

An aerial photograph of a city, likely Lagos, Nigeria, showing a dense urban landscape with numerous high-rise buildings and skyscrapers. Several large, mature trees are prominent in the foreground, their green foliage contrasting with the grey and white of the city buildings. The sky is a clear, bright blue. The overall scene is a mix of urban development and natural greenery.

# **DEREGULATING THE PROVISION AND MANAGEMENT OF EDUCATION IN NIGERIA**

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# **DEREGULATION OF THE NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY EDUCATION: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES**

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## **Abstract**

*This paper examines the issues and challenges of deregulating the Nigerian university education. There is an increasing wave of global deregulatory policies and practices in education. Among the raised are access to, excellence and proper funding of university education in Nigeria. The challenges posed by these issues to the Nigerian government, the university system and stakeholders in education highlighted. Suggestions made for improvement include increased funding by the government supplemented by internal fund generating strategies, use of strategic management for improved curricula and academic excellence, and focus on quality of university teachers through professionalism.*

## **Introduction**

Deregulation did not start with education. Rather it started with decreasing government oversight of industries with a view to creating more competitive markets that provide services at lower costs consumers. The concept of deregulation has to do with gradual or of full withdrawal of rules and regulations and control from a business venture or organization so that such organization can make its own rules and regulations for efficient and effective operations. Simply put, deregulation means withdrawal government control in the allocation of resources and production of goods and services. Consequently, allocation of resources and or prices of products are determined by the market forces. With the reduction government influence, the operating rules are relaxed, thereby creating a freer atmosphere for private investment.

The main objective of deregulation is to address the issue of inefficiency, usually brought about by fiscal indiscipline. It also has the objective of addressing the usual lackadaisical attitude of people to government property. With involvement of private organizations or

individuals, the operation of the business is based on actual market situation with profit margin as the performance indicator. The major benefit of deregulation is availability of the product(s).

Nigeria, like other parts of the globe, has witnessed the deregulation of the down-stream oil sector telecommunications, airlines, electricity, and water supplies and recently, the banking sector. Deregulation] has however been extended to education. The emergence of deregulation of the education sector in the last few years could be seen as a response to increased needs and demands on education by population growth and economic and societal necessities. The major focus of deregulating education in developing countries, Nigeria inclusive, is on tuition and other fees. In Nigerian universities for instance, the current 2003/2004 session witnessed an appreciable increase in fees and charges across the board. Accommodation fee, for, example, went up to between ₦10, 000 and ₦20, 000. Specifically at the University of Ilorin, the increase was from ₦1, 090 to ₦10, 000 (917.43%). The major issues of deregulation, bordering on effectiveness of the education system and derivable from appropriate curricula, discipline and excellence, are downplayed

The purpose of this paper therefore, is to address the issues and challenges of accessibility, affordability, excellence and funding of a deregulated Nigerian university education. The paper also examines the challenges these issues pose to the Nigerian government and the university system.

The significance of this paper lies in the fact that deregulation of Nigerian university education has focused on tuition and fees. This paper, viewing deregulation of university education as probably inevitable, emphasizes measures towards improved standards rather than reduced government funding of universities. Hopefully, this approach would stimulate national educational innovation and prepare Nigerian universities and their products for global integration and relevance.

### **The Global Practices of Deregulation of Education**

Initiatives for deregulation of education have been taken by developed and developing countries of the world. In Taiwan for instance, the end to the 40-year long martial law has resulted in the revised I 'diversity Law which reduced the power of the Ministry of Education over higher educational institutions (Tsai, 2001). Consequently, in line with more academic freedom, campus operations have become flexible. The flexibility is especially in the areas of the

tuition each campus charges, the courses offered, the students recruited and the appointment of each college president.

In recent years, Australia has also focused on deregulation of the tuition fees. Coleman (2003) reported that when Australian Labour Government introduced Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) in 1989, it reduced participation by students from poorer families in university education by 12%. With HECS, students are required to pay back about a third of the cost of their degree through a non- interest bearing loan indexed to the consumer prices.

By 1980, in the United States, the government discovered that regulation was becoming stifling. So to bring initiatives towards improvement, deregulation came about. The main focus of education regulation is in the area of parental freedom to control their children's schooling. The most obvious sample of deregulation are school voucher programmes. These programmes distribute public money earmarked for education directly to individual parents to help them send their children to the parochial or secular private schools of their choice. Another example of education deregulation is home schooling which eliminates virtually all government involvement in education, thereby, greatly increasing parental *j.-'* Tiomy (Denisc, 2002).

As far back as 1995, the Indiana General Assembly passed several education bills towards education deregulation (Buechler, 1995). One of these is the Senate Enrolled Act (SEA) 274 that established the Freeway School Programme. Under this programme, a school corporation can sign a contract with the State Board of Education that enables that corporation (or a school within the corporation) to receive waivers from a number of state laws and rules. Areas covered include curriculum, high school graduation time, school construction requirements, pupil-teacher ratio, along with the performance-based accreditation system and financial transfers. In return for the expanded flexibility, schools and individual teacher and principals with the schools are held more accountable for student performance. If the school fail to perform as expected, the contract is rendered void and the corporation can put the schools on academic receivership.

In Britain, too, deregulation has brought about autonomous schools, with greater responsibility placed on the schools to determine their own destinies.

A very important decision that occurs in all deregulation exercises is money in form of higher bills. In education, tuition deregulation is the usual focus, and the resultant high fees have always been met with some resistance by students and their parents but widely accepted by the governmental and institutional authorities. For instance, the proposed tuition deregulation for University of Texas which would save the state between \$300 and \$500 million is seen by university authorities as a move needed to cover the rising cost not budgeted by the state for higher education, if quality education is to be maintained (Castelan, 2004). The students however saw the move as forcing them to get more loans with interests and or spending more time to graduate. The Young Conservatives of Texas (TCY), the state watchdog for higher education, therefore vehemently opposed the move.

In Nigerian education system, deregulatory policies primarily emphasize privatization bordering on founding. Thus, strategic planning at the institutional level, accountability, proper management, functional communications systems are all necessary, but frequently absent, requirements for effective deregulation of the education system. Probably due to the proposed university autonomy, some efforts have been directed at strategic management at the institutional level. This is evident from vision and mission statement of each university, backed up by stated objectives for attainment. It is hoped that deregulatory policies and practices would emphasise curricular innovation and improved management practices of the institutions rather than government handing off funding of university education.

### **Issues and Challenges in Deregulating Nigerian University Education Access**

Deregulation of any sector of any sector of the economy implies less subsidies on that sector by the government. Deregulated education system all over the world has always resulted to less access. As reported by Canadian Federation of Students (2003), due to deregulation, access to higher education has -promised and student debt has skyrocketed. According to the report, students from low-income backgrounds are disappearing from deregulated programmes such as Law and Medicine. Consequently, the average first-year medical student comes from a family whose income is \$140,000 up from \$80,000 four years earlier. And a public examination system, to really merit its name should be accessible to everyone, regardless of how wealthy or poor that are (Coleman 2003).

The effect of the current increases in fees and levies within the Nigerian university system would soon begin to manifest. As reported by Salim (2003), the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) has been recording a steady astronomical rise of application forms. For instance, a rise from 766,000 in 2001/2002 academic session to 1,058,00 in 2002/2003, amounting to 72.4% without a corresponding increase in the number of universities or in the absorptive capacities of the existing universities. Increasing fees and levies without any form of assistance to the low-income group would further reduce access to university education. The issue of access challenges the government involvement in the establishment of more universities, expanding the facilities of the existing ones and giving more financial support to the low-income earners.

### **Funding**

University education is capital-intensive. This is consequent on specialized courses mounted, tailored towards manpower development for the different sectors of the economy. In some countries, students pay full fees through loans. In Australia for instance, loans of up to \$50,000 are made available to full-fee paying students repayable over 10 years at an interest rate of 3.5% per annum and indexed to inflation (Coleman, 2003).

Poor funding has been a major setback to the development of university education in Nigeria J (Uvah, 2003). Nigerian government has been the major financier of university education, until recently when a few private universities were established. Federal government budgetary allocations are being supplemented by charges and levies paid by students and supports by national and international bodies. Bui| as observed by Ukeje (2002), the budget allocation to education is poor and erratic. Consequently, the university system has generally been characterized by overcrowded student hostels, classrooms without adequate seats for students, ill-equipped departmental offices, hostels and faculty buildings without toile facilities and absence of meaningful staff development programmes. We should therefore not be deceived by the amount allocated of education, but rather, we should be concerned about what the money can do *ID* improve university education within the present inflationary trends and continuing increases in staff an student population.

Between 1990 and 2002, the recurrent and capital grants given to the Nigerian federal universities percentages of the universities requests were between 29.87% and 82.18% and between 10.62 and 100.00%, respectively (Uvah, 2003). Averagely, 51.66% and 25.19%

recurrent and capital releases made respectively for the 13-year period. However, the more crucial issue is the decreasing purchase power of the naira due to increasing rate of inflation, the exchange rate and other economic indices. According to Uvah (2003), the value of the naira has been tumbling since 1990s. This is evident from table 1.

**Table 1: Real Value of Grants to Federal Universities as Percentage of Actual Releases**

| YEAR | (1) RELEASES   | (2) REAL VALUE | (2) AS % OF (1) |
|------|----------------|----------------|-----------------|
| 1990 | 641,570,950    | 641,570,950    | 100             |
| 1991 | 704,887,817    | 625,455,028    | 88.7            |
| 1992 | 2,244,173,126  | 1,375,106,082  | 61.3            |
| 1993 | 3,226,229,278  | 1,258,279,750  | 39.0            |
| 1994 | 3,405,345,420  | 845,626,364    | 24.8            |
| 1995 | 4,576,364,236  | 657,429,139    | 14.4            |
| 1996 | 5,924,050,010  | 658,374,084    | 11.1            |
| 1997 | 3,697,819,940  | 378,680,997    | 10.2            |
| 1998 | 7,295,447,524  | 679,214,926    | 9.3             |
| 1999 | 10,362,430,272 | 904,857,690    | 8.7             |
| 2000 | 28,206,218,866 | 2,303,300,577  | 8.2             |
| 2001 | 28,419,719,503 | 1,952,306,073  | 6.9             |
| 2002 | 30,351,483,193 | 1,847,433,392  | 6.1             |

**Source:** Uvah, I.I. (2003). Innovation and University management in the face of dwindling resources, p.8.

Probably to cushion the effect of the proposed university autonomy, federal scholarships have -t- introduced. At the University of Ilorin for instance, 291 and 66 undergraduates (1.96% and 0.45%) were given for 2001/2002 and 2002/2003, respectively (University of Ilorin Academic Planning Unit). These efforts, though commendable, are a far cry from the required financial commitment to university education. This poses the challenge for increased funding to the government and renewed fund-generating drives to the university authorities.

## **Academic Excellence**

In developed countries of the world, in addition to tuition, deregulation programmes are focused on improved standards. In the U.S., schools that get waivers to mount some programmes must prove to be accountable, manifest in evidence of improvement on students' performance. Indianapolis Public Schools (IPS) board for example, establishes expected performance levels and annual evaluation plans for teachers and principals based on the performance of students under their care.

The Nigerian universities are beginning to look in the direction of excellence with reviews of curricula and re-examination of vision and mission. The vision statement of the university of Ilorin is:

“To be an international centre of excellence in learning, research, probity and service to humanity (University of Ilorin, 2003 p. 31).”

Likewise, the mission statement is:

“To provide world-class environment for leaning, research and community service (2003 p. 31).

Appropriate objectives to attain the vision and mission are also stated. Towards this direction, some curricular reviews and academic linkage programmes with western university are being carried out. The University of Ilorin has initiated an academic linkage programme with University of Wisconsin, USA a -; areas of Arts, Science, Agriculture, Medicine, Afro-American studies and Literature (Aliagan, 2004). The national Universities Commission has also initiated a compulsory entrepreneurial education for undergraduates of Nigerian universities (Akintunde, 2004). One of the challenges posed by excellence to university administration is the need to ensure that staff and students understand their roles, duties, limitations, privileges and expectations from the universities. This would ensure a healthy academic environment for the achievement of personal and organizational goals. Furthermore, it might result in healthy competition for excellence among the universities in order to attract the best among the candidates from general pool.

## **Conclusion**

Nigeria is currently witnessing a period when the availability of education and training is being increasingly demanded for, and when the cost of providing these has grown to hitherto unimaginable levels. Coupled with deregulation practices in countries the world over,

deregulation of Nigeria education, especially at the higher level, seems inevitable. However, education is, and should be seen to be, about values. As such, Nigeria must have a focus of how to educate her citizens, not for manpower development alone, but also socially, culturally and politically. Thus, certain measures should be taken against total deregulation of university education in terms of standards and funding. Towards this direction, the following suggestions are made.

### **Suggestions**

While increased federal government budgetary allocations to university education is suggested, total reliance on public funding might be a strategy too remote to be pursued as a single public policy option for the running of Nigerian universities. It is therefore suggested that other sources of internally generated funds be pursued by each university administration. Such sources could include investments such as consultancy services, guest houses, cyber cafes, renting of built-up shops, spaces and recreational facilities, transportation services, putting university research reports and findings on the Internet for sale, and collaborative curriculum and research efforts with national and international organizations. Nigerian universities should take advantage of the on-going academic globalization to improve standards international levels as well as generate foreign exchange earnings. The roles of the other two tiers government and other stakeholders such as parents, Alumni association, and business organizations in funding university education also need to be specified. For instance, private involvement in university education is a welcomed form of deregulation, provided that quality and relevance are not compromised. However, to increase the access of the low-income group within the society who cannot afford the full payment at private universities, the public universities should be more expanded and equipped.

The university autonomy, which is another form of deregulation, is on its way. Using strategic management at the institution level, the autonomy should emphasise improved standards in terms of improved curricula, and academic excellence by all within the system. As important as fund generation is the academic life should not be reduced to a business. Rather, teacher quality in terms of professionalism should be pursued. The current effort of registering university teachers by the Teachers' Registration Council is a right step. With time, professional qualifications would be required before registration.

Deregulation has leadership implications, it behoves the Vice-Chancellor to be an insider and have a clear understanding of the unique requirements of university governance.

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