it is regrettable to note that this unarguable fact has not been internalized in the consciousness of a preponderance of citizens in Northern Nigeria. The hangover of the lackluster reception of the north during the colonial days has not fully abated. This historically rooted attitude to western education which has received a boost in the wake of the boko haram campaign against western education needs to be deconstructed. To this end, the federal government in concert with state governments in the north should step up widespread and sustained program of sensitization and public enlightenment on the significance of acquiring knowledge through university education, in order to function optimally in this increasingly knowledge driven society. This can as well be treated and promoted as a counter narrative to the boko haram onslaught.
- v. Finally, and most importantly is the urgent need to decisively confront the state of insecurity in Nigeria. This resolve should be predicated on the understanding that no nation can make progress in an environment of insecurity. The enviable level of development made today in the advance nations of the northern hemisphere was underpinned by a relatively secured environment. Given that a sense of security of lives and properties are fundamental enablers for citizens to pursue their legitimate ambition in life, government should eschew politics and any

form of primordial sentiment in pursuing its constitutional mandate of providing safe and secured environment; as well as protecting lives and properties in every part of Nigeria.

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