
Deregulation Policy: Impact on Nigerian Universities

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ABSTRACT:

This paper was designed to examine the impact of government policies relating to deregulation on universities in Nigeria. It was observed that the Nigerian government is often quick in making policies to govern different sectors of the State's affairs, especially government-owned establishments or parastatals, from which higher education establishments are not exempted. The Nigerian government sees university education as an instrument to gear the economy to improvement, growth and development. As a result of the need to improve the Nigerian economy, different policies have been introduced, with different interpretations, over the last decade. This is an approach that has also been introduced to university education, with the hope of solving funding and mismanagement issues. This paper uses a standard literature review to study the government deregulation policies from their origin and to discuss the findings. The findings suggest that the deregulation policy was introduced to the university as strategy or approach that was assumed to be able to solve the long debated problem of access and funding in Nigerian universities. However, the policy was introduced in such a way that it solved the problem of access practically, but created other problems, such as management and funding issues.

Keywords – government policy, deregulation, university, Nigeria

Introduction

Recently, many of the discussions about Nigerian universities had focused more on the problems the country is facing in general, for example, problems of corrupt practices, mismanagement, and many more (Utulu, 2001; Adamolekun, 2007; Aina, 2007). It is claimed that these problems have affected many sectors, including the university institutions that are meant to develop the economy. In anticipation of improving or correcting these problems, the political administrators, politicians and civil servants have sought help from different foreign bodies and countries around the world. In light of this approach, they have introduced different policies, or assumed policies from other countries. The Nigerian public sector, amongst other bodies, has gained help from other developed countries and the World Bank in terms of advice on policies, such as deregulation, which have affected all of the sectors of the country and from which university education has not been exempted. University education has been hit with different policies and challenges in the desperate need for change within the sector. In most cases, Nigeria and its government owned sectors are more well known for many bad things, such as lateness to work, no one taking responsibility for government property, no ownership of the business, no creative or innovative thinkers among government workers to generate funds for the establishment they work for, rather than mismanaging the funds allocated to them for development while the little that they do generate never gets to the right purse, and many more. However, people tend to ignore the development that the country has witnessed in the last decade, especially in the university sector. For example, the government has established more private universities in the quest to solve the problems of access and finances. In a work by Adetunji (2015a), it was also confirmed that Nigerian universities have experienced many changes in recent times among which the establishment of universities has seen colossal efforts compared to other parts of the world. Adetunji (2015a) claimed that this achievement is important to know in understanding how the government have had a positive impact on the universities. A debate raised by Adetunji and Ogunleye (2015) explained that, in most cases, people tend to ignore the positive turnaround of situations experienced, especially when there is still a lot to be accomplished, as in the case of Nigeria's university development.

Significantly, the government has recognised that its sectors are faced with many problems that continue to affect the economy of the nation in general. These problems were not bargained for at the start of the universities being established, as the government's hope was that education sector in general, and universities in particular, would help to reduce the level of poverty in the community, which would, at the same time, assist the development of a modern society. However, surprisingly, the Nigerian universities that were expected to perform this huge task were faced with many challenges, which now have negative impacts on service delivery, as well as on results in terms of the graduates' performance. For example, Okebukola (2002) mentioned that Nigerian universities produce graduates annually in engineering, electrical studies, and many other courses, but still the Nigerian government cannot supply constant power or good roads and water to its citizens. Adetunji (2015a), in support of Okundare, Solaja and Siyewo (2013), explained that there are no good social amenities for jobs that can promote learning in the universities. In addition, the academic staff are not encouraged to do their jobs

because staff salaries have been delayed. No proper maintenance of the few infrastructure facilities has been provided by the government to resolve this major problem. Nigerians also complicate issues by damaging and destroying the few amenities put in place by the government, for example burning of tyres on the roads and vandalism of government properties or vehicles. In some cases, government officials may even be physically abused. In an attempt to permanently resolve these problems and to increase funding and access, the government has attempted to introduce different policies, such as deregulation and catchment areas for admission, for different issues without considering their effect on the existing policies. This paper focuses its attention on investigating the impact of government policies, especially deregulation policies, on university education.

Deregulation

Deregulation is an economic approach to sustainability and improvement. It is also a management strategy or approach to improve service delivery. Deregulation of services has different reasons, approaches and methods of introducing it into different sectors, in order to gear and determine the improvement of the services offered. What deregulation means is the total or partial removal of government involvement, rules and power from a public sector to make it function solely by creating its own rules and regulations for efficient and effective operation of the system (Alabi, 2006). Faniran (2012) expressed that, in an attempt to define deregulation properly, Alani (2008) had explained that a deregulation policy is associated with two management strategies, privatisation and commercialisation, both of which are tools for profitability. Adebayo (2014) also supported Alani's view by saying that although profitability may increase the nation's economy in the long term, it does not solve the problem of financing Nigerian universities but, rather, it widens the gap and exposes further government weaknesses in the management of public services (Simbine, 2003). In a review by Omotola (2004), he explained that deregulation is a new public management paradigm and was introduced as a fresh approach as a result of the need to make public sector officers take more responsibility, as well as bringing the best out of them to satisfy the needs of the citizens.

More recently, Fanira (2012) expressed that deregulation of university education simply means that the government will no longer provide education for its citizens for the purpose of economic development. Furthermore, Omotola (2004) stressed that deregulation means that the government no longer have legal and restriction rights over the deregulated sector and will allow the institutions to operate as business ventures, which is an approach that does not support the original intention of the Nigerian government to create university education across the country with the intention of making education free and accessible for its citizens. Alabi (2006) expressed that the new policy does not give room for such a development (that is making education free for all without financial benefit) if it was to operate effectively.

It is important to bear in mind that the introduction of deregulation is always for a reason, which is centred mainly on freedom from government-imposed decisions (Tsai, 2005). For example, deregulation was introduced in the United Kingdom (UK) in order to make university education more autonomous by giving the institutions the responsibility to determine their own fate and destiny (that is, to admit, train and graduate students), but, even with these intentions, the government did not turn its back on the universities. The UK government did not expect institutions to rely or depend solely on tuition fees to run the universities. Likewise, in the United States of America (US), Denise (2002) asserted in his studies that the deregulation of university education did not entail 100% government withdrawal of its duties and responsibilities; it was done to withdraw parents' freedom to control their children's schooling. These two illustrations are from developed countries, where the policy has been applied strategically. The introduction of the policy in the two illustrations above did not just see the policy as what they need to acquaint but what they needed to do to better their productivity. In their aim for deregulating universities, no commercial reasons, such as profitability or commercialisation, were intended but, rather, attention was strictly focused on improvement. Therefore, it was surprising that Nigeria, a developing country probably in a state of being underdeveloped at the moment, has attempted to implement the Western policy of deregulation without introducing the policy for similar reasons. Alabi (2006) explained that deregulation of university education was carried out in Nigeria primarily to allow private individuals or bodies to fund and create access for applicants. This is a big concern as the sector has many functional features that make the policy fit for purpose that were not in place. A good example was spelled out by Adetunji (2015c), where he talked about quality issues beyond the universities' control. Furthermore, it was observed that the first two countries, the UK and the US, that deregulated their university education did it not because of lack of funding or wanting to create access but in an attempt to make the institutions function better.

Nigeria's Issues

Nigeria is one of the developing countries in Africa, with a total population of approximately 182 million in the 2010 population census (Ojerinde, 2010). The country is developing rapidly in many areas of its business. In Nigeria, government policies started as a matter of public office holders unjustly trying to control the activities of the State. Nigeria is a country that was formulated by many ethnic groups and societies, each with their own leaders, cultures and beliefs. Prior to the independence of the country, Nigeria was intrigued by western education and fascinated by the missionaries and these were inventions that were strongly embraced by the western and eastern parts of the country. The northern region was reportedly not interested in western education because its citizens were predominantly Muslim and did not want the spread of Christianity to the northern part of the region. This was because the missionaries who brought western education came with Christianity as a religion alongside the education. The colonial master, Lord Lugard, noticed this issue and, in his approach to resolve it, a policy was first introduced to the colony. Lugard introduced direct and indirect rule. Direct rule was a policy

that was followed by the western and eastern parts of the colony, while indirect rule was adhered to by the northern region (Adetunji, 2014). The two rules had different ideologies in terms of their religious and educational principles with the leaders in these areas not sharing similar interests in terms of religion or education. Therefore, the colonial administrator, Lord Lugard, allowed freedom of religion as a common ideology for the region in his policy for independence in 1956, before the amalgamation in 1959 to 1960. It was in this period that education, from the elementary to the tertiary stage, was free for all citizens of the country immediately after independence. This approach or step was taken to enhance the development of both the citizens and the communities they lived in. After some time, the policy was reviewed and politicised by many leaders, using creation of access as a campaign strategy, which gradually jeopardised the intention of developing the citizens and their communities.

Impact of Deregulation

At the inception of the policy of deregulation in Nigeria's public sectors, it was assumed that the policy would help the government to restore all of the sectors back to normal, especially with the intention to cut funding and transfer part of the responsibilities to private investors in order to enhance the smooth running of government owned institutions (Fabunmi, 2005). However, the manner in which Nigerian universities are constructed, especially in terms of administration, has created many barriers to the management of the new policy of deregulation. A study by Ogbogu (2013) expressed that university administration, for instance, revolves around the Vice-chancellor, who is both the number one academic and the senior administrative officer of the institution. The Vice-chancellor is sometimes supported by a deputy, depending on his discretion and needs. The key point Ogbogu was making here is that the introduction of the government policy of deregulation does not change anything in the administration of the university system, which means that the institution still operates the same way as it did before the introduction of the policy deregulation. Furthermore, in reality, deregulation of university education takes away the benefits that individuals received from the government and transfers them to how well individuals can personally contribute to their own education (Omoike & Gbinigie, 2005). However, the policy has had a positive impact on the Nigerian university system, especially in terms of creating competition and increasing expectations from all stakeholders. For example, public universities have been seriously challenged about the senseless strike action that has almost become the culture of the institution, and this malpractice have reduced drastically.

It should be noted, however, that the way in which Nigerian universities have adopted the policy is totally different from how it was implemented in the western countries that the Nigerian government sought to imitate. For example, the first time that the government attempted to deregulate education in the United Kingdom, they introduced tuition fees to their tertiary education in 1991. They implemented tuition fees of £2500, and the government made available a student loan of £3000 to all students

wishing to study at a tertiary institution. This approach made United Kingdom universities more autonomous and independent as they could determine who they admitted or employed and what other learning materials they required to perform their duties effectively, based on the fees received from the student. However, the government continued to support the universities through student finance, support for charity funded research and funding the university environment. In contrast to this, in Nigeria, with the adoption of the policy, the government simply ignored their responsibility to the universities, forgetting that they are an agent that supports them in achieving their economic goals. They pass all of the costs to the citizens without any support, which is not the approach that the United Kingdom government considered.

To summarise, deregulation in Nigeria is expected to encourage private participation, autonomy of the institutions, system differentiation, mechanisms for quality assurance and strengthened governance, as well as providing them with the means to reduce government funding and involvement so that some funding can be diverted to other parts of the education system, such as creating physical facilities, purchasing laboratory equipment and upgrading libraries, among other things (Faniran, 2012). In other reviews by Bako (2002) and Adeogun, Subair and Osifila (2009), they mentioned that, instead of Nigerian universities experiencing a turnaround, the unprecedented crises in the institutions has suppressed new innovations.

It was observed that, even after the introduction of the deregulation policies, where the doctrine of 'laissez faire' should have been adopted and implemented, Nigerian universities are rooted in the customs and traditions of what was embedded in the old system or structure. Different policies, such as those on admission, catchment areas, quota systems, favouritism and nepotism were still in operation, approaches that should have been totally eradicated for the new management systems and approaches to function. The policies in terms of recruitment, such as federal character and nepotism, which should not be present in the operation of the universities have continued to develop into discrimination and, finally, have given way to corruption.

University service quality should be centred on admission, the process of recruiting competent staff and delivery, in terms of teaching and learning, as well as research that will uncover weaknesses and suggest solutions to the issues. Regrettably, the reverse is the case, as the universities are focused on assessment, testing students' knowledge and abilities through analytical questions that do not necessarily test the true knowledge of the students, as suggested by Adetunji (2014). Surprisingly, the university administrators have failed to understand that the deregulation policies are a new public management approach that should be treated differently from the traditional approach of public administration. In a paper by Omotola (2004), he expressed that the deregulation of higher education means the dismantling of government legal restrictions on the operation of certain businesses, the

reality was different as the governing council remains politicised by the government's indirect involvement. Government officials select many of the members of the governing councils, most especially politically. This governing councils dictate what happens in any Nigerian university (Adetunji, 2015c) and, while their involvement is linked with the government in public universities, it is linked with the proprietors' interests in the private universities.

Conclusion

This paper finds that the deregulation of university education has put the question of quality issues into the frame because the policy has opened the door for private investors to finance and manage university education with the intention of making a profit, which jeopardises the national policy of providing quality education. The involvement of private investors has led to a scarcity of materials for learning and less assistance to facilitate learning, such as lecturers, amongst others. This is contrary to the government's intentions for deregulation.

It has been observed in the study that the deregulation of university education in Nigeria has been centred on creating access and improving findings. It is important to point out that none of the government owned universities in existence before the introduction of the government deregulation policies have been privatised or commercialised. A challenging issue observed in this study is that other important requirements that make deregulation function effectively have been seriously ignored or taken for granted. These requirements include strategic planning at different departmental levels of the institutions, functional communication systems, accountability, proper management and, last but not least, academic integrity. This study finds that in the event that government policies do not have any positive influence on the above-mentioned requirements, then the policy cannot be effective. If a university is to be deregulated effectively, there must be an impact on academic standards, the academic staff, the funding systems and the university students themselves.

Recommendations

It is important for those making policies to be aware that those that work best in a western context might fail in an Asian or African context. This is due to other features that might not be present, or might not be considered to be important, because they are readily available and the policymakers do not need to think about them in order to make decisions or to implement policies. It is observed that, when developing policies for any organisation, the policies need to be well tested before passing them on to an individual, or group of individuals, for implementation. This method will help the policy maker to see where there is need for improvement and where there are things that need to be put in place in order to design a best practice.

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