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## The Quality of Nigeria's Private Universities\*

Olayiwola A. Erinoso\*\*

With the assistance of Diji Aina, Stephen Okhomina,  
and Segun Temilola\*\*\*

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### Abstract

This study is about the quality of private universities in Nigeria. Three of them (Babcock, Bowen and Igbinedion), two mission-sponsored and one that is owned by an entrepreneur, were studied using six indicators of quality assurance that are outlined by GOS Ekhaguere for similar work in African universities. First, the data indicate that the institutions mount academic programmes in science, humanities and, most especially, in the social and management sciences. Second, there is gender parity among students and disparity among staff. Third, the mission institutions are better positioned to give quality education. However, these private universities need to strengthen their staff and improve access to information and communication technologies. There is also room for improving the physical facilities. Overall, the study concludes that while it may be worthwhile to encourage private investors in higher education, this should not be at the expense of public universities because the latter's academic programmes are much more diversified than those which are offered by the former.

### Résumé

Cette étude aborde la question de la qualité des universités privées au Nigeria. Trois d'entre elles (Babcock, Bowen et Igbinedion) dont deux parrainées par les missions et une appartenant à un entrepreneur, ont fait l'objet de cette étude à

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\*\* Department of Sociology, Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye, Ogun State, Nigeria.

\*\*\* Department of Political Science, Babcock University, Ilishan, Ogun State, Nigeria.  
Department of Political Science, Igbinedion University, Okada, Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria.  
Department of Sociology, Bowen University, Iwo, Osun State, Nigeria.

l'aide de six indicateurs d'assurance qualité dont les grandes lignes ont été exposées par GOS Ekhuagere pour un travail similaire dans les universités africaines. D'abord, les données indiquent que les institutions montent des programmes académiques en sciences, lettres et sciences humaines et plus particulièrement dans les sciences sociales et de gestion. Deuxièmement, on remarque la parité hommes-femmes au niveau des étudiants contrairement au niveau du personnel enseignant. Troisièmement, les institutions de mission sont mieux placées pour assurer un enseignement de qualité. Cependant, ces universités privées doivent renforcer leur personnel et améliorer l'accès aux technologies de l'information et de la communication. Il y a lieu également d'améliorer les installations matérielles. Grosso modo, l'étude conclut que bien qu'il soit louable d'encourager les investisseurs privés dans le secteur de l'enseignement supérieur, cela ne devrait se faire au détriment des universités publiques parce que les programmes académiques de ces dernières sont beaucoup plus diversifiés que ceux qui sont offerts par les premières.

### **Introduction**

The mid-1980s witnessed a major transformation in Africa that has had an overarching effect on all sectors including education. The adoption of the structural adjustment programme (SAP) led to the devaluation of national currencies which in turn undermined the capacity of Africa's institutions to achieve their set goals. The infrastructures of schools and hospitals literally collapsed following the adoption of SAP. Furthermore, the conditions of service for public sector personnel in the countries that adopted SAP plummeted while the standard of their institutions declined rapidly. This situation exacerbated the brain drain with skilled workers leaving Africa in droves for high income countries in search of better conditions of service and professional fulfilment. A key element of SAP was the withdrawal of state support from social sector programmes like health and education. African Governments embraced the notion that education should/could be regarded as a private rather than a public good (Sawyerr 2002) in the context in which most of their citizens are living in abject poverty according to successive UNDP annual reports.

One of the ways by which African universities have responded to the crises is by devising various strategies for generating the much needed funds. This is pursued through rapid expansion in student enrolment without corresponding and perceptible increase in the number of quality staff and improvement/expansion of physical facilities. Universities began to mount various attractive market-driven professional degree or diploma courses in order to attract the students that can pay. Students are charged high fees for these programmes in order to generate the funds that are required to increase the salaries of academic staff and improve/expand infrastructures. The other step that the authorities of higher

institutions took was the privatisation of education. Various schemes have been introduced which made it possible for institutions to admit students into fee-paying and subsidized programmes. Those who could pay but could not be admitted under normal circumstances are offered admission under the fee-paying regime, thereby making it possible for the institutions to generate huge sums of money. Institutions that have implemented such a scheme include Makerere University, Olabisi Onabanjo University, Lagos State University, Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, University of Lagos etc.

Another way in which African countries have responded to the demand for higher education in the face of declining resources is to open up the sub-sector to private investors. As will be examined later on, various governments began to issue licenses to private organisations/individuals that have the resources to establish private universities. New private universities are springing up all over Africa to provide education to the yearning masses at fees that are much higher than those of public universities.

The landscape of the higher education sub-sector has changed dramatically within the past decade because of the shift toward a neo-liberal macroeconomic framework. African universities that were originally conceived as developmental institutions to produce high level manpower with government funding have embraced a neo-liberal philosophy in order to survive and also meet the demand for education. They have begun to enrol more students than they can handle effectively. Consequently, the lecturers have begun to spend more hours teaching and therefore they have hardly any time for research. Campuses have become overcrowded amidst limited facilities. The various institutions have witnessed a precipitous decline in the commitment of their staff to knowledge production and quality teaching that is informed by research. A general malaise towards scholarship has crept into them. Above all, the pursuit of material rewards has replaced the presumably hallowed mission of Africa's developmental universities.

### **Overview of Studies on Higher Education in Africa**

There has been a perceptible interest in higher education in Africa as reflected in the body of literature on its scope, place, mission, quality, and performance over the past two decades. The reason for this could be linked to the widely shared concern among scholars, bilateral, and multilateral organisations on the declining standard of higher education all over Africa with the exception of South Africa.<sup>1</sup> As a result, nearly all aspects of university education such as funding, access, equity, gender mainstreaming, infrastructural decay, the impact of information and communication technologies (ICT), to name some, have been addressed.

Available literature contains studies on the interplay between the paradigm shift on financing of higher education in developing countries, most especially in Africa (Obasi 2002). The reports on funding explore the benefits of cost sharing and/or how to generate the much needed resources for public universities in Africa (Johnstone 2004; Ishengoma 2004; Bloom et al. 2005).

Various other reports/studies address the impact of information and communication technologies (Adam 2003); the challenges in capacity building (Sawyer 2004); academic freedom (Zezeza 2003); attributes of university students including tracers studies on how well they are doing in the job market (Mayanja et al. 2001). There are also farsighted proposals on how to restore the lost glory of African universities in the literature.

Further attempts have been made to examine the merits and demerits of cross-border higher education (Knight 2004) including the consequences of the brain drain in Africa (Dovlo 2004). Similarly, other scholars have undertaken a critical appraisal of the World Bank's prescription for higher education in Africa (Hoebink et al. 2004; Jibril 2004) or the possible consequences of the '*massification*' of university education on knowledge acquisition and production (Bature 2004). There is also a genuine concern for the quality of higher education as attempts are made to expand enrolment, prompting Ekhaguere (2001) to outline a set of quality assurance indicators with the support of the Association of African Universities (AAU).

One other major area of interest is the impact and response of higher institutions to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. There is evidence most institutions have responded slowly to the epidemic and it is still doubtful if the situation has changed because their authorities bury their 'heads in the sand like ostriches' (Kelly 2001). He further argued that:

The most striking feature of the university response to HIV/AIDS is what can only be described as the awe-inspiring silence that surrounds the disease at institutional, academic, and personal levels. Notwithstanding some qualifications, for all practical purposes both individuals and institutions conduct themselves as if the disease did not exist.

The ominous silence on such a virulent disease prompted a number of scholars and agencies to study the response of higher institutions in Africa to the epidemic (Chetty 2006; Kelly 2001; Stremlau & Nkosi 2001; Otaala 2006; Ayim 2002; Africa-America Institute 2003; Association of African Universities 2006). A few others organized meetings to underscore the need to tackle the epidemic with all the zeal that is required in these institutions (Ayim 2002; Association of Commonwealth Universities 2001; Otaala 2006; Kelly 2001; World Bank 2001).

Although the emergence and proliferation of private universities is also of critical interest to scholars, nevertheless studies on them are still relatively few and far between. A study by the Association of African Universities (2000) provides an overview of their number, mission statement, and proprietors. Another describes the scope, programme, size, staffing situation, governance structure, financial environment, and regulations of such institutions in six African countries (Thaver 2004). Also, Useem (1999a:1999b) examined the emergence of Muslim institutions of higher learning in East Africa and the gap that they fill while Ruth (2005) and Oanda (2005) explore gender related issues. By and large, a cursory survey of available literature suggests that much more could still be learned if in-depth studies of Africa's private universities were to be conducted.

### Rationale and the Objective of the Study

This study was therefore conceived against the backdrop of the dearth of studies on private universities in Africa, using Nigeria as a reference point. Private universities are novel institutions because most of Africa's universities are publicly owned. They have multiplied considerably over the past decades by the tables below (Tables 1 and 2) and it is vital to appraise their quality and potential contributions to development.

**Table 1:** Private Higher Educational Institutions and Universities in Africa

Country	Private Institutions
Benin	27
Cameroon	17
Ghana	28 (9 university colleges)
Nigeria	26++
Kenya	14
Senegal	48
Tanzania	0
Uganda	12
Zimbabwe	4
South Africa	99

**Notes:** ++ The Government has since approved 32 universities.

**Source:** Policy Forum on Private Higher education, 2004; (HEP, ADEA and AAU).

**Table 2:** Total Enrolment in Private Universities for Selected African Countries (2002)

Countries	Total Enrolment	As % of All Universities
South Africa	30, 000	5% of total
Zimbabwe	1,797	20%
Uganda	13,126	16%
Ghana	5,383	10%
Tanzania	28,910	Less than 10%
Nigeria	19,740*	More than 3%

**Source:** Policy forum on private higher education, 2004 (HEP, ADEA and AAU).

**Notes:** \* Current enrolment must be above the figures in this table in view of the fact that more private universities have been licensed.

Various concerned stakeholders are now inclined to raise a number of issues on the emergence/proliferation of private universities in Africa. Of significance is the worry in some quarters about the capacity of Africa's private universities to meet the needs of society much more effectively than public universities. Besides and much more important in this context is the feeling about the capacity of these institutions to provide quality education or education that is at par with the standard in public universities before the latter slipped into disrepute and decay.

Quality assurance now occupies the centre-stage in higher education because of the proliferation of higher institutions of learning and programmes that are established in response to markets.<sup>2</sup> Institutions are either being rated by external agencies or are inclined to initiate self-appraisal of their programmes in order to show their worth, attract students, and meet the expectations of their funders or the public at large. Rating becomes the selling point for higher institutions in the marketplace.

The annual rating of universities within nation-states and across international boundaries and within nations is therefore the vogue today. The institutions that are highly rated attract large numbers of applicants who are also in turn likely to secure lucrative jobs much more easily and quickly than those at the lowly rated ones. Consequently, there is now a shift from the notion that quality could be presumed once higher institutions are granted the license to operate by the responsible national authorities. Various countries now establish a continuous evaluation regime by self-appraisal, peer review, and/or some other independent external agencies.

This study provided a golden opportunity to ascertain the quality of Nigeria's private universities. Even though the National Universities Commission (NUC) has established a Quality Assurance Unit, it is vital for the agency to appreciate the fact that the accreditation of an institution is not coterminous with quality assurance. Quality incorporates more indicators such as governance of an institution, gender mainstreaming, scope access to information and communication technologies etc. than just those that are taken into consideration during accreditation.

The aim of the study would almost be met if quality is recognised as an important issue by NUC as well as given the necessary boost in the research agenda. Both the public and private institutions should be subjected to critical appraisal on a continuous basis in order to restore the confidence of the consumers, their funders and the international community in the degrees that are awarded by Nigeria's universities.

### **Historical Antecedents on University Education in Nigeria**

Nigerians traversed all parts of the globe in search of university education prior to the establishment of the first full-fledged university in the country in 1948. However, the first batch of graduates of Nigerian origin obtained their degrees in the middle of the eighteenth century.

The first tertiary institution in the country was Yaba Higher College which was established in 1934 (Clark 2004). But the dropout rate was high while Nigerian nationalists also criticised the college for what they believed was its sub-standard level of education. Yaba College soon slipped into disrepute, forcing the colonial authorities to constitute a Commission that examined the feasibility of university education for the country.<sup>3</sup>

The Government subsequently established the first university in Nigeria (viz., University College, Ibadan) in 1948 shortly after the recommendation of the Commission was adopted. It began as a college of the University of London. The examiners came from London University and the Senate of the University granted the degrees of the early batches of students who received their education at Ibadan College.

Later on, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife (viz., then known as the University of Ife), Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, and the University of Nigeria, Nsukka were established by the Governments of Western, Northern and Eastern respectively. The Federal Government added the University of Lagos to its list of institutions in 1962. By and large, the quality of these pioneer institutions was not only beyond reproach (Ade-Ajayi 2001) but also at par with that of universities in the United Kingdom.

University education in Nigeria has grown well beyond imagination. There are now 88 (viz., 28 federal universities, 28 state-owned universities, and 32 private universities in Nigeria today.<sup>4</sup>

One of the principal reasons for the rapid expansion of university education in Nigeria is the demand for it in the population. Nigerians believe that university education will open opportunities to them, hence their insatiable demand for it. Not less than a million Nigerians annually seek admission into all the degree-awarding institutions in the country. Yet, all the institutions in the country can barely accommodate 2 percent to 3 percent of the qualified candidates (National Universities Commission 2004).

The rapid expansion of universities is at a price to the nation. Universities are facing serious crises in all respects. The physical facilities of all public universities that offer most of the places to students are grossly inadequate and/or in a complete state of disrepair. Their libraries are bereft of leading international journals and new books while the quality and quantity of teachers have declined. Most of them also lack information and communication technologies. Finally, most of the public institutions have become a haven for cultism, sexual harassment, and other unsavoury practices.

One of the reasons for the deplorable state of Nigeria's public universities is uncontrolled expansion. Banjo (2004), a former Vice-Chancellor of Nigeria's premier University, the University of Ibadan, observed that:

Ibadan is the first degree-awarding institution in the country ....Then followed the big explosions: seven new universities in the seventies and eighties. Clearly, other motivations than excellence were behind this proliferation. Not unexpectedly, the new universities found it hard to keep up with the older ones, and what is worse, they have had the effect of dragging these older ones down with them into the quagmire of under-funding and a welter of attendant problems, not least of which is compromised quality.

Prolonged military rule affected all departments of life in Nigeria including universities (Alubo 1999; Adesina et al. 2004). Successive military regimes eroded the autonomy of these institutions and most of the vice-chancellors gradually became dignified agents of the government of the day. Military rule also affected management style as well as subverted the due process that is customary of universities (Ekong 2002). The self-concept of academics and the capacity of their institutions to play their accustomed role in society also diminished.

The final assault on universities came through the implementation of SAP in the 1980s. SAP, as was observed earlier on, has had a deleterious impact on the funding of these institutions (Obikoya 2002) resulting in low salaries and poor



facilities and low morale. The Nigerian authorities searched for a solution elsewhere rather than mitigate the effects of SAP. The Government began to look towards the private sector providers in higher education. They opened the gate for them to establish universities.

The proliferation of such institutions is throwing up unanticipated challenges. Some observers are inclined to argue that the approval of private universities is without regard to their capacity to provide quality education. Others are of the view that they can only fill certain gaps and would therefore not be in a position to offer wide ranging courses as in public universities. Be that as it may, the emergence of private universities offers an opportunity to appraise their potential benefits and the possible risks.

### **Studies on Higher/University Education in Nigeria**

Past studies on Nigeria's universities are relatively few and far between since the establishment of the first university in the country nearly fifty-nine years ago. Early reports on university education consist of commentaries in national newspapers and the reports of commissions and panels that were set up to provide justification for higher education in the colonies. Among the early reports was that of the Sir Eric Ashby Commission (1960) which recommended the establishment of University College, Ibadan.

The establishment of the first university in the country (i.e., University College, Ibadan), stimulated studies on higher education and reports trickled into the literature by the 1960s. Among the baseline work on higher education was the monograph by Yesufu (1973) which was the first systematic attempt to appraise the role universities in Africa including Nigeria. Van den Berghe et al. (1969) conducted a study on the social characteristics of Nigerian university students. The lead author on the attributes of students also published a monograph on campus politics in a Nigerian university in the late sixties. An excellent critique of the educated elite by Ayandele (1974) was to follow.

But the past two decades have witnessed a plethora of reports and studies that describe the factors that account for the collapse of universities. Among such reports are those by the: Social Science Academy of Nigeria (SSAN) (2001; 2003), and the Ford Foundation (2001) including eight projects that were sponsored by a consortium of four US Foundations.<sup>5</sup>

Work by Adalemo (2001) concluded that institutional inadequacies have affected the performance of Nigeria's universities. His assertions are borne out of the fact the facilities are in a complete state of disrepair. Quite a number of the observations by this writer are corroborated in the case studies of four Nigerian universities by SSAN. The reports found decay of physical facilities; underde-

veloped information and communication technologies; and outdated academic programmes in these institutions.

Scholars like Ade-Ajayi (2001) traced the problem of Nigeria's universities to the adoption of SAP at the instance of the Bretton Wood Institutions. According to him, the World Bank plays a palpable role in education in Africa as amply demonstrated by the influence of its vision on the thinking of African policy makers. Ade-Ajayi intoned (2001):

The confusion about Universal Basic Education persist because, although we usually deny it, our policies are, to a large extent, teleguided by World Bank/IMF who use the debt burden to extract compliance even non policies about which there are serious doubts among our policy makers. Since the 1970s, the World Bank has been pushing the heretical idea that the return to the state compared with the return to the individual beneficiary is highest in elementary education and lowest in higher education and, therefore, the state must, in the name of structural adjustment, increase the allocation of resources to elementary education at the expense of higher education.

Available reports also contain suggestions on how to generate funds for university education. Perhaps, the most articulate paper on financing options is by Ukeje (2002) that outlines the following as an important source of funds for running universities: education tax fund, fees, loans to students, transfer of municipal services to government, private sector contributions, and funds from alumni and rationalisation of programmes including scholarships for brilliant and/or poor students. While agreeing, Obikoya (2002) outlined the effects of under-funding on university education.

The response of the authorities of the institutions to the funding crises has been to *massify* university education through the introduction of wide-ranging off-campus and/or extramural diploma and degree programmes. Large numbers of students now pay high fees for various market-driven degree programmes like banking, marketing, accounting, personnel management etc. However, the sudden explosion in the intake of students has had serious consequences.

But universities have also contributed to the crises in a number of ways. In the first place, the universities responded to the dearth of funds by devising various ingenious means of mobilising funds. First, they have launched numerous mouth watering degree programmes in order to attract students who are in turn charged outrageous fees. Programmes in labour and industrial relations, banking and finance, counselling, personnel, including managerial psychology, secretarial studies that are ostensibly dubbed professional courses have been launched in various universities. Lecturers are forced to mark hundreds or thou-

sands of scripts and no wonder quite a number simply do not just bother to mark them but merely supply marks to the departmental examination officers. There are stories that 'money changes hand' for marks. Results are not released on time and students that need transcripts for admission or for some other purposes face a hard time obtaining them (Erinosho 2004).

Ethics also loom large in work in higher education in Nigeria. There are reports of cultism, sexual harassment, and other nefarious acts that undermine the quality of education. Self-sponsored publications and books have overtaken the practice of peer review of scholarly publications while the leadership at the departmental and university levels is notorious for corruption and unethical behaviour patterns. The scope of the problems facing universities is amply documented in a study on university governance as well as in the proceedings of the Academy's 13th General Assembly (Social Science Academy of Nigeria 2001:2003).

The decline in the quality of higher education can be explained by poor funding. The assumption is that the introduction of fees will expand the resource base of these institutions and free funds for improving their facilities and the salaries of teachers. The government position is as follows:

One of the major problems of university education delivery in Nigeria is inadequate funding. Through the studies conducted by the education sector analysis working groups, the cost of training an undergraduate student in any discipline in Nigeria has been calculated. Following from this is how this cost can be shared among the stakeholders. This is to relieve Government of the burden of having to fund university education alone. Through cost sharing, more funds will be available to the universities to improve facilities.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is about the quality of Nigeria's private universities. Although the Government is determined to licence as many of them as presumably meet the set conditions, it is doubtful whether private universities have the capacity to fill the gap that is being created by the poor state of public universities. While competition between the private and public is desirable, it seems that there is a need to ascertain whether private universities are in a position to meet the accustomed standard let alone solve all the crises in higher education in the country.

The Christian Missionaries have been active in the education sector from colonial times. It is therefore not surprising that they have been in the forefront of higher education in Nigeria since the authorities decided to encourage the private sector to establish such institutions. Most of them to-date are owned by Missions. Overall, the private universities in Nigeria could be grouped into those that are founded by: (a) Orthodox or Pentecostal Christian organisations; (b)

Muslim bodies; (c) entrepreneurs who work solo or in partnership; and (d) Nigerians who are in partnership with foreigners/bodies. The key private sector providers of higher education in the country today are the Seventh Day Adventists, the Pentecostals like the Church of the Living Faith (otherwise known as Winners Chapel), the Redeemed Christian Church of God, Church of God Mission, Baptist, Anglican, and Muslim organizations. The Catholics and Methodists are about to establish their institutions.

One of the reasons why missionaries are responding is because of the rot in the public universities (i.e., they are mired in various unethical and anti-social practices). Another is due to incessant strike actions by academic and non-academic staff, resulting in students spending too many years gaining their degrees/diplomas. Consequently, the private sector especially the missions are determined to restore the lost glory of higher education in the country. They are concerned about bringing morality back into higher education as amply shown in the mission statements of two of the three that were studied.

### **Setting of the Study**

This study was conducted in three of Nigeria's private universities, namely, Babcock University, Ilishan, Ogun State; Bowen University, Iwo, Osun State; and Igbinedion University, Okada, Benin City, Edo State. They were selected based on certain distinctive attributes that would provide the basis for comparative analysis.

The first of them, Babcock University, was established by the Seventh Day Adventists Church of Nigeria in 1999 with the aim of:

Building people for leadership through quality Christian education; transforming lives; and impacting society for positive change through the prevailing influence of its graduates in service to humanity.

It is a residential institution which runs academic programmes leading to the award of first degrees in the humanities, social and management sciences, nursing, public health, education, and agriculture which is mandatory for all private universities in the country. The students' population is expected to rise to 5,000 from its current level of 3,551 in the next five years. Finally, the institution plans to establish degree programmes in law, security services, and medicine within the foreseeable future.

Secondly, the Nigerian Baptist Convention established Bowen University as a residential institution in 2001 in order to provide:

High quality, morally sound and socially-relevant education in the most cost-effective manner to all students irrespective of gender, race, colour, ethnicity or religion.

The students' population of the university which is currently 3,447 is expected to rise to 5,200 over the next five years. Bowen runs degree programmes in the sciences, social and management sciences and agriculture as required by the Nigerian authorities. It plans to introduce degree programmes in nursing, physiology, optometry, and medicine in five years' time.

Finally, the third institution, Igbinedion University, was founded by Gabriel Igbinedion (viz., a Bini Chief and entrepreneur) in 1999 with the aim of:

Pursuing excellence in teaching, research, and scholarship through the provision of world class facilities and opportunities for education, training, and employment to all those who are able to benefit without discrimination.

This residential institution runs a fairly ambitious academic programme that leads to the award of degrees in engineering (viz., mechanical, civil, electrical, petroleum, chemical), law, medicine, the health sciences, and agriculture. It also runs degree programmes in accounting, banking and finance, international relations, business administration, marketing, public relations, advertising and in the humanities (i.e., English, Theatre Arts). The students' population is expected to rise from 5,100 to 10,000 in the next five years.

Two of the universities are owned by corporate organisations (i.e., Christian missions) and a businessman is the proprietor of the third. However, Babcock stands out among the three institutions because the parent international wing of the Seventh Day Adventists exercises supervisory role over its programmes. The parent body has about 103 universities worldwide and Babcock is regularly reviewed by the parent body.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Three instruments were designed to gather data. The first (i.e., the institutional questionnaire) was designed to gather the following from each of the institutions: mission statement; year of establishment; history of institution; number of staff and students; gender of staff and students; academic qualifications of teaching staff; current and projected students' population; range of available facilities (i.e., both physical and information and communication technologies) including availability of, and access to, these facilities. Each institution was also requested to indicate the format for assessing its students – whether it incorporates term papers and continuous assessment and whether it organises tutorials for them.

The second questionnaire targeted the academic staff members of each of the institutions. They were requested to provide the following: academic qualifications; working experience, areas of specialisation, the thrust of their research work, and whether they have access to ICT in their offices. It also provided the

opportunity to corroborate the information that is provided by each of the institutions concerning their pedagogy (viz., tutorials etc) and mode of assessment of their students (viz., terms papers, continuous assessment etc.). The instruments also sought to gather information on whether their institution runs a staff development programme.

Finally, the third questionnaire was administered to students using purposive sampling technique. It was designed to gather information on their social background attributes (age, gender, religion, etc. including parental background income, education etc.), reasons for enrolling in the institution, attitudes to academic programmes, aspiration, aspects of pedagogy at the institution etc.

The data from the academic staff and students were procured in order to corroborate the information that was furnished by the authorities of the institutions on aspects of quality. Much more important is the fact that the data were gathered for the purposes of ascertaining quality which was the principal goal of the study. Ekhuagere (2001) hitherto outlined thirteen indicators of quality for universities in Africa that consist of: (i) vision, mission and goals; (ii) teaching and learning process; (iii) assessment; (iv) research; (v) organizational and management structures; (vi) planning budgeting and human resources; (vii) campus and community relations; (viii) norms, values and ethnics; (ix) gender equity; (x) facilities; (xi) new technologies; (xii) internationalisation; and (xiii) response to changing demands. However, six of them that are listed as follows are used in this study to ascertain quality: mission statement, assessment, teaching facilities, gender equity, information and communication technologies, physical facilities were used to judge quality in this study.

The data were coded, entered into the computer, and processed, using a variety of statistical techniques. The qualitative data were extracted and reviewed before inclusion in this paper.

### **Outcomes**

All the authorities of the universities completed the institutional questionnaire. Secondly, one hundred and seventy academic staff (22 from Igbinedion; 75 from Bowen and 79 from Babcock universities respectively) completed the questionnaire. Finally, 1,846 students were broken down as follows: 855 – Igbinedion; 714 – Bowen; and 277 – Babcock completed the questionnaire. The staff and students were self-administered.

The three institutions proclaim a laudable mission and vision which underscore their commitment to moral and quality education with the exception of Igbinedion which is not as concerned with morality as the mission-owned institutions.

Table 3 below indicates the focus of the degree programmes in these institutions. Emphasis is on social and management sciences, followed by the sciences. The majority of their students are therefore enrolled in market-driven courses such as banking and finance, accounting, business administration. However, Igbinedion runs more diversified degree programmes than Babcock and Bowen. By and large, the courses that are offered in private institutions are not as diversified as those in the public in the country.

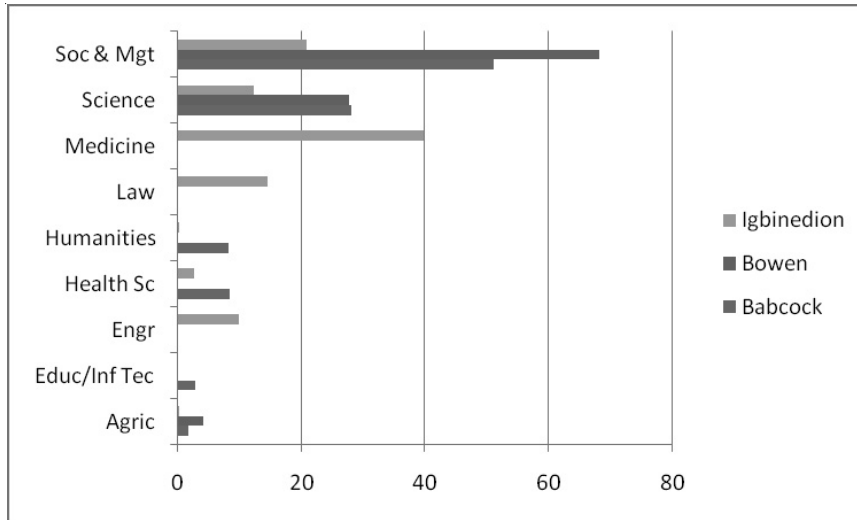
**Table 3:** Current Enrolment by Disciplines in Selected Universities

Disciplines	Babcock University		Bowen University		Igbinedion University		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Agriculture	59	1.6714	4.11	11	0.22	210	1.74	
Education & Information Mgt	97	2.73	Nil	Nil	Nil		97	0.80
Engineering	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	502	9.84	502	4.15
Health Sciences	297	8.37	Nil	Nil	133	2.60	430	3.55
Humanities	293	8.25	Nil	Nil	9	0.18	302	2.50
Law	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	735	14.41	735	6.08
Medicine	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	2026	39.73	2,026	16.75
Science	993	27.96	955	27.70	629	12.33	2,577	21.30
Social & Management Sciences	1812	51.032	2350	68.18	1055	20.69	5,217	43.12
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,551</b>	<b>100.1</b>	<b>3,447</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>5,100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>1,2098</b>	<b>100</b>

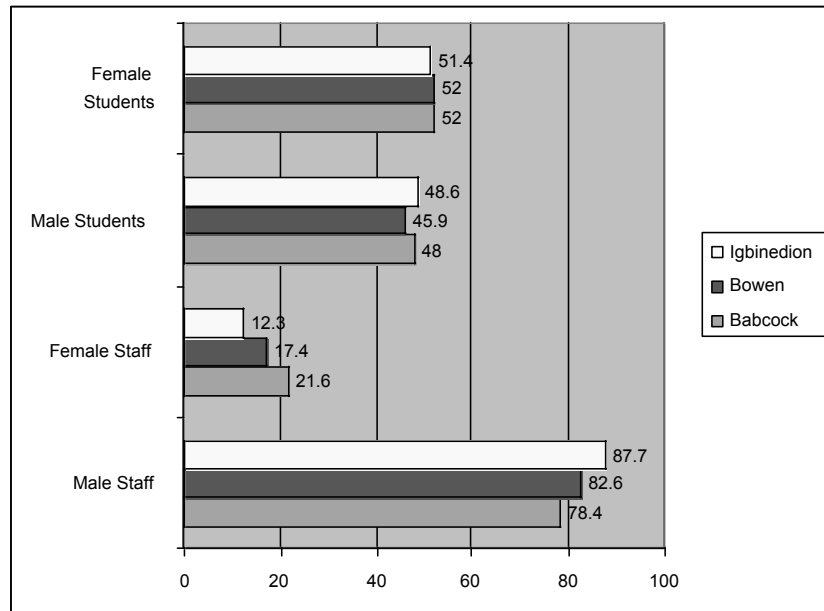
Table 4 as well as Figure 2 indicate that there are slightly more female than male students but more male than female academic staff in all the institutions. Furthermore, the ratio of academic staff to students is better at Babcock and Bowen than at Igbinedion (viz., 1:17 at Babcock; 1:22 at Bowen and 1:32 at Igbinedion).

The mission institutions have more PhD degree holders among their academic staffs than Igbinedion and presumably a higher calibre of teachers than the latter (i.e. Igbinedion) if this is adjudged by the number of doctorate vis-à-vis those with Masters' degree holders. There is 1 doctorate degree holder to 46 students at Babcock; 1: 49 at Bowen and 1 to 134 at Igbinedion. The table also indicates that Babcock has 1 academic staff to 17 students while there is 1 to 22 at Bowen and 1 to 33 at Igbinedion.

**Figure 1:** Scope of Academic Programmes Offered in Nigeria’s Private Universities



**Figure 2:** Gender of Staff and Students





**Table 4: Gender of Staff and Students in the Selected Universities**

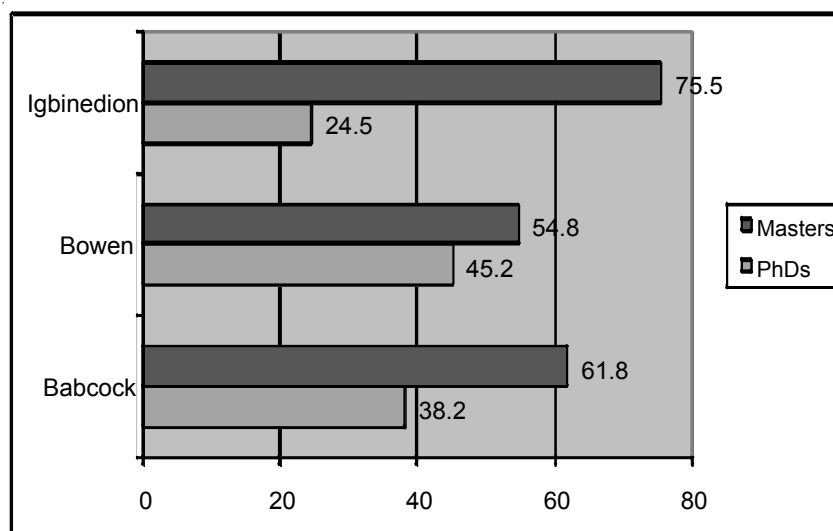
Universities	Male Staff		Female Staff		Total		Male Students		Female Students		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Babcock University	160	78.4	44	21.6	204	100	1,706	48.0	1,845	52.0	3,551	100
Bowen University	128	82.6	27	17.4	155	100	1,583	45.9	1,864	54.1	3,447	100
Igbinedion University	136	87.7	19	12.3	155	100	2,484	48.6	2,626	51.4	5,110	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>424</b>	<b>82.5</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>17.5</b>	<b>514</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>5,773</b>	<b>47.7</b>	<b>6,335</b>	<b>52.3</b>	<b>12,108</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 5:** Qualifications of Academic Staff by Universities

Universities	PhD Holders			Masters holders		Total		
	No.	Ratio*	%	No.	%	No.	%	Ratio**
Babcock University (Students' Pop=3,551)	78	<b>1:46</b>	38.2	126	61.8	204	100	<b>1:17</b>
Bowen University (Students' Pop=3,441)	70	<b>1:49</b>	45.2	85	54.8	155	100	<b>1:22</b>
Igbinedion University (Students' Pop=5,110)	38	<b>1:134</b>	24.5	117	75.5	155	100	<b>1:33</b>

\*Ratio of PhDs to total number of students.

\*\*Ratio of total academic staff to students.

**Figure 3:** Academic Qualifications of Staff

Further analysis of the data on the indicators of quality is undertaken in Table 6 below on their physical facilities including information and communication technologies. The mission-based institutions are better equipped than Igbinedion judging by access to space, and vital facilities like common and reading rooms as well as ICT. The facilities are poorer at Igbinedion than the two mission institutions. But the average number of students per room is comparable across the institutions.

Babcock ranks very high on the indicators dealing with capacity enhancement of staffs and students; followed by Bowen while Igbinedion is in the last position (see Table 7 below). Also, tutorials, term papers, handouts, and continuous assessment are incorporated into pedagogy at Babcock and Bowen with the exception of term papers in context of the latter. This is far from being the case at Igbinedion University where only continuous assessment is reported.

Faculty and departmental seminars are organised at Babcock while Bowen and Igbinedion universities do not. Moreover, Babcock University is committed to staff development in contrast to Igbinedion which has not established the mechanism for sponsoring its staff for higher education. Bowen seems to be making some effort in this regard.

It is self-evident in Table 8 that Babcock has more books per student than the two other institutions. There are about 12.6 books per student at Babcock in contrast to 2.56 per student at Bowen and 5.34 books per student at Igbinedion in their main libraries. The mission universities are also better placed than Igbinedion with regard to sitting capacity in their respective libraries. There are 10 seats to a student at Babcock; 4.3 to a student at Bowen and 46 to a student at Igbinedion. Overall, the table shows 10.4 students to a seat at Babcock; 6 staff/students to a seat at Bowen and 47.4 staff/students to a seat at Igbinedion.

Most of the staff members indicate that they would not like to spend the rest of their career in these institutions with the staffs at Bowen and Igbinedion itching to find their way to other institutions due to the conditions of service and the dearth of the wherewithal to provide quality education. About 60 percent of the staff that are surveyed in Igbinedion and 56 percent at Bowen would not like to work for the rest of academic life at these institutions in contrast to 27 percent at Babcock. Between 60 percent and 86 percent of the staff members who completed the questionnaire indicate that their remuneration is not competitive while between 50 percent and 84 percent of the students who completed our questionnaire in the three institutions were dissatisfied with their hostels but pleased with the way they are taught.

**Table 6: Physical and ICT Facilities**

	Physical Facilities				Information & Communication Technology			
	Common Rooms	Reading Room	Halls of Residence	Staff Access	Students Access	Networking	Internet Connectivity	
Babcock University	Yes	Yes	Yes 4 /6 per room	No	No	Yes	Yes	
Bowen University	Yes	Yes	4 to 8 per room	No	Yes	No	Yes	
Igbinedion University	No	Yes	Yes, 4 per room	No	No	No	Yes	

**Table 7: Staff/Students' Capacity Enhancement Indicators**

	Staff Development Indicators				Students' Capacity Enhancement Indicators			
	Staff Devt. Programme	Faculty Seminars	Dept. Seminars	Tutorials	Term Paper	Continuous Assessment	Handouts	
Babcock University	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Bowen University	Yes	Slightly Yes	Slightly Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	
Igbinedion University	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	

**Table 8: Library Facilities**

Institutions	Library Stock		Sitting Capacity of Library		Sitting Capacity	
	Number	Ratio of Books per Student	No of seats	Ratio of seats per Student	No of Seats	Ratio of seats per Staff/Students
Babcock University	44,740	1:12.60	360	1:10	360	1:10.4
Bowen University	8,838	1:2.56	800	1:4.3	800	1:6
Igbinedion University	27,000	1:5.34	110	1:46	110	1:47.4

### Discussion

The mission statements of the institutions proclaim their commitment to quality education and morality with the exception of Igbinedion which is less concerned with moral education. They provide an avenue for female education in view of the fact that they enrol more female and male students. However, there is gross gender imbalance among their academic staff members.

The academic programmes of these institutions are driven by markets rather than by a commitment to diverse disciplines. They offer degree programmes in the social and management sciences: accounting, banking and financing, marketing, public relations, business administration with the exception of Igbinedion which offers courses in engineering and medicine. This notwithstanding, most of Igbinedion's students are also enrolled in the market-driven courses like banking and finance, advertising etc.

The physical and academic facilities of the mission institutions are of a higher grade than those at Igbinedion. There are more books per student at Babcock and Bowen than at Igbinedion and equally higher ratios of seats per staff/student at the former than the latter. Igbinedion seems to have expanded its students' population beyond its capacity while the students' hostels at all the three institutions are overcrowded (viz., four to six or eight six students per room). This situation is by no means different from what is currently happening in many public universities in Nigeria whose hostels are notoriously overcrowded. But Babcock and Bowen Universities seem to make up for their overcrowded hostels by the provision of common and reading rooms which are not available at Igbinedion.

ICT is fairly developed at Babcock, followed by Bowen in contrast to the situation at Igbinedion where this is not the case. Overall, the staffs and students do not have free access to the Internet because the hostels and offices have not been networked.

One of the remarkable differences between Babcock and the other two is the fact that the former attaches importance to staff development and also utilises the appropriate strategies like term paper and tutorials to develop the capacity of its students in contrast to Bowen and Igbinedion. Igbinedion is perhaps worse off when compared to Bowen in this regard. Babcock also shows appreciation for departmental and faculty seminars. Bowen currently organizes departmental seminars while Igbinedion is yet to appreciate the importance of both the faculty and departmental seminars.

All the three institutions have hired more Masters' than doctorate degree holders as teachers. Overall, Igbinedion is worse off when compared to the other two institutions. This explains why Igbinedion is unable to utilise various strat-

egies like term papers and tutorials to develop the capacity of its students. The ratio of staff to students is bigger at Igbinedion and the institution would need several hours and small rooms for tutorials while its limited number of staff would be forced to spend hours reviewing the students' term papers. In any case, Babcock seems to be more committed to quality in this regard than any of the other two while Bowen is a shade better than Igbinedion. It is unlikely that Igbinedion will be able to improve on these factors as long as it admits large numbers of students into its programmes.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The Government of Nigeria is determined to deregulate the higher education sub-sector. Consequently, the sector is now open to private investors who are drawn from the Christian/Muslim missions as well as solo and group entrepreneurs. The aim of government is to widen access to higher education and also promote quality education. Private universities are now springing up all over the country due to the new policy on higher education. It is reported that hundreds of applications are under consideration while the NUC is likely to approve all those that satisfy the presumably stringent conditions.

While the privatisation of university education is in consonance with the trends in other parts of Africa, it seems that there is need for the authorities to exercise great caution over the implementation of this policy. The data paint a dismal picture of the quality of private universities which are expected to fill the niche created by the deteriorating situation in the public institutions.

The academic programmes of private universities are circumscribed. The founders are inclined to mount courses that will attract students or money or both and they may also be inclined to sacrifice quality. The courses are mainly in the social and management sciences (e.g., banking and finance, business administration, accounting, economics).

The outcomes of this study inevitably lead a crucial question concerning the place of private universities in Nigeria. Can such institutions replace the publicly funded universities? Certainly not, as amply indicated in data on the range of degree programmes that are being offered in the private vis-a-vis public institutions. Thus, any thinking in government circles that private can replace the public would amount to missing the point. It therefore stands to reason that it is in the national interest of low-income countries like Nigeria to invest in public universities while encouraging the private ones. The data indicate that the assumption that the private can fill the gap that is created by the collapse of the public or meet national needs in an effective way may not be valid after all.

It is important for the Nigerian Authorities to appreciate the fact that high-income countries like the United Kingdom, Canada and Australia still invest in



their public universities while giving room to the private investors in higher education. Similarly, the Governments of Ghana (*viz.*, a low income country) and South Africa are still striving to keep their public universities in a remarkably excellent shape while also encouraging private investors in higher education because they still regard education as a public good. More important, countries like Canada, Australia, South Africa, and Ghana to name a few, show appreciation of the fact the private universities are unlikely to meet their countries' needs in such expensive academic programmes like engineering, medicine, agriculture, land management etc. The point is that the promotion of private universities should not be at the expense of the public universities because of their circumscribed academic programmes. Consequently, investment in public universities is not only wise but necessary if the much desired socio-economic development is to be achieved.

More specifically, it is vital to focus on quality in the emerging private universities. Even though the private universities are doing extremely well by engendering higher education in view of the ratio of male to female students, they are however still a long way in ensuring gender parity on staffing. The academic staff members in the three institutions are largely male. Besides, they need to attract more qualified teachers because they are bereft of holders of doctorate degree. They are also inclined to depend on lots of part-time teachers or those who are on sabbatical leave who are mostly drawn from the public institutions that are being vilified by the Nigerian Authorities.

Although the mission institutions (*viz.*, Babcock and Bowen) are striving to maintain a high standard, this does not appear to be the case at Igbinedion which is founded by an entrepreneur. This significant should be noted by policy makers who are now inclined to license the applications of solo or group proprietors/investors in higher education without ascertaining their motives. The situation at Igbinedion clearly indicates that the proprietor is much more interested in making money from higher education than in quality. Already, a private university that is founded by a group of entrepreneurs in Nigeria has fallen on hard times.<sup>6</sup> In other words, it seems that corporate bodies like missions are perhaps much more likely to be concerned with quality and also motivated by altruistic reasons than entrepreneurs who are out to make money from higher education.

This is a final note to the Nigerian Authorities who are inclined to licence many more private universities in the next few years. It may be advisable to exercise a bit of caution at this point in time in view of the outcomes of this study. A moratorium on new private universities is necessary in order to allow those that currently operating to go through a maturation process. Some time is required to monitor quality in terms of the strengths and weaknesses of these

new institutions. It is undeniable that the knowledge that is gained through an effective monitoring regime could be used for setting the bench mark for eliminating the applications of prospective private investors into higher education whose motives might not be entirely altruistic. The Nigerian Authorities should avoid the mistakes that they encountered in the banking sector which forced them to take drastic measures to force merger and closure of innumerable non-performing banks that had been defrauding the public. As can be seen in the study, the motive to establish a university might not necessarily be altruistic but driven by the desire to make money from the gullible and unsuspecting public.

### Notes

1. For example, only four universities in Africa, namely Cape Town, Witwatersrand, Kwazulu-Natal, Pretoria are among the top five hundred in the world and even then they are listed among the last one hundred.
2. See the following on the historical antecedents, components and dimensions of quality assurance in higher education: David Leyton-Brown, *Demystifying Quality Assurance, Conference on Higher Education*, John Deutsch Institute, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, Canada, Feb 13-14, 2004; Alan Tait ed. *Perspectives on Distance Education – Quality Assurance in Higher Education: Selected Case Studies*, Vancouver: The Commonwealth of Learning, 1997; and David D. Dill, 'Designing Academic Audit: Lessons Learned in Europe and Asia', *Quality in Higher Education*, Vol. 6, No. 3, November, 2000, 23-35.
3. This was the famous Sir Ashby Commission which recommended the establishment of the university.
4. Based on the news report in Nigeria's newspapers – *The Nation*, May 15, 2007
5. Seven studies were commissioned: four of them on universities while three others address cross-cutting issues like gender, information and communication technology as well as governance.
6. CETEP, based in Lagos, one of the private universities, founded by such investors is already facing a serious crisis while the founders of Kastina University are also proposing a merger with the state-owned university because it is unable to attract sufficient number to the sciences. It currently has a distorted Science-Arts ratio of 10 to 90 (*The Nation*, November 2006, page 6 news report).

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