Privatization of University Education in Africa: Lessons from The Theories and Practices of the United States of America and Japan

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Abstract
This article explores the theoretical relationships between public and private sectors of university education as practiced in the United States of America and Japan so that the African nations could draw lessons from them. The paper is divided into four sections. The first section analyses the historical emergence of the private sector in university education in Africa. The second section discusses the ownership of private university institutions of education in Africa. The third section examines the quality of university education in the private and public institutions while the last section explores the theories in the relationship between the public and private sectors in the selected advanced countries and the lessons Africa can draw from them.

Introduction
Private higher education is one of the most dynamic and fastest growing segments of post-secondary education at the turn of the 21st century. (Altbach 1999). In the developing states of Africa, just as the developed countries, privatization of higher education is fast growing for a number of reasons. Firstly, there is the inability of the public sector to satisfy the growing social demand for higher education, hence the need for the private sector to expand students’ access to higher education. Secondly, there are the de-regulation policies of the governments on the provision of education and thus giving adequate opportunities for private participation in education. Thirdly, in many African countries, the demand for employment oriented courses and subjects of study had changed and public universities seem unable to respond adequately to this phenomenon, hence it becomes imperative that private sector should increase. Fourthly, in most African countries, public education is criticized for inefficiency while the private sector is increasingly promoted for its efficiency in operation.

African educators are, however, responding to the increase in the number of private higher educational institutions with mixed feelings. There is the fear that the implementation of this privatization policy may further erode educational standards, lead to uncontrolled expansion, increased graduate unemployment and possibly widen socio-economic inequality in Africa.

The presentation is a review of current literature aimed at achieving the following key objectives.

• To analyse the historical antecedent of private university education in Africa.
• To highlight the types of ownership and the quality of private as well as public university institutions in Africa.
• To make a critique of the six main theories of the relationship between private and public sectors of university education.
To analyze the practices of private universities in the United State of America for eventual transplanting to Africa.

The Emergence of Private Sector in Higher Education in Africa

At the time of the independence movements in Africa, education in general, and particularly higher education, was expected to play a central role in the national project of social progress. Thus issues about the philosophy and goals of education during the post-colonial period were viewed within the broader framework of political ideologies spanning from pro-western liberal ideology and capitalist systems (Botswana, Nigeria, Cote d'Ivoire) to Marxist-Leninst/Socialist ideology (Benin, Zimbabwe) to African socialism (Mali, Tanzania), (Assie-Lumumba 2004). Regardless of their ideological and political choices, they all conceived higher education as an important agent of development with the mission of formulating relevant programmes as well as providing high level man-power for the actualization of the governments’ project of national development.

Higher education in Africa therefore aimed at:

- Developing and inculcating proper values for the survival of the individuals to be self-reliant and useful members of the society;
- Developing the intellectual capability of individuals to understand and appreciate their local and external environments;
- Developing physical and intellectual skills of individuals;
- Promoting and encouraging scholarship and community service.
- Promoting national and international understanding and interaction.
- Promoting national development through relevant high level manpower training (Osokoya 2004).

Africas foremost nationalists were all agreed on the lack of relevance of the European inherited education in Africa and the need to adopt African education to meet the needs and aspirations of African peoples. During the period before and shortly after independence, universities had a near monopoly in providing higher education in Africa. However, with the market-friendly reforms initiated under the structural adjustment programmes (SAP), the deregulation policies, and the financial crisis in the African states, there opened an encouraging environment for the emergence of private higher education in Africa. This was further strengthened by some legislative measures enacted by the various national governments providing grounds for establishing private institutions of higher education. Today, Africa can boast of a large number of private higher institutions, even though the private sector accounts for a small percentage of enrolment in higher education. Privatization has therefore become a fast expanding segment of higher education in Africa (Varghese 2004a).

Scholars have based their arguments on the proliferation of private higher education in Africa on several factors. Kitaev (1999) based his arguments on the active performance of private agencies in school education compared with public institutions. Varghese (2004b) submitted that some foreign international bodies influenced the proliferation of private institution of higher education in Africa. In 1991 for example, the government of Kenya in her bid to obtain the World bank credit assistance, was made to restrict the growth of enrolment in public universities. Such restriction no doubt promoted the establishment of a large number of private universities and institutions in Kenya. The enactment of educational laws giving room for the provision of private higher education through constitutional means
also became a significant factor that led to the increase of private higher institutions in Africa.

In the 1990’s for instance, the Nigerian government enacted educational laws to give room for private universities. Yoloye et al (2005) submitted that the laws led to astronomical increase in the number of private higher institutions in Nigeria. They noted that between 1990 and 2005, 20 privately owned universities were granted license by the Federal Government of Nigeria through its agency, the National Universities Commission (NUC) while about 35 applications for private universities had been submitted to the NUC awaiting the normal processes for granting license. Similarly, in some other African nations such as Uganda, Cameroon, Mozambigue and Zimbabwe, the legislative measures on private higher education institutions got momentum in the 1990’s and more private universities have been established since then (Varghese 2004a).

James (1991) based his argument for sporadic increase in private higher institutions in Africa on social demand. To him, there was an increasing social demand for higher education in Africa in the recent times. He pointed out that Africans were noted for valuing education and the increasing demand for higher education by the younger ones meant that government was unable to cope with the provisions for higher education which eventually led to government changed policy measures encouraging private sector participation in higher education in many countries of Africa. The deregulation policy under the structural adjustment programme resulting to the fiscal incapacity of the state to expand public higher education was also an argument by scholars for the expansion of higher education in Africa. Babalola and Adedeji (2006) argued vehemently on the importance of deregulation policies under the structural adjustment programme influencing the development of private higher education in Africa.

They claimed that deregulation of provision of education deals with minimum involvement of government in the provision, financing and regulation of education. In their opinion, deregulation involves a deliberate elimination of wrong regulations, directives, rules, guidelines, laws, policies and practices (such as subsidization) that stand as barriers to free market and competitive system of education. They further argued that deregulation aims at enhancing active involvement of all stakeholders in the ownership, finance, administration and control of education and thereby making the system more efficient in responding to the learning needs of the society and that of the individuals in a dwindling economy.

In an earlier submission, Varghese (2004a) claimed that Kenya blazed the trail in the establishment of private higher education institutions in Africa. They were soon followed by Benin, Senegal, Tanzania, Uganda, Ghana, Mozambique, Cameroon etc. Levy, (2003) in his submission however claims that the Francophone African countries lagged behind their Anglophone counterparts in terms of a move towards the establishment of private higher education institutions in Africa. Between 1991 and 1999, about 65 private universities had been established in Sub-Saharan Africa (World Bank 2002).

Ownership and Quality of Private University Education in Africa.

Varghese (2004b) identified four ownership patterns of private higher education in Africa, namely: transnational, collaboration with foreign institutions, collaboration with public universities and religious affiliation.

Transnational— These are foreign owned private higher institutions in Africa. Such institutions were founded and operated by foreign organizations. The Daystar Company of the United States of America founded and operated Daystar University of Kenya. Other
foreign institutions such as Bond University of Australia, Monash University of Australia, as well as Business School Netherland, Holland, were operating some private higher institutions in Africa (Varghese 2004b). Levy (2003) also claimed that some foreign companies were operating private higher institutions in South Africa.

**Collaboration with Foreign Institutions**

There are several privately owned higher institutions in Africa that operate in collaboration with foreign institutions. Subotsky (2003) submitted that several of such institutions were in collaboration with universities in United Kingdom, United States of America and Australia. In addition, some private higher institutions offering two-year courses in industrial and professional subjects in Benin had affiliations with some universities in France. In the same vein, the Solusi University in Zimbabwe is affiliated with Andrew University, Michigan. (Varghese 2004a).

**Collaborations with Public Higher Institutions**

Some private higher institutions have affiliation with some public universities. In Nigeria, a large number of private universities are in collaboration with public universities. They include Ajayi Crowther University Oyo, Immanuel College of Theology Ibadan. Similar private universities exist in Ghana and Zimbabwe.

**Religious Affiliation**

A number of private higher institutions in Africa are owned and operated by Christian denominations or Muslim organizations. They include the Catholic University Kenya, Uganda Christian University, Adventist University Cameroon, St. Augustine University Tanzania, Bowen University Iwo Nigeria, Babcock University Ilishan Nigeria, Covenant University, Ota Nigeria, Maddona University, Okita Nigeria etc.

**Quality of Private Higher Institutions in Africa**

It may be difficult to generalize the quality of private higher institutions in Africa. We shall however base our assessment on factors such as infrastructural facilities, types of courses offered, quality of staff, performance of students, students’ admission requirements and funding.

**Infrastructural facilities**

Private higher institutions in Africa are established by some legal provisions which normally stipulate some minimum requirements for infrastructural facilities. Only institutions that meet the basic requirements are officially licensed by the governments. In Nigeria, a private higher institution is expected to be accredited by the Federal Government through its agency the (NUC) before granting license to operate. The National University Commission usually set up accreditation panels with duties to inspect the infrastructural facilities, curriculum as well as quality of staff of the private higher institutions that officially applied for license. The Federal Government of Nigeria no doubt adheres strictly to the minimum acceptable requirements before granting license. Commenting on adherence to the basic requirements on private higher education in some African States, Varghese (2004a) noted that though many countries had strict legislations on the infrastructural facilities to be provided, some of the private institutions did not comply. Examples of such non-compliance according to him included some private higher institutions in Cameroon operating with some limited facilities and were yet to be recognized by the government.
Quality of Programme

Since all the private higher institutions in Africa were self-financing, majority of them offered courses in subject areas which require limited investment in infrastructure. Courses in theology, humanities, law, social sciences and education for instance demand less facilities than those of science, engineering and medical courses. It should however be mentioned that in terms of facilities and quality of programme, most of the private institutions in Nigeria were said to be better equipped than most of the public institutions. The yearly reports of the Nigerian University Commission on the qualitative status of universities in Nigeria have publicly acknowledged the above claim.

It is also necessary to add that many of the countries in Africa have already established accreditation agencies to regulate the quality of university education. In the recent past in Nigeria, private higher institutions were claimed to be highly rated in some of the courses than the public institutions. In Kenya as well as in South Africa, most of the private higher institutions had been formally accredited by the accreditation agencies (Varghese 2004a).

Quality of Staff

The quality of staff is perhaps another important factor affecting the quality of education offered in higher institutions. Here, the private higher institutions are claimed to be better placed because they depended heavily on part-time staff drawn mainly from public universities. However, facilities for staff development and research opportunities for staff are limited in the private higher institutions compared with the public institutions.

Performance of Students

The entry level of students on the other hand could also affect their overall performance in the university education. In Nigeria for instance, the Joint Admission Matriculation Board (JAMB) was established by the Federal Government to conduct the University Matriculation Examinations (UME) for students seeking admission to the universities. To get admitted, candidates are expected to score a minimum percentage at the JAMB examination, in addition to obtaining credit passes in at least five subjects which must include English Language at the General Certificate of Education (GCE) ordinary level or its equivalent. The truth of the matter is that most of the students seeking admission to the private higher institutions in Nigeria were those who could not meet the above minimum requirements for admission selection. Since private higher institutions in Nigeria were mostly profit oriented, most of the students entering the private higher institutions were those who could afford the financial implications. However, the private higher institutions have an upper hand in stability of programmes during the session since they are not usually involved in incessant strikes by university students or teachers agitating for some fundamental rights such as salary increase, free university education or improved university facilities. Nigeria has been noted for such incessant strikes which perhaps have affected the quality of the products of public higher institutions in recent years (Yoloye et al 2003).

Relevance of Courses

One important criterion for the success of the private institutions is the employability of its graduates. Specifically, privately-owned institutions in Africa attract candidates with employment oriented courses as well as courses of entrepreneurship skills. Most of the courses that were popular on the employment market and were not offered by the traditional public universities were the favourites of the private higher institutions. Some
of the courses offered in private higher institutions are therefore aimed at providing opportunities for students to get lucrative private-sector jobs, as well as jobs in the multinational corporations and international agencies, or to be self-employed.

**Financing**

Public universities receive a major share of funding from the government, while private institutions seldom obtain financial aid from public authorities. Tuition fees therefore form the financial backbone of many African private higher institutions. The tuition fees in the private higher institutions are therefore normally higher than the public institutions. However the tuition fees in the private higher institutions vary particularly between the non profits oriented institutions and profit oriented higher institutions (Varghese 2004a).

**Theories of Relationships between Public and Private University or Higher education**

Lawton (1992) identified six main relationships between the public and private sectors in the areas of ownership, finance, administration and control of higher education. The first relationship concerns a completely free market of higher education where there would be no government intervention. In such a model, the parents would have complete freedom of choice within the constraints of their ability to pay. This model might not give room for any central monitoring and control of standards, no public financial support while attendance cannot be made compulsory.

The second theory has to do with a completely privatized system of higher education operating within government guidelines. In this second theory, the central monitoring as well as the control system are usually specified by the nation’s legislation. The national laws therefore provide for minimum standards, curriculum, admission conditions, teacher qualification, infrastructural standards, monitoring system and specific conditions for the closure of institutions not meeting the required standards. Lawton (1992) submitted that a regulated privatized system of education had two demerits. Firstly that inspectors would be unable to compel the provision of an institution neither could they encourage quality beyond the defined minimum. Secondly financial problem would make it difficult for private proprietors to perform above what parents could afford.

The third option is privatized system of higher education subsidized by government. The argument in favour of this is that private sectors would be more efficient than the public system because it would enjoy some freedom of bureaucracy. In addition if the private higher institutions failed to be efficient, they would be forced to close down. The argument against the option however, is that such assumptions of closing down inefficient private institutions may not be practicable because of lack of information, apathetic feelings of parents and inability to take action. The fourth option is the theory of competitive relationship between private and public higher education institution. Thaver (2003) argued that since public higher education systems are slow, unresponsive and bureaucratic, an existence of parallel private system would lead to “value for money” for the consumer and is capable of raising the standard of higher education in both sectors.

The fifth option assumes a complementary relationship between public and private higher education institution. In this model, both sectors co-operate to produce the required skilled man power. The sixth option is a system of higher education where only public institutions are permitted. Gianatti (1981) criticized this theory on the basis that it is only possible where
private higher education has failed to be self-regulating and totally irresponsible thereby discouraging people from participating in private higher education.

**Privatization of University Education in the United States of America.**

The right of private school to function is not expressly guaranteed by the American constitution; rather it is implied in the various clauses guaranteeing freedom of choice. Private institutions are however governed by appropriate state laws just as much as the public schools in the United States of America. Apart from the above, private schools are bound by the general laws of the land in such areas as building codes, health law, fire prevention rules etc. (Johnson et al 1998). There are three main kinds of degree granting higher education institutions in the United States. These are the two-year community or junior college, the four year undergraduate college and university. Each category has both public and private institutions.

In the United States, both private and public higher institutions enjoy some degree of autonomy from government control. The Federal government in particular exercises no direct control over the establishment or over the standards they maintain (except for those concerned specifically with preparing military personnel) (Babalola 1998). Both the public and private sectors receive authority from the state in which they are located or incorporated to function. Nearly all the private and public higher institutions in United States receive some form of financial support from government; they are therefore expected to meet certain minimum standards as conditions for financial assistance.

The ideology of privatization of higher education institutions in the United States of America is based on the belief that a variety of institutions is necessary to further America’s tradition of mutual collaboration. Private higher institutions in America are therefore expected to pursue their own supportive, collaborative, independent path for the nation’s good (Babalola 1998). Private higher institutions in the United State have made significant contribution to American education. Firstly, they have furthered the preservation and the strengthening of the cherished ideal of freedom of choice in education. Secondly, by educating a sizable segment of American students, they have helped to reduce the burden on the public school system. Thirdly, they have made distinctive contributions to educational theory and practice (Ikenberry 1974). More than half of higher education institutions in America are private but the public colleges and universities account for approximately 78 percent of the total enrolment. (US Department of Education 1990).

**Japanese Model of Private University Education**

The multiple system of higher education in Japan has similarities to the American system. In the 1950's and 1960's, Japan moved into mass higher education as it allowed the burden of expansion to be shouldered by private institutions. During this period between 75 and 80 percent of the students in higher education were in the private sector (Collins 1989). This is even in contrast with the development in the United States of America where the public higher education institutions account for most of the total enrolment in the universities.

There are three types of higher education institutions in Japan. The first is the national universities. Second, there are universities supported by governments below the central level and lastly, the private universities and colleges (Collins 1989).

Private higher institutions in Japan like their counterparts in America enjoy some degree of autonomy and self-reliance. The major difference between the administration and
control of private higher education in Japan and United States of America is that unlike America, the Japanese private sector has not been able to avoid governmental pressures and influence (Babalola 1998). Clark (1993) submitted that in the 1970’s the Japanese Government worried about the low standards in many of the private higher institutions took some measures for upgrading the private higher institutions by offering financial support on some conditions that the private higher institutions met certain centrally established and monitored guidelines. Perhaps a major feature of the Japanese model is that there are a few imperial universities which are highly rated above all other higher institutions; such imperial universities were accorded higher reputation and status. They enjoyed better facilities, admitted better qualified students and their staff enjoyed better work conditions.

Lessons from the Experiences

Considering the benefits of higher education to the public and the poverty profile of Africans, a completely free market of higher education would be both unfair to the majority of the population and uneconomical to the African society where skilled manpower has been considered as a major constraint to socio-economic development. Nevertheless, a shift towards more privatization in Africa is in good direction because it will change the present pattern of public subsidy and the huge financial resources which governments expend on higher education. It is therefore recommended that Africa should settle for a model that balances between privatization and subsidization.

From the experience of the two advanced nations analyzed, there is no evidence of totally independent private higher institutions. Africans expect every private higher institution to serve the interest of the society just as the public sector. Failure to do this should lead to government intervention and closure of such institution. It is imperative that the private higher institutions in Africa should aspire to be self-reliant. They must also be self-governing and self-regulating like the public institution, but they must be able to impose upon themselves a sense of responsibility. Like the American and Japanese patterns, African governments should monitor and control the standards of both private and public higher institutions. Such monitoring should include the tuition fees charged as well as the quality of research and standard of education.

It is however very important that governments should adequately subsidize students in private higher education in Africa so as to reduce the burden of financing private higher institutions which is usually borne by parents. Government scholarship as well as bursary awards should therefore be extended to students in the private higher institutions. Furthermore, both sectors of higher education should be seen as working hand-in-hand for the success of the society. Perhaps, the Japanese experiment of raising the reputation of a small set of public higher education institutions above others could be imbibed by Africans to provide management example or leadership for private institutions. The Federal Universities in Nigeria for example could serve as models for other public and private higher institutions. Similar institutions could also be established in other African countries as models for the private higher institutions.
REFERENCES


